A stylized illustration of a nativity scene. The background is a deep blue and green gradient, speckled with small white stars. A large, bright, multi-pointed star is positioned in the upper center. In the foreground, silhouetted against the dark sky, are a man riding a horse and another man walking beside it. To the right, a silhouette of a town or city with a prominent tower and lit windows is visible on a hill.

Let Every Heart
Prepare Him Room

Daily Activities and Reflections for Families
During St. Philip's Fast

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

The Praying Your Way Through Lent program that the Ukrainian Orthodox League sponsors has a great following. Many participants that have read scripture or the Psalter readings have felt better prepared for the upcoming feast. I, myself, found renewal and a deepening of faith when following the assigned Psalter readings. This became a challenge for me, however, once my family started growing. This is why I felt it necessary to create a family track called Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room.

In the following pages you will find activities and reflections that all members of a family can participate in. There are weekday activities (Monday through Friday) for families to do together to better prepare their hearts for receiving the Newborn King.

I pray this program will help you grow as a family unit and reflect on the blessings God has bestowed upon us. May the time spent together bring the Joy of the World into your home on Christmas Day and thereafter.

I pray this Advent guide helps your heart prepare Him room.

With Love in Christ,

Matushka Laryssa Charest

Week 1: Hope- He's coming

Day 1: Prophecies

Day 2: Names of Jesus

Day 3: Prayer List

Day 4: Send Hope

Day 5: Family Time- Coloring

Week 2: Faith

Day 6: Send a Message

Day 7: Rainbow Ornament

Day 8: Family Tree

Day 9: Profess the Faith

Day 10: Growing your Faith

Week 3: Preparing - Fasting

Day 11: Unplug

Day 12: Clean your Icon Corner

Day 13: Take Away/Fill Up Jar

Day 14: Collect Food Bank Items

Day 15: Collect Clothes for Donation

Week 4: Acts of Kindness

Day 16: Blessing Bag

Day 17: Thankful day

Day 18: Compliment Day

Day 19: Because You Matter Bag

Day 20: Community Helper Appreciation

Week 5: Praise

Day 21: Favorite Things

Day 22: Christmas Carol

Day 23: Angels Sing Praise

Day 24: Gratitude Reflection

Day 25: Gratitude Card

WEEK 1: HOPE- He's coming!

Day 1:

The St. Philip fast can also be referred to as Advent. The word Advent means 'coming'. People were told of Christ's coming before the Archangel Gabriel told Mary she would have a baby. In the Old Testament, there are prophecies. Prophecies are God's promises that we see fulfilled in the New Testament.

For example, we read a prophecy in **Isaiah 7:14** "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Immanuel." This prophecy is fulfilled in **Matthew 1:23** "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us'."

Another time we read, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. His name will be called the Angel of Great Counsel, for I shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by Him." (Isaiah 9:5). This prophecy is fulfilled in the verse from Matthew written above and also in Luke 1:31, "and behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus."

The fulfillment of the prophecies show that God exists. Only God can tell what the future will hold. God has been with his people throughout the ages.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

Reflection/Activity:

As we read in Romans 15:13, hope gives us and others joy and peace. Pick the activities/reflections below that apply to your family! When you are finished, post them prominently in your home.

TODDLERS:

NAME: _____

HOPE

Having hope means:

I am grumpy

Looking forward to something

Being afraid

Asking for help

Here are ways I can use words to give people hope:



Keep trying!



Believe in yourself!



God loves you!

Don't give up!

I know you can do this!

You did really well!

You are amazing just the way you are!

SCHOOLS KIDS-ADULTS

MY HOPE FOR...

MY FAMILY:

MYSELF:

ST. PHILIP'S FAST:

Day 2:

Let's read Isaiah 9:5 again. "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. His name will be called the Angel of Great Counsel, for I shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by Him."

In this verse, it says the Son, Jesus Christ, 'will be called the Angel of Great Counsel.'

What are some other names for Jesus? Try to come up with some on your own. Then look at the next page to see which ones you may have heard.

