

Keeping Advent

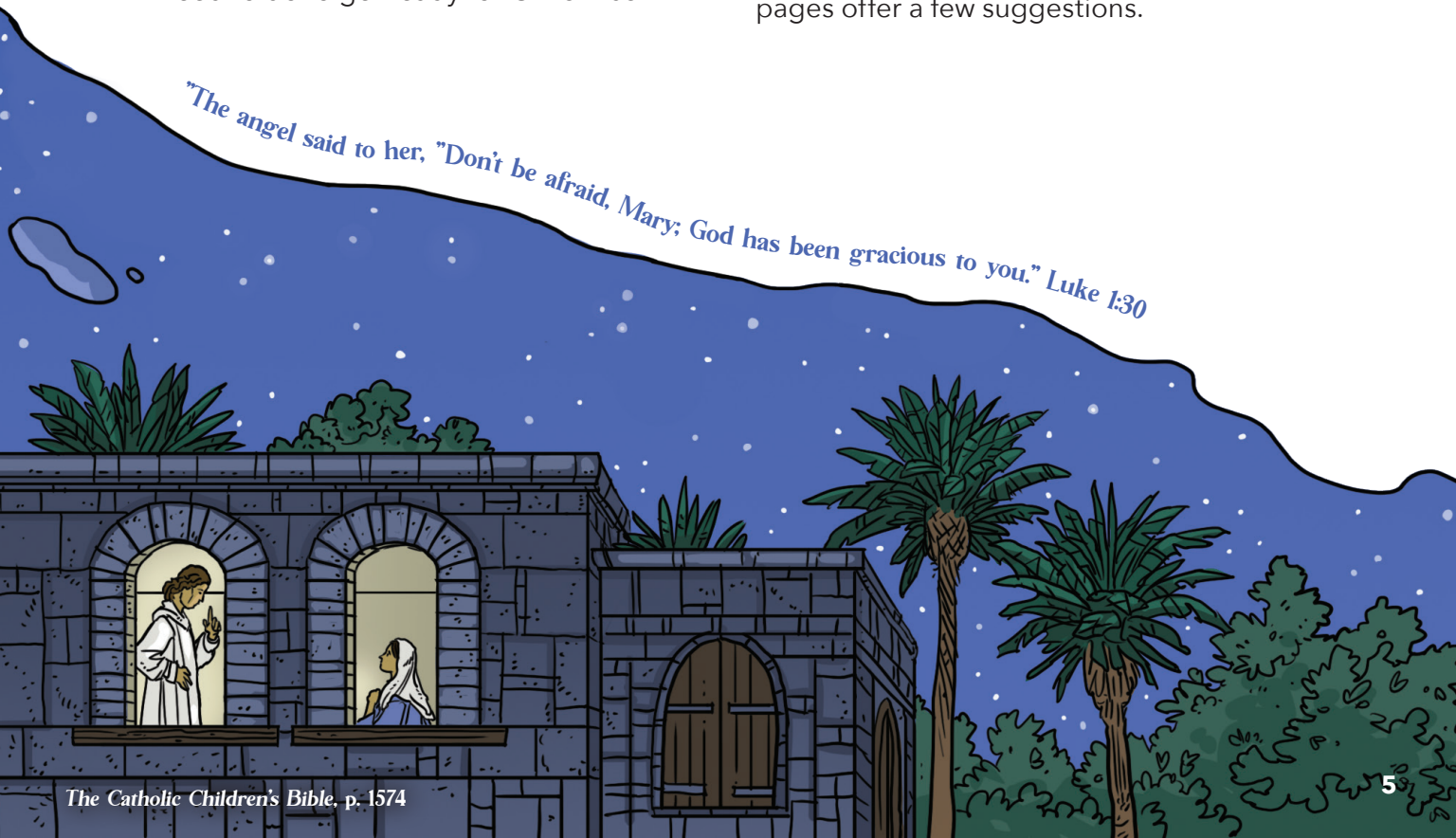
by Joanna Dailey

Christmas comes at us like a steamroller and seems to start earlier every year.

Christmas store displays go up right after Halloween, ads about the perfect gift for the perfect person begin to appear on TV and in our inboxes, Christmas music begins to fill the air, and holiday recipes begin popping up on our social media accounts. Inevitably, we start thinking about all we need to do to get ready for Christmas.

Do we have the right gifts? How will we celebrate with our family? It is easy to bypass Advent and skip right to Christmas, especially in our preparations. But Advent is an important time to stop, pause, reflect, and prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of the Savior, Emmanuel. Taking time to incorporate Advent practices into your classroom can help children keep Advent and better prepare mentally and spiritually for Christmas. The following pages offer a few suggestions.

"The angel said to her, 'Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you.'" Luke 1:30



Make room for silence and solitude

Set aside a few moments (start with five minutes) each day to experience quiet, peaceful waiting. Darken the classroom space. Pull down the shades and turn out the lights. Say a short Advent prayer ("Come, Lord Jesus, into our hearts and into our lives") and then just wait. Why? Because we need to experience "empty time" in order to experience the "fullness of time" at Christmas.

Light candles of the Advent wreath

Consider lighting the candles just before your time of silence. You could also ritualize the moment by inviting everyone to sing an Advent song while lighting the candle(s).

Drape your space with Advent colors

Be the countercultural classroom or corner by decorating with purples and a splash of pink. If possible, try to hold off your classroom Christmas party until after Christmas, when it's finally *time*: perhaps plan it for January 6 or for the Monday after Epiphany.

If a pre-Christmas party or gift exchange is a must, make it an Advent party, with purple gift wrap and ribbons.

This may take some out-of-the-ordinary courage, but it will give students something to talk about and remember. Besides, who needs to be ordinary?

**"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting,
the baby moved within her. Elizabeth
was filled with the Holy Spirit" Luke 1:41**



"I tell you, whenever
you did this for one of
the least important of
these followers
of mine, you
did it for me!"
Matthew 25:40

The Catholic Children's Bible, p. 1510

Display an Advent calendar

Try to find one with a Scripture quote behind every door. Ask children to take turns opening the "door of the day" and reading the Scripture quote. If you are unable to find an Advent calendar with Scripture quotes, have the class make one using Scripture citations from the Advent Sunday readings.

Remember those who are in need

If your school or parish does not have an Advent project, consider initiating one with your group. Choose a worthy organization to help with your "time, talent, or treasure" this Advent. Make an Advent bank. Invite the children to contribute what they can each week (or determine a set amount in advance) and donate the final collected amount to a worthy cause.

Set up a Nativity scene

Keep the manger empty. You may want to set up a box near the crib into which the children can place prayer intentions. (Announce whether these will be read at an Advent prayer service or kept private.) Draw names to select a child who will place the Baby Jesus in the manger on the first day of school *after* Christmas. When children return, continue the celebration! Set up the class Christmas tree and decorate it. Plan a party. Continue your quiet time, this time by the light of the Christmas tree. The Christmas season ends on January 12, 2020, with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Explore the Saints

The Advent season includes many feast days of saints. Incorporate an Advent saints component into your classroom time. Introduce saints on their feast days and invite children to think about how each saint waited for the coming of Jesus. Consider the following:

December 3: Saint Francis Xavier

December 6: Saint Nicholas

December 9: Saint Juan Diego

December 12: Our Lady of Guadalupe

December 13: Saint Lucy

December 14: Saint John of the Cross

December 17: Saint Hildegard of Bingen

As you make plans for the month of December, be intentional about keeping Advent in your classroom. By simply incorporating one or two Advent practices, you can help the children in your group make the journey through Advent to Christmas. ■

