

# CHRISTMAS GUIDE | 2021

A time for family, gratitude and generosity



Advent season  
calendar

Christmas  
Reflection

Christmas  
Activities and Facts



**Caritas**  
AUSTRALIA

End poverty  
Promote justice  
Uphold dignity





## A Christmasmessage from the CEO

In more ways than one, 2021 has proven to be just as challenging as last year.

Our world has experienced numerous crises, including issues of climate justice and economic collapse, political upheaval and famine, as well as the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. Vulnerable communities have been pushed further into hunger and poverty, creating an unprecedented level of need.

More than ever, Christmas acts as a timely reminder of how important it is to show solidarity with, and generosity towards, our sisters and brothers in need. In his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis invites us all to care for one another and to form unity through social friendship. We are called to adopt these practices during this season of giving, and privilege the needs of others over our own.

Christmas is the time for us to be renewed in our faith and hope, and to give unconditional love and kindness to those around us. It is a time to show gratitude and compassion. To lend a helping hand to the stranger on the road and to show them the same warmth and kindness we would to our friends and family.

With your help, Caritas Australia is continuing to work with our partners to bring compassion in action to the world's most vulnerable.

On behalf of everyone at Caritas Australia, I would like to thank you for your generosity and support, and wish you a safe and merry Christmas.



With gratitude,

*Kirsty Robertson*

**Kirsty Robertson**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Caritas Australia



## Prayer from Bishop Vincent Long

Lord God of Life and love.

Together with the beautiful traditions of decorating the Christmas tree, of singing carols and giving gifts, we celebrate the birth of the child Jesus with this Christmas dinner.

Come, Emmanuel, the God who is with us and surround our feast day table as we delight in this joyous season of Christmas. Gift us in this meal with the taste of happiness as we savour the coming together of family and friends.

Teach us to build and extend the circle of loving relationships, especially to those you call us to embrace.


As sparkling stars and singing angels rejoiced at the birth of the Christ Child in Bethlehem, so may we take great joy in this our Christmas dinner-celebration.

May you bless this special meal, those who partake of it and those we hold dear in our memory.

May you unite us all as one in your enduring love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

By Bishop Vincent Long.



Vatican City, October 16, 2019.  
Pope Francis kisses a child as he leaves at  
the end of the weekly general audience in  
St. Peter's Square.  
Image: Riccardo De Luca/ Shutterstock.com



# Advent Calendar | Week 1 - Hope



Sun 28 Nov

## Today's Scripture

Luke 21:25-28



Mon 29 Nov

## Reflection

Today we are invited to advance Jesus' mission and show kindness and solidarity. Think of three different ways to show solidarity this week.

Tue 30 Nov

## Activity

Create an Advent wreath using plants and flowers from your garden, pine cones and fruits. You will Today's need four candles – one for each week. For the weeks of Hope, Peace and Love, use purple candles. For the week of Joy, use a pink candle. Light a candle at the beginning of each week.

Wed 1 Dec

## Our Work

When her home was destroyed by a typhoon, Aloma was determined to help her family and community rebuild from disaster.

Through the help of our local partner, she gained a set of skills that have allowed her to become a leader in her community and to better withstand recurring extreme weather events.

Thu 2 Dec

## Activity

Gather around with your family and/or friends and list three things that you hope for in 2022.

Fri 3 Dec

## Reflection

Today we are called to heal, and to have faith and trust in God. Discuss what you think the meaning of faith is with your family and/or friends.

Sat 4 Dec

## Prayer

Hopeful God, you are always patient and you share with us the true meaning of hope. Guide us to follow your lead as we patiently wait in this season of Advent. Help us be the light that brings hope to people like Aloma, whose lives have been affected by poverty and natural disasters.

Let us carry out all that you have called us to do.

In your name we pray, Amen.



Advent wreath with candles.  
Shutterstock.



Thanks to your support, women like Aloma can receive training to help their communities.  
Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia.

# Advent Calendar | Week 2 - Peace

Sun 5 Dec

## Today's Scripture

Luke 3:1-6



Mon 6 Dec

## Reflection

The theme of this week is peace. Peace can be found in many ways, one of them being gratitude. Amongst friends and/or family, reflect upon this year and think of five things you are grateful for.

Tue 7 Dec

## Activity

Protecting our common home is a challenge every person of faith should adopt. As part of this challenge, we invite you to hold an arts and crafts session with your friends and/or family to create a Nativity Scene by repurposing recycled materials found in your home (e.g. pieces of cardboard, cloth, yarn, etc.).

Wed 8 Dec

## Our work

Jamila, a Rohingya woman living in the world's largest refugee camp in Bangladesh, fled the armed conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State to save herself, her elderly mother and eight-month-old baby daughter. She faced life in the camp, caring for them on her own. With the support of Caritas, Jamila gained access to emergency food and shelter, as well as life-changing psychosocial supports and training.

