

Great Catechist Idea:
Advent for Primary Students

By Kathryn Schuessler

I wanted to help my first graders understand Advent and its importance to Christmas, but I was frustrated because most Advent activities are designed as daily activities. Since I only had three classes to explain Advent and help the children to be ready for Christmas, the obvious choice was to focus on the Advent Wreath and the meaning of each week of Advent. However, to start with a ready-made wreath would put more emphasis and importance on the candle lighting ceremony.

I also did not want to have a long ceremony, with me doing most of the talking/reading. First graders are at such a wide range of reading ability; some can't read and others are quite proficient, and I wanted each child to have a part over the three weeks. So, I put the focus on creating the wreath with the children each week and ended with a small, simple ceremony.



WREATH: I used the hand-shaped Ellison Die Cut to cut hands out of green card stock. I cut five hands per student. Then I stapled the 5 hands together by: first, stapling 2 hands together palm (hand 1) to fingertip (hand 2) with thumbs facing up; second, making another set (hands 3 & 4); third, placing the 5th hand, fingertips up between the two sets of stapled hands; and fourth, stapling the heel of the palms of the 2 sets of hands (thumbs up) to the sides of palm of the upright 5th hand. I used tape on the back to secure the hands to make them less floppy. The hands should form a straight line as two left hands (thumbs up), an upright hand in the center, and two right hands (thumbs up).

CANDLES: I decorated 5 prepared pasta sauce jars with tissue paper using decoupage. I made 3 purple jars, 1 pink jar, and 1 white jar. I tied purple and pink ribbon around the neck of each jar.

FLAMES: I downloaded a picture of a flame from Clip Art and traced it onto orange and yellow card stock. I made the orange flame about 1/4" larger and made 2 smaller yellow flames. I glued 1 yellow flame to the orange flame and attached that to a large craft stick. I attached the other yellow flame to the other side of the craft stick, in alignment with the orange flame.



WEEK1: We talked about Advent and its meaning. I then asked the children to put their names on the center hand. We discussed the meaning of the first week, Hope, and shared the things for which we hoped. After we brainstormed a list, I had the children write the word "Hope" on the first hand, the far left hand, and under it write what it is for which they each hoped. Then we gathered on the floor in a circle and put our hand wreaths in front of us, overlapping slightly with the neighboring hand wreaths, to create one large wreath. I put the first candle in front of one of the children. We said our normal opening prayers and I read a brief Advent candle lighting prayer. To "light" the candle, I passed the flame to the child next to me and we passed it in a complete circle and then back to the child with the candle in front of him. Then we finished our prayer.

WEEK 2: We followed the same process as in Week 1, by starting with a discussion of the meaning of Week 2, Prepare/Peace, and filled in the second hand, the one just left of the center hand. We proceeded to the candle lighting ceremony. Because there were only 3 classes to cover Advent, I also did Week 3, Joy, during this class, finishing with the candle lighting ceremony.

WEEK 3: Followed the same process, by starting with a discussion of the meaning of Week 4, Love, and finishing with the candle lighting ceremony.

This was very simple and I think the children enjoyed it too.

*Kathryn is a catechist at St. John the Baptist, Winfield.
If one of your catechists has a great idea – let us know!*