

A LIVING ADVENT CALENDAR

by Judy Gattis Smith



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A Living Advent Calendar

A children's Christmas season program

by Judy Gattis Smith

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Child 1-3

(Elementary-age children)

Teacher

Reader 1-7

(Or more, up to 24 Readers if a different
child reads for each day)

A child or children to display the day's date and symbol

(From 2-48. Readers may also display
their own symbolic objects.)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Overview: In the rush of Christmas, children sometimes forget the story we celebrate — the long-awaited birth of Jesus. An Advent calendar is a daily visual reminder of this story. Now the Advent calendar is ready for its church debut! Many families enjoy such calendars at home, opening one little door each day to reveal an appropriate picture, symbolic object, or treat to count down to Christmas. This customized calendar is life-size for maximum visibility from the congregation, with a cardboard frame hand-decorated by your church's children. Simplifying the typical calendar's 25 "windows," there are only two hinged openings. One reveals the date and the other a child who shares a few lines and displays a symbol, such as a scroll, stuffed animal, or straw. Each Sunday of Advent, children present that week's short readings and symbols to create a total biblical overview of Jesus' birth. It includes every day from December 1-24 with the window on the Advent calendar opening to show the date, counting down the days, and the symbol that illustrates the story is displayed.

This is a refreshing change from the typical wreath candle lighting, and every bit as meaningful.

Options: This program was written as a Sunday-school-wide production with the four upper elementary classes each taking a week. It would work equally well in a sanctuary setting. You may opt to use the entire play at one performance instead of in weekly installments.

It also incorporates a variety of children's talents. Some could help with the construction and building of the living Advent calendar. Others could draw on, decorate, and paint the calendar. Still others could use acting skills in portraying the meaning of the symbols. Some children could be backstage property helpers, holding up props through the open window.

Depending on the size of the Advent calendar, the date and prop may be held up with the children concealed, or if the opening is large enough, the child may peek through. The Readers may peer through the window (recommended), stand adjacent to the living Advent calendar, or be concealed inside it. Just make sure a microphone is properly placed for maximum sound.

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Dates of Advent: Advent spans the period between Advent Sunday and Christmas. Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. The season of Advent begins on a different date each year. It can fall on any date between November 27 and December 3. This will necessitate dividing the weeks differently, depending on the year. For example, in the year that this Advent program was published, Advent starts on November 27. That means only December 1-3 will be read that first Sunday. The second Sunday, December 4-10; the third Sunday, December 11-17; and on the final and fourth Sunday, December 18-24 will be read. The following chart will help you to know how to divide the readings to be consistent with the calendar year.

First Sunday of Advent	Last Sunday of Advent
November 27	December 18
November 28	December 19
November 29	December 20
November 30	December 21
December 1	December 22
December 2	December 23
December 3	December 24

Props: You will need a different object to appear in the open windows for each day of the week. For the “date” window, this is simply a sign with the date. Create one sign per day — December 1, December, 2, etc., up to December 24, Christmas Eve, and the final day, for a total of twenty-four signs.

Objects reinforce a story in the minds of the children and remind them of their significance in our history. Following are some suggestions for each day’s symbolic object. You may also ask the children for their suggestions and allow them to bring what they consider appropriate objects. Be creative! There are often a number of ways the props may be used.

December 1-7 — Hourglass. It may appear behind the open window each day of the week with the sand receding each day — full in the time of Abraham, almost empty in the time of Isaiah. A series of pictures of hourglasses would be easiest to depict. If an actual hourglass is used, allow it to run out each day. An alternate approach would be to use only the changing date at the window, with each Reader (in costume and holding a sign with biblical character’s name) stepping up to the window to speak his part for that day. December 8 — A scroll or even a tax form or census form; December 9 — Donkey (stuffed or photo); December 10 — Sandals; December 11 — Door knocker; December 12 — A key (real or large picture); December 13 — A “No Vacancy” sign; December 14 — Stuffed animals (cow, sheep); December 15 — Straw; December 16 — A burst of light from a bright flashlight behind the calendar; December 17 — Actual music (such as a hymnal) or a musical score or notes; December 18 — An angel figure, such as a tree topper; December 19 — Hands folded in prayer; December 20 — A shepherd’s crook; December 21 — Star; December 22 — Camel (stuffed or photo); December 23 — Three wrapped packages or items approximating gold, frankincense, and myrrh; December 24 — Child’s growth chart or yardstick.

