

# Advent Christmas —AND— INTERNET SAFETY

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*This e-book was designed to act as a practical and reflective guide throughout the season of Advent. Each of the four main sections can be read and implemented during each of the four weeks of Advent. It is our hope that this guide will not only help you keep your family safe, but will also encourage your family to welcome Christ into your home this Advent in new ways.*

Advent  
Christmas  
— AND —  
INTERNET  
SAFETY

# ADVENT, CHRISTMAS, AND INTERNET SAFETY

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The Christmas season is perhaps the most joyous season of the year. We put aside our busyness and the stresses of life to focus on what is truly important. It is a time of getting together with our families, exchanging gifts, and, most importantly, remembering that God became man and was born among us as an innocent, vulnerable child. That Baby, born in a manger in Bethlehem, would grow up to suffer, die on the cross, and rise again so that each of us might be healed from our infirmities, forgiven of our sins, and live in the joy of being sons and daughters of God.

As we reflect on the birth of the Son of God, we cannot help but to pause in great wonder. It is important to reflect on the great role that St Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary played in the life of Jesus. **They were called to protect, nurture, educate, and provide for this small, vulnerable Child. They taught Him to work, to play, and to pray.** He learned to love from the love He witnessed between Mary and Joseph, as well as from the love He received from them. In return, Jesus taught His parents how to love and sacrifice.

For Mary and Joseph, every aspect of parenting and raising their Child took on the character of worship. Every expression of motherhood and fatherhood was ultimately an expression of their love for God. This is also true of every Christian parent. From the moment of your child's baptism, they became a vessel of the Holy Spirit, a living tabernacle. Just as Mary and Joseph were responsible for protecting, nurturing, educating, and providing for the Son of God, every Christian mother

and father is called to do the same for their children who are adopted sons and daughters of the same God. The right of baptism reminds parents of the duty to “keep the light of Christ burning brightly” in the hearts of their children. The Christmas season is also a time to reflect on this great responsibility and the vocation to protect and nurture the light of Christ that burns in the hearts of our children.

One of my favorite childhood memories and one of the things I miss most as an adult, is the annual trip to see Santa at the mall. I would wait in line for hours just for the opportunity to tell Santa exactly what I wanted for Christmas. On one of the last trips of my childhood, I asked Santa for the most coveted Christmas gift I could imagine, a ColecoVision. For those of you that are younger than me, ColecoVision was a video game console that played two-dimensional games which were sold separately as cartridges. It had much better graphics than its competitors, the Atari 2600 and Intellivision. I remember the joy I had when I unwrapped it on Christmas morning because it was the best, newest technology available, and it was all mine.

Today, most kids would find that game console incredibly boring, and, nostalgia aside, so would I. Kids still want the newest, best, technology that the modern world has to offer under their tree on Christmas morning. Most likely, your Christmas joy involves a home filled with new iPods, smartphones, tablets, laptops, computer game systems; the list goes on and on. The difference between these new gifts and the ones I grew up with is that today almost every form of technology somehow connects us to the outside world via the internet. If we aren't careful we may be giving our children more than we bargained for.

**Today, whether we like it or not, every internet-capable device brings with it the potential for accidental exposure to inappropriate content, pornography, or sexual predators on social media sites.** Your vocation to “keep the light of Christ burning brightly” involves protecting your children from harmful content. It also involves making time in your family to welcome the presence of our Savior into your home, into your conversations, and into your hearts. The following chapters of this short e-book are excerpts from a series of Advent reflections on preparing to welcome Jesus Christ into our homes at Christmas. The content is timeless and applies to all of us at every time of the year. Each section will guide you through the steps necessary to make your home safe from illicit content, as well as a more welcoming environment for the presence of Christ. I hope these ebook will help you in imitating the Holy Family as you protect, nurture, and educate your children, always keeping the light of Christ burning brightly in their hearts.

— ONE —

**IS THERE ROOM IN YOUR INN?**

The Advent season is once again upon us, and it is likely to be busier than ever. In addition to the normal pace of the kids’ sports, plays, and other activities, we are planning trips to see relatives, trying to get our shopping done, and decorating our homes and churches for the holiday season. If we aren’t careful we will put up our Christmas trees, nativity scenes, and advent wreaths without stopping to reflect on the “why” behind what we are doing.

