

The Birth of Jesus Advent Calendar

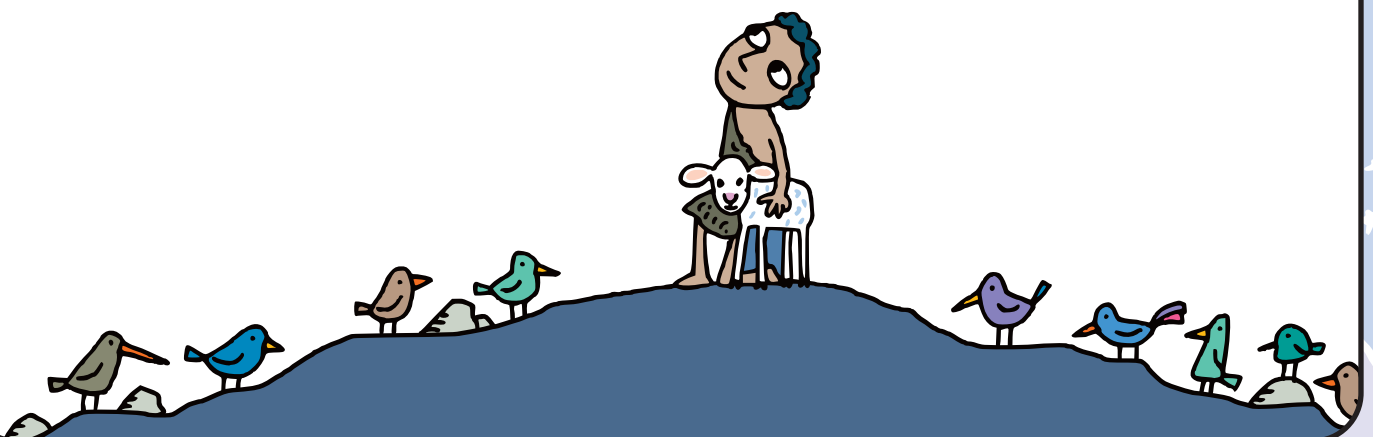
You've received The Birth of Jesus Advent Calendar and Nativity Scene designed by Italian artist Agostino Traini! This lively and interactive calendar helps families count down the days to Christmas. It includes familiar nativity figures like Baby Jesus, shepherds, and animals in the stable. But you may have noticed that it also includes some unexpected figures, like a woman holding an espresso maker and a man who has just made a Pizza Margherita. Why are *these* characters entering the scene?

The artist wanted to show this familiar story in a new way, featuring everyday people from his own experiences and whimsical artistic imagination. Those who first came to adore Jesus were humble shepherds. Can't you also imagine a local man bringing some clementines or a woman bringing fresh eggs from her chickens? And do you think Mary and Joseph would have turned down that espresso after the night they had?

We hope that these characters bring families some surprises, laughter, and imagination as they place one figure in the scene each day of December. And we're also giving children's ministry leaders like you a way to connect with families each day in December with a brief script for each numbered figure that helps connect the story of Jesus' birth to their own lives.

These scripted, daily descriptions of Advent Calendar figures can help you connect with the children and families in your ministry. You can read each one live using an online platform like Facebook Live or prerecord the segments and post them daily on your church's social media sites.

Each script takes less than a minute to read on camera. For many days, you can add something personal to the video. Look for those prompts in parentheses. Bring your energy and enthusiasm to reading the script while you hold the figure and then place it in the numbered spot on the puzzle board. You now have an easy, colorful way to connect with families in December. Have fun!



1



Timber! Take a look at this man. He might be on his way to build something with this log—maybe even a house! Think about the people who built *your* home. Imagine working in the same place for weeks or months to build a place for other people to live. Let's say a prayer of thanks for their work.

Dear God, thank you for carpenters and construction workers who build homes for others. Keep them safe as they work. Amen.

2



Baaa! This man is a shepherd who is caring for these sheep. He feeds them and keeps them safe from danger. We read about shepherds and sheep in many places in the Bible. I wonder if you can remember how they are part of the story of Baby Jesus being born. We'll have to wait a few weeks to hear that story. Until then, (sign off with your pun of choice)

I hope this video finds you wool!
Remember that I'm here for ewe.
Don't stay up pasture bedtime!
Stay tuned for the sheep of things to come!
You herd it from me first!
Enjoy the first days of Decembaaa!

