

ABSOLUTELY ADVENT!

A TEEN'S JOURNEY
TO CHRISTMAS
2023 

For Teens





WHY DO WE, AS BELIEVERS IN JESUS, NEED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE EARTH, SEA, AND SKIES?

These are not exactly the words from the title of a beloved Christmas movie or Christmas song. But we should all be dreaming of a time when our care of the earth will enable our planet to thrive for thousands, and maybe even millions, of years to come.

The reality is that Mother Earth is groaning in pain. In our cities, the air is heavy with smog. Landfills are overflowing. Urban sprawl is replacing farmland. Rivers, lakes, and streams are polluted. Rain forests and the animals that inhabit them are disappearing. Signs of global climate change are all around us.

The real message of Christmas is that God loves creation, including humanity, so much that God the Father sent the Son to become human and live on earth. This is the Incarnation: God becomes human and takes on a human existence. What does this tell us? It is a sign that God loves this earth and loves human beings and wants the best for both. God calls us, as stewards of God's creation, to care for our planet and for one another.

In speaking of this responsibility, Pope Francis tells us: "To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds."

Pope Francis challenges us to protect all of God's creation. What better time than the Advent season, when we are preparing to celebrate the coming of Emmanuel—God with us—to accept this challenge?

ABSOLUTELY ADVENT will help you to prepare for the coming of Jesus.

On each day of Advent, you will:

- Read a passage from the Scripture readings for the day.
- Discover an activity that helps you connect the Scripture with your own life.
- Reflect on the Scripture with journal questions that relate to your own experiences.

ABSOLUTELY ADVENT will also help you to prepare the earth for the coming of Jesus. For each week of Advent, you will find a Green Christmas Activity designed to protect and preserve God's creation. You'll want to invite friends and family to help!



First Saturday of Advent

DECEMBER 9 ★ SAINT JUAN DIEGO CUAUHTLATOATZIN

★ Today's Scripture Reading » Matthew 9:35-38 ★

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

This is a very important time because Jesus saw that he and his disciples were too few to teach, to tell the good news, and to heal the sick. He said to his followers that they must ask for more help.

Warm-up

The **harvest** is plentiful; the **laborers** are few. **Using the letters of the word harvest, can you make at least 15 words? And then can you make as many words from the letters of the word laborers?**

HARVEST

LABORERS

Reflection:

We understand from this passage that the laborers are those who do God's work among the people. There are many, many people among us, young and old, who are in need of help. What do you do to help others?



Second Friday of Advent

DECEMBER 15

★ Today's Scripture Reading » Isaiah 48:17 ★

When you were born, you were born with “Instructions Inside”—inside your very being. But you may still be living with the belief that “if all else fails, read the instructions”! When you reach that point, something has already gone wrong.

So when you are in a complicated situation, remember the words and examples of wise people in your life, recall lessons from your religious instruction, search your conscience, pray. Look and listen for what God offers.

“I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHO TEACHES YOU FOR YOUR OWN GOOD, WHO LEADS YOU IN THE WAY YOU SHOULD GO.”

Warm-up: Your sweater has a label with instructions for proper care; your clock has operating instructions. **Write out a label with instructions on how you want people to treat you.**

CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Reflection: What are some signs in your life that God is teaching you, leading you, instructing you?



Third Tuesday of Advent

DECEMBER 19

★ Today's Scripture Reading » Psalm 71:3–6 ★

Have you ever felt alone? This is a common human experience. Here's how the psalmist expresses the hope to be in the presence of God.

*Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.*



Reflection: Certain people in your life are said to be “God sent.” Who has been “God sent” for you? What did this person say or do that gave you comfort?

Warm-up: Identifying people in your life to whom you can go when you are experiencing difficulty isn't always easy. When someone is with you in a time of loneliness or difficulty, that person is in **Solidarity** with you. **It can be as challenging as finding the person from the top of this page in this collage.**



THE CHRISTMAS TREE

You might think that the Christmas tree is one of our oldest traditions to celebrate Jesus' birthday. In fact, the custom of putting up an evergreen tree in one's house dates back only to the sixteenth century.

So, what's the story of the Christmas tree? The Germans were the first to take evergreen trees—in their case, fir trees—and bring them indoors. The original trees were hung upside down and represented the Trinity because there were three sides or points to the triangular or cone-shaped tree. Martin Luther, the German Protestant reformer, was said to be walking in the woods one night and was stunned by the beauty of the stars amongst the trees. With that, the custom of putting candles—the early version of Christmas lights—on trees was begun.

The history of the Christmas tree in the United States is even shorter. In the 1830s, German immigrants living in Pennsylvania began the custom of the Christmas tree in this country. The newly settled farmers cut down trees, brought them into their houses, put candles on the branches, and placed fruits and other small gifts on the trees.

The custom of having community trees in public squares—Rockefeller Plaza or the White House—was also imported from Europe. Celebrating with a Christmas tree has grown into a great tradition!



A GREEN CHRISTMAS

ACTIVITY: Maybe you are one of those last-minute shoppers.

There is one week to Christmas. Sure, the stores are full of items that a family member or friend might need. But consider, instead, giving a donation to a worthy cause in the name of the loved one. A homeless shelter, meal program, thrift shop, church, or other nonprofit organization would welcome your donation. If you are still stumped (a pun on the Christmas tree tradition), consider donating to Heifer International, helping children and families around the world receive training and animal gifts that help them become self-reliant. Visit www.heifer.org. The best part—you will even save gas by shopping from your own home!

