



Finding the Treasure in Christmas

*Advent Traditions for Families
with Kids of All Ages*

Dr. John S. Lewis

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Advent Traditions for Families with Kids of all Ages

Fourth Edition Trade Book 2024

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Praise for *Finding the Treasure in Christmas*

F*inding the Treasure in Christmas* beautifully reconnects families with the rich heritage of Christian tradition. Familiar and favorite Christmas symbols blend with the story of Jesus, offering children and parents a meaningful way to anchor the season in faith. Thoughtful daily practices and creative ideas make it a valuable resource for families and church leaders alike.

As your family returns to this book year after year, you'll discover that it also:

- Creates a flexible structure that can adapt to your family's uniqueness and experience of a Christ-centered Advent season.
- Restores your connection to the 2,000-year Christian tradition of Advent.
- Provides your family with simple rhythms and a daily menu—read, reflect, sing, share, do, pray.
- Helps everyone see the whole gospel of Jesus and story of the Bible in a bigger light.
- Develops the habit of looking Jesus in all of culture, not just in the Christmas symbols.
- Weaves new, fun ideas and Jesus truth into your existing traditions.
- Is ideal for families, teachers, and ministry leaders of any church background.

I haven't seen elsewhere a guide that is so helpful for sharing creative ideas for families to practice and observe, in ways that will be really appealing for kids and meaningful to adults at the same time.

Wendy Redal

What Others Are Saying About *Finding the Treasure...*

“Growing up, my family made a special effort to celebrate the Christmas season together. When I started my own family, I looked forward to shaping my own Advent traditions. Borrowing from the ideas that John used with his family meant I didn’t have to reinvent the wheel. When my children were babies and toddlers I was eager to help John make his book more age-appropriate, so we could start using it right away. As they’ve grown and matured, we’ve continued to use the book. We have enjoyed transitioning to the more in-depth questions and meanings from the same Advent themes we have used many years every December.”

Emily Bosh

“This Advent book has prompted us to set aside time as a family in the weeks leading up to Christmas. The book has numerous ideas to choose from each week to focus family time on worship and prayer, creating traditions that keep our focus on Christ. We highly recommend this resource for families with kids of all ages!”

Damon and Polly DeLapp

“This book is a great resource for helping families and church communities connect through the celebration of Advent. Our church used it as the basis for an all-ages Advent program, where we invited everyone to come together to remember the importance of the season. Using this book as a resource, we were able to include activities that were engaging for children, parents, and grandparents! What a wonderful way to connect within the generations of our church community.”

Kendra Paker



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Advent Traditions

This book was designed to help your family make Christmas and Advent traditions for many years to come! To help make this book the family treasure it is designed to be, pages in the back have been added for the inclusion of *your* photos, highlights, and memories from each Christmas season.



Cover from the first Lewis Advent Book in 2003

Symbols and Themes for Each Week

SYMBOLS

WEEK ONE: TREES & LIGHTS

This week highlights the larger story of our faith, from the world's creation to the Second Coming of Christ.

WEEK TWO: ORNAMENTS & NATIVITY

This week emphasizes Jesus as Emmanuel, "God with us." Jesus was, and still is, very present in the relationships and realities all humans share.

WEEK THREE: GIFTS & STOCKINGS

This week reminds us that our tradition of giving presents at Christmas comes from the spirit of the Magi's gifts: we give to each other because God first gave us Jesus.

WEEK FOUR: STAR & ANGELS

As the stars and angels guided the characters of the Christmas story, so Jesus still goes ahead of us and guides us through the darkness of our life journey.

ADVENT ACTIVITIES

FOCUS

Each day has a title and focus related to the Christmas symbols and theme of the week. This focus includes something important for our lives all year long.

READ

One or two Bible passages are given for reading. Included are both the classic Christmas stories and also other biblical passages. To get our post-preschool children more involved, we had them look up and read the passages themselves; sometimes they even acted out the story.

REFLECT

This is a short reflection relating to the theme of the day, written with slightly older children and adults in mind. Parents can skip or paraphrase this section for younger children.

SHARE

Activities or discussion questions related to the day's theme are offered for Monday to Saturday. The questions after "Ask" are meant to be read aloud directly to your kids.

Because this book was designed to be used in a family over many years, the three sharing questions are appropriate for, and usually broken into, three age brackets:

- Young children (roughly ages 2–4)
- Older children (roughly ages 5–12)
- Teenagers (roughly ages 13–18)

SING

This is a verse from a classic Christmas carol. There is often a connection of the carol's words to the scripture or focus of the day.

PRAY

There is a short prayer provided for you to use directly—feel free to modify it, or offer your own.