Have you ever heard of Jesus as the great 'I AM'? (It's on the list on the following page) The Great thing about Jesus Christ is that He came to us as all of those. Have you ever thought of who you are? We weren't born with all those descriptions. The good thing is, we have our lives to work up to those. So what do you want to be known for?

Activity:

Each member can fill out the Jesus Is- I am sheet. Adults or teenagers can help younger ones with their list. This list goes along with the list from the day before. Your names will help you be better at what the Lord has called you to do.

**Need help coming up with words? How about...smart, helpful, honest, kind, caring, reliable, sweet, generous, trustworthy, reverent, brave, loyal...does that help?*

Let's Pray:

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere present and filling all things. Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life, come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity. And save our souls, O Good one.

Names for Jesus

Jesus RESTORER OF HOPE Lord of Lords
THE WORD Holy One
Bread of Life Master BRANCH
ALPHA & OMEGA Teacher
Dayspring Prince of Peace
Son of Man COMFORTER
everLASTING SHILOH Anchor
FATHER The Almighty Light
Counselor TRUE VINE of the
MESSIAH THE LIFE HIGH World
Giver of Life PRIEST
& Blessings THE BELOVED
FAITHFUL & TRUE WITNESS Shield ROCK
Mediator Wonderful Counselor
The Resurrection King of Kings
Immanuel The Amen
LAMB OF GOD Healer | AM Servant
Good Savior LIVING WATER
Shepherd Redeemer
Advocate The Way, the Truth & the Life

BRIGHT MORNING STAR

ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

Jesus is....

Write down which names have special meaning to you.

_____ is...

Write down what you would like to be known as.

Day 3:

The theme of this week is Hope. Do you remember the last time you thought about the people you know that could use some hope? Let's do exactly that. Let's take the time to sit down and list the people who need some joy or peace in their lives. Use the template on the next page and remember to leave room for more names to be added. After you complete your list, read the prayer on this page as a family. Take turns reading the names. Afterward, leave your list in your prayer corner.

Prayer in Time of Need for Others

O God, our help in time of need, Who are just and merciful, and Who inclines to the supplications of His people. Look down upon (LIST OF NAMES) and have mercy on them and deliver them from the trouble that now besets them. Deal with them according to their iniquities, but according to Your manifold mercies, for we are the works of Your hands, and You know our weaknesses. I pray to You to grant them Your divine helping grace, and endow them with patience and strength to endure their hardships with complete submission to Your Will.

Only You know our misery and sufferings, and to You, our only hope and refuge, we flee for relief and comfort, trusting in Your infinite love and compassion, that in due time, when You know best, You will deliver them from this trouble, and turn their distress into comfort. We then shall rejoice in Your mercy, and exalt and praise Your Holy Name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Those Who Need Hope

Prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation for cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness. – St. John Chrysostom

Day 4:

If this is the first time you have done an Advent devotional or are setting aside time to pray together or do something spiritual together, know that creating a habit takes time. There will be times when things don't align quite right. Hopefully this format will be forgiving of those times when it just couldn't happen.

If you do lose track, don't get discouraged. Keep going! These activities were intended for your family to experience the Joy of the Nativity on a whole new level. Have hope and share it. Then you'll receive joy, and share that too!

Activity:

Send a card.

Think of the people who are on your prayer list. Is there one person who would be surprised if they received a card? Or is there someone you haven't talked to in a while? Have every member of the family think of one person to send a card to. Send them some hope, joy, or peace. Write a personal note and include one of these scripture verses:

1. The Lord has done great things with us; we were glad. Psalm 125:3
2. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, For His mercy endures forever. Psalm 135:1
3. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials. James 1:2
4. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. John 15:11
5. Rejoice always. 1 Thessalonians 5:16
6. Pray without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17
7. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

DAY 5:

Greetings on the Feast of the Entry of the Holy Theotokos into the Temple!

Today's activity is simpler since some of you may have attended Divine Liturgy this morning.

What really matters? Faith, Hope, and Love. In the first week of the St. Philip fast we've learned about hope. We've shared it through Love and ensured it through prayer.

