

WELCOME TO



The Family Patch
feeding the creative spirit

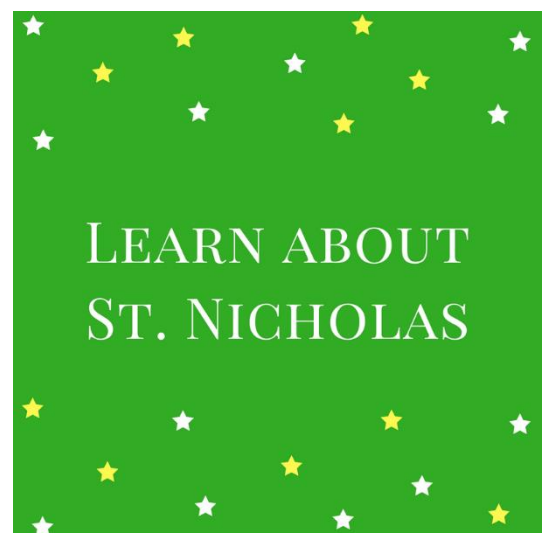
ADVENT CALENDAR

We're so excited to have you join us during this Advent Season. It is our hope that through the activities in this calendar you'll be able to spend time with your kids, exploring the spiritual side of the season whilst having fun together.

We know that the run up to Christmas can be incredibly hectic, not to mention expensive, and so every single activity is easy to do with limited time and resources.

Simply print out the 24 activity squares included in this pack, and either display them on the wall or put them in little envelopes to be opened each day. We've included some suggestions on the following pages, to help you get started.

Finally, don't forget to share your journey online using #FPAdvent – Enjoy!









Write a Christmas Wishlist

We're starting off our Advent Journey with a chance to sit down and reflect upon what we want to get out of this year's Christmas Celebrations.

It's a time to think about not only what gifts we may wish to receive, but also what joy we might find in spending time with family and friends.

Younger children will enjoy writing their letter to Santa, and it can be as simple as this if you want it to be. Keeping the magic alive in their hearts through activities such as writing to Santa will ensure that they create memories that will last a lifetime.

But older children may wish to try something a little different (especially if they have decided they are "too old for Santa"!) It can be difficult, sometimes, making that transition from believing in Santa to not believing in him – Christmas can suddenly feel a bit less magical, right? But it doesn't have to be that way...

Writing down our hopes and dreams can be a really powerful tool in focusing our hearts and minds on what is really important to us. It can be even more powerful if you make it a creative challenge, cutting out images to make a collage or painting a picture of what it is you most desire.

Why not take the opportunity to sit down with your kids today and talk about the things you each want, and how you might be able to get them. And then ask them to think about what others may want this year too... do all children want what they want, or do other people have different priorities?

Whilst it is wonderful to write a Christmas Wishlist that includes the latest trends and gadgets, are presents the only things we want from Christmas or do we want more? How do we want to feel? And who do we wish to see?

You could even end today's activity by promising to help each other get one thing off each list. Because, after all, wishlists will remain lists of wishes only if we don't work together to make them come true!

Have a Festive Treat

Ah, Christmas, what joy you bring us with all your tasty treats and delicious morsels! Whether it's mince pies, Christmas cake, chocolate coins, or gingerbread, everyone has something which means "Christmas" to them.

Perhaps it's something that you had as a child – nuts you cracked open yourself, or juicy clementines with the leaves still attached. Maybe it's the festive spices that fill the home and throw you back to years gone by. It could even be something completely random that only you and your family associate with Christmas.

Whatever it is, enjoy it today. There is something truly special about food that you only eat at this time of the year, because the smell and taste alone can bring back a flood of happy memories in a moment. And there is a real beauty in sharing these traditions, which span the generations and outlive any and all of our passing trends.

It doesn't matter what it is that you enjoy, nor whether you have made the treat yourself or bought it from a shop. The important thing is that you take time out to truly savour the scent and flavour of what you eat, and share your memories with your children.

Kids love to hear about our childhood memories, because to them it is almost impossible to imagine that we were ever so young! Sharing memories and stories as we eat is such a time-honoured tradition, it connects us to our ancestors and keeps their memories alive too. What better time to remember them than at Christmas, when the memories are usually so full of joy?

By taking time out, just 5 minutes is enough (but more is even better), we are allowing ourselves to slow down, beat the stressful rush of Christmas preparations, and truly be present with our kids whilst reflecting on the happiest memories from years gone by. And the beauty of this is, your children will also be creating their own sensory-based memories that they can look back on in years to come – what a blessing that is!

Watch a Christmas Classic

There are two reasons we have chosen this as today's activity:

- 1) Watching a Christmas Classic is a great way to build upon the traditions we cherish throughout the years (films have as great an ability to throw us back in time through our memories as food does!)
- 2) Watching a Christmas Classic also requires us to take time out to sit with our children and enjoy something together, for at least an hour, if not more!

