

ADVENT



Your Coming was Special!

Children enjoy listening to stories about themselves. This Advent, tell them about their advent, their coming. Bring out some of the tiny clothes and toys you had for each of your children. Talk about how you made them or who gave them to you, how everybody cared about the baby and looked forward to the new boy or girl.

Share their baby books, the photos taken in the hospital and during the first months. Remember all the details! This time spent together will remind the child how big a part of your lives he/she was and is today. Remember to tell them how Mary and Joseph must have looked forward to the coming of Jesus.

Sharing Your Light

Light is often used as a symbol of hope. Place a candle in a special place in your home. Each day, light it and tell about a special person in your life who has brought or brings you happiness and hope. Conclude with the following prayer or one of your own:

Lord, God, we look forward to the coming of Your Son. We rejoice in His peace. We rejoice in His justice. We rejoice in His love. He will lead us out of darkness into the light. May we live our lives in His light and love. AMEN.

Sing an appropriate Christmas carol that has special meaning for your family.

A Family Advent Calendar

A family Advent calendar helps people keep track of the days leading up to Christmas. It serves as a daily reminder that the birth of Jesus is the reason behind the season and helps family members pause for a few minutes each day to think about the importance of Jesus in their life and in the life of the world.

Advent calendars can be purchased in most card shops and religious bookstores. An even better approach, however, is to involve the whole family in making an Advent calendar of your own.

Using poster board and construction paper, magazine photos and whatever else strikes your fancy, create a picture of a family home, a neighborhood scene or a Christmas crèche. Behind the doors, shutters and other possible hiding places in your picture (under a nest in the tree or rock in yard) draw or paste pictures or symbols that carry a special Advent message for your family. Tape construction paper shutters over the windows and doors so they can be opened easily to reveal your message. Make sure there is a message (and hiding place) for each of the days between the first Sunday of Advent and Christmas day. Put a Number over each hiding place, starting at the highest number, and working down gradually to your Christmas message.

Each message should help your family in their preparation for Christmas. Be creative in deciding what messages you will use in your Advent calendar. If possible, divide up the messages among family members so that every day's message is a surprise for someone in the family. Messages can include:

- † Simple scripture passages, e.g. 1 John 3:11 (This is the message taught from the beginning: We must love one another) or Matthew 5:14, 16 (You are the light of the world; your light must shine before others so they see the good things you do and praise your God in heaven).
- † A family-enriching, Christmas preparation activities, like making dough ornaments together for the Christmas tree, deciding on a special gift you can buy as a family for a child from a poor family, or reading together a children's picture book on the birth of Jesus.
- † A faith question to discuss together, e.g. why is Christmas so special, or what does Santa have to do with Jesus?
- † A family, fun-time suggestion, e.g. sing the Fa La La song together, call grandma and tell her how much you love her, hug each other two or three times.

Put your advent calendar in a prominent place in your home. Choose a regular time during the day when you can all be together to uncover your message. Light a candle and say a simple prayer before your "grand opening."

A simple prayer like the following is appropriate for families with young children:

*Thank you, Jesus, for loving us.
As we get ready to celebrate your birth on Christmas day, help us to share our love even more with each other. Amen!*

Table Prayer During Advent

Light the Advent Candle(s) and pray:

Blessed are you, Lord, God, of all creation: in the darkness and in the light. Blessed are you in this food and in our sharing. Blessed are you as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ. Come Lord, Jesus!

The Jesse Tree

The Jesse Tree is a small evergreen tree or just a leafless branch on which symbols are placed which represent those people who helped prepare the way for the Messiah, or who were part of Christ's genealogy. The symbols start at the bottom of the tree and progress in relative chronological order. These symbols can be made from construction paper, felt, contact or wrapping paper over cardboard forms, or baker's dough. Most importantly, make trimming the Jesse Tree a family ritual.

The **Apple** symbolizes Adam and Eve to whom the promise of the Messiah was first made. This was the beginning of our salvation history.