[For indeed a house is a little church. -St. John Chrysostom](#)

Now is a good time to check in with each other in your little church.

Activity:

Spend time together as a family. On the next few pages, you will find coloring pages for all ages. Sit at the table together and color. Let this give you an opportunity to start a conversation about what is coming or Who is coming.

TODDLERS:



SCHOOL AGE





Week 2: Faith

DAY 6:

Let's start with a prayer to say before reading scripture.

Illuminate our hearts, O Master who loves mankind, with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge.

Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Thy gospel teachings.

Implant also in us the fear of Thy blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto Thee.

For Thou art the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory, together with Thy Father, who is from everlasting, and Thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Now let's read from the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be

called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Archangel Gabriel is known as the messenger. As we read above, Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary and delivered a message. He told her the news that she will have a son. So, let's send a message as well.

Activity:

Let's paint a rock together. Find a rock for every member of the family. Paint it any color you wish. On that rock, paint/write the word 'faith'. If you want to get creative, try writing a part of the verse on the rock or anything having to do with Christmas. Then, some day this week, take a walk with your rocks and leave them where they can be found by others. Send the message that the Lord is coming! Send a message to have faith! Send a message that you believe!



DAY 7:

Luke 1:45 "Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

The Holy Theotokos is an example to all Orthodox Christians. Her strong faith is witnessed in the above verse. The Archangel Gabriel told her she would bear a son and she willingly accepted this. She lived and acted in faith. God wanted her to be Jesus's mother and she obeyed His will.

Sometimes in our lives our faith wavers or weakens for some reason. But God made promises for us to keep our faith. Do you believe God will keep you safe? Do you believe God is always with you? Do you believe God loves you? That is faith! And as we learned while reading some prophecies last week, God keeps his promises.

Let's read through God's promises:

God is always faithful "But the Lord is faithful..." (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

God will never leave you- "...I will never leave you. I will never forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

God will love you forever- "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever." (Psalm 135:1)

God keeps His promises. "...the Lord your God, this God, is a faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments." Deuteronomy 7:9

God will help you! "Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth." (Psalm 120:1-2)

God will comfort you! "...but He who has mercy on them will comfort them; and He shall lead them..." (Isaiah 49:10)

God will keep you safe! "The Lord is merciful to those who wait on Him in the day of affliction, and He knows those who reverence Him." (Nahum 1:7)

Activity:

Do you remember the story of Noah's Ark? Do you remember the appearance of a rainbow? The rainbow in this particular story is a promise from God. Rainbows are also a sign of hope. Let's make a rainbow ornament. Use your creative juices to come up

with your own handmade ornament. Remember to hang the ornament on your tree to remind you of God's promises.



Ideas: Paint popsicle sticks different colors and write the verses above on each stick. Try using pearly beads, pony beads, or melting crayons. Try painting sticks. Use your imagination!

Want a harder idea? Try looking up macrame rainbow ornaments.

DAY 8:

Faith is defined as your confidence or trust in God. Trusting is believing or knowing. We've already discussed God's promises. We can continue to read about those promises in the bible. What other things help your faith grow? Attending Divine Liturgy, acts of kindness, confession, the Eucharist, scripture...How about praying?

Do you have a habit of prayer? Do you say morning or evening prayers alone or as a family? Do you pray before and/or after meals? If you don't, you can start now. IF you already have a routine of prayer, consider adding or changing parts for a different perspective.

Let's start with reading through prayers for our Guardian angel, Patron Saint and parents.

Prayer to Your Guardian Angel:

O angel of God, my holy guardian, given to me from heaven, enlighten me this day and save me from all evil. Instruct me in doing good deeds and set me on the path of salvation. Amen.

O angel of Christ, holy guardian and protector of my soul and body, forgive me everything wherein I have offended you every day of my life, and protect me from all influence and temptation of the evil one. May I never again anger God by my sins. Pray for me to the Lord, that He may make me worthy of grace of the All-Holy Trinity, and of the blessed Mother of God, and of all the saints. Amen.