By Christmas Classic, we mean a Christmas Movie or Seasonal Special that you just have to watch every year, without fail. There is such a wealth of Christmas Movies available both on DVD or via streaming services and on demand TV these days, that there really is no excuse to miss out on this wonderful activity today.

In fact, it doesn't even have to be specifically about Christmas, if you find Festive Films a little bit too cheesy for your liking. Take, for instance, my personal tradition of watching *The Wizard of Oz* on Christmas Eve. There is nothing remotely Christmassy about this film, and yet thanks to the scheduling of TV during my teens this film always seemed to be shown that day and I came to associate it with the last minute Christmas prep!

But even though that is my Christmas Eve tradition, there are so many other Christmas Classics I try to fit in during December. I'm such a huge fan of them that we have almost an entire shelf dedicated to them. However I often find that we do not watch them as a family. I either watch them in the evening whilst putting the finishing touches on gifts, or WB watches them whilst I make dinner.

So making one day specifically for sitting down and watching a film together means that we get to cherish the moment and build memories of time spent cuddling on the sofa, under a warm blanket, drinking hot chocolate, and enjoying each other's company.

And that's what it's all about, really, making time to do things together amidst all the hustle and bustle of this busy season. Because what's the point of running around trying to make it perfect, when you can't even take an hour out to truly focus on a shared activity?

Decorate the Christmas Tree

So, we know this is something that you would be doing anyway, but we wanted to include it in the Advent Calendar because it is such a huge opportunity to dig deep into the heart of our Christmas traditions, whilst still having lots of fun.

One of my favourite memories of Christmas as a child is that decorating day was a big deal in our house. We'd set aside an entire day and whilst my parents were getting the trimmings out of the loft, my sister and I would trundle around to the corner shop to buy a chocolate bar for everyone (a huge treat in our house!)

We'd put Christmas music on, eat the chocolate, and decorate the entire house, starting with the tree and ending with our bedrooms. I cannot tell you how wonderful it felt to see the same old decorations coming out year after year – we even had the same Advent Calendars for years, the windows carefully pushed closed at the end of each December ready for the following year.

As we've grown older, some traditions have continued, such as the eating of chocolate and listening to Christmas music. So even though the decorations have changed, as things have broken and needed to be replaced, decorating day still feels the same as it did when I was 5 years old! Which is why it's important to us to instill that same sense of joyful tradition around decorating the tree.

Tim and I let WB have free reign when it comes to putting ornaments on our tree... it may not be the most balanced tree in the world, but it is his creation and that means more to us than a perfectly trimmed tree. It means he has been fully involved in what we were doing, and can look at his efforts proudly throughout the entire festive season. We also play Christmas music and eat chocolate, because they allow me to share my memories of Christmas Past with WB.

So today I'm asking you to think about what traditions you want to pass on to your children? What special gifts can you include (e.g. treasured ornaments)? And what about starting new traditions of your very own, like buying a new decoration each year, or cutting out paper snowflakes and making strings of popcorn to add to the tree? Make it special, in your own unique way.

Write Christmas Cards

Is there anything more wonderful than receiving card after card during December, gradually filling up your home with festive greetings? I don't think so.

Christmas Cards are a timeless tradition, that allows us to show those we love and care about that we are thinking of them and wishing them well. In years gone past, before the time of the internet and social media, Christmas Cards were often the only time in a year when you heard from certain acquaintances.

Nowadays it's more common to be privy to the daily lives of people we previously might have lost contact with, and so you might think Christmas Cards wouldn't mean so much anymore. But actually I think they mean a whole lot more in many ways. Think about it, when we're so used to seeing a quick message on a screen, how precious would it be to receive a handwritten message in an actual card?

Of course, Christmas is not just about what we receive, it is about what we give to others too. In fact, one of the greatest messages I think we can pass on to our children is that it is more beautiful to give than to receive. Because when you think carefully about what you give and how you give it, you find you cannot wait to see the look on the recipient's face!

Christmas Cards are a great way of sharing the love between friends and family, and it is so easy to get your kids involved in this. You can let younger children who are unable to write simply scribble on the inside of a card, whilst you write a message for them. Kids who are just learning to write will get huge joy out of writing their name over and over again. And older kids will enjoy picking out which card to give to whom, maybe even making a few themselves.

Why not set aside half an hour today, pop on some Christmas music, and sit together at the table, writing cards and getting them ready to be posted or handed out in the playground. Not only will you find the joy in giving, you're also finding more time to spend together as a family too.

Learn about St. Nicholas

Ah, good old St. Nicholas. Or Santa. Or Father Christmas. He's quite the character, isn't he?

Whatever your personal feelings on whether you should play along with the Santa game or not, there's no denying that a Father Christmas figure of some kind is a traditional concept that has survived for generations and will likely continue for generations to come.

So why not dig a little deeper and learn more about the development of our modern day Santa Claus from the humble 4th century Greek Bishop?

