

CUPS & CLASSICS

CULTIVATING FAMILY CULTURE THROUGH THE CLASSICS



DECEMBER — LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

ART • MUSIC • POETRY • STORY • MANNERS • FEAST • CRAFT

KARYN TRIPP

TEACH
BESIDE ME

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Created by Karyn Tripp, founder of Teach Beside Me.

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ABOUT CUPS & CLASSICS

Cups & Classics invites your family to rediscover that rhythm through the beauty of art, music, poetry, story, manners, and food. Each month we'll slow down, gather around something beautiful, and fill our minds and hearts together.

Each Cups & Classics month is built around four weeks of study, focusing on one artist, one musician, one poet, and one region of the world. Together, they create a unified cultural theme that helps your family experience beauty, gratitude, and connection in meaningful ways.

This month's theme, Light in the Darkness, invites us to notice the quiet ways brightness enters winter – through candlelit moments, familiar traditions, and acts of kindness that warm the heart. With guidance from Scandinavian art, music, and stories, we'll explore how simple rituals and shared goodness can shine gently through the darkest days of the year.

HOW TO USE IT:

Each week includes:

- Artwork – Observe, describe, and wonder together.
- Music – Listen, move, and imagine.
- Poetry – Read aloud and reflect.
- Folk Story – Discover timeless wisdom from the featured region.
- Recipe – Cook or bake a simple dish inspired by the culture studied.
- Grace Note – Practice manners, gratitude, or an act of refinement.
- Family Reflection – End with conversation, connection, and gratitude.
- Bonuses for December- Optional faith reflection and craft.

Set aside one cozy hour each week – light a candle, pour some tea, and gather together. Keep it simple and screen-free. This is about connection, not perfection.

SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER PLANNING SHEET



Theme: Light in the Darkness

This month we are studying:

Artist: Carl Larsson

Composer: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Author: Hans Christian Andersen

Region of Focus: Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway, Denmark)

Shopping List for Recipes:

Week 1

Recipe: Cinnamon Rolls (Scandinavian-Style)

Needed Supplies: flour, sugar, cinnamon, yeast, milk or plant milk, butter or oil, eggs, salt, mixing bowls, baking dish

Week 2

Recipe: St. Lucia Saffron Buns (Lussekatter)

Needed Supplies: flour, sugar, saffron, milk or plant milk, butter, yeast, salt, raisins, baking sheet

Week 3

Recipe: Swedish Ginger Cookies (Pepparkakor)

Needed Supplies: flour, sugar, molasses or honey, butter or oil, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, baking soda, mixing bowls, rolling pin, cookie cutters

Week 4

Recipe: Cinnamon Dough Ornaments

Needed Supplies: ground cinnamon, applesauce, optional ground cloves or nutmeg, rolling pin, parchment paper, Christmas cookie cutters, ribbon or string

EXPLORE THE WORLD: SCANDANAVIA

This month, our Cups & Classics adventure takes us to Scandinavia—a northern region of snowy forests, candlelit windows, and traditions that celebrate light in the darkness. In Sweden and Denmark especially, artists and storytellers found beauty in home life, winter landscapes, and the warmth families create together.

In this region, we meet:

- Carl Larsson, painting scenes of family life in his beloved home in Sundborn, Sweden, where bright interiors and winter celebrations filled his work with color and joy.
- Hans Christian Andersen, the Danish writer whose winter tales and poems teach hope, humility, and wonder.
- Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, a Russian composer whose world overlapped with Scandinavian culture and whose music for *The Nutcracker* echoes the sparkle and magic of northern winter.

Discuss Together

- Find Sweden, Denmark, and Russia on a map.
- Notice how far north they sit. How might short days and long nights shape the art and stories of this region?
- Winter can feel cold and dark—but how do people create warmth? What traditions, foods, or celebrations make December special?
- Look around your space. What small things tell you “this is home”? How do these everyday comforts help create light in our lives?



SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK ONE– WELCOMING THE LIGHT

Artist Study: Carl Larsson– A Day of Celebration, 1895



In *A Day of Celebration*, Carl Larsson invites us straight into the heart of Swedish winter joy. The room is alive: children in wreaths of evergreens and flowers, parents and neighbors greeting one another. Traditional folk costumes, warm reds, and soft wood tones fill the home with color and life. Larsson reminds us that light often enters through gathering, through tradition, and through the simple delight of being together. This painting sets the tone for the month: December is not only about holidays themselves, but about the warmth we create as we prepare to welcome them.

Discussion Prompts

- What clues tell you a celebration is happening in this home?
- Which character catches your eye first, and why?
- How does Larsson use color to make the room feel warm?
- What traditions help your family prepare for a special day?

Art & Culture Connection

In Sweden, winter celebrations were treasured. Families cleaned and decorated the house, baked special breads, made wreaths of evergreen, and prepared festive clothing. Larsson captures a day when the home shifts from ordinary to extraordinary.

DECEMBER–WEEK ONE– WELCOMING THE LIGHT

Composer Study: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Overture Miniature from The Nutcracker (1892)



Scan to find the song on YouTube.