Prayer to Your Patron Saint:

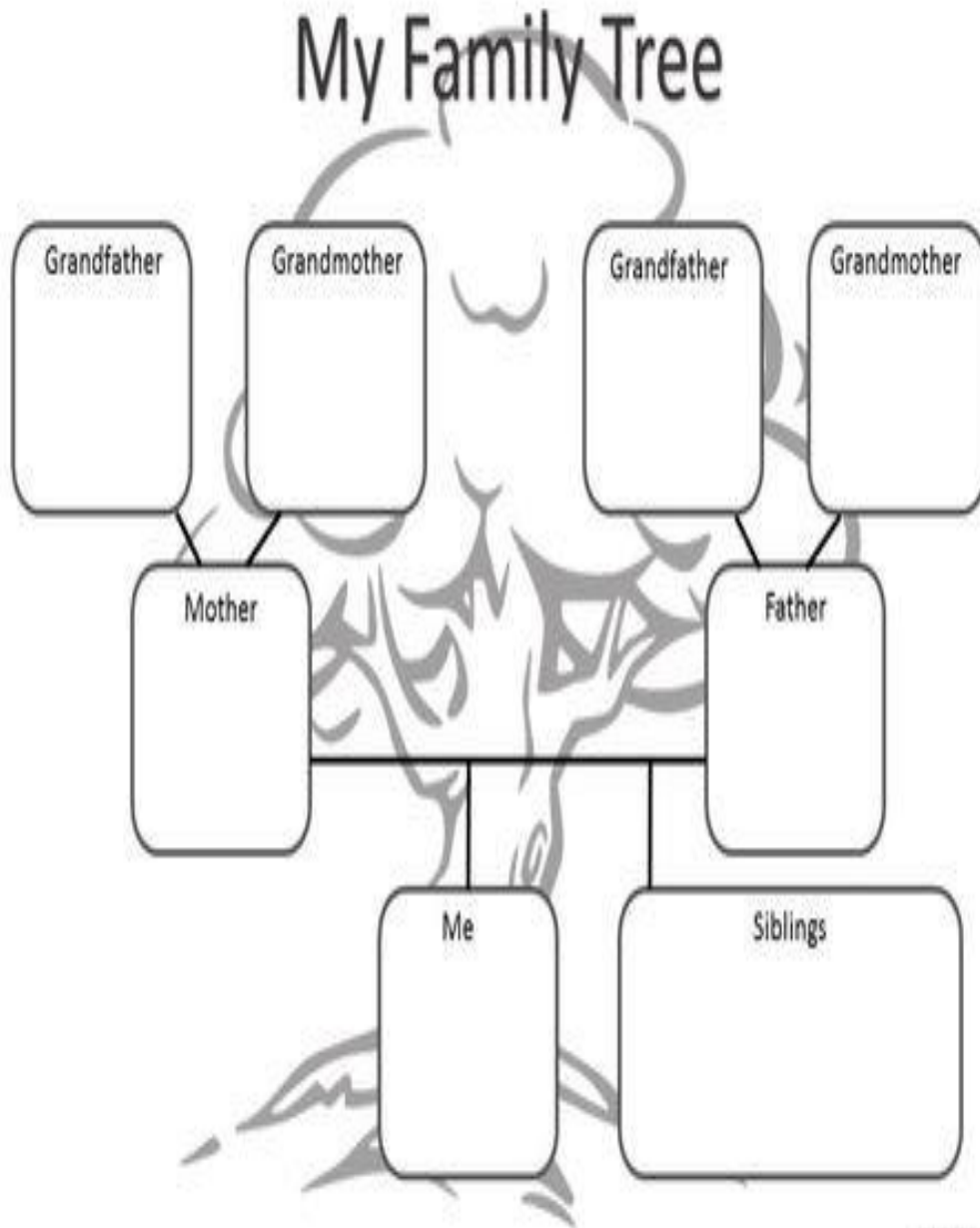
Pray to God for me, O Holy Saint (Name), for you are well pleasing to God: for I turn to you, who are the speedy helper and intercessor for my soul.

Prayer for Parents

Save O Lord, and have mercy on my parents (their names), my brothers and sisters, my kinsmen after the flesh, and my friends; and grant them Thy blessings both here and hereafter.

