

Winter Festivals



STORIES, POEMS, VERSES & ACTIVITIES FOR THE WINTER FESTIVALS



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ADVENT (check dates they vary each year November 28 – December 24)

SONGS

People Look East (Traditional)

People look east, the time is near

Of the crowning of the year.

Make your house fair as you are able

Trim the hearth and set the table.

People look East and sing today

Love the Guest is on the way

Bird though ye long have ceased to build

Guard the nest that must be filled.

Even the hour when wings are frozen

He for fledging time has chosen

People look East and sing today

Love the Bird is on the way

Stars keep the watch, when night is dim

One more light the bowl shall rim

Shining beyond the frosty weather

Bright as the sun and moon together

People look East, and sing today

Love the Star is on the way

Angels, announce to man and beast

Him who cometh from the east

Set every peak and valley humming

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*With the word the Lord is coming
People look East and sing today
Love the Lord is on the way*

Give Me a Light (You can make up your own melody)

*(Name of the child) is walking to get his little light.
All the stars are watching him by day and by night.
Now he has his little light and his face is shining bright.
Carefully he's walking home to keep it by his side.*

POEMS

Recite each time you light a candle in the Advent Wreath.

Week 1: First candle and first stanza

Week 2: First and second candle and the first and second stanza and so on.

*The first light of Advent is the light of stones
The light that shines in crystals in seashells and in bones*

*The second light of Advent is the light of plants
Green plants that reach up to the light and in the breezes dance*

*The third light of Advent is the light of beasts
That shines in all creatures in greatest and in least*

*The fourth light of Advent is the human light
The light of hope and of thought, to know and do what's right*

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Poem for the Advent Spiral

*The gift of the light we thankfully take,
But not shall it be alone for our sake,
The more we give light, the one to the other,
It shines and it spreads, growing still further;
Until every spark by friends set aflame,
Until every heart, the joy to proclaim;
In the depths of our souls,
A shining sun glows.*

Story Suggestion

MARY'S LITTLE DONKEY

ACTIVITIES

Advent Calendar Traditional

Materials

- 2 large pieces of thick construction or poster board
- 1 piece of tissue paper
- X-acto Knife
- Sharp pencil

1. Sandwich the tissue paper between the 2 pieces of thick construction paper
2. Cut to the desired shape: square, heart, circle, etc
3. Remove the tissue paper leaving the two pieces of cardboard sandwiched together
4. On the top piece draw in the 24 doors in random order and size with a sharp pencil.
5. Press hard to make indentations in the lower piece of paper.
6. On the lower piece of paper inside the indentation, draw simple symbols of the season
7. With the X-acto knife cut them out and glue the tissue paper to the paper

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8. Then take the top piece of paper and cut out the doors leaving a threads of paper attached
9. Glue the top piece over the lower piece and the tissue paper
10. Hang in the window and enjoy!

Advent Calendar: Starry Sky

Materials

- A piece of blue cardstock about 10" x 14"
- Gold paper for the stars
- Scissors
- Glue

1. Round the corners of the card stock
2. Cut out 24 stars
3. Each day of Advent glue a star to the cardboard
4. By the 24 you will have a beautiful night sky covered with stars.

String of Tiny Presents:

I just recently came across this idea. The idea is you give your child one time present for each day of the Advent Season. For example: a marble, flower, nuts, raisins, mandarin orange, etc. Use your imagination.

Beeswax or clay figures for the Nature Table

Materials

1. Beeswax
2. Clay
3. Plasticine
4. Homemade modeling dough

1 cup white flower

½ cup salt

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1-cup water
1-tablespoon cream of tartar
2 tablespoons oil
Food coloring of our choice
Medium saucepan
Heat resistant mixing spoon

Directions

1. Measure and combine the ingredients into the saucepan
2. Stir the ingredients constantly over medium heat for several minutes. A ball of dough will form.
3. Remove the dough from the pan and let cool.
4. Once cool, knead the dough on a lightly floured surface until smooth.
5. Store the dough in an airtight container
6. The dough should last several weeks, even months if properly stored after each use.

Cards

Cards are so much fun and it helps the children think about the people that are important in their lives. Once you cut out the card, it can be decorated with almost anything including: glitter, tissue snowflakes, color pencil, acrylic paint, buttons, embroidery thread, pine needles. Get creative!

SAINT NICHOLAS: *(Feast of Saint Nicholas in Holland is on the evening of December 5th)*

VERSE & POEMS

Tonight when it is dark
Saint Nicholas may come.
He loves to bring a big surprise.
He gives the children toys.