The **Altar of Sacrifice** symbolizes the story of Abraham and Isaac. God established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. "I will make my covenant between you and me, and will give you many children," God told Abraham. "I will give you and your children this land in which you live, and I will be your God." This was God's part of the bargain, and from the chosen people, God asked only love.

The **Ark**. The Chosen People were aware of the promise of the Messiah. They were also aware of the covenant of God to Abraham. For many years they kept the covenant faithfully. But as time went on, the people forgot the covenant and returned to evil ways. To remind them of their agreement, God sent a flood that destroyed all except the just man, Noah, and his family.

The **Coat of Many Colors** represents Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, but who, like the Messiah, saved his brothers from death.

The people continued falling in and out of love with their God. To re-establish his covenant, God gave Moses **Tablets** of stone on which were written specific laws of Love.

The **Key and the Crown** represent King David. The prophets foretold that the Messiah would be of the House of David. He would be the key that opened heaven for all humankind.

A **Scroll** represents the numerous prophets who continually reminded the people of Yahweh's covenant with them, and of the promise of the Messiah. It was through the prophets' tradition of constant correction and affirmation that a small remnant of people accepted the Messiah.

The **Shell and Water** represent John the Baptist, the precursor of the Messiah and last of the Messianic prophets. John preached a baptism of repentance to help the people prepare for the Messiah.

St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, is represented by the **Hammer and Square** because he was a carpenter. Sometimes a **Donkey** is used to represent Joseph, because he led the donkey bearing Mary to Bethlehem.

The **Lily** is a symbol for Mary, the Mother of the Messiah.

The **Chi-Rho** is placed at the top of the tree to symbolize the Messiah or the Christ, the fulfillment of the promise and the "Desired one of all." Chi (X) and Rho (P) are the first two Greek letters in the title Christ. (Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew title Messiah, meaning the Anointed One.)

As a family, make and hang the symbols, explaining the meaning of each. Conclude the ritual with a prayer of blessing for the tree and the family members.

In the weeks that follow before Christmas, as a family, decide to spend time each day discussing the Bible stories that correspond to the symbols on the tree.

The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath itself is simply a circle of greens holding four candles. Even little children will be delighted to assist or accompany parents in buying or cutting tree boughs for the wreath. The base holding the greens can be made of just about anything – wood, Styrofoam or coat hangers bent straight and then formed in a circle. Fresh greens can be sustained for the season by providing each stem with water from tiny plastic floral vials. For the longest-lasting wreath, purchase a florists' sponge wreath form (sometimes called an “oasis wreath”); the greens need only be inserted into the sponge and the wreath can then be kept well watered. Involve children in creating the Advent wreath by asking them to help secure the greens and place the candles.

The four candles may be natural-colored, or the customary three purple and one pink. If you choose natural colored candles, the colors of the season may be represented by purple and pink ribbons during Advent, changing to white/gold or another festive color for Christmas. You may have a little crib set or Infant that can be placed reverently inside the wreath by little hands, or you can change the center decoration as the season moves on.

The Advent wreath may be used as a table centerpiece, as the candelabrum for evening prayer, or as part of the household's prayer corner.

The Advent wreath service may take place Saturday evenings. Using this time can serve to orient the children toward the Sunday Advent liturgy at the parish.

Presenting selected Advent texts to the very young child can be ideally done in the Advent wreath setting. The usual format for the presentation of scriptural texts could become the structure for the Advent wreath ceremony. Due to children's age-spread in the family, judicious flexibility will guide the choice of scriptural texts; choices should probably favor the younger child(ren).

On the first day of Advent, point out the symbolism of the wreath:

- The four candles represent the 4,000 years prior to Christ's coming and, of course, the four weeks of Advent.
- The unlighted candles represent the dark ages before Christ's coming.
- The lighted candles represent Christ, the Light of the World. Each week we light one more candle and that represents the idea that the coming of Christ is closer.
- The circular form of the wreath symbolizes that God has no beginning or end.
- The green of the boughs indicates hope – just as the green of spring indicates new life.
- The word *Advent* means the coming or promise.