SUNDAYS

Because families might more easily make Sunday their special Advent celebration day, you will find some extra activities on this day.

On Sunday you are invited to decorate your home with the common Christmas symbols that will be highlighted and reflected upon during the week.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

Here you will find a brief explanation of the week's Advent candle. Procure an Advent wreath and candles ahead of time.

OTHER OPTIONS

These are extra options for Sunday or other week days, for those who want to experiment or change up the routine.

WATCH

Here you will find one or more classic Christmas shows or movies to watch on Sunday or any day of the week. The suggestion is accompanied by a brief explanation of how the movie relates to the week's theme.

CONNECT TO OTHERS

This section discusses a way to deepen your family's celebration of Advent and presents an idea of how to extend God's gift and the spirit of Advent to your neighborhood and community. This can be accomplished at any time during the week.





WEEK ONE

**JESUS IS THE TREE OF LIFE
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**



— WEEK ONE —

SUNDAY

1. Watch *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, 1966. (Note the theme of the light and life of Christmas not being found in material things, but in the heart.) Or watch, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, 1965.
2. Take a nighttime walk around your neighborhood and enjoy the Christmas lights. If they are old enough, let the kids hold flashlights as a sign that you are God's light. Pray for your neighbors as you walk.
3. When it becomes dark, shut off all the house lights. Sit in darkness for a moment, and then plug in your lights. Imagine the lights are like Jesus bringing his light into the world.

FOCUS

Our green Christmas tree and its lights remind us that Jesus is our Life and the Light of the World. He calls us to bring his life and light to the world.

TRADITIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Make or buy your Advent wreath and find a central place for it in your home.
2. Set up your tree. You might pick out a fresh tree from a tree farm or tree lot or bring out your artificial tree from storage; no matter the process, we can still be reminded of Jesus' story. If you go out to buy or cut a fresh tree see the previous page.
3. Put lights on your tree and outside, if you do that.
4. Light the first Advent candle, which some traditions call the "Prophecy Candle." Read Isaiah 9:2 and 11:1 as you do. These verses are prophecies about the future spoken hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Notice how Isaiah 9:2 mentions people walking in darkness will see a great light. Isaiah 11:1 promises that a shoot of new green life will come up from God's people who appeared to be just a dead stump. As we light the first Advent candle, we are reminded that God brought, and still brings, his light and life to the world.

REFLECT

Our family's first Advent tradition is to cut down our tree, put it up in our house, and decorate it with lights. But where did this familiar tradition come from? Legend has it that centuries ago, on a Christmas Eve night, the theologian Martin Luther looked at a forest, and saw the trees with the moon and stars behind them.

Inspired by this beautiful scene, he introduced the tradition of the Christmas tree and candles. The pine tree, already a recognized symbol of life in ancient Druid festivals, became a symbol for Christ's abundant and everlasting life. The candles symbolized Jesus, the Light of the world.

Two Isaiah prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus' coming. In his teaching, Jesus brought his light of truth to minds and hearts darkened by sin. In his miracles he brought life to the sick, the stuck and the aimless. The Apostle John summarized how Jesus did that in John 1:4, "In him was life, and the life was the light of us all."

Yes, Jesus is a gift of light and life. The line from "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" perfectly sums up our wish for Advent: "Welcome Christmas, bring your light!"

SING

Hark, the Herald Angels Sing (Verse 3)

Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings.

Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

PRAY

Lord, your light is greater than our darkness and shows us the way. Your life is greater than what our world and its ways could ever offer us. Thank you, God, for being full of life and light, and thank you for Jesus, who shared both of these gifts with us. May our lights and tree remind us of this daily. Help us to receive your light and life and then share them with others. Amen.



MONDAY

Jesus Is the Light and Life of Creation

FOCUS

At the beginning of the Bible story, God creates light and living things to fill the Earth. We are to remember that God still gives light and life to us today!

READ

Open to **Genesis 1:1-5, 11 and 2:4-9, 15-17** (verses most related to light and life). A fun idea might be to start reading this scripture in the dark with a flashlight, then turn on the lights when you get to the part where God creates light.

REFLECT

This week's symbols of light and trees show up repeatedly in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This week we will follow these themes throughout the grand sweep of the entire Bible story. Let's start at the beginning.

Just as each day begins at midnight in darkness, the creation story in Genesis also starts in chaos and darkness. Then, God speaks light into existence (1:3). This light creates the possibility of life for plants, animals, and us.

Trees were also part of God's rich creation. Eden was tucked in the middle of a desert where water was scarce and fruitful trees were signs of extravagant life. God's first command was for the woman and the man to eat their fill as often as they liked from these fruit-bearing trees.

