

Advent begins with Mercy

Derived from the Latin “ad venire,” meaning “to come to,” Advent is not to be mistaken with Christmas.

The Christmas Season goes from Christmas Day, Dec. 25, to the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Jan. 8. The four weeks before Christmas encompass the Advent season, one of preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ.

This year, Advent begins Dec. 3. Giving time, talents and resources via spiritual and corporal works of mercy offers a way for Catholics to serve while preparing for the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord.

Keep others warm

For those who are gifted with the ability to knit, consider making hats to donate. Make a variety of sizes - adult and children’s hats - to donate to a local homeless shelter; newborn-sized caps to send to local pregnancy centers; and the smallest of all for babies spending the holiday in local NICUs.

Seasonal events

Keep Christ and the true meaning of Christmas at the center of the season by immersing yourself in parish activities. St. John the Evangelist in Hydes, for example, will host an Advent Evening of Reflection Dec. 5.

Check your parish bulletin for bazaars, marts and other local events.

Feed a family

While out shopping for your favorite Christmas dinner ingredients, pick up extra. Check the giving tree at your parish, which might offer the opportunity to donate Christmas dinner to a family in need. You can also spend some time at a local food resource center, such as Beans and Bread, or a food pantry.

Party - with a twist

At a Christmas party, have guests bring gifts for a cause. At St. Matthew in Northwood, for instance, a Christmas drive for flannel shirts and socks is held for the single men visiting Our Daily Bread Employment Center.

Advent calendar

Create a reverse Advent calendar: place a box in a common area of your house. Each day, add an item, such as a canned good, a toy or a toiletry. Near Christmas Eve, donate the items to a local shelter. You can also place gently used items in the box for donation, such as clothing, housewares or toys.

Brighten Christmas

On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, gather holiday treats and personally deliver them to those who have to work over the holidays, such as hospital staff and first responders.

The gift of communication

Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Community in Catonsville collects new Christmas cards, stamps and money for the Women's Detention Center in Baltimore City, allowing the women to send holiday greetings to family and friends.

Prayer, special intentions

Use this season to pray for others, and to pray in thanksgiving. Consider creating an Advent prayer chain. Cut strips of paper to match the days of Advent 2017, Dec. 3-24, and write a prayer intention on each. Create a paper chain and remove a link each day to reveal that day's intention.

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