Advent Wreath Blessing

All In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leader Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All Who made heaven and earth.

Leader

In the short days and long nights of Advent, we realize how we were always waiting for deliverance, always needing salvation by our God. Around this wreath, we shall remember God's promise.

Scripture Reading

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing.

This is the Word of the Lord.

(Alternate readings: Isaiah 63:16-17 or Isaiah 64:2-7)

All Thanks be to God.

Lord's Prayer

Leader

Let us now pray for God's blessing upon us and upon this wreath.

Lord our God, we praise you for your child, Jesus Christ:

the Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples,

the wisdom that teaches and guides us, the Savior of every nation.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath.

May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

May he come quickly and not delay.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Light the first candle.

Leader Let us bless the Lord.

All Thanks be to God. *(Making the sign of the cross)*

The blessing concludes with a verse from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" or another advent song.

Each day in Advent, perhaps at the evening meal, light the candles: one candle the first week, two the second, and so forth.

Advent Prayers

Family members gather around the Advent wreath before the evening meal.

Family Leader: Let us begin our prayer of waiting for the Lord.

One family member lights the weekly candle(s).

All: Our hope is in the Lord. Jesus is the light of our family.

Leader continues with one of the daily prayers listed below.

Leader

Let us hear the word of God: “O Lord of all creation, we are the clay and you are the potter. We are all the work of your hands.” (Pause)

Let Us Pray

O Lord, thank you for the gift of life which you have given to all of us in this family. You fashioned each of us as unique individuals. Help us to prepare our hearts for Christmas by being more patient with one another. Open our eyes of faith that we might recognize You in each other.

All We wait for you Lord.

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Leader

Let us hear the word of God: “Nations, hear the message of the Lord and make it known to the ends of the earth: Our Savior is coming.” (Pause)

Let us Pray

Lord, thank you for the promise of your Son who is our salvation. Help us to prepare our hearts for Christmas by opening our ears so that we might truly listen to each other in our family. May the words that we speak to one another become the sweet music of our unique family.

All We wait for you Lord.

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Leader

Let us hear the word of God: “A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse and from his roots a bud shall blossom. . . justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. . . then the wolf shall be the guest of the lamb and there shall be no harm or ruin on my holy mountain.” (Pause)

Let Us Pray

Lord, thank you for becoming one of us and for teaching us your way of faithfulness and justice. You can heal the hurts which divide us as a family. Help us to prepare our hearts for Christmas by seeking to forgive each other for the hurts which stunt our growth as a family. May we become both forgivers and acceptors of forgiveness.

All We wait for you Lord.

Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "As Jesus moved on from Capernaum, two blind men came after him crying out, 'Son of David, have pity on us!' Jesus said, 'Are you confident that I can do this?' 'Yes, Lord,' they replied. At that he touched their eyes and said, 'Because of your faith, you shall be cured'." (Pause)

Let Us Pray

Lord, thank you for our gift of faith. We are confident that you can heal us as a family of all sorrows and disappointments. What gift can we give you in return? Help us to prepare our hearts for Christmas by making time to laugh as a family while remembering all the crazy and fun times we have shared through the years.

All We wait for you Lord.

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Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "Make ready the way of the Lord, clear a straight path."

Let Us Pray

Lord, help us to prepare for the coming of Christ by giving new life through acts of generosity to our family members.

All We hope for you Lord.

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Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "I, the Lord, your God teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go."

Let Us Pray

Lord, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Teach our family to follow your example of prayer, compassion, and service.

All We hope for you Lord.

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Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "God who is mighty has done great things for me."

Let Us Pray

Lord, your greatness abounds in nature and in your people. Thank you for the countless blessings you give to our family. May we who have been so loved, now love others in return.

All We love you Lord.

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Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "They shall call the savior Emmanuel, a name which means God is with us."