Cookies apples,

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Balls and games,
Bells and whistles,
Dolls and trains.
Surprises for the boys.
Surprises for the girls.
Saint Nicholas is our friend in heaven.
He is the children's saint.

We thank you, good Saint Nicholas!
We thank you for the toys!
We thank you, good Saint Nicholas!
You bring us many joys. by Ade Bethune

STORY

Saint Nicholas Story

Once upon a time there lived far away in the East a pious man, the Bishop Nicholas. One day he hears that far in the West was a big town IN this town all the people had to suffer hunger, the children also. Then Bishop Nicholas called his servants who loved him and said to them 'bring me the fruits of your gardens and the fruits of your fields that we can still the hunger of the children in that town'. The servants brought baskets full of apples and nuts, and on top laid honey cakes, which the women had baked. And the men brought sacks of wheat. Bishop Nicholas had all these things taken onto a ship. It was a beautiful ship, quite white and the sails of the ship were as blue as the sky and as blue as the mantle of the Bishop Nicholas. The wind blew into the sails and sped the ship along. And when the wind grew tired the servants took to the oars and rowed the ship westward. They had to sail for a long time, for seven days and seven nights.

When they arrived in front of the big town it was evening. The roads were empty, but in the houses there burnt lights. Bishop Nicholas knocked at a window. The mother in the house thought a late wanderer had come and she asked her child to open the door. Nobody was outside. The child ran to the window. There was nobody outside the window either. But instead, there stood a basket filled with apples and nuts, red and yellow, and a honey cake lay on top. By the basket stood a sack, which was bursting with golden wheat grains. All the people ate the gifts and once again became healthy and happy.

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Today St. Nicholas is in the heavens. Every year on his birthday he starts on his journey down to the earth. He asks for his white horse and journeys from star to star. There he meets Mother Mary, who gathers silver and golden threads for the shift of the Christ Child. Mother Mary says to him; 'Dear St. Nicholas, please go again to the children and bring them your gifts; Tell them; 'Christmas is nigh and soon the Christ Child will come'.

The earth is wide and great. There, where St Nicholas cannot go himself, he asks a good and pious person to go to the children and take them apples and nuts and tell the children of the coming of the Christ Child.

M. Meyerkort.

LAS POSADAS (*December 16th – 24*)

In Spanish the word Posada means “lodging”. Traditionally a party is held each night in a neighborhood home. At dusk the guests gather outside the house with the children dressed as shepherds, angels and sometimes, Mary and Joseph. An angel leads the procession followed by Mary and Joseph or by guests carrying their images. The adults follow, carrying lighted candles. The wanderers sing a song asking for shelter, and the hosts sing a reply. Finally they open the doors to the guests and offer hot “ponche” (fruit punch), buñuelos (flat, round cookies), hot tamales and other festive treats.

The group outside the house sings:

En el nombre del Cielo os pido posada,
pues no puede andar me esposa amada

*In the name of Heaven, I ask you for lodging
because she cannot walk, my beloved wife*

The group inside replies, also singing:

Aquí no es meson; sigan adelante.
You no puedo abrir, no sea algún truante

This is not an inn, keep on going

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I won't open the door, in case you are a truant.

This goes back and forth a couple of times, with those outside pleading for a place to spend the night, and the people inside the house refusing to let them in. Finally when they discover who the freezing people are they open the door and let them enter.

When they open the door they also sing.:

Entre, Santos Peregrinos, reciban este rincón;
no de esta pobre morada, si no de mi corazón.

*Enter, Holy Pilgrims, accept this dwelling;
not of this humble house but of my heart.*

During the rest of the party they break piñatas and villancicos (*carols*) are sung. The tradition comes from the times of the Colonial period, but it is interesting to note that the Aztecs celebrated the arrival of the god Huitzilopochtli between the 7th and the 26 of December.

SANTALUCIA: (*December 13th*)

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Popular Saying

Lucy Light,
The shortest day &
The longest night.

Poem

Santa Lucia
Thy light is glowing
Through darkest winter night
Comfort bestowing.
Dreams float on wings tonight,
Comes then the morning light
Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia

Santa Lucia
Christmas foretelling
Bring light in darkest night,
To every dwelling
Bring to the world again Peace and Goodwill to men
Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia

HANUKKAH (*25 Kislev, December 1-9*)

SONGS

The Dreidel Song

I have a little Dreidel,

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I made it out of clay.

And when it's dry and ready,

Oh Dreidel I shall play.