Why do we take these four weeks to prepare to celebrate the Incarnation—the coming of God into the world? Shouldn't it be to intentionally prepare for the Lord's coming? It is precisely to focus our attention on Jesus' coming into the world—not only His first coming, but also on His final coming at the end of time and the end of our lives. If we want to truly be prepared to greet Him, we must focus on the way He enters into our lives each day.

One of my favorite things about this season is the classic Nativity play that young people perform to remind us of the story of Christ's birth. My favorite character is the innkeeper. Inevitably, a few of the most animated children get to play innkeepers who insistently slam the door in the face of St. Joseph, the Blessed Mother, and the Savior in her womb. "NO MORE ROOM! GO AWAY WE DON'T HAVE ROOM! GO SLEEP IN THE BARN!" The Innkeeper almost always gets the best laughs, and if we stop to reflect on this character, he also provides us with the most profound Advent meditation.

In his final Christmas homily as our Pope, Benedict XVI reflects on the innkeeper asking the questions, "Do we really have room for God when He seeks to enter under our roof? Do we have time and space for Him? Do we not actually turn away God Himself?"

These are the fundamental questions of the Advent season. Are we first and foremost creating a space for the Lord in our hearts? Are we creating space for Him in our minds, or are our minds too full of "other stuff" to take time for Christ? Our Holy Father went on to say, "We begin to do so when we have no time for God. The faster we can move, the more efficient our time-saving appliances become, the less time

we have. And God? The question of God never seems urgent. Our time is already completely full.” Isn’t it true that the more efficient our time-saving appliances become, the less time we have? At a minimum, are we constantly looking at screens instead of at one another?

What can we do this Advent Season to make room for Christ in the Inn of our hearts? Here are a few suggestions: Set aside all technology for specified times. Take the time to talk with one another, play a board game with your kids, go for a 10 minute walk with your spouse, **each time you walk by your Advent wreath offer the simple prayer, “Lord, help me to prepare a space in my heart for You.”**

Another specific way to not only prepare a space for the Lord, but also to protect that space in our children’s hearts, is to ensure that their hearts and minds are guarded from the anti-love, anti-gospel, anti-family messages in the media. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reminds us that, “In the family we can also learn to be critical about certain messages sent by the various media. Sad to say, some television programs or forms of advertising often negatively influence and undercut the values inculcated in family life” (274).

Throughout this ebook, I will be providing tips and a step-by-step approach to making your homes safer and protecting your children from the anti-gospel which crowds the “Inn of our heart” and keeps us from fully welcoming Jesus. The first tip: Set up filtering on your home Wi-Fi network.

Filtering keeps much of the anti-love content available on the internet out of our homes. Unfortunately, we live in a world where the average age of exposure to online pornographic content is eight years old. It is

common for a High School senior to have been viewing pornography for ten years by the time he or she graduates, and most students report that there was no filter on their home Wi-Fi network. Filtering for home Wi-Fi networks is free through a service called OpenDNS. Take this first step toward preparing the space in your home to welcome Christ not only at Christmas but each day of our lives.

— *TWO* —

**CHRIST'S FIRST COMING—INTO OUR HEARTS**

The Catechism reminds us that, “When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor’s birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’” (CCC 524). Each year we remember—we make present—the ancient expectancy of the Messiah. We prepare ourselves to receive Him just as the people of God were prepared to receive Him throughout the Old Testament. This reflection and preparation also must take place in our families. Since each family is a “domestic church,” it is the gift and responsibility of each family to prepare to welcome Jesus into its home by reflecting on the first coming of Jesus into our lives, into our hearts, and into our families. For those of us who are cradle Catholics, this means reflecting on your baptism.

For parents, this means reflecting on your children’s baptism. That day when you brought your child to the Church, water was poured



over their heads, and the Holy Spirit entered into their hearts. This was indeed the first coming of Christ into our lives, and it too involved some preparation.