Just as we place our Christmas trees in the center of our homes, God placed the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the center of the garden, in the middle of Adam and Eve's daily living. In declaring the second tree off-limits, God made the boundaries to his love and generosity clear. Only in trusting and obeying God would Adam and Eve truly enjoy their Creator's gift of true life. And what a life God had in store for them in Eden's abundance.

And who was there with God the Father, co-creating life and light, trees and abundant vegetation? God's son, Jesus Christ. When Jesus eventually came to Earth in human form, it was to continue the work both he and the Father began long before any of us were created. No wonder we call Jesus the Light of the World and Giver of Life.

For those who put their trust in God, Jesus is still bringing abundant life out of chaos and light out of darkness. Through this grace, we are grafted into God's strong Tree of Life. Without Jesus, we are like a balloon without air, a light bulb without a socket, a puppet without a hand. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

SHARE

Read and then discuss the question or questions that are best suited for the ages of your children.

1. Have everyone draw a favorite plant and/or animal that God created in the beginning and that he still creates.
2. Unplug the tree's lights and turn off the room lights. Ask: *What would the world be like without the sun or any other kind of light? What would happen to the plants? Our food? Our life?* Remember together: the only way we, too, can truly live is in the light of God's "Son."
3. God's first and generous command is literally to "Eat, eat of every tree of the garden." Ask: *What do you imagine his tone of voice and the expression on his face were when God said this?* Have everyone share a specific example of how you experienced God's generosity and life this last year.

SING

O come, O come, Immanuel
O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

PRAY

Thank you, God, for making each of us, and breathing the breath of life in this beautiful world and in beautiful me! Everything would be so different without the abundant life and light you give to us. We are so glad you are good and take care of everything you made. Help us to keep you as central in our lives as our Christmas tree is in our home this season. Amen.



TUESDAY

Light and Life Became Dim Through Sin

FOCUS

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they were surrounded by darkness and felt lost and afraid. When we disobey God, we can feel the same way, and that we, too, are trapped in the dark. This is why God would later send Jesus to bring us light and make us alive again.

READ

Turn off all the lights and use a candle or a flashlight to read **Genesis 3:1-13, 22-24**.

REFLECT

After the world was created, God made Adam and Eve to live in the Garden of Eden. However, it did not take long for God's paradise to experience disaster. The serpent's question about God's command and stinginess clouded Eve's ability to trust God's words. She believed the lies and ate the fruit, hoping for true life in each forbidden bite. Unfortunately, Eve found herself in darkness and death, hiding from her husband in shame.

Where was Adam all this time? Right beside his wife. He, too, was fooled by the serpent's false promises. He joined Eve in disobeying God's loving and serious commandment, "Don't eat

from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." The Lord kept true to his word and sent the man and woman out of the privileged place of Eden's full pleasure.

The Lord's mercy made sure that death did not have the last word. Despite their rebellion, God still approached Adam and Eve right after their sin in the cool of the day. The consequences of their sin were serious but not fatal; they would be allowed to live and still enjoy many of Earth's blessings, though now under the curse of broken relationships.

Adam and Eve traded in extravagance for existence as the central experience of life, and the world has never recovered. We, too, live under sin's consequences. We might appear to ourselves or others like the Christmas trees in our living rooms, to be fully alive, but in reality, we are already drying up and doomed to death.

But thankfully, because of God's great love for us, we are not left in death and darkness! It is only by God's mercy that our sin does not cut us off completely from the spring of his living water. God's light makes a blazing comeback throughout the rest of the story—and the rest of human history. That is what Christmas is all about.

SHARE

Read and then discuss the question or questions that are best suited for the ages of your child(ren).

1. Have everyone hang up a plain red ornament on the tree, which is traditionally a symbol of sin. Looking at these red ornaments in the weeks ahead will remind us of Adam and Eve's disobedience, our own sin, and why Jesus needed to bring us life and light.
2. Turn out all the house and Christmas lights. Sit for a moment in the dark. Ask: *Why are people afraid of the dark? What are some ways people experience darkness in their lives?* Then turn on the lights and be thankful Jesus does not leave us in our sin and darkness!
3. Recall from our story together what Adam and Eve did, or did not do, that harmed their relationships with God and each other. Ask: *What is one personal example from the last year where your sin had a negative effect on your relationship with either someone close to you or with God?*
4. Review together what Adam and Eve did after they ate the forbidden fruit: they hid, blamed others, and felt shame. Ask: *What is an example from your current relationships or in our culture where you see the same consequences happening: hiding, blame, shame?*

SING

O Holy Night

O Holy Night!
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks
a new and glorious morn!