Introductory Lines: The first and last weeks of Advent have accompanying skits. For weeks 2 and 3, you may have the Teacher say the following, or you may simply start with the readings.

Week 2:

TEACHER: Last week was a good start to our Advent celebration. Let's continue learning more about Jesus' birth with our living Advent calendar.

Week 3:

TEACHER: Each day of December has taught us something about Jesus and his birth. We'll keep counting down to Christmas with another full week of readings about the Nativity.

Music:

Week 1 song: "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

Week 2 song: "Away in a Manger"

Week 3 song: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

Week 4 song: "Joy to the World!"

CONSTRUCTING A LIVING ADVENT CALENDAR

by John Perryman

An easy option is to use a large appliance box and simply cut two hinged openings beside each other — one for the date and one for the symbol — and paint and decorate the front of the box. Cut an opening in the back so the children can get in and out easily.

If you are up for trying something a bit more involved (but easier to store), buy some lattice wood from a home supply store. The lattice wood is inexpensive — the material used for arbor screens, fences, or under-porch vine holders. It's about 1 ½ inches wide and ¼ inch thick. It comes in eight or ten foot lengths, and it may be stapled together to make a square frame. Some places also have plastic lattice wood. Cover the frame with paper, canvas, or other material, stapled on. It may then be painted and decorated.

The two windows may be cut out and supported with smaller frames attached to the main frame with inexpensive small hinges, also available at home supply stores. Some window shutters come in very lightweight plastic and may be suitable for the project. The whole calendar may be dismantled and stored for future use.

Anything is possible, and it doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg!



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Introductory Skit

(To be performed on the first Sunday of Advent, which could be any date from November 27-December 3, depending on the year. See chart on page iii.)

(Three elementary-age CHILDREN are On-Stage. At least one is seated.)

CHILD 1: Wait! Wait! Wait! It seems like all I ever do is wait!

CHILD 2: Yeah. Waiting for the bus — waiting in line at school.

CHILD 3: Waiting for the school day to be over.

CHILD 1: Waiting for Christmas.

CHILD 2: Waiting for my grandparents to come.

CHILD 3: Waiting to open presents.

ALL: Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! *(TEACHER enters.)*

TEACHER: Why all these long faces? What's going on?

CHILD 1: We are so tired of having to wait for Christmas.

Why do we have to wait anyway?

TEACHER: Well, you know that Christmas is a very important event for us in the Christian faith. The birth of Jesus is a great mystery, and we need time to think about it.

CHILD 2: I already know the Christmas story. I don't need to think about it. I've heard it a thousand times.

TEACHER: But we can all learn something new about this story every time we hear it.

CHILD 3: I still don't like to wait.

TEACHER: There are many things in life that you need waiting time to prepare for. A baby needs nine months to grow and develop before birth. We have to wait on cold winter nights for spring to come. We wait for the sun to rise every morning. You had to wait to be old enough to go to school. In the same way, to really celebrate Christmas, you have to wait and reflect on the story — to try to understand the mystery. The church has set aside a special time called Advent, which is four weeks before December 25, to ponder this powerful story.

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CHILD 1: Four weeks! How can I wait that long?

TEACHER: Hmmmm. I think I have something that might help. Children have always had trouble waiting for Christmas. At first, children made a chalk line for every day in December until Christmas Eve, counting down the days. That helped some. Then, in 1908, a man named Gerhard Lang made an Advent calendar. The calendar, which was first used by German children, had windows or tiny doors to open for the days of Advent. Behind each window was a picture or symbol or verse to remind the children of the Christmas story.

Today we have a living calendar. (*Curtain opens on life-sized Advent calendar. See instructions for construction plans.*) In this first week of Advent, we want to remember how long the world waited for a Savior to be born.

DECEMBER 1

READER 1: (*Holds up a full hourglass as December 1 sign is displayed.*) Go back to 2000 B.C., Abraham and Sarah decided to follow one God. They left their home, walking to the Promised Land. They were waiting for a Savior. (*READER 1 exits. READER 2 goes to window as sign changes to December 2.*)

DECEMBER 2

READER 2: (*Holds up a slightly less full hourglass as December 2 sign is displayed.*) Remember Jacob, grandson of Abraham. God appeared to him and changed his name to Israel, so the Hebrews became the children of Israel. They were the people waiting for a Savior. (*READER 2 exits. READER 3 goes to window as sign changes to December 3.*)