Let Us Pray

Lord, you loved us enough to become one of us. You are a humble God who visits your people. We invite you to come into our home this Advent season to be Lord of our home. May your peace be our peace and may we learn to share your peace and presence in our world.

All We love you Lord.



Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "Nothing is impossible with God."

Let Us Pray

Lord, we don't know how to love as you love. We don't know how to forgive as you forgive. We trust that whenever we call out to you, we will be filled with your overflowing love. Our wealth is your love for us; we pray for the grace to be generous and trusting enough to give it away.

All We love you Lord.



Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "God who is mighty has done great things for me."

Let Us Pray

Lord, your love is prayer; a power which helps us to be generous. Your love is grace which helps us to forgive. Your love is truly great. Teach us your way of love, and help us to give it away to our family, our church, and to a waiting world.

All We love you Lord.



Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "All this is the work of the kindness of our God; God shall visit us in mercy..."

Let Us Pray

Lord, thank you for visiting our family. Renew our faithfulness to one another and to our church community.

All We rejoice in your coming Lord.



Leader

Let us hear the word of God: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near."

Let Us Pray

You have shown your kindness throughout this season. By our thoughts, words and actions, may we be a blessing to others this day.

All We rejoice in your coming Lord.

SPECIAL DAYS IN ADVENT

St. Nicholas Day

St. Nicholas lived in the fourth century and was a bishop in Asia Minor. There is a legend that when a poor man was unable to provide dowries for his three daughters, Nicholas felt sorry for them and secretly tossed a bag of gold into the father's window - three different times, once for each daughter - so that the daughters could marry. This legend evolved into the custom of giving gifts on St. Nicholas' feast day, and in English-speaking countries his name, Saint Nicholas, eventually became Santa Claus.

To help share in the generous spirit of St. Nicholas, you can fill a stocking or basket with goodies and leave it anonymously at someone's door.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

In Panama City this day is celebrated as Mother's Day and all the children wear their First Communion clothes to walk in an afternoon procession honoring Mary, the mother of Jesus.

You can share your First Communion stories with one another and invite any children who have recently received First Communion to wear their First Communion outfits to Mass on this feast day.

Las Posadas

Mexico celebrates nine days of Posadas. Processions of "pilgrims" knock at doors asking for posada – or shelter. They are invited in for fun and merrymaking centered around pinatas.

- Plan the first night gathering in the parish or in a neighborhood home. Invite parish families to take part in a procession with Mary and Joseph going from place to place asking for lodging. Only at the last place are they invited in and welcomed with prayer, reading of the Christmas story, and refreshments.
- To add to the festivities, fill a piñata with small candies and treats. Hang it high and let the children (and adults!) take turns, blindfolded, trying to knock a hole in it so the gifts will spill out.
- In the Mexican tradition, encourage families to open their doors to one another and share a true spirit of hospitality.

CHRISTMAS



Alternative Gift-Giving

Gather as a family to think about the persons to whom you want to give. Begin by reflecting about your past Christmas celebrations. What is the significance of gift giving in your family? What was it about Christmas and gift giving that each of you found frustrating or troubling? Discuss your feelings with one another. Take control of your spending and ask the important question: Does a meaningful gift have to cost a lot? Solicit ideas from each family member about giving gifts to relatives or friends.

Christmas Card Prayer Link

Use Christmas cards as a link to real people and their needs through the Christmas season and the month of January.

- † Choose one Christmas card each day from those received. Read the whole card aloud and pass it around the family circle. Do this at a regular time like breakfast time, after dinner, or at bedtime.
- † Have a special prayer together for each person in the family that sent the card.
- † Send a postcard to that family to tell them about your Christmas-card prayers and that their card was the one chosen on this day. They will appreciate knowing that your family prayed for them today.

Ring the Bells

Christmas bells ring out the Good News of Jesus' coming into our hearts, into our homes. Give a bell to each child to ring hourly on Christmas Eve day.

