

Advent through the eyes of a toddler

We often hear about the benefits of seeing Christmas through the eyes of a child – the innocence, the wonder, the excitement. But what about Advent? This has been a lesson for me so far this season.

For our family, last December was quite a bit different. Our son was 7 months old and just starting to crawl. This year he's running full speed – usually somewhere a parent would not want him to go. Last year he was infatuated with, and a little scared of, the sound of the electric mixer. This year, he is eating cookies with a look of delight (and saying "num num!"). Last year he could barely reach to touch the lowest branches of the Christmas tree. This year he is hanging ornaments – albeit in his own unique way (i.e. upside down).

These changes meant that preparing our "domestic church" for the season was more challenging than it has been in the past. When I put the Advent wreath on the table, Joseph seemed to think it was his job to "collect all and win," and bundled the purple and pink candles into his chubby arms and ran as fast as he could away from my outstretched (and just out of reach) arms.

As I placed white battery-operated candles in each of our windows, he followed along behind me as the self-appointed clean-up crew. The whole thing took a little longer than usual.

When I hung up our new felt Advent calendar complete with 24 pieces to Velcro daily into the waiting Nativity scene, he removed at least half of them and put them in my boot. Because, why not?

For our 18-month-old, all the signs and traditions of the

season to which we have become accustomed, and even perhaps desensitized, over the years are brand new. They are mysteries to unfold, treasures to unwrap. And what a joy it is to be able to begin to teach him what they all mean – including that, no, shepherds and wise men do not belong in footwear.

As my husband and I point out Mary riding along next to Joseph (who, we have to explain, also, is not him), our Joseph “neighs” in delight at the sight of the donkey. He “baas” at the sheep by the manger. And he looks in wonder at the lit Advent wreath, even as he strives to unwittingly burn down the house. And we wait together, in all of our imperfections, for the coming of the Lord.

As my husband and I cherish this time with our toddler, we also wait together in joy for the coming of another gift from God in May who, two years from now, God-willing, will also be “neighing” at the statue of Mary and Joseph as they continue their journey toward Bethlehem to welcome our Savior into the world.

Our hearts are filled with joy as we praise the Lord for his generosity and blessings. But this season has been a reminder that babies do not stay babies forever, and that the task of formation is upon us before we know it. Such is the privilege of parenthood. And so, with the whole Church this Sunday, we rejoice.