How you do this will depend entirely upon a whole range of factors, including: whether your kids (still) believe in Santa; how Father Christmas is portrayed in both your own family traditions and the media; how much history you and your kids wish to explore; and the resources available to you.

It will also depend, of course, on the meaning you wish to place upon your exploration of Santa's character. Do you want to look at him as a "jolly old elf", who simply loves to gift children on Christmas Eve? Perhaps you want to look at the symbolism that has created such an iconic figure? Or maybe you feel rather cynical about it all and want to focus on the commercialisation of the "Coca-Cola Santa" in red and white, and would rather look at the historical roots alone.

However you approach today's activity, just make sure it means something to both you and your kids. The idea is that this activity will give you a chance to find a new way of looking at an old tradition, finding new meanings and connections along the way.

There is a post on The Family Patch blog entitled "The Spiritual Side of Santa" to help accompany today's activity. You can find the post at www.thefamilypatch.com/finding-spiritual-santa. Please do check it out if you want to read more.

Look at Christmas Lights

I'm pretty sure it's safe to say that every single neighbourhood has at least one house that goes all out at Christmas with outdoor lights and decorations. And what a joy it is to be able to walk past that house on a cold and dark Winter's evening.

Christmas lights are such a beautiful symbol of all we are celebrating at this time of year. Whether it's the Nativity, with its "light in the darkness" message, or the ancient Celtic celebration of the Solstice, with the return of the sun after the longest night, the focus is indeed on a light shining away in the darkest of moments.

And with the nights drawing in, and dark descending upon us earlier and earlier each day, it is super easy to schedule a short walk around the neighbourhood to look at the lights. You could wrap up warm and take a walk while dinner cooks, or take a stroll after tea before returning home for a mug of hot chocolate as a bedtime treat.

Or, if you're feeling more adventurous, you could combine an evening of late night shopping with a walk around town to see the lights. That way you're getting on top of your to-do list whilst also having fun with the kids – bonus!

The idea of this activity is two-fold – you get to enjoy time together whilst also talking about the symbolic nature of lighting up the dark skies with pretty lights. As with all the activities in this Advent Calendar, you can keep this as simple as you like. The most important thing is to enjoy spending time together and developing traditions to last a lifetime. I remember how magical it felt to walk around in the dark as a child, something which you rarely get to do when you're young, and the lights always seemed so beautiful.

However, if you or your kids are interested in learning more, you could sit together and Google news articles and videos of Christmas light displays around the world. How do they differ from country to country? And have they become more extravagant over time, or have there always been people who shone light into the darkness in any way they could? You could lose an entire evening on YouTube alone with this one!

Make a Christmas Wreath

What do you think of when you hear the term, “Christmas Wreath”? Do you think of fancy evergreen, pine cones, and ribbons? What about sparkly baubles and woven willow? That’s pretty much what I think of too.

And there is a part of me that has always wanted to hang a wreath fresh from the florist on my front door, just like in all those beautiful Victorian Christmas cards. But that just isn’t in my budget (plus my front door is down a passageway, so only the postman would see it anyway!)

So, I asked myself how else I could take part in this tradition, without breaking the bank or spending hours upon hours crafting something myself. And do you know what my answer was? Pinterest!

I kid you not, Pinterest is the absolute best place to go for inspiration of any kind. Sure, a lot of pins and boards focus on the really fancy stuff, but there are also some great ideas for kid friendly craft activities that use things you already have around your home (or can buy for next to nothing).

Paper plate wreaths, you’ve got it. Pom-pom wreaths made with yarn scraps, why not? Painted toilet roll tubes stuck together with glue, now you’re talking! Seriously, the idea here is not to aim for perfection, but to learn how resourceful you are and let your inner child enjoy creating for the sheer fun of it. Because there is nobody more talented at teaching you to simply enjoy crafting without worrying about the end result than you kids!

If you’re looking for inspiration, I’ve set up a Pinterest board especially for today’s activity, which you can find at <http://bit.ly/FPAdventWreaths>

Play a Game Together

How often do you make time in your day to sit down as a family and play a game, without watching the clock and thinking about the dozen or so tasks still waiting on your to-do list?

I know in our house it's not that often. Even though I'm home most days, WB and I rarely think to sit down and just play a game because we've specifically planned it. That's not to say that we don't play games together – we do and it is always a lot of fun. But because I don't specifically plan it into our day's activities, I find we often end up rushing to finish so that I can start cooking dinner or some other task that really needs to be done.

It's even less likely that we'll plan a game for the evening or weekends when Tim is at home, as they are usually filled with bedtime routines, grocery shopping, and everything else I haven't been able to do myself during the week. Which means we miss out on so much fun together.

I'm sure we're far from alone in this – parents are so busy just trying to keep up with work, feeding the kids, helping them with their homework, and getting them to bed on time. I get it. And it's even more hectic during Advent, there's no doubt about that.

