

# Make this Advent, Christmas seasons of joy



Like many of you, our Thanksgiving was quiet this year. Our Christmas will be quiet, too. And the days in-between will be more muted than in past years. But even though our holidays in this time of pandemic must be different this year doesn't mean that they must be devoid of joy. On the contrary, I am demanding that joy be thrown into hyperdrive in our home this year. It might not be normal, but I am bound and determined that we will celebrate the holidays fully despite our limitations. Luckily, with a 3.5-year-old and a 1.5-year-old, I don't have to do much demanding. Those two find joy in absolutely everything, and it's contagious.

It started with Thanksgiving. Though we cooked for only four people – two of whom cannot or will not feed themselves – we made every dish (except for the one I forgot about). We baked two pies. We had appetizers. We are still full. The kids stirred casserole ingredients in colorful bowls with big wooden spoons. They delighted in the whirring of the electric mixer, played with pie dough, and generally caused happy chaos. It was wonderful.

A few days later, on the first Sunday of Advent, I made six dozen Christmas cookies. As I baked, my two little elves sat in their chairs next to me, munching on colored sprinkles and the occasional Spritz Christmas tree.

For the start of the new Church year, we upgraded our Advent wreath so that the candles look less like colorful replicas of the leaning tower of Pisa. It is big and bright and sets just the right tone. The kids love looking closely at it, examining the bows and the branches.

We have three Advent calendars going simultaneously – one a Nativity scene made out of felt and velcro, another “lift the flap” Nativity story from my childhood, and another one online sent by grandparents. All are delightful in their own ways and help the kids anticipate each day of Advent with excitement and catechesis.

We are in the midst of extracting all of our Nativity scenes from storage to set up around the house. With our toddler daughter’s kleptomaniac tendencies, things should get interesting.

For one of the scenes, the kids are constructing a straw bed for Baby Jesus out of their good deeds. As not-so-good deeds have the potential to lead to a deficit, that should make things interesting, too.

In the weeks of Advent, we have family video calls arranged for simultaneous home decorating, gingerbread house construction and general merriment. The kids are used to being on camera, and have plenty of opportunities to practice their skills at adult conversation interruption, which, as every parent knows, is an essential ingredient to any holiday celebration.

Because we are a family that loves music, there is usually some kind of music playing throughout the day. Advent hymns are mixed in with Christmas carols, and the kids are learning and relearning the familiar melodies and even humming along. Musical instruments of all shapes and sizes make their way to all parts of the house. We sing more at bedtime.

Christmas decorations are still going up, but they will be extra fabulous this year. For I am bound and determined that this season will be one of joy.

Because no matter what may be going on in the world, whatever sickness lurks or whatever traditions we might be sacrificing, we know that there is one thing – the most important thing –

that remains exactly the same: that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This tiny babe in the manger is with us still. And so we rejoice.

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