

Our Family Celebrates **FRIENDSHIP**

by Mary Sellars Malloy

As we journey through the four weeks of Advent, Mary's story is celebrated in a special way on December 8 (the Immaculate Conception) and on December 12 (Our Lady of Guadalupe). But on December 23, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we hear the story of Mary's Visit to Elizabeth (see Luke 1:39-45).

This year let their story of friendship, faith, and joy inspire your family's Advent and Christmas journey. At the start of the Advent season, gather your family around your prayer table or your kitchen table. Invite everyone to share the names of and something about their friends. Then create an Advent and Christmas season calendar that follows the example of Mary and Elizabeth by focusing on and celebrating friendship. Here are five suggestions.

1. SAY THANK YOU

Choose a date or two on which to create Christmas cards, write special notes, or bake special treats for those who have blessed you with the gift of friendship.

2. OPEN YOUR HOME

Host an open house afternoon or evening in celebration of friendship. Serve soup or hot chocolate and cookies as a way of saying "Thank you!"

3. OPEN YOUR HEARTS

Create a family Advent prayer list or a book of prayer intentions that includes the names of friends who are sick or who are suffering in some way. Pray for them throughout the Advent season at mealtime or at bedtime.

4. MAKE ROOM AT THE TABLE

Be mindful of friends, family members, and neighbors who will be alone during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Invite them to Christmas dinner or set aside time as a family to call, visit, or take small gifts to them during Advent and Christmas days.

5. WIDEN THE CIRCLE

Be mindful of the needs of those you do not know by name. Contribute what you can to parish and community outreach ministries to those in need.

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, gather around your Advent wreath or Christmas tree and take time to read together the Gospel (Luke 1:39-45). Recall the ways you have celebrated the gift of friendship this Advent and look forward to the ways you will continue to do so throughout the Christmas season.

Mary Sellars Malloy recently retired from her position as project manager for RCL Benziger. She continues giving presentations and leading parish missions and retreats throughout the country. Her hope is to encourage Catholics of all ages to appreciate and to live their faith.