DECEMBER 3

READER 3: (*Holds up an hourglass that is emptier than the day before as December 3 sign is displayed.*) Remember Jacob's favorite son, Joseph. He was sold by his brothers into slavery and was carried off to Egypt. After many

hardships, he rose to power. He spent his life trying to follow God in a strange land. He was waiting for a Savior. (*READER 3 exits. READER 4 goes to window as sign changes to December 4*)

DECEMBER 4

READER 4: (*Holds up an hourglass that is emptier than the day before as December 4 sign is displayed.*) **Remember Moses.** After four hundred years in Egypt, the children of Israel were slaves. Moses led them out of slavery toward the Promised Land. He wandered forty years in the wilderness. He was waiting for a Savior. (*READER 4 exits. READER 5 goes to window as sign changes to December 5.*)

DECEMBER 5

READER 5: (*Holds up an hourglass that is emptier than the day before as December 5 sign is displayed.*) **Remember David.** He became a great king and made Jerusalem the capital city. He reigned for forty years, waiting for a Savior. (*READER 5 exits. READER 6 goes to window as sign changes to December 6.*)

DECEMBER 6

READER 6: (*Holds up an almost empty hourglass as December 6 sign is displayed.*) **David's son Solomon built a great temple that housed the Ten Commandments given by God. That was an important act, but he was still waiting for a Savior.** (*READER 6 exits. READER 7 goes to window as sign changes to December 7.*)

DECEMBER 7

READER 7: (*Holds up an empty hourglass as December 7 sign is displayed.*) **When the kingdom of David and Solomon was destroyed, prophets arose to lead the people. Isaiah was one of these prophets. He dreamed and taught and preached, waiting for a Savior.** (*READER 7 exits. READER 1 goes to window as sign changes to December 8.*)

TEACHER: In the fullness of time, it came to pass. A Savior did come. But first, even then, Mary and Joseph had to wait.

DECEMBER 8

READER 1: (*Holds up a scroll, tax form, or census form as December 8 sign is displayed.*) In those days a decree went out from Rome that all the world would be taxed. (*READER 1 exits. READER 2 goes to window as sign changes to December 9.*)

DECEMBER 9

READER 2: (*Holds up a donkey as December 9 sign is displayed.*) Mary and Joseph made the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem because they were of the house and lineage of David. (*READER 2 exits. READER 3 goes to window as sign changes to December 10.*)

DECEMBER 10

READER 3: (*Holds up a pair of sandals and moves them in a walking motion as December 10 sign is displayed.*) Many families joined them on this journey. All were returning to their place of birth. (*READER 3 exits. READER 4 goes to window as sign changes to December 11.*)

DECEMBER 11

READER 4: (*Holds up door knocker as December 11 sign is displayed.*) When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, the town was very crowded. Though they knocked on many doors, spare rooms were filled with relatives and other travelers. (*READER 4 exits. READER 5 goes to window as sign changes to December 12.*)

DECEMBER 12

READER 5: (*Holds up a real key or an oversized picture of one as December 12 sign is displayed.*) Their last hope was a large inn. Surely there would be room here. (*READER 5 exits. READER 6 goes to window as sign changes to December 13.*)

DECEMBER 13

READER 6: (*Holds up "No Vacancy" sign as December 13 sign is displayed.*) **The innkeeper sadly shook his head. His inn was also full. Taking pity on Mary, who was about to give birth, he pointed to his stable. (READER 6 exits. READER 7 goes to window as sign changes to December 14.)**

DECEMBER 14

READER 7: (*Holds up stuffed stable animals as December 14 sign is displayed.*) **Mary and Joseph found warmth and shelter in the barn and were welcomed by gentle animals. (READER 7 exits. READER 1 goes to window as sign changes to December 15.)**

DECEMBER 15

READER 1: (*Holds up a handful of straw as December 15 sign is displayed.*) **The long-awaited Messiah was born in a manger, a feed box for animals. (READER 1 exits. READER 2 goes to window as sign changes to December 16.)**

TEACHER: **The Savior has come, but not in the way the people expected a king to arrive. This birth was different from other births. Miraculous events happened.**

DECEMBER 16

READER 2: (*Beams up a burst of light from a bright flashlight held below the calendar window as December 16 sign is displayed.*) **Shepherds on a nearby hillside were startled by a great light. (READER 2 exits. READER 3 goes to window as sign changes to December 17.)**

DECEMBER 17

READER 3: (*Holds up a hymnal or other musical score that is opened up as December 17 sign is displayed.*) **Suddenly the air was filled with music! (READER 3 exits. READER 4 goes to window as sign changes to December 18.)**



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