3



Look! It's another sheep who showed up! It is with someone holding a special kind of cake called a Panettone, which is a traditional Italian Christmas sweetbread. Does your family bake something special during the holidays? (Share something about your Christmas baking tradition.) I would love to hear about your traditions for special foods. Let me know what they are!

4



(If you have a cat, feature it in this video.) Meow! Now we have a cat showing up in our Advent calendar! This woman *and* her four-legged friend want to be there when Jesus is born. As your family gets ready for Jesus during this Advent season, think of some ways you can care for the animals in your community. Maybe that's putting up a birdfeeder, or providing some fresh water, or leaving some leaves for wild animals to make a winter habitat. Check with your local nature experts for more ideas.

5



What's this? A man holding a bowl with some greens and a lemon! If you live in a place where wintertime gets cold, you can't really harvest fresh lettuce or pick lemons off a tree right now. But somewhere in the world someone is doing these things! Let's say a prayer for those who harvest food during the winter months to feed the whole world when many fields and orchards in the Northern Hemisphere do not produce food.

Dear God, thank you for the harvesting that happens in winter. Thank you for lettuce and citrus fruits and all the vegetables and fruits we eat during these cold months. Bless the farmers and those who pick the food. Amen.

6



Who do we have here? Maybe a father and son, or an uncle and nephew, or other family members who are here to see Baby Jesus. During the holidays, will you see any family members or friends from far away? (Share about any of your own friends or relatives from afar who will visit you this month.) What will you do together? Maybe you could plan a special activity with them.

7



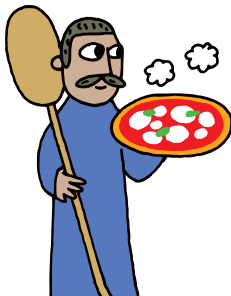
Snuggle up! This man is holding a purple cloth with blue dots. It looks like a blanket to me. Maybe he wove this blanket himself. Do you have a warm blanket? (If you have a favorite blanket, snuggle up with it.) Snuggle with it sometime today and think about whose hands made it. Even if we don't have fancy, expensive things to offer, we can share what we make with the world.

8



(Start the video as you are drinking from a cup.) Look at our Advent figure today. It's a woman pouring something to drink from her jug and offering it to someone else. Did you know that Jesus had something to say about offering people a cup of cold water? In Matthew 10:42, he says "whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward." Who could you give a cup of cold water to today? Try it and see what happens!

9



Yum! This man just baked a Pizza Margherita with olive oil, tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese, and basil. Let's say a pizza prayer.

Thank you, God, for all the people who help a pizza get to our table: the growers of tomatoes and olives and herbs, those who harvested the grain for the crust, and the dairy farmers and cheesemakers. The work of their hands brings delicious pizza to our table. Thank you, God, for all of them. Amen!

10



(Start the video as you are smelling some flowers. Or, if you have a dog, feature it in this video.) This woman and her dog look like they may be on their way to give these flowers to someone. Giving flowers to someone is an act of kindness that can share joy with others. Who could your family give some flowers to during December to brighten their day?

11



Here is another person bringing food to Baby Jesus and his parents. Even though babies don't eat eggs, maybe Mary and Joseph would enjoy an omelet or some eggs sunny-side up to go with their espresso. What is your favorite thing to eat for breakfast? (Share your favorite breakfast food.) It's not too early to plan what your family will eat together for breakfast on Christmas morning. Ask each family member for their ideas and see what ends up on the menu.

12



Hallelujah! (Raise your arms to look like the man.) This man looks really excited to see Baby Jesus. The goat seems pretty interested too. What do you do with your body to show you are excited for something? Maybe you raise your arms or clap your hands or do something else. We can move our bodies in all kinds of ways to celebrate Baby Jesus. And if you have a goat nearby—all the better!

13



(Make sniffing sounds.) Is that soup I smell? It looks like this man may be ladling something warm and tasty from the pot. During December, warm foods like soup may be extra tasty in chilly weather. Could your family try making some soup together? Give it a try, and then share it with someone else.

14



(Hold up an orange to begin the video.) Look how many oranges this person has! I bet he going to share them with some other people. During this season of Advent, we think about how we can share what we have with others. Next time you pack a lunch for school, could you bring two oranges and share one with someone else? Just make sure a bird doesn't sneak one of the slices.

15



Look! Another person is so eager to see Baby Jesus that he has his arms up! His dog is keeping its eyes on Baby Jesus. Seeing all these animals in this Advent calendar helps me remember that pets are a wonderful gift from God. I wonder if there is a way your family could help a local animal shelter this December to make sure that the dogs and cats and other animals there can be cared for before they find new homes.