But just for today I'm asking you to carve out some time specifically for a game together. It doesn't have to be a long or complicated game, it could be as simple as snap, dominoes, or even Simon Says. The game itself doesn't matter, just that you are making time to have some fun together.

If you're feeling extra festive, why not pop on the internet and print out some Christmas Bingo cards or a festive memory game? Older kids may even enjoy a Christmas Trivia game. Once again, Pinterest is a great source of inspiration for this, with many free printable options for you to print out and enjoy. I've popped some of my favourites on the board at <http://bit.ly/FPXmasGames>, but there are so many more to choose from if none of those take your fancy.

Visit a Christmas Fayre

Visiting a Christmas Fayre, Church Bazaar, Christmas Market, or other Seasonal Event can be an excellent way of getting into the Christmas Spirit. It doesn't matter what the event looks like, how big (or small) it is, nor where it is held, just that it has a Christmassy feel to it.

For instance, where we live there is a large Christmas Market, which spans across the historic part of the city and is filled with stalls selling handmade goods, locally produced food, and all manner of festive treats. You can lose an entire evening wandering around, but it isn't necessarily the easiest thing to visit with a young family.

In comparison, our local church runs a Christmas Bazaar each year, with small stalls selling homemade cakes and jams, handmade cards, and second-hand books and toys. It is much smaller than it was when I was growing up, when it used to have a Santa's grotto and enough stalls for me to find gifts for my entire family using my pocket money. But it is still a special event held each year.

Then, of course, there are the school Christmas Fayres too! These usually have a visiting Santa, plenty of second-hand stalls, and sometimes a spot of caroling too. And just a few years back I remember taking part in a Family Fun Day at the local pub, helping kids make their own tree decorations out of beads whilst someone else read them festive stories. There really is an event for everybody!

The point of today's activity is to do something together as a family that will be fun and festive, so ask around in your local area to find out what events there are and choose one that you know you'll all enjoy. There's simply nothing more exciting than wandering around stalls, drinking a cup of hot chocolate (or mulled wine), and soaking up the festive atmosphere as Christmas music plays in the background.

And whilst some of these events will have stalls that sell goods at a price too expensive for pocket money, most will have lucky dips or raffles that your kids can take part in. Get into the spirit and have some fun – it's Christmas!

Take a Family Photo

Today's activity sounds super easy – most of us have cameras on our phones now and we're usually snapping away at things multiple times a day. But how often do we purposefully choose to take a photo that we can print out and save in a photo album or picture frame?

If you're anything like me, you'll have tons of pictures on your phone and computer, but hardly any ever get printed out. I tell myself I will print some out (soon), but I never do, and so most of the photos around our house are from either before WB was born or during the first 3 months of his life. And that is such a shame, because he adores looking at photos and whilst we can show him them on the computer, it's just not the same as having them on the wall or in an album he can look through at any time.

Which is why today's activity is to take a family photo that you will print out and either put on the wall or place in a Christmas photo album, to keep the memories alive. You could even start an annual tradition, so that by the time your kids are grown they can look back through the years and see how things changed, as well as how some things will always remain the same!

Be creative with this one – wear your Christmas jumper, create a series of photos showing the development of something (such as making mince pies, from rolling the pastry to eating the first one), let the kids be the photographer and direct your pose, or pull silly faces to make each other laugh.

Once you've taken your photo, decide what to do with it and then make a plan to do so. You could make a date to go to the shop and get it printed. Or you could get on the computer and, using a design site such as www.canva.com or www.picmonkey.com (both free), create your own personal Christmas cards to send to family and friends. You could even take a series of 12 photos and make them into a calendar for the following year.

There is absolutely no limit to what you can do with today's activity, its simplicity leaves it completely open to your own interpretation. Have fun!

Read the Nativity Story

Today's activity focuses specifically on the Christian roots of Christmas, and whether you personally relate to that or not I'd still suggest giving this one a go. You see, there are so many different ways to read and interpret the Bible, and so this activity is open to your own interpretation as much as any of the others.

I personally don't accept the Nativity as a historically accurate account of the birth of Jesus, but that doesn't mean I don't find a deeply beautiful symbolism within it. It also doesn't mean I am not going to read the Nativity Story to WB, because I am.

I remember hearing about it as a kid and simply accepting it as is, without ever questioning what it meant nor how it related to the Christmas we celebrated as a family. I just loved singing the carols and thinking about the Nativity Story as I knew it, and that was perfectly okay for me for many, many years.

And that's the point of this activity really, it gives you the opportunity to explore the Nativity Story in an age-appropriate way with you kids. Younger children may simply want to hear the story, whereas older kids may enjoy exploring the deeper meaning behind it all.