That preparation was expressed liturgically when our parents and godparents spoke the baptismal promises on our behalf. These promises signify a time of preparation that involves for all Christians the rejection of evil and sin, and an entrustment of our lives to the person of Jesus. “Do you reject Satan? And all his works, and all his empty show?” **When we say “I do” to these questions we say no to all sin, we say no to all resentment, we say no to the lies that he sows in the world.** We are then free to say yes to God the Father, Jesus Christ His Son, and the Holy Spirit. We say “no” in order to say “yes.” This dynamic is all the more evident when an adult is baptized and they are fully conscious of the parts of their past life that they are saying no to in order to freely receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and the person of Jesus Christ.

Saying “no” to temptation, sin, and the occasion of sin are therefore an integral part of preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ at the end of time and in our daily lives. It is a way of preparing room in the Inn of our hearts. Yet, many of us can be forgetful of this promise to say no and find it difficult when we are constantly bombarded with new information and ideas. This can be particularly difficult for our young people who are growing up in a time of unprecedented distraction especially as technological advances offer bottomless options for entertainment through the devices that while intended to make our lives better, often present temptations to isolate ourselves. Even worse, they have become occasions of sin due to increased accessibility of inappropriate online content.

Our late Holy Father once said, "The abuse of sexuality is the main obstacle to spirituality" (*John Paul the Great: His Five Loves*, p. 104). This carries great significance today as the average age of exposure to hardcore pornography has dropped to just 8 years old. This means that we have high school seniors who have regularly been viewing pornography for ten years by the time they graduate. There is surely an obstacle to spirituality here and an obstacle to saying "yes," as well as welcoming Jesus into the inn of their hearts. Many young people who have grown up in our modern culture admit that they wish their parents would have done more to limit access and exposure to media.

This Advent Season is an opportune time to take the steps necessary to safeguard the hearts of our children. The first step to set up filtering through your home Wi-Fi networks by using a service like OpenDNS. The next step is to say "no" to Satan, his works, and his empty promises, by making sure that parental controls are set-up on all internet capable devices in your home. Nearly all tablets, iPods, smartphones and video game systems can browse the internet today. They also come with parental controls that allow you to once again say "no" to evil on your child's behalf. Sometimes parents feel that if they set parental controls they are somehow not trusting their children. I would answer that not setting parental controls is placing too much trust in the internet. Most first exposure to internet pornography is "accidental". Although no solution is perfect, setting all the parental controls is necessary to minimize the chance of accidental exposure. Taking this step now also provides the opportunity to ensure that all devices will be safe before they are unwrapped this Christmas season.

Another tool I highly recommend is called a Kitchen Safe. It is basically a container with a timer lock. Devices can be a distraction in general from family communication. Placing all devices in the kitchen safe and setting the timer for an hour, or two, or five is a great way to set aside distraction and open up space for your family to be present to one another—and to Christ.

— *THREE* —

**THE JOY OF BEING KNOWN**

On the Third Sunday of Advent, we celebrate Gaudete Sunday. That name comes from the entrance antiphon for the Mass—Gaudete in Domino Semper: iterum dico, Gaudete. “Rejoice in the Lord always; I say again rejoice.” The Gospel reading focuses on the proximate coming of Christ and the immediate preparation for His coming which was manifest in the ministry of John the Baptist. The rose-colored vestment reminds us that there is cause for great joy as we anticipate the celebration of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

There are two questions for us to ponder during this season: Do I have joy? Where does joy come from?

The Catechism teaches in paragraph 1765 that, “The most fundamental passion is love, aroused by the attraction of the good. Love causes a desire for the absent good and the hope of obtaining it; this movement finds completion in the pleasure and joy of the good possessed.”

If we apply these words to this Advent season in which we are waiting for the coming of Christ, we can identify with the idea of an absent good.

**All of creation was waiting for the good that is God to enter into the world, and when He finally came there was cause for great rejoicing. In our spiritual lives, we have a need and a holy desire to possess God.** We have a desire to have Him dwell within us.

