



## **CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH THESE CATHOLIC TRADITIONS**

### **Read or chant the announcement of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ from the Roman Martyrology**

You can find this text, which is most appropriately sung or chanted on Christmas Eve, at the [website of the U.S. Catholic bishops \(usccb.org\)](http://www.usccb.org). “The announcement of the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord from the Roman Martyrology draws upon Sacred Scripture to declare in a formal way the birth of Christ,” the USCCB explains. “It begins with creation and relates the birth of the Lord to the major events and personages of sacred and secular history.”

### **Add figures to your manger and bless it**

If you have left your manger set or nativity scene mostly empty during Advent (except for the animals, of course!), then you can make a big deal out of adding the angels, shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and other figures on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. For a Christmas morning surprise, add the baby Jesus to the manger before your kids wake up. You may also want to place the three kings someplace else in the house so that they can “journey” to the manger after Christmas.

If you haven’t already, bless your nativity scene, using [the blessing found at the USCCB website](http://www.usccb.org).

## Pray before the baby Jesus

“No one, whether shepherd or wise man, can approach God here below except by kneeling before the manger at Bethlehem and adoring him hidden in the weakness of a newborn child.” So says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#563).

Encourage your kids to imitate the shepherds and wise men by kneeling before the baby Jesus in the nativity scene at your church or at your home, either after Christmas Mass or right away on Christmas morning, before opening gifts. You can find a brief [Prayer Before a Creche](#) here, or encourage your kids to make up their own prayer.

## Decorate and bless your Christmas tree

If you have held off on buying a Christmas tree (or kept it as an [Advent tree](#)), then decorate your Christmas tree on Christmas Eve as a sign and celebration of Christ’s arrival. (Take down your [Jesse Tree ornaments](#) first!) If you are just getting started with your family Christmas traditions, make your own homemade Christmas ornaments (see below for ideas).

The Church has a blessing for just about everything—including Christmas trees! You can find [the blessing at the USCCB website](#), or make up your own.

## Make and light a Christ candle

If your family has enjoyed lighting the Advent wreath, extend the practice by making a Christ candle. Purchase a large white candle, ideally one made for liturgical use (at least 51 percent bees’ wax), and decorate it with the *chi rho* (the first two letters in the Greek word for *Christ*) along with the year. Place it in the center of your Advent wreath and light it throughout the Christmas season as a reminder that Christ is the light of the world (John 1).

## Do more works of mercy

The message of the Gospel and the call of the Church is unambiguous: fully celebrating Christmas means reaching out to the poor, the oppressed, and all those in need of our help. Model the true spirit of Christmas for your kids by seeking out opportunities to help others throughout the whole Christmas season.

- Pray for Christians being persecuted around the world.
- Give away things you do not need (and maybe some things that others might need more than you), and renew your commitment to Christian stewardship and simple living.

- Consider year-end gifts to charitable organizations that help those in need; let your kids help choose a recipient.
- Donate goods to your local food pantry or other charity.

### **Celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family**

The Feast of the Holy Family follows quickly on the heels of Christmas (usually on the following Sunday). You can use the occasion to celebrate your own family by making a very simple “family tree” with photos of each person. Talk with younger children about what it means to be a family. Include the date of your wedding anniversary as the “birthday” of your family.

### **Celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord**

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

It’s also the perfect time to remember your kids’ baptisms, and to talk about what that means: “Did you know you were baptized, too, just like Jesus?” Tell the story of your child’s baptism. What was the most memorable moment? Why did you ask to have your child baptized? What promises did you have to make? Pull out anything related to your kids’ baptism: a baptismal gown, candle, pictures, or video.

Using fabric markers, make a tablecloth celebrating baptism containing the baptismal dates of everyone in the family; bring it out for meals on the anniversary of each person’s baptism.

### **Make your own Christmas tree ornaments**

If you’re just getting started with your family Christmas traditions, try making your own Christmas tree ornaments. If you have kept your tree as a super-simple Advent tree, then this might be a good activity for later in the day on Christmas Day.

There are so many great ideas for homemade ornaments online, we’re not going to attempt to provide a complete guide here. However, if you’re going to let your young children be involved (a great idea!) and if you care at all what your tree looks like, you’re going to want to choose simple decorations that are going to look pretty good no matter how your kids do with them. Some suggestions that caught our eye:

- **Classic or fancy paper chains.** Google “fancy paper chain” for a cool twist on this classic childhood ornament. If you go classic, personalize your paper chain with words (Christmas greetings or Bible verses) or art from each family member.
- **Ribbon chains.** Like a paper chain, but made from ribbons.

- **Natural ornaments.** Go foraging outdoors for natural objects to make into Christmas ornaments (respecting natural environments and any applicable laws). Ideas for natural ornaments include pine cones (decorated or plain), shells, dried grasses braided into decorative ropes, stones (polished and hot-glued to string or hangers), dried flowers, sea glass, twigs fastened together to make stars and snowflakes, and so on.
- **Strings of fruit and popcorn.** String cranberries, popcorn, and other dried fruits and nuts (dried orange wheels, shelled peanuts), then bring the strings outside for a tasty Christmas treat for the wild critters around your house.
- **Salt dough ornaments.** Homemade salt dough is easy to make and fun to play with; when the dough hardens, you can paint it to make your own ornaments.
- **Paper snowflakes and other ornaments.** For a twist, try making 3D paper stars and snowflakes.
- **Edible ornaments.** Candy canes, gumdrops, and other hard candies look pretty strung on a tree.

### Christmas Eve luminaries

In Spanish-speaking countries and parts of the southwestern United States, it is traditional to set out luminaries—candles set in paper bags weighted with sand—on Christmas Eve. It is said that the lights are meant to invite Christ, the light of the world, into the home. Probably the tradition is just as much about making a pretty and interesting light display in a season of darkness.

### Watch a Christmas classic

Let's face it, from the original cartoon version of *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* to *It's a Wonderful Life* to *The Nativity Story*, certain movies and television shows have a way of working their way into our hearts. Pass the popcorn, and pass on a Christmas movie-watching tradition to your kids.