Christmas Traditions

- † Plan a family outing to cut down your own Christmas tree at a Christmas tree farm. Make it a full day: plan a scenic drive, pack a lunch and cut the tree together. If this is not possible, make some kind of special plans for buying and setting up the tree together.
- † Start a tree-decorating tradition. Serve the same menu each year as you trim the tree. The children will look forward to it.
- † Every Christmas, ask each family member to choose his/her own tree ornament to hang on the tree which becomes a keepsake in later years.
- † Have a party in honor of Jesus whose birth we celebrate. Invite an older person who would otherwise be alone, a young person away from home and special friends who are important to your family's life.
- † Gather together all the Christmas paper, ribbon and boxes, tape and string that you want for wrapping packages. The older children can help the younger ones, so everyone can participate. The giving of gifts is beautiful. Remember that Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least important of these, you did it for me!" (Matthew 25:40). What we do for others we are doing for Jesus. Give with open hearts full of love, for it is an extraordinary opportunity. After the packages are all wrapped enjoy a cup of hot cocoa together.
- † Do some early shopping! Find out if there are people in the parish who need transportation and invite them to join you.
- † Set a date with another family to go caroling in the neighborhood or nursing home. Close the evening with refreshments.
- † Begin writing Christmas cards early and pray for the special people on your list. Keep the list in a prominent place – on the refrigerator or bulletin board – and mail cards to the people in the parish who may not receive many cards.
- † Prepare a meal for a needy family in the parish. Call a few days in advance and then deliver it as a family at meal time.

A Christmas Creche

A Christmas creche is a wonderful visual for children. They can use it to see, touch and talk about the key characters in the Christmas story. Your family creche can be made together, or selected together from the variety of creche sets available for purchase in religious goods stores, Christmas shops and department stores. Many religious goods stores and museum shops now offer creche sets from different parts of the world featuring, for example, clay figures from Mexico, brightly painted wooden characters from El Salvador and sturdy plastic, classical reproductions from Italy and France. Pick a set that fits your tastes and that is large and tough enough to be regularly handled by young children.

Set aside some special time as a family, during Advent or on Christmas eve, to set up your creche. Use the following process or create one of our own:

- Read the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem from a children's bible or a good children's picture book.
- Discuss the story together, trying to breathe life for young children into the characters and events. Ask simple questions like: What do you think the city was like that Mary and Joseph were traveling to? How did they feel as they walked around looking for a place to stay? How did they feel when they finally found one? Where do you think the shepherds thought the music was coming from? How did they feel when the angel appeared? How would you feel if an angel suddenly appeared here! Why are we happy that Jesus was born that night?
- Choose and arrange the spot where your creche set will be displayed for the Christmas season.
- Take the creche figures out one at a time, identifying them and the role they play in the Christmas story. Allow children to carefully hold and touch the figures. Decide together where each figure should be placed.
- When all the figures are in place, light a candle and have one of the family members read the following prayer:

Lord, bless this creche. Help us always to be like the Christ child who is in love with his God. May the presence of the creche in our home remind us of how much God loves us. May we grow, every day, in love for one another, for our family, for our friends and for all the people of the world.

- Close by singing together a Christmas carol like *Silent Night*.

Yesterdays of Christmas

Grandmothers and grandfathers, uncles and aunts, as well as parents, can tell what their Christmas holidays were like when they were children. Here are some questions your children can ask. And they'll think of more!

Cut the slips apart, put in a container and draw out, one at a time. Do this through the holidays whenever relatives or friends visit and see how much better you get to know them! As an added treat, tape each question to a candy mint.

What do you remember most about Christmas?	How did you get your Christmas tree?	Who visited your home at Christmas time?
Did you sing carols and go caroling?	When did you open your Christmas presents?	Did you visit relatives and friends?
When was your favorite Christmas? Why?	What kind of presents did you give?	What kind of presents did you receive?
What decorations did you have?	What time did you go to Church?	When did you exchange gifts?
What was your favorite gift?	Did you have a special meal? What did you eat?	Did you have a stocking?

