

Advent Preparation Ideas

Mary on the Mantel (instead of Elf on the Shelf) -

- The idea is that we prepare our hearts to receive Jesus in the manger by loving others. Similarly to the Elf, Mary moves around your house throughout Advent, perhaps drawing closer to the Christmas manger. But instead of spying on your kids for Santa, she's preparing for the birth of her baby. Mary is a friend, a companion, a confidant who helps them be more compassionate.
- There are many ways to use this idea: use your own Mary doll, your own ideas, download the digital kit, order the physical story book, or get a Mary from the store.
- Read more: <https://aleteia.org/2020/11/30/walk-with-mary-this-advent-as-a-sweet-alternative-to-elf-on-the-shelf/>
- Buy the kit: <https://beaheart.com/blogs/blog/mary-on-the-mantel>

Prepare the Manger for Jesus -

- This is the tradition of making Baby Jesus' bed soft by adding straws in the manger. The straws reflect extra spiritual efforts made during Advent. The manger or crib is a symbol of our hearts. Advent is the time to prepare one's heart for Christ's coming at Christmas.
- You can use your own nativity set with hay, make one out of cardboard or sticks and use yarn, or you might purchase the giving manger storybook with manger and straw provided, here: <https://www.thegivingmanger.com/>
- Read more: <https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/straws-in-manger-preparing-our-hearts-for-christs-birth/>

Crown the Newborn King -

- Keep your crowns (or make new plain ones) from your Christ the King celebration. Cut out colorful paper into gem shapes or gather stickers or other decorations appropriate for a king's crown. Put those in an easily accessible spot with some glue sticks and the crowns. Practice your new Church year resolutions through Advent and add jewels or stickers to the crowns when you practice your resolution or offer Jesus a sacrifice. Hopefully, by Christmas you'll have crowns that are glorious to present to our newborn King.

Jesse Tree:

- The Jesse Tree is a beautiful Advent tradition that many Christians use to prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas. It's a kind of special Advent countdown calendar that is focused on the true meaning of the season, and it is a great way to teach children about the plan of redemption from creation through salvation, tying the Old Testament to the New Testament.
- There are LOTS of Jesse tree resources out there - here are just a few:
 - All In One book with ornaments, discussions, questions, and more: https://www.amazon.com/Jesse-Tree-Eric-Sammons/dp/1644137240/ref=asc_df_1644137240/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=622125306141&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=1559371153322909713&hvpo=one=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9019626&hvtargid=pla-1800478831436&psc=1
 - Jesse tree stickers, see their activity book and videos as well: <https://holyheroes.com/products/jesse-tree-poster-and-sticker-activity-2-pack>

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Create an Advent Environment:

- These days, we see Christmas decorations in stores right after Halloween and many places are fully decorated by Thanksgiving. December is filled with Christmas parties and Christmas music - usually by Christmas day, we are saturated with Christmas celebrating, and by December 26th we are ready to move on. Instead of keeping up with this secular pace, resist the pressures to celebrate Christmas before it happens, and instead embrace the spirit of Advent: preparation and joyful waiting. What ways can you wait to celebrate Christmas? Consider:
 - Opt for Advent songs, and try to avoid playing Christmas music until Christmas
 - Make decorations sparse so that they reflect the "waiting" spirit of Advent, such as: making an advent wreath prominent during advent (you can change it to white Christmas candles and add lights or decor at Christmas), hanging plain greenery or keeping prelit greenery turned off/unplugged until Christmas or the feast of St Lucy (the light-bearer), decorating your tree with only Jesse tree ornaments until Christmas or waiting to light the tree until Christmas or waiting to add the star or angel at the top until Christmas
 - Set out an empty manger and gradually move the pieces toward the manger so that they arrive for Christmas - hide the baby Jesus until Christmas eve

Advent Devotional

- There are many options out there for Advent devotionals. Check out the advent resources provided at the parish or on FORMED.org (type Advent in the search bar) - these are meant to help you prepare room for Christ in your hearts. Choose a resource and set a time to incorporate this into your day. Try to be consistent.

Make Space for Jesus

- When Jesus was born, there was no room at the inn. This Christmas, will Jesus find space in your home and your heart? Here are some ideas to create space:
 - The less things we own, the more free we are to focus on God and others. Commit to giving things away this Advent - perhaps find one small item a day, or create a box from one room or level of the home each week of Advent.
 - The less noise and distraction we have in our day, the more space there is within us to hear God's voice in our hearts. Commit to creating silence by giving up screens (for a certain hour of the day, certain devices, or even altogether) or creating actual silence (giving up music or podcasts for a certain time of day or altogether, setting aside a certain time of day to sit quietly).
 - Making little sacrifices for God shows him that he takes up the first space in our hearts. Commit to some small sacrifice that you can make regularly throughout Advent, such as giving up chocolate, cream in your coffee, etc.