Activity:

Fill out the family tree below. Now you'll have the members in your family listed on one sheet for prayers and your family history documented.



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Consider putting together a little photo album for toddlers to use for their prayers. Toddlers could make the sign of the cross and/or say Lord have mercy. Older kids could just write the names of relatives.

DAY 9:

Let's make today an easy catch up day. Do you know what the Orthodox faith professes? Find the time today to say the Creed together. Younger children can repeat sentences after adults and older children.

The Creed

I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, being of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were created. Who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And on the third day, He rose, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets. In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church, I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Activity:

If you want to do more, try writing the Creed and giving it to your Spiritual Father. Ask him to give it to one of the shut-ins he visits.

DAY 10:

Picture someone exercising. They probably have to do repetitions of certain movements, right? This is because those repetitions help strengthen natural muscles. Likewise repeating or making a routine of praying will strengthen our faith. If you don't already have a routine, try to come up with one. Start little and build upon it, just like you would if you started exercising today. Commit to talking to God. Commit to praising His Goodness. Take time to thank Him for His blessings. And always call on Him for help.

Reflection:

Is prayer a priority? Is it important?

Do I talk to God every day?

Could I make more time for Him?

Activity:

Complete the following worksheet and use it as a guide for next week's prayers.

I CAN PRAY EVERY DAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

List who you
will pray for
every day this
week.

Week 3: Preparing - Fasting

Day 11:

The 40 days before Nativity is called St. Philip's fast, or Advent. Fasting is asked of us in order to prepare for something greater. In this case, it is the birth of Jesus Christ. Even when we were born, our parents prepared for our arrival. **So how does fasting help us prepare for the birth of our Lord and Savior?**

Let's recall our own birth stories. Take a few minutes to share everyone's birth stories. If you still have grandparents, include them too. Was your baby on time? Were they born in a hospital? Do you have any memories of visitors or doctors/nurse's comments? How did you prepare? Did you decorate a room? Did you receive gifts from a baby shower?

In most cases, parents received gifts to help welcome the new baby. Time before the baby's arrival is spent folding the baby clothes, decorating rooms, adding safety precautions to cabinets and drawers. I remember in my last month of pregnancy, I cleaned. For women, this is called the nesting period. I mopped the floors. I wiped down the walls. I dusted every piece of furniture. Every speck of dust had to be removed for my baby. At the end of this fasting period, we are to receive a baby. **What are we doing to prepare to take the Christ child home? Are we taking the Christ child into our homes?**

Fasting during St. Philip's fast means abstaining from meat and dairy products. For families with children, this can't always be followed strictly. I encourage you to speak with your spiritual fathers to come up with a plan good for your family.

During this time, we 'take away' certain foods. **Do you take away anything else?**

Activity:

Tonight, let's refrain from using electronics. Let's try to unplug our devices and TVs. Light a candle in your prayer corner and take time to talk about how you will prepare your home for Christmas.

DAY 12:

This week's theme is fasting and preparing. Yesterday, we started with unplugging. See if you can continue that every week. Make time to unplug!

Let's continue preparing! On Christmas Day, we will all partake in the Divine Liturgy. Afterward, we are called to bring the Christ child back to our homes. **How do we bring Jesus Christ into our homes?** We are called to bring His Word, His example, and His love into our home. Where is one place where we can see all of this? In our Icon/Prayer Corners.

Activity:

Take time tonight to clean or prepare your icon corner. We have our family icon corner on the main floor but we have patron saint icons in each bedroom. Take a look at your family's icon corner. Take time to clean each icon and discuss the meaning. Talk about why your icon corner looks the way it does. Does everyone know the story of the Saints? * If someone were to come over and ask about any of the icons, could everyone in the family say something about each one?

Ask your children if they would like to see anything specific in the icon corner. Make sure to have candles available for lighting, a prayer list, and books of prayers.

Here's an example:



Day 13:

There are a number of benefits to fasting. Most importantly it strengthens our faith and it increases patience and humility. Therefore, what we are able to take away, makes room for better things. Fasting isn't about just giving things up. We give up to fill up!