16



One, two, three, four birds! As this man gently cares for these birds, he is connecting to God's creation. Think about the birds you see on a typical day. They are created by God too. Let us pray. *Thank you, God, for creatures of the air. Amen!*

17



Look who we have here. It's a man with a bird and some fish, and he's bowing to Baby Jesus. During Bible times, bowing was a sign of respect to someone in power, like a king. But Baby Jesus was a different kind of king. He did not expect people to bow to him. He wanted them to follow him and become fishers of people. More on that after Christmas.

18



Whoa! It must take a lot of balancing to keep that jug on top of her head. Parts of life can feel like a balancing act, but we can lean on other people—or goats—for help. Who does your family lean on when things get out of balance? How could your family help someone who is feeling a little unbalanced right now? Never underestimate how your family can be a steady presence to someone else!

19



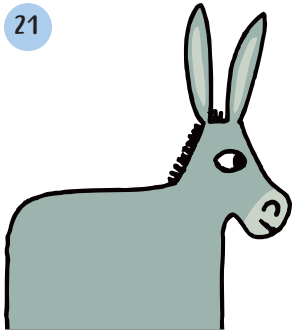
(Hold your favorite hot beverage mug with a hot drink inside and smell it.) Mmmm! Sometimes a hot drink on a chilly day is a wonderful treat. This woman is holding a pot for a special kind of coffee drink called espresso that is from Italy, the same country where the illustrator of this Advent calendar comes from. I wonder if he included a drawing of her because he thought Mary and Joseph needed some coffee. Stay tuned . . .

20



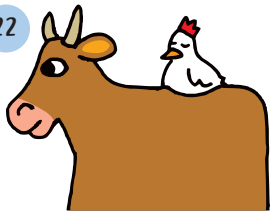
Can you smell those freshly baked rolls? I wonder if they have any cinnamon. Did you know that people have been baking bread for thousands of years? That means that it wouldn't be long before Baby Jesus would learn what fresh bread smelled like, although there wasn't any cinnamon there at the time! Baking during Advent is a wonderful way for you to spend time together as a family, and you could even share with others. I wonder who would enjoy some of your baked goods.

21



During Jesus' time, people walked and rode animals to travel long distances. Imagine if you had to ride a donkey to school! Here's a thank-you prayer for the grown-ups who drive you to school and other places. *Dear God, thank you for bus drivers and carpools and grown-ups who drive kids to where they need to go. Keep us safe on the road. Amen.*

22



Moo! When baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he was in a stable that was surrounded by animals like cows and chickens. They would have helped keep him warm in the manger. Seeing these animals reminds me of Psalm 148 that says "Praise the Lord!" Who is sharing this praise? Verse 10 tells us "Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!" I wonder how the cows and chickens sounded when Jesus was born.

23



(Hold your favorite mug.) I told you that coffee would show up again. Here we have Joseph near where Baby Jesus will show up. Joseph would have been so tired after their long journey. If you've ever been stressed out on a trip, you know it's hard to be away from home. Imagine if you had to walk dozens of miles and couldn't find a place to stay! But Joseph knew God was at work, and even if he didn't get a hot cup of coffee while he stayed in the stable, he could be comforted by God's presence.

24



(Hold up your mug again.) Here we have Mary, also with some of that espresso. On this Christmas Eve, we think about Mary and her journey. An angel appeared to her to tell her she would have a baby. She visited her cousin Elizabeth. She traveled with Joseph to Bethlehem. Mary was away from home when she gave birth, but God was right there in that manger. One name for Jesus is *Emmanuel*, which means God with us. Mary knew God was present.

25



Merry Christmas! Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus. God's son came down to live with us and was born a tiny, vulnerable baby who was wrapped in cloths and laid in a manger. On this day, I pray that your family feels the warmth and love of this little tiny baby who came to teach and love and save the whole wide world. Now that's some good news!

26



Look! We get one more figure for our Advent Calendar. Here are the magi who followed a star to find Jesus. Then they gave him gifts that were fit for a king! During this short season of Christmas, how could you celebrate the gift of Jesus in community? Could you invite another family to join you for a Christmas celebration? Maybe you could have a game night, or make Christmas cookies together, or plan an outdoor event like sledding or hiking or a picnic. Whatever you decide to do, know that Jesus is born and we receive this gift of grace from God every day. Merry Christmas!