

## SCES Parents' Group

### Keep Calm it's Advent!

All of us on the SCES Parents group find that as Christmas rushes towards us that we are all full of **good intentions** to '**Keep Christ in Christmas**' and every year we find ourselves happily looking at our families and homes filled with Christmas but with the nagging question 'are we filled with **'Christ'**'?



In normal times, if we are not cleaning, shopping, going to or even organising Christmas Shows or Fetes then we're cooking, decorating, writing cards with the notion that it will be very different next year! Well this year *is* different and although we may be looking towards the return to normal life which, God willing, may come in 2021 we can prepare for Christmas 2020 with the gift of time to reflect with our families and create authentic celebrations of the Christmas feast.



### Advent

Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning 'coming'. So, let us prepare our hearts and homes as if Jesus himself was coming to Christmas dinner and let's get everyone in the family involved.

# Prepare

Here are some ideas to allow us to prepare for a most wonderful Holy Christmas full of joy, love and peace, without doing anything complicated.

Begin by creating an Advent Wreath as focus for your family's reflections. Perhaps your family set up a home altar whilst the public celebration of Mass was suspended in the spring. Why not repeat this for advent and the Christmas season? A wreath can be as simple as a printed colouring sheet coloured in by the youngest members of the family (for example, [artwyrd.com](http://artwyrd.com)). Add tealights for the four weeks of advent and a white Christmas candle to burn on Christmas day.

Find a time each weekend in Advent to light the advent candles, pray and reflect.

## *1<sup>st</sup> Candle (Purple) **The Prophecy Candle** or **Candle of Hope***

*'And again, Isaiah says, "the Roots of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."  
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' - Romans 15: 12-13*

Be hopeful as you pray for an end to the pandemic and join Pope Francis in giving thanks for the news of a possible vaccine. Pray together a decade of the Rosary, meditating on the first joyful

mystery - The Annunciation - and it's hopeful message of salvation for all.

We have all missed celebrations with family and friends this year so sending Christmas messages in cards, letters and emails will be more appreciated than ever by those feeling isolated. Get the family involved in making or writing cards or putting together a digital message with photos or pictures. See writing your cards as sending the peace of Christ to others. Take the opportunity to evangelise your children with the gift of hope and don't be afraid to write *God Bless.*

## *2<sup>nd</sup> Candle (Purple) **The Bethlehem Candle** or the **Candle of Preparation***

*'Console my people, console them' says the Lord. 'Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her that her time of service is ended, that her sin has been atoned for' - Isaiah 40: 1-4*

The Advent candle readily demonstrates the strong contrast between darkness and light. In the Bible, Christ is referred to as 'the Light of the World' contrasted by the darkness of sin.

Take time to prepare yourselves for Christ to come and enter your heart and your home with a short examination of conscience.

[Examination of conscience for children](#)

[Examination of conscience for teenagers](#)

If available, why not go to confession as a family? Even if your kids are too young to receive the sacrament, let them see you going to confession – the importance of saying sorry and having a happy heart. Make a celebration of it with, perhaps, a cake after dinner to show the joy of forgiveness.

Keep others in mind as you shop for Christmas. If you are food shopping you could get the kids to put some additional items into the trolley for the local foodbank. You could even create a reverse advent calendar by putting an item a day into a basket and then donating to those in need. Many toy drives are operating differently this year but, if you are in a position to help, that help would be greatly appreciated. This would be a great time to share the story of [St Nicholas](#) with children.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Candle (Pink)* **The Shepherd's Candle** or **The Candle of Joy**

*'Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God'* Thessalonians 5:16

The third Sunday in Advent is called *Gaudete Sunday*, literally rejoicing Sunday. We can rejoice because we know Christ is coming very soon.

Your family may have much to pray for as 2020 draws to a close. Remember loved ones who have died; who are or who have been ill; who have lost jobs; who have missed out on life events. Give thanks too for prayers answered and for time together as a family. Rejoice that the Lord is very near.

Get decorating! When cleaning and preparing the house 'offer it up' and think of it as preparing for Christ coming. Talk as a family about Jesus's birthday and for older children about preparing both domestically and spiritually for Christ coming. Focus on how blest we are to have what we have – put on Christmas tunes and enjoy the preparation.

While putting up the Christmas tree, share the story of [St Boniface](#) (eighth century Bishop). You can leave off the tree topper until week four so you can thread the theme of Peace, light and joy and reaffirm the Christmas tree as a Christian Symbol.

End the decorations by setting out the Crib discuss the figures as you place them in the stable. Why not think about leaving the baby Jesus until Christmas day? Instead use cards with words such as 'joy' 'peace' 'love' where the manger will be.

*4<sup>th</sup> Candle (Purple) **The Angel's Candle** reminding us of the angel's message of 'Peace on Earth and Good Will towards Men'*

*'The Lord says this: You, Bethlehem Ephrathah the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born for me the one who is to rule over Israel; for from then on he will extend his power to the ends of the land. He himself will be peace.'* Micah 5: 1&4

Usually, this is the week of Christmas Parties, concerts and Nativity Plays. These festivities will be missed but in their place is an opportunity to focus on Jesus, the one who 'will be peace'. Welcome him to an intimate birthday celebration in your home and pray for the reality of that peace in your heart, in your home and in the world. Draw a banner with 'Peace on Earth and Good Will towards Men' to add to your home altar and use it as a focus for your prayers this week. Add the tree topper. For an angel, pray about the Angel's message of Peace, or for a star, the Star guiding us to Christ and His gift to us. This gift of peace and salvation can't be bought or wrapped, it can only be received.

So, keep calm this Advent. Do what you need to do but do it for Christ!