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**Celebrating Advent as a Family**

**By Lisa M. Hendey**

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For families longing to build traditions related to their identity as Roman Catholics, few times of the year hold greater promise than the liturgical season of Advent. The sites and sounds of the holidays fill the air around us, as we communally anticipate the glory and majesty of Christmas. Beginning with the First Sunday of Advent, Catholic families have the opportunity to share the treasures of our faith with our children in prayer, symbolism and song.

Meredith Gould, author of *The Catholic Home: Celebrations and Traditions for Holidays, Feast Days, and Every Day* (Doubleday, February 2004, hardcover, 256 pages) writes on the customs and rituals prevalent in Catholic culture. A recent convert to Catholicism, Gould shares the following advice for families looking to truly rejoice in the season of Advent with their loved ones.

**Q:** Why is it important for Catholic families to observe and celebrate the liturgical season of Advent?

Gould: Advent is not "pre-Christmas," it's a separate, distinct, important liturgical season that deserves the same attention and reverence as Lent. Like Lent, it's a penitential season where we have yet another opportunity to recall, reflect, recollect, and reconcile. During Advent, we do this within the context of watchful waiting for the birth of Jesus, who is not yet our Christ.

We also have an opportunity to contemplate the vast meaning of Mary's "yes." I think this is particularly important given our general cultural resistance to obedience, along with our need, as women, to balance saying "yes" with saying "no."

Advent is a season of discernment. I love it! And I love that living in the northeast means that I get to do this in rhythm with days that are shorter and colder, thus amenable to hibernation.

**Q:** For families who have no tradition of celebrating Advent, what are some simple traditions and rituals

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you would recommend?

Gould: Definitely start simple, perhaps adding a new tradition or ritual every year. The easiest one to start with is the Advent wreath, especially because it's a home-based tradition that everyone can see practiced in church as well. (Gould's book describes the meaning and significance of the symbolism and colors, enriching the practice.)

The Advent calendar is also very easy to incorporate. Here I make a big deal (read: stink) about finding a calendar that has doors that open onto scripture and religious art. I think Advent calendars with Santa and secular nonsense (e.g., reindeer) are an abomination...and you may quote me!!!

The Jesse Tree is a bit more elaborate and labor intensive, but is a wonderful way to teach salvation

history and offset the mania around decorating a Christmas tree within 20 minutes of digesting Thanksgiving turkey n' trimmings.

Q: What are some of your family's favorite Advent traditions?

Gould: I was raised Jewish, so I have the blessing of being able to come to this season without preconceived notions of what has to happen.

Today, I fill my home with the sights, scents, and sounds (including hefty periods of silence) of the season: Candles, different renditions of "O come, O come, Emmanuel" (O Antiphons!), frankincense & myrrh incense. Whatever wreaths or garland I have is left undecorated until Christmas Vigil. I move my Mary paraphernalia (icons, etc.) front n' center in my living room, kitchen, bedroom, and office. I invite friends for a light soup n' bread supper to craft ornaments. I believe adults are better able to convey wonder and mystery when \*we\* feel it ourselves.

I also, I confess, have the Three Kings from my Nativity Scene travel from the nether reaches of my home to the crèche. I'm opposed to having the whole thing set up before Christmas Vigil...Mary and baby Jesus should not make an appearance before midnight. Aren't converts annoying???

I think it's important for readers to know that we Catholic hail from a religion that celebrates God's creation and presence in all things, so that décor actually has meaning. As Fr. Andrew Greeley writes in *The Catholic Imagination*, "As a rule of thumb, if there are no votive candles it, a church really isn't Catholic."

Q: How can observing the season of Advent enhance a family's Christmas celebration?

Gould: I encourage people to observe Advent as a way to heighten their appreciation for Christmas. Watchful waiting gives way to delighted awe at the birth of Jesus. I think it's also a great way to instill (in children and adults) an appreciation for the value of cultivating patience. We move way too fast in this society. We're too often ahead of ourselves. Even Catholics need to learn how to "be here now" and Advent is a pretty powerful "now."

Q: What recommendations would you give for parents who would like to emphasize the spiritual celebration of the holiday season over material celebrations?

Gould: Well, the forces of culture are so strong it's a major challenge for parents to push this back. But I think key to this is having parents understand the true nature of Advent. I think this is a necessary first step. I also think parents ought to reestablish their authority within the domestic church. I'm truly shocked by the ways parents cave in to their children's' demands. (Easy for me to say? I guess.)

Basically, my recommendations boiled down to: 1) Make sure \*you\* understand the spiritual nature of the season so you can convey that to your kids; 2) Make sure your kids understand that \*you\* are in charge of the home/domestic church.

With the beginning of Advent, we welcome a new liturgical year. Why not begin this new Church year with the resolution to grasp hold of each occasion to share your Catholicity with your children? By building family traditions related to the season of Advent, we teach them what is truly special about Christmas, ensuring precious memories they will one day share with their own children.

For additional information on The Catholic Home visit  
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0385509928/catholicmomcom>

For activities, crafts and devotions related to the season of Advent, visit  
<http://www.catholicmom.com/advent.htm>

Lisa M. Hendey is a mother of two sons, webmaster of numerous web sites, including  
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## **Why Do Dog Lovers Love Dog Lover Gifts?**

**By IPRWire Staff Writer**

Ask anyone who owns a dog, and they'll tell you that dog lover gifts rank high on their "must have" list for holidays and birthdays. It's not at all uncommon to see dog owners sporting all types of paraphernalia celebrating their pooches and their respective breeds. What gives? Why do dog owners love to proclaim their canine love so loudly?

Perhaps the answer lies in the role that dogs play in society—and in American families. Today, over 65 million dogs live their lives in harmony with humans. And an overwhelming number of those "humans" (approximately 92 percent) consider their dogs more than just pets - they consider them family.

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It's no wonder. Dogs, with their unique personalities and willingness to please, are often given the same liberties at home as other family members. As family members, dogs are no longer relegated to back yards or cramped kennels. Today's dogs are treated to regular grooming, doggie-daycare, and organic treats.

Owners demand human comforts for their dogs, and they aren't shy about celebrating it. It's not surprising, then, that dog owners welcome dog lover gifts from others who recognize the unique relationship they have with their pets.

This "humanization" of dogs has elevated the amount of care provided to man's best friend. From veterinary care to cosmetic products geared towards dogs, dog lovers often seek the same quality of products they would want for their children. It stands to reason, then, that those devoted to their family pooches welcome (and maybe even hope for) any gifts that showcase their four-legged family member.

In the past, the choices available to those shopping for dog lover gifts were limited. Coffee cups and bumper stickers were often the only options readily available. However, with the advent of so many pet superstores and online specialty pet stores, more options are available than ever before. Just a few items available for dog lovers today are:

- \* Dog-themed jewelry. From charms to bracelets to earrings, male and female dog owners alike enjoy wearing long-lasting mementos of their favorite pooch.
- \* Picture frames. Today, Fido's face sits on the mantle right along with the rest of the family.
- \* Magnets. Pictures of children aren't the only thing decorating American refrigerators these days.
- \* Key chains. They carry the keys to their owner's hearts, so it's only fitting that they carry the rest of the keys, as well.

Dogs aren't just pets anymore, they are family members. As such, their roles in families are celebrated in much the same manner as children or devoted companions. With sales of dog-related products in the billions of dollars each year, owners have made their pet priorities ring out loud and clear. Anyone who graces them with dog lover gifts can only be affirming that proclamation.

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