

Advent

“Making a list and checking it twice”

Tis the season of big tests in school, traveling, colds and viruses, dressing up for photos and parties, hot chocolate, malls, Santa, and more. You know it; we all know it: the church competes in this season with the cultural push to buy, do, and rush, but our faith tells us to wait, prepare, and reflect. It can easily become overwhelming for families and teens to try to be all and do all that is expected of them to observe both a religious Christmas and a secular Christmas. And at the end of the season, who really wins at doing both?

Many churches and youth groups already have a great list of Advent activities, worship opportunities, and spiritual practices to support youth and families. However, sometimes we forget why we do what we do. Consider using the following reflection before or near the beginning of Advent to prepare with your youth group, youth committee, youth volunteers, or just by yourself.

- Brainstorm on a board or a large piece of paper what youth do in December (Advent) each year and/or this particular year. Ideas: exams, Advent wreath/calendar, performing concerts, caroling, writing Christmas cards, traveling, going to church on Sundays and Christmas Eve, holiday parties and traditions, etc.
- Once the list feels comprehensive, go through the list and mark a heart symbol by the activities that youth “LOVE TO DO.” Mark a star by the things that youth “HAVE TO DO.” Finally, mark an “X” by the items that youth “COULD DO WITHOUT.”
- Then circle the activities that help youth celebrate Advent by waiting for Christ, preparing for Christ, and reflecting on the meaning of Christ.
- Ask the group or yourself to reflect on this list by using some of the following questions:
 - (1) Out of all the things on the list, how can youth select and do a balance of things that deepen their experience of Advent?
 - (2) What are the things youth must do this month, and are there ways to make those things more meaningful?
 - (3) What things do youth do that are the most loved?
 - (4) Are we doing too much in school, in church, and at home?
 - (5) Would adding a youth Christmas party or another mission project add to our Advent experience, or would additional activities add more chaos to an already busy season?
- Read Luke 1:67–79, in which the prophecy of Zechariah sets the scene for Advent.
 - Considering this passage, discuss how to make the list more balanced: one that honors the important season of Advent as we wait, prepare, and reflect on the birth and life of Jesus.
- Make three distinct lists entitled WAIT, PREPARE, and REFLECT. Then add experiences or things that help youth do each of these during Advent or remove all the activities that distract youth from Advent. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Wait

- Advent Wreath
 - Set aside time to make wreaths or yule logs at church with youth and their families or send the supplies home for youth to do with their families. Provide a reflection focused on the virtues of waiting for Christ, patience, and anticipation as they light a new candle each week.
- Advent Calendar
 - Use Advent words (light, baby, love, change, etc.) to inspire youth to take a photo that illustrates that word and post it on social media (Instagram, snap chat's my story, etc.) each day or week during Advent.
 - At a youth group or a special youth group gathering during the week prior to Advent or the first week of Advent, ask youth to come up with their own activities to put on a blank calendar of each day during Advent and use it as a reminder of what they will do daily to wait for Christmas.
 - Cut Bubble Wrap into a seasonal shape like a tree or star and use permanent ink, fine-tip pens to write numbers on each bubble—as many numbers as there are days in Advent. Youth can take it home and pop each bubbled number as the countdown to Christmas begins.
 - Each week of advent, have youth read and reflect on one of the following four Bible passages about virtues associated with waiting:
 - **Patience** James 5:7–8
 - **Anticipation** Matthew 24:36–44
 - **Self-Control** Philippians 4:12–13
 - **Faith** Psalm 130:5–6

Prepare

- Worship
 - Encourage youth to attend worship each week in Advent and listen to the reading of Scripture. Consider giving them personal journals to help them reflect on the Scriptures used during Advent that prepare us for Christmas.
 - Invite youth to participate in worship leadership during Advent. They could greet, read Scripture, write or say a prayer, or light the Advent candle.
- Music
 - Find ways for youth to participate in or listen to music during Advent. This season has a strong music focus, and our young people need to learn and participate in the Advent music during worship or at performances. The carols only become familiar with time and repetition, and they are great ways to dwell in the Advent and Christmas stories.

- You can invite youth musicians to play preludes or offertories during Advent, as many may know Advent-themed pieces already from private lessons.
- Decorate
 - Have youth help prepare the church and sanctuary for the coming of Christ on Christmas. They can help hang greens, wreaths, liturgical cloths, and banners.

Reflect

- Help with the Christmas Pageant
 - Have youth help with or attend your own church’s or another church’s Christmas pageant, play, or live nativity. It is always important to keep experiencing the story.
- Seasonal Devotions
 - Find a resource of simple devotions to share with your youth for their weekly or daily use during Advent. One example is www.D365.org. It provides daily Advent devotions oriented towards youth through their seasonal series “Following the Star.”
- Service Projects
 - Invite youth and families into opportunities to think about others rather than themselves during this season through service work. Look for opportunities that may already exist that youth and their families could do together, like collecting gifts for Angel Tree or volunteering during school breaks at a food pantry or animal shelter. This may not be adding an event for your whole youth group but providing a list of activities for youth and their families to consider doing together.
- Caroling
 - This is so simple, but the power of singing carols to church members who can’t attend worship regularly anymore or at a nursing home is a great intergenerational activity that youth can participate in to reflect on God’s love and family this season.
- Party
 - If you have an annual youth Christmas Party, or want to add one this year, consider the joy of being together as one reflection of the season. Being together and having fun is one way to know each other better and build God’s Kingdom. You can also do any of the previous activities as part of your party or time together as a group.

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