Ask yourself?

What have you 'taken away' during this fasting period?

What have you added?

Activity:

Today create fasting jars. Take two mason jars or solo cups. Label one 'Take Away' and the other 'Fill Up'. Then take popsicle sticks and write down different items you can give up for Advent and place them in the 'Take away' cup. Then, write down ways to 'fill up' on popsicle sticks and place those in the 'Fill Up' cup.



Need help?

Take away ideas: No sugary treats, soda, tv, i-pad, negative comments, fighting with sibling...

Fill up ideas: write favorite scripture, motivating words, or acts of kindness

Day 14:

"Prayer is good with fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness. A few prayers with righteousness are better than many with wrongdoing. It is better to do almsgiving than to lay up gold." (Tobit 12:8)

Prayer and fasting go hand in hand. When we fast, we should also pray. The verse from the Book of Tobit says prayer is also good with almsgiving and righteousness. Almsgiving is the practice of giving food or money to poor people. It is an offering of relief. Let's have today's focus be food.

Activity:

Have each member of the family take a grocery bag and fill it with food items that can be delivered to a food bank or food pantry. Teenagers might like a challenge of having a budget and trying to stretch it as much as possible. See how much you can buy with only \$50 (you can change the amount according to your budget).

Once the items are collected, come together as a family and recite the following prayer:

We give thanks to Thee, O Christ our God, that Thou hast satisfied us with Thy earthly blessings; deprive us not also of Thy Heavenly Kingdom. As Thou didst come to Thy disciples and didst grant them peace; so come to us and save us, O Savior.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lord, have mercy. (3x)

Blessed is God, Who has fed and nourished us with His bountiful gifts by His grace and compassion always, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

"For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;" (Matthew 25:35)

Day 15:

We already collected food items for the poor. What is another need the poor have that we try to fill? Clothing.

"I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to Me." (Matthew 25:36)

When we struggle to satisfy our needs, we may feel weak like we do when we're sick. Others who struggle to buy clothing or food for their family feel the same way. In a way, they might feel like they're imprisoned. Easing that pain or providing relief for that struggle brings hope.

Today, let's focus on clothing. What can we give away that someone else can use? What can I share with someone? Do I have too many sweaters or pairs of pants? Am I holding onto things that I don't need/fit into?

Activity:

Fill at least one bag with clothing and drop it off at a shelter or clothing drive box in your neighborhood. Try to focus on things you have too much of.

Take away thoughts like: "I don't need this anymore." "

"I don't like this." "I don't want this."

Fill your mind with thoughts like: "This will keep someone warm."

"I love wearing this sweater and I want someone to feel the same way."

"This shirt will make someone feel good about themselves."

Week 4: Acts of Kindness

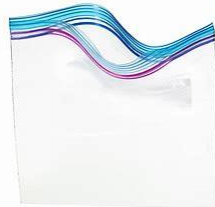
Day 16:

The theme of this week is Acts of Kindness. The Nativity is fast approaching and now is a great time to combine all that we've done into actions. This entire week is dedicated to actions that will bring hope and love to people in our communities, our friends, and family.

Remember we gathered food and clothing for the poor, last week? In continuation, let's make a homeless care kit.

Activity:

Make a blessing bag. Use a backpack, Ziploc bag or water bottle. Fill your vessel with useful things. You can use the list below to help you.



Items to put in your blessing bag/bottle:

Gloves, Socks, Hat, Hand Warmers,

Granola bars, breakfast bars, snacks, flavored water packets, candy, coffee singles,

First aid kit, wet wipes, comb, deodorant, toothbrush, toothpaste, nail kit,

Gift cards, wash cloth, cough drops, gum, flashlight

Personal Message: I am praying for you!!!

Feeling ambitious? Why not make a few for your church members to take and hand out!

Day 17:

Greetings on the Feast of the Conception of Anna!