Oh Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel,

I made you out of clay;

And when you're dry and ready,

Then Dreidel I shall play.

Oh Hanukkah

Oh Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah

Come light the menorah

Let's have a party we'll all dance the horah

Gather round the table

We'll give you a treat

Spinning tops to play with

And latkes to eat

And while we are playing

The candles are burning low

One for each night

We shed a sweet light

To remind us of days long ago

To remind us of days long ago

STORIES

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The Vanishing Flame by Yerachmiel Tilles

THE DREIDEL GAME

(Playing the dreidel is a traditional Hanukkah game played in Jewish homes all over the world, and rules may vary. Dreidels have four Hebrew letters on them and they stand for the saying “Nes Gadol Haya Sham, “a great miracle occurred there.”)

Directions

1. Any number of people can play the game.
2. Each player begins the game with an equal number of game pieces (about 10-15) such as pennies, nuts, chocolate chips raisins, or matchsticks.
3. At the beginning of each round, every participant puts one game piece into the center pot. In addition, every time the pot is empty or has only one game piece left, every player should put one in the pot.
4. Every time it's your turn, spin the dreidel once. Depending on the outcome, you give or get game pieces from the pot:
 - a. **Nun** means nothing in Yiddish, so the player does nothing
 - b. **Gimmel** means everything in Yiddish, so the player gets everything in the pot.
 - c. **Hey** means half in Yiddish, so the player gets half of the pot. If there is an odd number, the player takes half of the total plus on.

CHRISTMAS (December 24-25)

STORY

The Fisherman's Wife: A Grimm's Fairytale

The Legend of the Christmas Rose

CRAFTS

1. Centerpiece

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Materials

Clay Base

Seasonal nature objects: leaves, branches, pinecones, acorns, holly, pine branches etc.

2. Decorations around the house

There is nothing better than the smell of evergreen upon entering through your front door. You can take a field trip to collect items from outside and then decorating different areas of the house. The children love this and the more they feel a part of the process the better.

3. Pine cone wreath

Materials

7 pinecones of the same size

Thin wire

A length of ribbon

A pair of pliers

Directions

1. Choose 7 pinecones that roughly the same size and dry
2. Lay the cones in a circle
3. Measure a circle with the wire that is $2 \frac{1}{2}$ times the size of the circumference of the circle of cones.
4. Bend the wire double making the eye at the bend by twisting the wire round several times
5. The twisted length between the eye and the first cone should be about $\frac{1}{8}$ '.
6. Wrap the between the scales of the cone about half way up
7. Twist the wire to secure the cone and attach the rest of the cones in a similar manner
8. Make sure to twist the wire tightly in between each cone.
9. Once all the cones have been attach, bend the whole thing around to make a wreath.
10. Finish off the wreath by tying a bow with the ribbon under the first eye that you made.
11. As a variation you can also tie in some greenery.

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4. Decorating the Tree

However you decorate your tree is a personal choice, but it's nice to decorate the tree with some consciousness of what the ornaments represent for the family or different individuals in the family.

1. Homemade ornaments can be used year after year and hold a special significance for the children.

- a. Cut-outs decorated with glitter
- b. Snow Flakes cut from tissue paper
- c. Origami
- d. Fleece angel
- e. Popcorn and cranberry strings

Wax: (Beeswax is preferable)

1. Candle Dipping



Materials

Beeswax or candle stubs

Candlewick or thick cotton yarn

Tall narrow tins (coffee cans)

A saucepan of hot water

A hotplate

String & Dowel for dipping

Place to store the candles

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Directions

1. Fill the pan with water
2. Turn on the hot plate to begin heating the water
3. Place the tin with the wax inside into the pot of heated water
4. Using a stick stir the wax as it begins to melt (be very careful as hot wax burns!)
5. Wrap the wick around a thin dowel
6. After the wax is fully melted dip the wick into the wax.
7. Try your best to straighten out the wick on the first dipping.
8. Let each dipping dry and then continue until it is the size that you would like.
9. Before the last few dips you can stick flower petal, rosemary, or other plants for decoration.

