



The Christ Candle

The next family religious project we offer for your consideration is the Christ Candle. This candle, just as the project of the Advent Wreath, can be as simple and exquisite or elaborate and full of meaning according to your ambitions. It is a German custom to decorate a large candle with a "Chi Rho" (pronounced Key Roh) or other symbols of Christ; place it in a holder and cover it with a blue silk mantle symbolic of Our Lady, who carried Christ under her heart before He was born.

This candle is lighted on Christmas Eve during your special family dinner or celebration. It is lighted nightly during the twelve day octave of Christmas. The flame is the symbol of Christ, the Light of the World.

Another way to decorate this candle is to study the Scriptures from the events in the Garden of Eden right down to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and from each of the chapters you read and discuss, you may find a symbol you will want to draw and paint onto the candle which will describe the genealogy of Christ. For example, at the top of the candle you might draw the tree, with bright green leaves and red apples, with a yellow serpent. Two face profiles staring at the loose apple with two bites taken out of it depict Adam and Eve. And their tears show that they have disobeyed God. You might discuss this chapter of Genesis with your children and teach that the "real" reason for Christ's coming was the fall of man and that for thousands of years the Jews awaited the Messiah as the prologue to the Redemption. In other words, Christ did not come down to be born a baby just because it seemed like a lovely idea.

One does not have to be a fine artist to decorate the candle. Children in nursery school and kindergarten learn how to make stick and circle people, and if no one in the family can draw a straight line we have sketched some symbols on the last page for you to trace or copy. Or you may be very creative and want to make up modern art or symbols of your own, if you pick this candle as a family Christmas project, by all means let the children get in on the decorations and designs.

On the practical level, you might find inexpensive, large white candles (approximately) 10 inches high and 3 inches wide: at the nearby nursery and dime store. There are also colorful yet inexpensive candle holders available too. The other supplies you will need are a can of white or clear shellac, with a plain 1/2 inch brush, a set of poster paints and a small pointed brush. Also, keep on hand clean rags, a pan of water (to clean away mistakes) and some newspaper on which to work with your candle.

The easiest method for transferring designs onto the candle is to first draw the figure on a paper with a soft lead pencil. Then, reverse the paper, pencil side down, against the candle, and rub the lead of the pencil on the back of design. After each of the designs are transferred, put a coat of shellac over it. It dries quickly and smudging is then avoided. Poster paints can then be used to color the pencil drawing. (Note: when you are painting clothes on a figure, you might want to use simple patterns of dots, stripes or "x's" and then outline the whole figure with a dark brown paint.)

Some of the other figures that might be used are Noah's ark with the dove and olive branch on top. Abraham has a torch and sword in his hand. Isaac has the firewood on his back. Their story of this father and son and their obedience, faith and sacrifice gave us quite a lot to talk about.

Jesse is a colorful figure in a crimson robe and a musical instrument that looks like a cello. Jesse is one of our Lord's grandfathers and is familiar to us in the genealogy of Our Lady known as the tree of Jesse: she is referred to as springing from the Root of Jesse. Then comes David, the son of Jesse. He sits holding his harp to remind us of his beautiful songs, the Psalms. He wears royal purple and gold robes. There is much of David that points to Bethlehem.. "Mary and Joseph of the house of David.

Mary and Joseph are well known to us and we will let the children choose the picture or symbols that they like best. We will want the Baby Jesus centered between them, so maybe a special nativity scene will have to be worked out by all three of the children together. You might decide to circle the bottom of the candle with the bright, golden word GLORIA!

When all the figures and designs have been colorfully painted on the candle, then apply the final coat of shellac. If you are thinking this project will last all through Advent, you are probably right. The reading and discussion of the Scriptures, the planning, designing and painting of the candle should take time, so that everyone in the family is fully prepared to commemorate that very special blessed event. We can begin to understand and teach our children that Christmas isn't all presents, or Santa Clause, or parties. Christmas celebrates the beginning of the Redemption, the story of God's love after man's disobedience; of God's desire that man shall be with Him in heaven. It explains how we must love one another, why we get presents at all on His birthday. We finally learn that the greatest gift of all at Christmas is ours; the Son of God sent to buy us back with love.