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Conception of Anna. This is when Anna found out she was having a baby, Mary, the Mother of God. St. Anna married St. Joachim and could not have children until the Archangel Gabriel appeared and gave the good news. Imagine what St. Anna and St. Joachim must have felt. They wanted children but couldn't have any. Then one day their prayers were answered. I'm sure they were grateful to God for their unexpected gift.

When we are grateful, we often express thanks. What are you thankful for?

Let's make today, a day of thanks.

Activity: Links of Gratitude. Cut out strips of construction paper. On each strip write down something that you are thankful for. Then, link all the strips together to create a paper chain. Choose a prominent place in the house to display it. You could even put it on your Christmas tree. Remember to look at it each day and count your blessings!

Need help? Parents, why are you thankful for your children? Children, why are you thankful for your parents? What person are you thankful for? What place are you most thankful for? What personal trait are you most thankful for?



Day 18:

We are getting closer to the Feast of the Nativity. We've gone through a number of activities to help us grow our faith and grow closer to Jesus Christ. We've touched upon fasting and how it cleanses our soul. We've also talked about feeding our soul. When our soul is hungry, it's important that we feed it.

"Kind words are like honey, sweet to the soul and healthy for the body." (Proverbs 16:24)

What was the last compliment you received from someone? Take a minute to complement each other. It is a joy to hear something nice about yourself. Let's spread that joy.

Activity:

Make a conscious effort to compliment as many people as you can. Parents- prompt little children. You could take one step further and count your compliments. Use M&M's or something else to count how many compliments you pay in a day. The bowl/cup represents our soul and the M&Ms are food. It's a good visual aid for this activity. Now, wait until the Nativity to eat the M&Ms.

Need help? Here are some compliments to help you get started.

You made that look easy. Great idea!

That's a cool toy. That was very kind of you.

I think you're nice! What a wonderful thing to say!

I like your mask!

Day 19:

Yesterday, we focused on compliments. Kind words make us feel good and they make others feel good too. Do you know the Golden Rule? "Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you." (Matthew 7:12) If we want people to be nice to us, then we should be nice to them. Kind gestures make us feel like we matter. That's a wonderful feeling. God gave us His only begotten Son, because we matter. Jesus died on the cross, because we matter. God always wants us to know we're important.

Hopefully, the past few days have made you feel really good. Feeding our souls with good words like scripture and good deeds help us prepare for the birth of Jesus.

Activity:

Grab a paper or Ziploc bag for each member of the family. On the front write 'Because You Matter'. (You can choose whether to sign your name or not.) Fill the bag with some sweet treats/candy. Then give it to your neighbor, someone that lives in your neighborhood, or someone at church.



Day 20:

All week we have been spreading Joy through our actions. Today is no exception. Let's share some joy with people that we see often but may not know very well.

Do you have a mail carrier? Mail carriers help deliver messages to us and help our letters get to where we intend.

Does your garbage get picked up? Garbage men/women keep our communities clean. They take away garbage so it doesn't pile up.

Both jobs are very important to our families. How often do we express our thanks to them? Let's share some joy with these important people.

Activity:

Find or make some decorations and hang it on the mailbox for the mail carrier and tape it to the trash cans for the garbage men/women.



Week 5: Praise

Day 21:

What is Praise? Think of a time when you have received praise. Praise is a way of thanking God for what he has done.

"I will praise the Lord with my whole heart." (Psalm 110:1)

Do you praise God? Believe it or not, you have already praised God throughout this Advent Journey. You praised Him through prayer and good deeds. Praise is done with a joyful heart. Read the following passage:

Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with high-sounding cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

Activity:

Have you seen the Sound of Music? Do you remember the song 'Favorite Things'? Have each member make a list of 5 of their favorite things. Once you are finished read the following prayer.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the blessings You have given me this day.

I praise and glorify Your holy name. Amen.

Day 22:

"Sing praises to our God, sing praises. Sing praises to our King, sing praises." (Psalm 47: 1, 6-7)

Another way to praise the Lord is through song. Do you sing in church? Do you sing Christmas carols?

Activity:

Take some time to learn a new carol or review an old one. After Christmas, you could visit a neighbor and sing praises to them. You could also call family and sing to them.

Here are a few options:

ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains. gloria...