It doesn't really matter how you approach it, just that you do. The reality is that your kids will come across the Nativity Story through school, TV, and books, whether you read it with them or not. So why not take the opportunity to discuss it with them; find out how they feel about it and share your own thoughts and feelings about it. Because in doing so you help them develop key skills in exploring religious texts and using their own discernment to figure out what feels right to them and what doesn't. And that is a truly useful skill to have as you journey through life.

If you don't know where to begin with today's activity, why not check out the Pinterest board I have created for it at <http://bit.ly/FPNativityKids>. I have also written a blog post entitled "Exploring the Nativity Story with your Kids," to accompany today's activity. You can find this post at www.thefamilypatch.com/exploring-nativity-story-kids

Make your own Gift Wrap

Wrapping presents can be such a fun activity (so much so that it is included as another daily activity later in this pack). But it is so much more enjoyable when you get to wrap presents in paper that you have created yourself!

Interestingly, as much as I adore wrapping presents (and I do), I never actually tried this until WB was a couple of years old. And then suddenly the idea came to me – if I bought some brown parcel paper and let him draw all over it we'd have our very own personalised wrapping paper.

Now that's not to say that the bright and colourful wrapping paper you can buy in the shops doesn't have its place, because it does. There is no way I'd be able to create enough wrapping paper to cover all the presents we send out at Christmas. But it does mean that certain selected items can be wrapped in something that is made with love and care. And who doesn't like to receive something homemade?

And there are so many different ways in which you could do this. We've generally used brown parcel paper, but this year we bought a roll of white paper from IKEA and plan on using some of that too. You could use pens, paints, stamps, glitter, or stencils to create pretty patterns and designs.

One of the most exciting parts about this activity is that it grows with your child year on year. When WB was 2 his contribution was random scribbles. By the time he was 3 he was obsessed with numbers and that's what covered our Christmas presents that year. Last year it was trains and other vehicles, and this year I suspect it will be character from BFDI (a YouTube series he loves). Allowing your kids free reign with this will allow their individual personalities and interests to shine through!

Have a chat with your kids whilst they decorate the paper, explain to them that their artwork will provide a lot of joy on Christmas Day and makes the present given extra special. Ask them if they would like any help from you, and let them direct you for once. Basically turn this into a fun activity that shows them the joy there is to be found in making something nice for others. Because, after all, Christmas is all about bringing joy to others, isn't it?

Do a Random Act of Kindness

Random Acts of Kindness (or RAOs for short) are becoming increasingly popular, as people share their ideas over the internet and inspire others to make someone else's day that little bit happier without any expectation of a reward.

The idea is that you choose someone who might appreciate a little bit of extra cheer, and then do something for them "just because". The whole point behind RAOs is that they aren't done for a specific purpose (such as a birthday or Christmas) but because there is joy in both giving and receiving, at any time of year.

In the middle of all the hustle and bustle of Christmas preparations it can be hard to find time and energy (and resources) to reach out and do something "just because", but that is exactly why I have chosen this as today's activity. You need to step back from it all for a moment to decide who really deserves a bit of extra joy and how you can do it.

Perhaps you have a neighbour who lost a family member this year and may be finding the Festive Season difficult? Or maybe there is a mum at school who is absolutely exhausted and just needs an extra pair of hands? Ask your kids to think about this too, do they know of any friends who might need a little extra love today?

RAOs could be as simple as smiling at someone on the bus, or stopping to talk to the person sleeping rough on the streets. They can be making a colleague a cup of tea after a difficult phone call, or sitting next to the new kid at school and introducing him to your friends. They could even be offering a play date to that busy mum, or visiting the elderly neighbour to sing Christmas Carols or share memories over a mince pie.

Whatever you choose, big or small, know that your Random Act of Kindness will have cheered someone's day so much that they will remember it for a long time.

If you want some more ideas for RAOs, check out my Pinterest board at <http://bit.ly/FPRAOs>

Help Wrap Presents

So, you've made your very own wrapping paper and now it is time to wrap the presents in it. But rather than rushing to do this of an evening or while the kids are at school, why not make it a family activity?

Sure, it takes longer and can be a bit messier when you wrap presents with younger kids, but they can still help you fold the paper and stick tape over the edges with your direction and support. And you never know, your kids may absolutely love it!

Wrapping presents has to be one of my absolute favourite activities of all time. I kid you not, in my teens I used to specifically ask people if I could help them wrap their presents because I loved it that much. I'd stick on some music, set myself up with everything I needed, and then wrap, wrap, wrap until I could wrap no more.

I remember my mum setting up a kind of production line one year – she would write out the gift card and choose the wrapping paper for each present, and then I would wrap the present and stick the label on. Not only was it a really efficient way of getting through her massive pile of gifts, it was also a really lovely afternoon spent sitting together on the living room floor. I think I enjoyed the company more than the actual activity itself.

And that's again the focus for today's activity – doing things together. Yes, you could probably do it quicker and easier without the kids, but you'd also miss out on an opportunity to prepare for Christmas together.