We've already reflected on that first coming of Christ into our hearts—the first time we possessed Him. In the order of grace, we must also reflect on the fact that we are possessed by Him. That He has claimed us. He has called us. We are sons and daughters of the Father. True joy wells up within our hearts when we come to a deeper knowledge that we belong to Him (Psalm 100). In fact, the significance of the Incarnation is that God became like us in all things but sin. He made Himself known to us and He knows us completely. Only in Christ can we be sure of the fact that we are completely and unconditionally loved. He has called us to a unique, exclusive, and unrepeatable relationship. As our awareness of this reality grows through prayer and reflection, our sense of joy grows as well.

On a recent visit, I had the opportunity to witness this dynamic in my three-year-old niece, Brigid. I only see her a couple of times per year, so when I arrived at my brother's house and greeted her, she basically ignored me. My sister-in-law asked her, "Do you want to say 'hi' to your uncle Sean?" She quickly responded, "No." So, for a couple of days I worked on getting to know her. We made a lot of eye contact. I imitated her facial expressions to communicate to her that I noticed her. Once in awhile, she experimented with throwing toys at me. She was trying to figure out if I was a safe person, if I was interested in her, and if I understood her life (as much as a three-year-old tries to figure these

thing out). On the last day of my visit, she was leading me around the room, laughing constantly, and showing great protest that I was leaving to return home. There was joy in coming to know one another. My niece had a conversion from not knowing me to knowing me, and the result of that conversion was joy.

**This is what Christ wants for each of us. For each of us to come to know Him and to be known by Him.** John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ by calling people to repentance. Countless men and women went to him to confess their sins and be baptized. In this confession of their sins, they were, in effect, making themselves known, and therefore preparing themselves to receive mercy. The same happens with us when we go to sacramental reconciliation. We make ourselves known to the Lord so that we might experience His love and mercy for us. Jesus doesn't love the perfect version of us or the façade we put on for others. He sees and loves what is in the heart. He came to seek and save what was lost. True joy comes when we rid ourselves of secrets and shame and allow Christ to rule every aspect of our lives.

Secrets are an obstacle to joy because they prevent us from being known and loved by God and others. In addition to harming our spiritual lives, secrets and shame can do terrible damage to marriages and families. In our own time, technology has made keeping secrets more and more accessible, and we must be vigilant in safeguarding our hearts and our families from this occasion of secrecy. Recent studies have even linked divorce with social media use. In 2011, Facebook was implicated in one-third of divorce cases, evidencing the damage that internet secrecy does to intimacy, love, and joy. For this reason, I

recommend that all couples use joint social media accounts. Nobody's ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend reaches out to the Facebook account of \"Bob and Sue\" when they are lonely.

Another important step to safeguarding your family is to consider installing internet accountability software on all of your family's devices. Covenant Eyes is a program that will monitor each of your family member's devices and send a report weekly to an accountability partner. Mom might get Dad's report, Dad gets Mom's, and Mom and Dad get each one of their kids. Accountability software is not only for people with pornography problems. It is just a good way to be online and safeguard ourselves and our families from secretive internet habits. It allows us to be known by another. Accountability software also reminds us that we are never alone when we are online and that everyone should have at least one person in their life who is allowed to know what they do on the internet. Each week two of my friends get my report, and they don't hesitate to call if I Netflix binge on my day off, and I'm grateful for that because I am trying to curb that behavior right now. Every wife should be able to know how much time her husband spends on ESPN and every husband should be able to know how much time his wife spends on Pinterest (though he really may not want to!). Most especially, parents should know what their children do when online. The report will do more than simply reveal if there was any exposure to inappropriate content, it will also help you to see the good content your child is consuming online. It will help you to know what they are interested in and maybe even provide topics for ongoing conversations that help them to feel more known and loved by you. Most of all I pray that it will create even more space for Jesus in your family and that His presence will bring you great joy.

— *FOUR* —

**WELCOMING CHRIST—IN HIS BODY**

The Lord is near! It is during the fourth week of the Advent season that the Church focuses her attention on the first coming of Christ into the world. We always hear the announcement of the birth of Jesus proclaimed to St. Joseph and how he is told to not be “afraid to take Mary as his wife.” The Angel Gabriel tells St. Joseph that the child born of Mary will “save His people from their sins” and His name will mean “God is with us.”