Thu 9 Dec

## Activity

Take a moment of your day to sit outside (this can be at the beach, your local park, or even your backyard) and meditate to find peace.

Fri 10 Dec

## Reflection

Today we are called to act justly and to treat everyone as equals. Conduct a random act of kindness towards a stranger and discuss with family or friends.

Sat 11 Dec

## Prayer

Peaceful God,  
Today we seek your guidance to be peacemakers in the world. We pray that all nations will live in harmony and that people like Jamila no longer have to flee face conflict in their home countries. We thank you for our sisters and brothers who strive to help others to live peaceful lives. May we continue to share in your ministry of peace and reconciliation. In your name we pray, Amen.



Jamila and women in refugee camp in Cox's Bazar. Inmanuel Biswas/Caritas Australia.



Meditating with sunset/Shutterstock.



# Advent Calendar | Week 3 - Joy

Sun 12 Dec	Mon 13 Dec	Tue 14 Dec	Wed 15 Dec	Thu 16 Dec	Fri 17 Dec	Sat 18 Dec
<p><b>Today's Scripture</b></p> <p>Luke 3:10-18</p> 	<p><b>Reflection</b></p> <p>Take a moment to reflect on something that brought you joy today and how you can bring joy to someone else's day.</p>	<p><b>Activity</b></p> <p>For children: On a piece of paper, draw what the joy of Christmas means to you.</p>	<p><b>Our work</b></p> <p>Maria lives with her husband and six children in a small village in northern Tanzania. Through the support of our partners, Maria learned sustainable farming techniques, literacy and numeracy, hygiene and sanitation, and numerous other skills. Thanks to her new skills, Maria and her husband have a sustainable income to support their family.</p>	<p><b>Activity</b></p> <p>Be the reason someone smiles today. Spread joy complimenting or offering help to a stranger.</p>	<p><b>Reflection</b></p> <p>On this third Friday of advent, we are reminded to be selfless and to show generosity. Reflect on the links between selflessness and joy in the context of Christmas.</p>	<p><b>Prayer</b></p> <p>Joyful God, you bring us joy during the Advent season as we await the celebration of Jesus' birth. Help us follow your example and continue to make a difference and bring joy to the lives of those like Maria and her family. Help us to care for the common good of all and put their needs ahead of our own.</p> <p>In your name we pray, Amen</p> 
 <p>Christmas drawings from around the world. Caritas Australia.</p>				 <p>Maria in her village in Tanzania with her four children and two brothers. August Lucky/Caritas Australia.</p>		

# Advent Calendar | Week 4 - Love



**Sun 19 Dec**

## Today's Scripture

Luke 1: 39-45



**Mon 20 Dec**

## Reflection

On this last week of Advent, we are asked to think of those who spend Christmas alone. Reach out to our neighbour and offer them our support. If you know someone who will be alone on Christmas, reach out to them and offer your support and company.

**Tue 21 Dec**

## Activity

To spread love and kindness during this holy season, write a Christmas message on a piece of paper or a card and put it into one of your neighbours' letterboxes. You can sign this with your name, or leave it as anonymous. In your letter, challenge them to do the same.

**Thu 22 Dec**

## Our work

Evangeline is strengthening Aboriginal culture, while making a living for herself and creating opportunities for her community. She went from seeking employment to being a Senior Artsworker and an inspirational leader for youth. Her work at Djilpin Arts Aboriginal Corporation, has supported the organisation's growth from a multi-media project to a multilevel contemporary arts and culture centre.

**Fri 23 Dec**

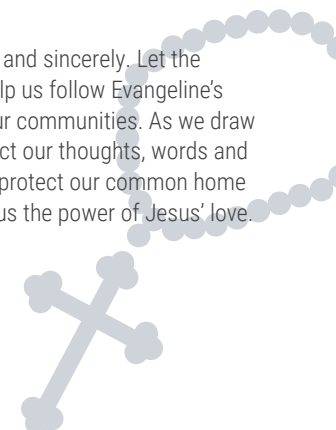
## Activity

Reach out to a friend or family member you have not spoken to in a long time and remind them that you love them.

**Sat 24 Dec**

## Prayer

Loving God,  
you continue to love each of us generously and sincerely. Let the love of your Holy Spirit be in our hearts. Help us follow Evangeline's footsteps and continue to spread love in our communities. As we draw nearer to the celebration of Christmas, direct our thoughts, words and actions today so that we may care for and protect our common home and each other. May people know through us the power of Jesus' love.  
In your name we pray, Amen.



