

Printed by
THE EXTENSION SERVICE
of
FOUNTAIN STREET CHURCH

Living Advent

– A Guide for
Religious Liberals,
Quasi-Christians,
Doubting Thomases
and Outright Skeptics

Copyright © 2008 by Fountain Street Church

Why Observe Advent?

The Christmas season is observed by over 90% of North Americans. A significant number celebrate willingly but uneasily, troubled either by the Christian theology at its heart, or the rank commerce that has grown over it like mold.

Surrounded by so many ancient ideas and symbols, buffeted by so many social customs and demands, it is all but impossible to ignore the season. What's a religious liberal to do? This brief guide is a first attempt to create an authentic spiritual path through the Yuletide season. If it proves effective and rewarding, may you be inspired to continue some of these practices even afterward.

At the end you will find a guide to the historic and current meanings of Advent, along with basics of spiritual practice for religious liberals. It offers four spiritual themes and four spiritual practices you may find informative and helpful ... even after Advent.

Reading Resources (a partial list only)

Books and other prose:

A Christmas Carol – Charles Dickens
Skipping Christmas – John Grisham
Bedtime Christmas – stories by W. F. Wooden
A Christmas Oratorio – W.H. Auden
The Gift of the Magi – story by O. Henry
A Pint of Judgment – Elizabeth Morrow
Mr. Edwards Meets Santa Claus – Laura Ingalls Wilder
One Christmas Eve – Langston Hughes
Old Folks Christmas – Ring Lardner
A Child's Christmas in Wales – Dylan Thomas

Poems and essays

'A Visit From St. Nicholas' – formerly attributed to CC Moore.
'The Boy Who Laughed at Santa Claus' – Ogden Nash
"Well, so that is that" – by W.H. Auden (Christmas oratorio, final page)
'The House of Christmas' – G.K. Chesterton
Christmas Trees – Robert Frost
"Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" – Francis P. Church
'BC:AD' – U. A. Fanthorpe
'Journey of the Magi' – T.S. Eliot
'Little tree' – e.e. cummings
'Ghost Story' – Dylan Thomas
'African Christmas' – John Press
'Christus Natus Est' – Countee Cullen

7. **Turn off the Christmas carols** or Christmas TV shows until Christmas Eve. Instead, investigate other holidays, such as St. Nicholas Day, St. Lucy's Day, the winter solstice, Hanukkah, Divali ...
8. **Make gifts bags from remnant cloth** instead of buying and using wrapping paper. Use them every year and you will both save paper and develop a family tradition. Make at least twelve and open only one a day until January 6th. In fact, celebrate all 12 days, buying a number of small gifts and opening them on each day.
9. **Fold paper cranes.** They are associated with the hope for world peace. Use scrap paper around the house to make the cranes, turning refuse into beauty. Decorate your tree and house with them. Save some for next year.
10. **Give time to a person or an organization.** Help an elder who needs to decorate for the season or prepare seasonal foods to leave for their use. Clean the house for someone.
11. **Serve food** at a shelter, chaperone a school holiday event, deliver meals to the housebound and cookies to the police station, local emergency room, road repair barn, or refuse collectors.
12. **Give money.** Find out what the local shelter needs and pick four items. Drop off one a week. Choose a local, regional/state, national, and global organization that serve the same cause and send a contribution each week. Leave the change. Tip double.



Living Advent

Below are twelve spiritual practices you may follow through the season. The idea is to make Advent and Christmas more authentic and meaningful. You alone can decide which path will lead you there.

1. **Choose a book** from one of those listed on the following pages; parse it out through the Advent season. Reading is an act of faith. We put our trust in the story and go along as though led by the hand. Let each day's reading be a gift you are giving yourself, not unlike an Advent calendar with 24 doors.
2. **Memorize a poem or passage.** Read it daily and commit one line or stanza or paragraph to memory by reading it aloud, then closing your eyes and reciting it back. Saying it out loud is important, so you can hear the words as well as see them. Then, recite the poem to others on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day as a gift for the holidays.
3. **Compare the three stories of Mary** – Matthew 1.2, Luke 1-3, and in the Qur'an (notably Surah 3 & 19). They are three separate stories, although elements overlap. Motherhood is an icon. Is Mary an iconic mother? Is she a role model?
4. **Read the story of Hanukkah** as found in the First Book of Maccabees. Look especially for the story of the menorah and the miracle of the oil. This holiday is now referred to as the "Season of Our Joy"—what sort of joy?
5. **Place a menorah in your front window** during the holiday (yes, it's allowed). Find out how to light the candles. You can even make your own menorah. People in Montana did it when anti-semitic attacks took place.
6. **Give up a bodily pleasure** – alcohol, dessert, meat, candy, smoking. Do it for a day or a week or the whole season. Figure out the monetary value. Give it to a street person (yes even \$20!), not a charity.