2. Candle Decorating

Materials

A thick candle: beeswax is best, but any candle will do. Don't use the candles that have a smooth coating

Candle decorating wax: Stockmar makes the best decorating wax and can be found online

Sandpaper or something to "score" the base candle so the wax will stick

Directions

1. Rough up the base candle with a little bit of fine sand paper
2. Cut the modeling wax in the shapes you would like to use
3. Press the decorating wax onto the candle
4. For a special effect, you can knead the colors together on the candle to create more abstract designs

3. Fleece Angels

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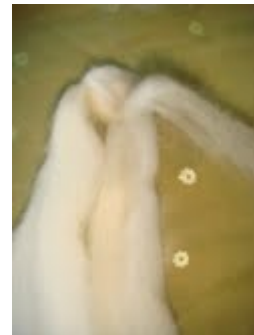
Materials

Teased sheep's wool of any color: can be found at craft shops, if not you can buy un-carded wool and card it yourself which takes a while but is very rewarding

Thin gold silver thread: can be found at craft shops, beading, or jewelry making shops

Directions

1. Make sure not to cut the sheep's wool, simply pull it apart
2. Once you've made one angel, then you can decide on the size and thickness of each section
3. Separate out 3 lengths of wool: One thicker than the other two
4. Cut a thread 18 inches long.
 4. Take the thicker piece of wool and tie a single knot in the middle
5. Fold the wool at the knot, creating the head and the hair.



6. Separate out a small piece of wool from either side of the knot.

7. Wrap that tiny piece below the head to create the neck. Wool is so great to work with because you just wrap until you can't wrap any longer and let it trail off, and then it will hold its grip.



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8. Take one of the smaller pieces of wool and tie a small knot on either side for the hands. You have to place the knot an inch or so in so that the arms won't be too long. After you have made the knot simply fold the yarn inwards, separate out a small piece of yarn and wrap to create the hands the same way you did for the neck.



9. Slip the arms underneath the neck.

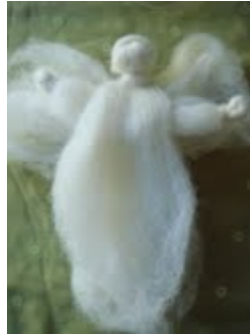
10. Take the other piece of wool and fold in half, or fold the end in to meet the center; just do what ever looks best.



11. Slip this in under the arms. (Now as you are looking at the face you see the arms and the wings layered with the arms on top sandwiched in between the large knotted yarn.)

12. Create a loop in the middle of the gold thread.

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13. Wrap the thread around the neck and then cross in front and take the thread to the back at the level of the arms



14. Before you tie it off, check to see that everything is where you want it to be. It's easy for things to get out of place when you are wrapping the golden thread



14. Tie off the back with a bow or a knot.
15. Admire your beautiful creation!
16. Remember to refrain from cutting the wool. It looks so much more “ethereal” when it is left wispy.

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THREE KINGS DAY

Although many believe the song, “*The Twelve Days of Christmas*,” to be about the 12 days leading up to Christmas, it is actually about the 12 days following the birth of Jesus also known as the Holy Nights.

Three Kings Day, also known as **Twelfth Night**, **The Feast of Epiphany**, or “**Adoration of the Magi**,” is celebrated on January 6th, twelve days after Christmas. According to legend it is the day the Three Kings (Caspar, Mechior and Balthasar) saw, on the night when Christ was born, a bright star. They followed it to Bethlehem, found the Christ child and presented him with gold, frankincense and myrrh. In many villages, “kings fires” are still lit as a reminder of the fires that, according to legend, burned that night in Bethlehem to hide the star from King Herod

January 6th, the last day of the Christmas season comes with its own traditions, rituals and symbols. In Spain as well as other Spanish-speaking countries, the tradition has always been to observe Christmas Day as a solemn religious occasion, reserving Three Kings Day or *Dia de los Reyes* for a the party and exchanging gifts. In England the Yule log was kept lit until Twelfth Night in order to bring blessings and good fortune throughout the upcoming year. In Germany, children go from house to house on Epiphany eve singing carols. In many homes the Christmas tree is taken down specifically on that day and burned. For some children this is an especially joyous occasion because this is when the sweets, chocolate ornaments wrapped in foil or cookies are eaten.

Where as the season of Advent celebrates the journey of Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, Epiphany celebrates the journey of the Three Kings the return of the light.

ACTIVITY #1 (*The return of the light*)

1. Make a star to put in the window, one for each of the 12 days leading to January 6th. This represents the return of the light and warmth of the sun.

2. It can be nice to wait to put the star on top of the tree on January 6th.

ACTIVITY #2 (*The journey*)

Materials

1. This is a magical activity for the children. You begin during advent season leading up to Christmas

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by setting up the manger scene.

2. Right after Christmas you can create with your children the 3 Kings in anyway that works for your family. They can be made out of clay, dough, plasticine, wood, or felting.
3. After you have created the 3 Kings you place them somewhere in the room.
4. As the days pass, while the children are sleeping, you move them closer to their goal.
5. Each night they are moved along their road and each morning the children wake up and get to see how far they have gone.
6. If there are older siblings, then it's nice for them to be able to move the 3 Kings while the children are sleeping.