PRAY

Lord, from the very beginning of time, Adam and Eve's story has been our story too. We are tempted to think we can see without your light, that we can be joyful and happy with something besides you. Sometimes, when we recognize our sin, we feel ashamed and far from you and each other. The world has needed a Savior since Adam and Eve. Come, Lord Jesus, and change our death into life and bring your light to our darkness. Amen.



APPENDIX

Preparing Kids to Live in a Polarized World

Once heard a story of two women immersed in Christmas shopping at a local mall. Tucked in the midst of all the glitter, sale tags, and holiday music, they discovered a small unassuming manger scene. One of the ladies said, “Isn’t it just like those Christians to sneak this into Christmas?”

The story reminds me that Christmas brings two perspectives together that are often mutually exclusive. We wanted our children to recognize and understand this tension.

The first view of Christmas, I call the sacred pole. To those loyal to this perspective, “Christmas” means “Christ mass,” a worship service for Christ. God’s people gather in gratitude to celebrate Jesus’ coming into the world, recalling the story of Bethlehem. Early Christians established Christmas as a time to remember and share the good news of the loving God who came as a baby and who will one day come as King of Kings.

Supporters of this sacred perspective point to history. The early church was celebrating

Christmas by the 4th century. Industrialization in the 19th century and commercialization in the 20th reshaped earlier celebrations, but they did not change the fact that Christmas for God’s people was anchored in the story of Jesus’ birth. Many beloved symbols originated in this sacred story and must be remembered amid distorted messaging. Traditional carols and church services help preserve the holiday’s meaning.

On the other end of the Christmas spectrum is the secular pole. The story of the women at the mall reflects this view: many celebrate the season without reference to the baby of Bethlehem.

Advocates of this secular view also look to history. Before Christmas was a Christian holiday, the Romans celebrated the winter solstice, anticipating the return of light in winter’s darkness. When Christianity became the Roman Empire’s official religion in 327 AD, Christmas took on official status and was woven into existing traditions. Some argue that modern symbols have little connection to the

biblical story and that the holiday functions more culturally than religiously.

Many Western traditions do trace back to Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, not Scripture. The phrase "Merry Christmas" first appeared in 1534, long after the Bible was written, and Dickens helped popularize it. His focus on family gatherings, generosity, and festive meals has shaped how many now celebrate December 25th.

Endearing non-sacred symbols have also emerged. Traditions and songs without reference to Christ abound, celebrating family, love, generosity, or simply winter—snow, sleigh bells, fireside warmth, and joy. Some assert the Christmas tree traces back to pagan festivals. Activities like putting up lights, decorating, exchanging gifts, baking for neighbors, or giving to those in need do not require belief in the Bethlehem story but meet a human desire to celebrate with others and bring relief from winter's heaviness.

Where do these polarized perspectives leave those who follow Jesus and want to celebrate Christmas faithfully? How do we live as a light in a season marked by darkness?

THE SACRED AND SECULAR TENSION

Many of us intuitively know this sacred/secular divide is artificial. This false dichotomy

creates alienation between the church and the nonreligious. Like other poles in politics or religion, extreme positions often leave us frustrated or disconnected. More importantly, the debate distracts us from a wiser way forward.

Some reject the secular pole altogether. Others attend church only on Christmas Eve while celebrating the rest of the season in secular ways. Many of us resist this split and sense there must be a better way.

Christmas, like life, is not simply light or dark. Both poles contain truth and must be held together. Celebrating Christmas "between the poles" helps us recognize that the holiday's origins are mixed—both sacred and secular.

Our goal during Christmas is to let both coexist in tension—not because both are equally true, but because the church is called to live in the world but not of it. Our homes during Advent should be like a greenhouse, where we practice living like Christ in the world. Learning what matters to the world and pointing others to Christ in word and deed is essential—for the world's sake and our own formation.

CHRISTMAS IS A PERFECT TIME TO PRACTICE THIS


In this Advent book, sacred and secular symbols are embraced together as invitations to see Jesus. Sometimes we see Him directly—in the

Nativity, the angels, the star. Sometimes the message is more subtle—in ornaments, gifts, candy canes, and lights.

When our families learn to see Christ's story in these symbols, we become better able to see Him in daily life—in commercials and billboards, marketplaces and movies, playgrounds and parties, courthouses and campuses.

This has been my hope as we raised our children. Now it is the hope of this book.





As a family, choose a photo from this Christmas to paste on one of the following memory pages. Answer the questions and watch as this keepsake takes shape year after year. God Bless and Merry Christmas!



Our Christmas Celebration 20____

PASTE A PHOTO HERE

1. Where did we celebrate Christmas Eve and day this year, and who joined us?

2. What activities, gatherings and events during the season did we do?

3. What traditions did we do (this book and otherwise)?

4. Was there a special present(s) given?

5. Anything else we want to remember?