Christmas Tree Blessing

When the tree has been prepared, the family gathers around it. All make the sign of the cross.

Leader

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All Now and forever.

Leader

This tree is a blessing to our home. It reminds us of all that is beautiful, all that is filled with the gentleness and the promise of God. It stands in our midst as a tree of light that we might promise such beauty to one another and to our world. It stands like that tree of paradise that God made into the tree of life, the cross of Jesus. Let us listen to the words of the apostle Paul to Titus.

Scripture Reading

Titus 3:4-7

Leader

Now let us pray for God's blessing upon all who gather around this tree.

Lord our God, we praise you for the light of creation: the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night. We praise you for the light of Israel: the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures. We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son: he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree. May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts. May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The lights of the tree are then illuminated.

Manger Scene Blessing

The manger scene has a special place near the Christmas tree or in another place where family members can reflect and pray during the Christmas season. It is blessed each year on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Leader

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All Who made heaven and earth.

Leader

We are at the beginning of the days of Christmas. All through the season we will look on these images of sheep and cattle, of shepherds, of Mary and of Joseph and Jesus. Let us listen to the words of the holy gospel according to Luke

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:17.

Leader

Pray now for God's blessing as we look on these figures. God of Mary and Joseph, of shepherds and animals, bless us whenever we gaze on this manger scene. Through all the days of Christmas may these figures tell the story of how humans, angels, and animals found the Christ in this poor place. Fill our house with hospitality, joy, gentleness, and thanksgiving and guide our steps in the way of peace. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader

Let us bless the Lord.

All Thanks be to God.

Christmas Table Blessing

Family and friends gather around the Christmas table, upon which there is an unlighted candle.

Leader

Glory to God in the highest.

All And peace to God's people on earth.

Leader

As we light our candle on this feast of light may the Spirit of God that shone on the star of Bethlehem grow even brighter in our hearts and home(s) as we live our lives together.

A child lights the candle.

1st Reader

Listen to the words of the holy gospel according to John: And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of God's only Son, full of grace and truth. This is the Word of the Lord.

All The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

Blessing Prayer

The blessing may be read by one person or by a number of persons, each reading a paragraph.

Oh God of gentleness, in love you gather us at this table for our Christmas feast. We rejoice in being together to celebrate our joy in your great gift to us Jesus Christ your Son.

Lord Jesus hold us close to each other, unite us in spirit with those who are distant and with those who have died.

In the peace of this season may the hungry be filled and the homeless sheltered, and may the unremembered be united especially through your love and peace at work in us.

We remember especially those who have loved us in a special way this past year - who have been bearers of Jesus' love to us. (*Names may be said aloud or in silence*).

All Lord bless our food, our family, our friends. Help us to share our love.

Leader

Glory to God in the highest.

All And peace to God's people on earth.

Blessing Before or After Opening Gifts

Leader

Lord, we gather today as a family with a past history and a future hope. Be with us as we share our gifts with those we love. May this sharing bring us closer to you and each other. Let us see each other as a special and unique gift and as a sign of your love to this family.

Option 1: Remembering

Leader

Let us pause for a moment in silence to appreciate the Christmas tree and the gifts around it, and to remember a special joyful Christmas memory. If anyone wishes to share this memory, please do so.

Option 2: Appreciating

Leader

We are all gifts to each other. Each person has been given unique gifts by God. Let us call to mind the special gifts that each person here brings to our family. Let us recognize each person by name and tell what gifts they bring to us as a family. (*Allow enough time so that each person is affirmed and appreciated.*)

Blessing

Leader

Gracious God, we praise and thank You for all the many gifts and blessings which you have given us. Today, we especially praise and thank you for Your Word of Love to us, Jesus Christ. Be with our family today and every day, so that we may continue to be a family which always loves, forgives and appreciates one another.

All Amen.