On Christmas Day we will celebrate the first coming of Christ into the world—the day that God Himself came to live among us. He came to live, and to love, in a family. He came to live, and to love, in a body. The Incarnation—the fact that the second person of the Holy Trinity—took a body to Himself is the definitive difference between Christianity and all other religions. **Through his body, Jesus revealed the love of the Father as he embraced sinners.** Most profoundly He revealed the love of the Father as He offered His body on the cross to redeem us. In our own time, a time in which the body is objectified by so many in our culture, this truth must be proclaimed over and over again. If it is true that God has a body, then the body must be holy.

A friend of mine was recently sharing her conversion story with me. She had struggled for many years with different addictions. At times, it seemed that her body was in complete rebellion against her. She once cried out to God in frustration, “Why did you have to give me this body!” One day, as she was praying, she could see Jesus in her mind’s eye standing across the room, and it hit her. Christianity is the only religion

in which God has a body. This very fact began her conversion process which eventually led to her consecrating herself to Christ.

During Advent, we have been preparing to welcome Jesus into the world, into our families, and into our hearts. We have been preparing to encounter the love of God in a most profound way. We have focused on the need to create space for Jesus in our families by safeguarding our time, by saying no to worldly distractions, and repenting of our sins. In particular, we pointed to ways to safeguard our children from the objectification of the body by filtering our home internet connection, setting parental controls, and using accountability software. Now, let's focus our attention on what we are saying yes to and how parents can facilitate an encounter with Jesus their homes this Christmas season.

### **THE BATTLE MUST BE WON**

We have to start winning the marketing battle. Good marketing tries to put a message in front of customers as many times as possible. As we are about to celebrate the greatest act of love in the history of humanity, we might ask ourselves how that message is being communicated to our children. Every day we are bombarded with anti-love, anti-gospel, and anti-family messages. Do we find opportunities each day to speak about the love of Christ for us, God's true plan for human love and marriage, and the joy that comes from living a chaste life? Each of us needs to be constantly reminded that the reason we celebrate Christmas is because "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus came so that we "might have life and



have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Pope Benedict XVI, in an address to the pontifical council for the family on December 1, 2011, stated, **“In our time, as in times past, the eclipse of God, the spread of ideologies contrary to the family, and the degradation of sexual ethics are connected... the family is indeed the way of the Church because it is the “human space” of our encounter with Christ.”** Pope Benedict rightly points out that the degradation of sexual ethics and the eclipse of God are connected. If we are to facilitate an encounter with Christ, we must both shun the false teaching of the world and teach our children about the truth, beauty, and goodness of their bodies and God’s plan for sexuality. Pope Francis makes this point clear in *Amoris Laetitia* 281, “Sex education should provide information while keeping in mind that children and young people have not yet attained full maturity. The information has to come at a proper time and in a way suited to their age. It is not helpful to overwhelm them with data without also helping them to develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform sexuality.”

Education for love is the primary duty of every parent. Below you will find a list of resources to assist you in proclaiming the truth about our bodies, love, and human sexuality to your children. They can easily be found on [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) or you can order them from your local Catholic Bookstore.

- *TOB for TOTS*. This is a book series written by Monica Ashour from the Theology of the Body Evangelization Team (TOBET). Beginning with very simple books like “Everybody has a body,” “Everybody is a

gift,” and “Everybody is smart”, the TOB for tots series will provide the opportunity to begin to proclaim the truth about our bodies and love to your children beginning at ages 2-3.

- *GOOD PICTURES/BAD PICTURES*. This book has been given great reviews from parents. It helps to provide a language for teaching children to shun the negative messages about their bodies that they consume through media. From about age of five children will learn to identify “bad pictures” and report to their parents if they ever see them or are shown them.

- *WONDERFULLY MADE BABIES!* This book is designed to read with your child at about the age of nine. It is a beautiful Catholic book which helps parents to teach children the beauty of their bodies and about God’s plan for procreation. If age nine seems young to you, remember that the average age of exposure to pornography is 8-10 years old. Most parents who have read this book to their child at this age report that it actually results in a more secure relationship between parent and child. Wonderfully Made Babies also has an Imprimatur from Archbishop Chaput of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

For more information on any of the information in this e-book visit us at [www.integrityrestored.com](http://www.integrityrestored.com)





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