## Did you know?



It is said that the tradition of the Christmas tree dates back to Ancient Egypt and Rome, where trees that remained green all year round had a special meaning. Back then, it was believed that evergreens would keep away illness and misfortune. However, the modern Christmas tree originates from 16th century Germany, where devout Christians would bring decorated trees into their homes. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles if wood was scarce.



The first Christmas card in history was sent in 1843 in the United Kingdom. Sir Henry Cole, a government worker, and artist John Horsley, created the first Christmas card depicting people helping the poor and enjoying Christmas dinner with their family.



On 16 December 1965, Gemini 6 astronauts Tom Stafford and Wally Schirra conducted a Christmas-themed prank by sending a message to mission control. As part of their prank, the astronauts sang a rendition of Jingle Bells, making it the first song ever broadcasted in space.



# Christmas Reflection

Our Christmas tree is like a family museum. Every year, my family and I get the old box from the back of the garage and bring it into the lounge. Piece by piece, we rediscover all the little things that we have not thought about since last year. Wrapped in paper are the decorations made of pasta that our kids made in preschool. Now, thanks to a great deal of other pasta, they are so much bigger. We find the brightly painted nutcrackers that granny gave us. Then there is a little painted crib from a dear friend. We have baubles with our children's names in glitter that we bought when they were babies. We have some glass pieces that were gifted to us as wedding presents. There are even a couple of items from our respective childhood homes.

We are mindful that having such things places us amongst the fortunate. Bit by bit, it all comes together. By the time we are finished, the whole house feels different. The atmosphere is festive and expectant. We just have to make sure that the cat and dog don't start pulling things off the tree.

The nativity stories in the New Testament are a little like this. They bring together many of the great themes of scripture, unpacking them and arranging them with beauty and delicacy; full

of expectation of what is to happen. Of course, Jesus was born in a time and place and for that fact we thank God literally on a daily basis. But the Gospels, especially those of Matthew and Luke, describe these events as though they are a tree on which we can hang so many experiences of God from so many centuries. The birth of Jesus is lit up by generations of human longing.

There is a deep connection to tradition in the stories, evident, for example, in the wonderful figures of Simeon and Anna waiting in the temple. The connection through time is also evident in the Magnificat, the prayer of Mary, recorded in Luke's Gospel. When Mary discovers she is to be the mother of Jesus she visits her kinswoman, Elizabeth. 'His mercy is from generation to generation for those who fear him,' she says. Mary is thunderstruck by what has happened. As she thinks about it, she realises that God has always sprung surprises. 'He has taken down princes from their thrones and raised the lowly.' Matthew's Gospel quotes from the prophets, a bit like finding old treasures and putting them on a new tree.

Now let us dig right to the bottom of the box. What is the heart of the story that never fails to surprise us? What is the mystery we need to

unwrap with greatest care? It is the bare fact that Jesus was born into poverty. There was nowhere other than a stable for Mary to give birth. His birth was made known to shepherds, people close to the land and with very little status or money. The family was driven into flight by Herod's hunger for power. They became refugees.

Caritas Australia invites us to celebrate Christmas in the most heartfelt way possible. Our partners are people with enormous potential, held back by overwhelming challenges. Our vision is to support them as they move into the light. We read in scripture that 'the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.' Christmas is full of light. The final moment in setting up the tree is often to flick the switch and see everything we brought out of the box burst into colour. Your support of Caritas Australia will help do this for millions of people. We can all bring light to the world. We can all follow the star to where Jesus is born into poverty among us – Michael McGirr, Head of Integration, Caritas Australia.



## In other parts of the world

### Paról Christmas Tradition in the Philippines

One of the best-known symbols of Christmas in the Philippines is the paról (derived from the word farol, Spanish for lantern). These colourful star-shaped lanterns usually hang outside people's homes or decorate the streets of cities and villages.

The paról represents the star of Bethlehem that guided the Three Wise Men to the manger of the newly born Jesus Christ. The origin of the paról dates back to the Spanish era in the Philippines. Paról were originally used to light the way of those attending the nine-day Simbang Gabi or Christmas Gifts Masses. After coming home from hearing the mass, people would hang their lanterns outside their homes.

Paróls are traditionally made of bamboo and brightly-coloured paper, and are illuminated with a candle. However, they have evolved into more intricate and lavishly designed Christmas ornaments over the years.



*Nativity scene stained glass, Church of St. Catherine, Bethlehem. By Zvonimir Atletic/Shutterstock.*

**This Christmas resource was brought to you by Caritas Australia. Thanks to your generosity we can continue to give support to vulnerable communities - a gift that lasts forever.**

**Donate now to give the gift of hope to someone in need.**

**DONATE NOW**



If you would like to give the gift of hope this Christmas, why not buy a Global Gift? Global Gifts are Caritas Australia's charitable Christmas cards. The funds raised from these gift cards go towards supporting our work with vulnerable communities around the globe, including right here in Australia.

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