As kids it can be so easy to get caught up in anticipation for Christmas Day, and forget how much actually goes into making the big day so special. So, by encouraging your kids to take part, you are helping them to get involved and discover that what we do today prepares the way for the rewards of tomorrow.

If you want to take this a step further, you could teach your kids how to add blessings of love and joy to each gift, by saying a prayer or imagining the love they wish each recipient to feel as they wrap them.

Sing Christmas Carols

Who doesn't love a good sing-a-long when it comes to Christmas Carols (or other Christmas Favourites)? So why not crack out the CDs, turn on the radio, switch to a TV music channel, or stream some tunes direct from the internet, and get singing!

One of the great things about Christmas Carols is that we sing them year after year. They are traditional, they invoke memories of years gone past, and most people know the words to at least the first verse, if not the whole song. So it's super easy to get everyone involved, even the most reluctant of singers.

As with most of the activities included in this Advent Calendar, this is something you can adapt to fit your own personal needs. If someone in the family plays an instrument, combine their practice with a singing session around the fire. If you've got jobs you need to be getting on with, make a game out of it and see how many carols you can sing in the time it takes you to make the bed/prepare the dinner/hover the floor, or whatever else it is that you need to do. Singing whilst you work certainly makes it feel less like a chore, and encourages kids to join in and help out too.

If you take it in turns to choose the carols you sing, each member of the family gets a chance to share their favourite with the others. You could make it more interesting by asking why each person chose each particular carol. If it's the lyrics, what do those words actually mean? If it's the tune, are there any other carols that have a similar tune? Make it fun by asking questions and really listening to the answers, you might be surprised by some people's answers!

And if you're really looking to delve deep into today's activity, why not hop online and search the history of your favourite carol. Who wrote it and when? What was their inspiration and how did it become so popular? There is a fascinating history behind our modern day favourites, and with the internet for help you could find out so much about them in just a short amount of time.

Others ideas could include acting out the story the carol tells, or creating your own lyrics to an old favourite (most kids know at least one cheeky version!) You could even try singing the lyrics of one carol to the tune of another – it's more challenging than you think!

Buy Gifts from a Charity Shop

There are so many reasons why this activity has been included, and it's one of my absolute favourites from the entire Advent Calendar. So in order to explain why, I'm just going to pop them into a list below:

1. Charity shops sell items that your kids can afford to buy as gifts using their pocket money. This gives them a feeling of satisfaction and pride at being able to buy those they love a present out of their own savings.
2. The vast majority of items in a charity shop have been donated, which allows you to start a conversation with your children about how donating unwanted or outgrown items can both help others and limit how much is thrown away.
3. Charity shops raise money for a wide variety of causes, and if you visit more than one you will have an opportunity to discuss how many people in our world need our help, as well as just how many people are working really hard to make sure those people get all the help they need. Tell your kids how spending their pocket money in a charity shop means that they are supporting the work the charity does and therefore helping so many others.
4. Charity shops tend to be less busy than the bigger shops, especially at Christmas. So you will have more time to wander around, as well as a bit more freedom to allow your kids to rummage through the books and toys (with appropriate supervision, of course) without worrying they will be in somebody's way or get lost by wandering down the wrong aisle.
5. It's always very hit and miss as to what you can find in a charity shop, as it all depends on the items that have been donated. So talk to your kids about how they need to go in with an open mind rather than a specific idea of what they want to buy for each person on their gift list. When you spend the time simply looking, you'll be amazed at the absolute treasures you can find. And often they are things you would never have even thought to look for. How wonderful it is to find a unique gift for someone, which you know nobody else will give them because that item is not on the shelves anywhere else!

Choose some Toys to Donate

So today's activity runs nicely off the back of yesterday's, although I appreciate that you may want to switch them around so that you can take the donated items to the charity shop with you when you go shopping. So let's look at how you can approach this with your kids if you do this activity first.

Most kids will have a lot of toys, books, games, or clothes that they no longer use or which they have simply outgrown. Some of them may be passed down to younger siblings, and some of them may simply be sitting on a shelf or in a cupboard, practically forgotten about.

This is just part of growing up – whereas some things will be treasured for years, most things only suit us for a certain number of years before they no longer meet our needs or desires. What interests us as a 5 year old may no longer interest us two or three years later.

But what generally happens is that we, as the parents or guardians, sort out the outgrown items and pass them on to friends, donate to charity, sell on eBay, or simply throw out. Most kids don't play an active part in that, other than to maybe cry, "but I still use that", even when they haven't touched it in several months but simply don't want you getting rid of a once prized possession.

So today's activity is all about giving your kids some control over this. Explain to them that if they want to make room for the gifts Santa will be bringing them, they need to make space. And then suggest that as they need to make space anyway, why not choose something really nice that they could donate to either another child or charity.

Tell them how much another child might appreciate it, because they don't have as many lovely things as your child has. Explain to them how many children there are around the world who live in poverty, in ways your kids can understand. And then ask them what they think they could give to make another child happy.

