Culture
Spirituality
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The Advent season is a beautiful time to unite in prayer through all sorts of art. While many of us enjoy watching some of the same Christmas movies over and over again (claymation classic "The Little Drummer Boy," anyone?), I have compiled a list of Advent movies, music, art and books that can add new elements of joy and understanding to your family's Advent journey.

Movies

- **Family movie night**: "The Nativity Story" is a 2005 film that retells the harrowing journey of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem as they prepare for Christ's birth. The filming, notably featuring a young Oscar Isaac as Joseph, presents a very human retelling of the world's most famous story — one that acknowledges the moments of shock, fear, awe and most importantly prayer, that brought Christ's earthly parents to the foot of his manger bed. Parents, may want to make note that the film portrays Mary as having experienced pain during Christ's delivery. The film is still chock-full of value and worth watching together and discussing after.

- **A film to watch and discuss with your secular friends**: "The Ultimate Gift" is a 2007 film that, while not explicitly Christian, teaches Christian values such as selflessness, charity and forgiveness. The story centers around a man named Jason, whose inheritance from his billionaire grandfather is a list of altruistic tasks he must complete if wants to earn "The Ultimate Gift." Along the way, Jason meets a woman and her young daughter, who is dying of leukemia. Jason receives the gift of perspective, as he learns what's really important in life.
- **Put on a movie for the kids:** "The Star" is a 2017 animated film that tells the nativity story through an unexpected set of eyes — the manger animals. Mary and Joseph's trusted donkey steed and the wise men's camels are joined by all sorts of animal friends as they journey toward Bethlehem, intent on delivering the child savior safely. Though the animals encounter dangers and enemies along the way, even the "bad" animals that tried to stop them are redeemed through friendship This unique telling of the nativity story engages kids and is filled with lots of extra lessons on the importance of kindness and trust. "The Star" features the voice acting skills of Oprah Winfrey, Tyler Perry, Gina Rodriguez, Kelly Clarkson and many others.

Animated characters appear in the movie "The Star." (CNS/Sony Pictures)

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Music

- In "Noel," Christian music megastars Chris Tomlin and Lauren Daigle join to create a euphoric tune that evokes hope and wonder.
- Released just last year, "Still Still Still" by Maggie Amini serves as a Christmas lullaby, no matter your age. Repetition comforts as harmonies rock the listener to rest and peace.
- Joshua Carswell, Marie Miller and Scott Mulvahill made something bold, beautiful and unusual in their version of "Bring a torch Jeanette, Isabella." The song is about two young French farmhands who discover the infant Jesus and the Virgin Mary in the stable. Interestingly, this song was originally not meant as a Christmas song, but rather a dance for wealthy French families.



"Sagrada Família" by Josefa de Óbidos (Wikimedia Commons)

Art

- Mediate with A quiet moment by Timothy Schmalz
- "The Visitation" by Amber Knorr
- "Sagrada Família" by Josefa de Óbidos

Books

- **A devotional to complete with your spouse**: *Awaited: An Advent Devotional for Catholic Couples* by Stephanie Calis and Carissa Pluta offers couples a chance to walk alongside Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem. This devotional invites husbands and wives to make a gift of themselves this Christmas, facilitating deeper connection and unity to the holy

family through meditations and discussion questions.

- **A fresh perspective on Advent**: When you think of Advent, "death" might not be the first word that pops into your mind. But *Memento Mori: An Advent Companion on the Last Things* by Pauline Sr. Theresa Aletheia Noble challenges you to look at Advent in a new light. Somber but beautiful, this book reminds us of the intrinsic connection between death and life.
- **A book for kids transitioning out of their Santa Claus years:** *The Father Christmas Letters* by J.R.R. Tolkien is the perfect book to read with your older child who is starting to ask big questions about Santa Claus. This book is essentially a compilation of letters Tolkien wrote to his children every Christmas, posing as the North Pole's most famous beard and belly. Reading this alongside your older kids will help give them some perspective and joy as their understanding of Christmas traditions evolves, while also encouraging them to keep the magic alive for younger siblings and cousins.