ACTIVITY #3 (*The Feast!*)

1. A crown-shaped loaf of bread or sweet bread is prepared
2. After it is cooled, and before the icing is applied, put a treasure inside the cake or bread. Depending on the country a silver coin, bean or a porcelain figure (plastic) figure of the baby Jesus is hidden inside.
3. Every one sits down and takes turns cutting their slice of cake or bread.
4. The one who gets the treasure is crowned as King for the day.
5. In Mexico children have to try and break the piñata so that it breaks open, showering them with candies and small coins.
6. In Mexico the one who gets the treasure is to cook the feast for Candlemas on Feb 2.
when everyone will be invited for *tomales* and *atole*.

ACTIVITY #4 (*The Cake*)

German Three Kings Cake (Dreikonigskuchen)

Cake

2 cups + 3 tbsp flour

1.4 oz fresh yeast

¼ cup + 1 tbsp lukewarm milk

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7 tbsp butter melted

½ tsp salt

1 chopped lemon

½ tsp cardamom

2 eggs, 1 separated

½ cup raisins, soaked in rum

1 cup chopped, mixed dried fruit

Frosting

2 tbsp powdered sugar

2 tbsp lemon juice

½ cup red candied cherries, halved

Directions

Put ¾ of the flour into a bowl and make a hole in the middle.

Put the yeast into it and mix it with a pinch of sugar and some of the lukewarm milk.

Dust the mixture with flour and cover with a cloth and let it rise in a warm place for 15 minutes.

Add the melted butter, salt, lemon, cardamom, egg, egg white, remaining milk and flour to the flour and yeast mixture.

Knead the dough till smooth.

When the dough begins to form a ball, stir in the raisins and mixed, dried fruit.

Form the dough into a log.

Cut off ¼ of the log, divide the ¼ into 4 equal parts and form into balls of dough.

Divide the remaining log into 4 parts and form into four balls.

Grease well a spring-form pan with a central tube.

Place the dough into the pan, alternating large and small dough balls.

Cover the pan and let it rise in a warm place.

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Brush the dough with the beaten yolk and place it in a pre=heated oven (350 degrees F)

Let it cook for approximately 30 minutes.

Cool the cake thoroughly before removing from the pan.

*Place the coin (bean or doll) inside the cake and ice

Mix the powdered sugar with the lemon juice to an icing consistency.

Ice the cake and decorate it with the candied cherries.

In Germany, a small gold crown made of foil is placed in the middle of the cake.

CandleMas

February 2 is halfway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. The light seems to have returned by this time of the year and the days are noticeably longer. Thoughts of spring and getting the garden prepared are filling the air and we slowly begin to emerge back out into nature, as the groundhog does (US it is GroundHog Day). The ancient festival of Ibolc and St. Brigid's Day are also celebrating on Feb. 2

In Catholic church, it is the day where candles were taken to the church to be blessed, thus Candle-mass. And early festivals revolved around fire.

Making Candles is a fun way to celebrate and bring some light and heat to your home. Pancakes or crepes are a traditional food (as it coincides close to Shrove Tuesday).

It is also a time of year to embrace new things (think resolutions).

A few notes on candlemaking* get all supplies ahead of time and read instructions carefully. I found a nice library book called "[Basic Candle Making](#)" that was very helpful and had a lot of pictures. This is a long process that cannot be rushed and you can't stop in the middle. Give 3 hours or more.

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Here we heated the beeswax until it melted in our make-shift double boiler.



I started the candle by dipping each wick for 1 minute in the hot wax. It made the wick stiff when it cooled. Then it was an "assembly-line" production. The girls each dipped and I would get the kinks out by running my finger down each candle to straighten it.

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After about 10 dips they began to look a bit like candles. We made our own drying rack out of 2 chairs, a broom handle and a garden stake! The tiny ones on the garden stake became our birthday candles. So cute!



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We ended up really needing more wax, because when they got to this point the wax was too low in our dipping can, that it made fat candles on the bottom and thin on top. But, we love them! We finished by rubbing them slightly on some waxed paper and trimming the bottoms.

We are wrapping and giving them as Valentine's Day presents..

note we used a large Bushs Baked bean can to melt our wax in and it worked great. The only expense was for the beeswax blocks (much cheaper than the pellets and can be cut with a sharp knife) and the wicks.