Children have the biggest hearts, so let them share their love today!

Donate Food to Charity

Again, today's activity fits in with the theme of the previous two days', and I have chosen to put them together because I know WB will personally make the connections between them all better if they run one after the other.

However, if you want to split them up, here are some ideas for making the connections between this activity and the conversations you may have already started about helping those in need.

The Trussell Trust explains on its website that over thirteen million people in the UK live below the poverty line. Isn't that a staggering statistic? I can barely wrap my head around that, and so I know WB will be completely unable to understand the significance of it.

But what he does understand is that he likes to eat food and he can always find food in our kitchen. And so this is the starting point for our conversation. We talk to him about how lucky we are to have food in our cupboards to fill our bellies when our tummies are rumbling. And then we tell him that other people aren't so lucky, that some of them cannot find food even when they are hungry.

We ask him how he thinks he would feel if he couldn't eat even the most basic of foods, like the chocolate spread sandwiches he so loves, or mashed potatoes and gravy. And then we talk about how wonderful it would be if we could give someone else food to eat, so that they don't have to stay hungry.

Then we take ourselves off to the supermarket, armed with a list of foods which the local Food Bank or Community Larder needs most, and find as many items as we can to pop in our trolley. We then put these in the Food Bank collection bin (available at a range of supermarkets in our area) or drop them off ourselves. And all of this is done with WB, so he can see exactly what we are doing.

If you want to know more about how you can help your local Food Bank, including where to find them and what items they desperately need, check out the map at <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/>

Attend a Carol Service

You don't have to be a Christian to attend and enjoy a Carol Service. In fact, Carol Services are often one of the only times each year that some of us go to church. There is a real beauty in getting involved in a traditional service, with songs you know, and a welcoming congregation.

Many Carol Services include children from local groups, such as the Girl Guides and Scouts, and so they are perfect introductions to church for your kids if you've never been before. And most will have tea and mince pies to follow, allowing you to spend some time getting to know people at your local church, if you so wish.

The great thing about Carol Services is that they are family friendly and so you don't need to worry about your kids sitting still and quiet throughout the service, because there will be plenty of singing and other opportunities for them to feel involved. And if you choose a church that has an active children's group, they may even have a space set up just for the kids (our local church only has 3 kids that regularly attend, but there is a table and chairs at the back of the church with activities and toys for them to play with throughout every service!)

However, if you feel that attending a church service is a little bit too much for you, why not check out alternative options in your area. In the past I've attended a Carol Concert at the local football ground, as well as enjoying the Salvation Army band playing Christmas Classics in the shopping centre. These are only two examples of ways to enter into the festive spirit without actually going to church.

Why not ask the other parents at the school gate whether they are attending a Carol Service? You never know, you may find someone else to go with, making it feel that little bit less daunting. Or if you are a regular church-goer yourself and are already planning to attend a service, why not reach out a welcoming hand and ask the other parents whether they would like to come with you?

Celebrate the Solstice

The Midwinter Solstice marks the shortest day and longest night of the year. It is a turning point in time, when the dark that has been creeping up upon us finally begins to recede, and we can have hope that we are heading back towards the lighter days of Spring.

In this respect, the Midwinter Solstice has a very similar message to that of the Christian version of Christmas, that is of light returning to the world. Within Christianity, that light is in Jesus, but the celebration of light returning to the world at this time of the year goes back long before the days of Jesus.

Our Ancient Celtic Ancestors were hunters, whose survival would naturally be more difficult during the colder, winter months. As such, they often worshipped the sun, and many great celebrations developed around the cycles of the seasons.

Such celebrations included the Roman festival of Saturnalia, which ran from 17th December for seven days, as well as the lighting of the Yule log by the Druids, who believed the sun stood still for 12 days at this point in the year.

Many of these traditions were adapted and incorporated into our modern day celebrations, and it can be interesting to read into the history behind our customs and traditions. Doing so can help us to understand that there are areas which span each and every religion and faith, helping us to find unity where we might have previously only seen a divide.

So why not spend today doing something a little different? Learn about the Midwinter Solstice and how it is celebrated around the world today. Have a go at making some Solstice themed decorations for the home. Or create your own little ceremony to celebrate the light in the darkness. Make it personal to you and your family, something that your children can relate to, so that the memories of it last all year.

If you want to know more about the Midwinter Solstice you may find this post helpful. <https://www.thefamilypatch.com/celebrating-midwinter-solstice-kids/> I've also created an inspiration board on Pinterest, which you can find at <http://bit.ly/FPMidWin>

Read The Night Before Christmas

The Night Before Christmas is such a well-known poem, isn't it? There's just something about it which grabs us by the heart and stays with us throughout the years.

I think this is, in part, because each one of us has at one time wished we could catch a glimpse of Santa as he goes about his business. The poem shares the wonder and joy at what this would feel like, and gives us a wonderful impression of a "jolly old elf" who loves what he does so much. No wonder it is such a beloved poem.

