Advent around the world

Most of us are familiar with European Advent customs such as the Advent wreath, the Jesse tree and Advent calendars. While these traditions are popular, they aren’t the only way Christians prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. This year, add a little international flavor to your Advent by circling the globe with these ’round the world customs.

Europe

In Alpine countries, children carry a statue of St. Joseph to a different home each night during Advent. Carry the statue of Joseph from your crèche to each child’s room, where it will spend the night, and then move it on the next day. On Christmas Eve, put Joseph next to Mary in the stable.

Middle East

Named after St. Barbara who is said to have been martyred in Egypt, a twig from a fruit tree, usually a cherry, is placed in water. If the “Barbara branch” blooms on or before Christmas day, the family will have good fortune. This custom recalls the prophesy in Isaiah that the Messiah will spring from the root of Jesse.

China

Colorful paper lanterns are hung in Christian homes during Advent. Decorate a Jesse tree branch with paper lanterns, chains and flowers.

Latin America

A Novena to the Holy Child (La Novena del Niño), nine days of prayer, is traditionally held during Advent. Make your own family novena by singing a different carol each night beginning the first Sunday of Advent.

Australia

It’s summer down under, and homes are decorated with fresh flowers. Break out the grill and barbecue hamburgers on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Philippines

Advent is marked by attending Mass nine days in a row (called Misas de Aguinaldo, or Gift Masses), beginning on Dec. 16. If you can’t make it to Mass all nine days, try to attend at least a few days of daily Mass.