Refrain: Gloria in excelsis deo

Shepherd why this jubilee
Why your joyous strains prolong
What the gladsome tidings be
Which inspire your heavenly song?

O Come All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;

Refrain: O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

O Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing all that hear in heaven God's holy word.
Give to our Father glory in the Highest;

All Hail! Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning,
O Jesus! for evermore be Thy name adored.
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

Day 23:

Yesterday I gave an example of two Christmas carols: *Angels, We Have Heard On High* and *O Come All Ye Faithful*. Both Christmas carols mention angels. Angels praise God, they carry people to heaven, they look after people and deliver messages.

The Nativity story has a lot of angels. An angel appears to Mary to tell her she will have a baby. An angel appears to Joseph to tell him not to be afraid. An angel appeared to the shepherds. All of these angels were serving the Lord.

God has given us the ability to deliver messages like the angels do. Today's activity will be to create an angel ornament to share with someone. When you share this ornament, share your feelings about your journey through Advent. Share your joy for the birth of Jesus. Share your thanks that the Lord is coming!

Activity:

Make an angel ornament to give to someone. Share your joy of the season and let them know why you're thankful for this journey.



Day 24:

What is praise? Praise is giving thanks. Do we only give thanks for good things? Should we give thanks when times are tough? What if it seems like nothing is going our way? Do we give thanks when we have a really bad day?

We've all been upset before? We have all felt frustrated. Often times, the last thing we think of is being grateful for those times. Why should we be thankful for tough times?

Even when days are bad, God gives us everything we need to be able to get through that. When we're sad, God will comfort us. When we're mad, God offers us peace. When we need someone to listen, God hears us. He always gives us hope through his promises and through His son, Jesus. Jesus was sent to us to save us.

Activity:

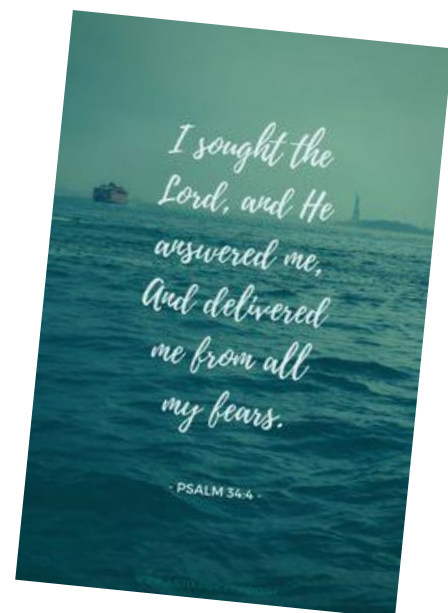
Complete the following reflection. Parents can help little ones with their sheets.

Gratitude Reflection

How am I feeling today? _____

I'm having a hard time with:

My challenges allow me to:



Day 25:

One way God shares His love and grace with us, is through His churches. Our church allows us to heal. It helps us find peace. The church gives us an opportunity to pray and refocus our lives. The church is there as a reminder of His love.

Activity:

Send a card to your priest or bishop (or both). Let them know you are thankful for your church and her leaders. Let them know you are thankful for the opportunity to pray for others and to be prayed for. Thank them for their ministry. Share your gratitude. Share your joy!

Day 26:

Read the Matins Gospel reading from Matthew 1: 18-25.

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being ^{la}a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is ^{lb}conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name ^{lc}JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

²⁴ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and ^{ld}did not know her till she had brought forth her ^{le}firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Day 27:

Read the Gospel account of the Nativity Matthew 2: 1-12.

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, ^{1a}wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

⁶ 'But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the ^{1b}wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."

Now, we are very close to the Feast of the Nativity. And our Advent Journey is coming to an end. Let the remaining time be prayerful and peaceful. Make things right. Think of the good that came out of this plan. Rejoice in your commitment to these daily activities.

This preparation will allow the Light of the World, our Lord and Savior, to replace any darkness that may have settled into your heart. The Newborn King will pour new life into you, for you to share with the world. Then, when you hear the words 'Christ is Born!', LET US 'Glorify Him!'