Even if you've never read it to your kids before, the chances are they have already heard it either in part or in a parody version somewhere else, as it is included in so many Christmas movies and TV specials.

But it never gets old; reading it for the tenth time can be just as exciting as reading it for the first time. In fact, sometimes it becomes more enjoyable the more you read it, as you begin to learn it by heart. There's something very satisfying about knowing what is coming next and being able to anticipate the ending, "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a Good Night".

Reading *The Night Before Christmas* with your kids as Christmas Eve approaches can be a great way to build up even more excitement about what is to come. It reminds them of the magic, and gives them a chance to share with you how much they wish they could meet Santa.

You never know, it may become a much treasured part of your family's Christmas Traditions, bringing back a reminder of that magic long after your kids have grown beyond believing in Santa. And we'd all love to have ways to bring back that feeling of magic and awe we once felt as a child, wouldn't we?

More than anything, reading a story together gives us a chance to snuggle up close and enjoy each other's company. And as Christmas Day draws ever near, those moments can sometimes become few and far between with all the last minute tasks we have to get done. So treasure these moments, you're making memories to last a lifetime!

Share the Christmas To-Do List

Today's activity is aimed at encouraging our kids to think of others and lend a hand, even when they would much rather be doing something else. It's also about helping us to remember and respect just how much our kids can do, and how giving them little jobs can actually empower them, by showing we trust them and value their input.

Have a look at all the things you need to get done between now and Christmas Day, and choose one or two activities that your kids can help you with. The tasks you choose will depend on the age and ability of your children and what still needs to be done, but the point here is not what you ask them to do but that you simply ask them in the first place.

If you find your kids are reluctant to take part in today's activity, try sitting down with them to explain why you need their help. Tell them that you want to be able to sit down this evening and watch a Christmas movie, or play a game, or read a book, or whatever it is you love to do together, but that you won't be able to do that if you don't finish all the tasks on your To-Do List.

Tell them you've noticed how good they are at doing the job you've asked them to do and how much their help means to you. Ask them if there's a different job on the list they would prefer to do, or whether there's something special they need to help them do it (e.g. a special Christmas apron to wear, or Christmas music playing in the background). Make it a game by suggesting you'll see who can finish their task quickest, or that the most helpful person will be called "The Chief Elf" for the rest of the day.

Most kids will happily get involved if you make it a fun and rewarding experience. They like to feel useful, and all kids love receiving praise for a job well done. By working together in this way, you'll get your jobs done quicker and your kids will feel a real sense of achievement. And the reward for all of that, as if you need any more reward, is that you'll have spent some time together working for a common goal. And what is Christmas all about, if not coming together as a family, in everything we do?

Christmas Eve is Finally Here!

Can you believe it? We've reached 24th December and our Advent Calendar is almost complete. It's been such a wonderful honour to walk through the past few weeks with you and I do so hope that you've enjoyed the activities and made some lasting memories together.

Today's final activity is to do something, anything, that says "Christmas Eve" to you. Most families have their own traditions for this special day, but if you don't have any then now is the time to start making some!

I know families who open one gift every Christmas Eve, which always turns out to be a new pair of pyjamas, as well as families who read a certain story or watch a specific film every Christmas Eve.

Maybe your tradition is to eat a certain dinner or play a board game together before bed. Or maybe you create a Christmas Eve Box, with a selection of items for your kids to enjoy, such as new pyjamas, popcorn, hot chocolate, and a new movie.

And let's not forget that time-honoured tradition of leaving a tasty morsel for Santa to eat and a carrot for the reindeer. Sneaking outside to pop the carrot by the side of the house was always a real joy for us growing up, and super exciting the next morning when we discovered it had disappeared!

Whatever your tradition is, and it could be anything, just enjoy it today. You've spent some wonderful time this Advent, finding ways to step away from the hustle and bustle so that the things you do become more than just a long list of tasks to be completed. Well done!

I know it isn't always easy to make that time and step back from the desire to make everything just perfect, but the reality is that by doing so you have created a much happier and calmer experience for both you and your kids. And who could want more than that?

All that's left for me to do is wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

And finally...

I truly hope that you have enjoyed journeying through Advent with us. We're already planning more blog posts and resources for the coming year and we hope that you will join us over at The Family Patch from time to time.

You can subscribe to get new posts delivered direct to your inbox, by visiting <https://www.thefamilypatch.com/> and clicking on the "subscribe" button on the sidebar. Alternatively, you can follow us using blog readers such as [Feedly](#) and [Bloglovin'](#).

We'd absolutely love to get to know you better, so don't forget you can connect with us over on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Pinterest](#). We're all about community here at The Family Patch.

Once again, thank you so much for walking through Advent with us – we hope you have a blessed Christmas and a wonderful year ahead.

Amanda, Tim, and Little Man xxx