Light, sparkly, and full of anticipation, the Overture Miniature opens The Nutcracker with a sense of wonder. Violins flutter like snowflakes, and the melody twirls upward as though lifting a curtain on something magical. This overture is all about preparation – the moment before celebration begins.

Listening Prompts

- What does this music make you imagine – snowfall, a party beginning, children playing?
- How does the fast, fluttering music make you feel?
- What instruments do you hear most clearly?
- Why do you think Tchaikovsky began the ballet with such lightness?

Extension Idea: Listen to the overture while you begin decorating your home or setting up your Christmas book basket. Let the music fill your space.

Geography Note: Tchaikovsky wrote The Nutcracker in St. Petersburg, Russia – a city known for its snowy winters, grand theaters, and deep love of ballet. Its geography shaped the magical, wintry atmosphere of the music.

DECEMBER–WEEK ONE– WELCOMING THE LIGHT

Literary Study: Hans Christian Andersen Excerpt from The Snowdrop

Story Summary

In this gentle tale, a small snowdrop rests beneath winter's frozen earth. Though all around it is cold and dark, the warmth of the sun reaches it little by little. Trusting that light, the flower pushes upward and blooms before spring arrives. Tiny and easily overlooked, the snowdrop becomes a quiet sign of hope in the midst of winter.

Excerpt from The Snowdrop

The snow lay thickly on the ground. The snowdrop was hidden under the snow as if it were buried. But every day the sun shone through the snow, and warmed the earth, and the snowdrop felt it, and stirred under the snow.

Then it pushed and pushed until it came up through the snow, and when a ray of sunshine fell upon it, the flower unfolded itself, white as snow, and green as the first grass.

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think Andersen chose such a small flower as his symbol of hope?
- What helps the snowdrop decide to grow even when winter hasn't ended?
- Can you think of a time when a small act—like the snowdrop blooming—made a big difference?



Author Note

Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) was a Danish writer whose fairy tales often highlight resilience and simple beauty. Growing up in Denmark's long winters, he wrote many stories where small, humble characters—like the snowdrop—bring light and hope to dark seasons.



SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK ONE– WELCOMING THE LIGHT

Folktale: The Little Candle in the Window

In a small Scandinavian village, winter nights came early. Houses lined the snowy road, each one dark except for a single candle set in the window of a humble cottage at the far end.

Inside lived an elderly woman known for her kindness. Each evening, she lit her candle and whispered, “For those who wander.” No one knew exactly whom she meant.

One stormy night, as the wind howled, a traveler stumbled into the village. Snow blinded him, and he lost his way—until he saw the small light flickering through the icy air. He followed it to the cottage, where the old woman welcomed him, warmed him, and shared her simple supper.

“I light it each night,” she told him, “because someone may need it.”

Word spread. Soon other villagers placed candles in their windows. The road glowed like a trail of stars.

And ever after, when winter came, the village lit its windows in honor of the woman who taught them that one small light can save a life.

Moral: Even the smallest light can guide someone home.

Reflection Questions

- How did the old woman’s small nightly habit create a big impact?
- Why do you think one candle was enough to guide the traveler home?
- What does this story teach about doing good even when no one is watching?
- How can one family’s kindness inspire a whole community, just like in the tale?
- What “small lights” can we offer in our own home or neighborhood this week?



DECEMBER–WEEK ONE– WELCOMING THE LIGHT

Recipe: Swedish Kanelbullar (Cinnamon Rolls)

Warm, spiced, and woven into many Swedish winter traditions, kanelbullar are the perfect recipe for a week centered on service and comfort. Unlike American cinnamon rolls, Swedish kanelbullar are less sweet and more spiced, perfect for sharing with neighbors or bringing to a St. Lucia celebration.

Ingredients

Dough:

- 1 cup warm milk
- $2\frac{1}{4}$ tsp yeast
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, melted
- 1 egg
- $3\frac{1}{2}$ –4 cups flour
- 1 tsp cardamom (optional but traditional)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt

Filling:

- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup softened butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp cinnamon

Topping:

- 1 egg (for brushing)
- Pearl sugar or coarse sugar



Directions

1. Combine warm milk, yeast, and sugar. Rest 5 minutes.
2. Add butter, egg, salt, and cardamom.
3. Add flour gradually until a soft dough forms. Knead and let rise 1 hour.
4. Roll dough into a rectangle. Spread filling.
5. Roll up, slice into spirals, and place on a baking sheet.
6. Brush with egg and sprinkle pearl sugar.
7. Bake at 375°F for 12–15 minutes, until golden.

DECEMBER–WEEK ONE– WELCOMING THE LIGHT

Grace Note: Begin with Intention

The way we begin shapes the way we journey.

Start this season slowly: set your intentions, desires and hopes for the month. Intention brings clarity, and clarity brings peace.

Manners Moment: Set the tone. Offer a warm greeting each morning, look each other in the eyes, extend a hug. It lights the home more than any lamp.



Family Reflection: Welcoming the Light Together

Gather together and discuss:

- What are we hoping for this month?
- What kind of light do we want in our home – kindness, calm, joy, service?
- How can each of us help create it?

Write one intention on a slip of paper and tuck it somewhere meaningful – inside a book, on a mirror – a quiet reminder that the month is beginning with hope.

DECEMBER–WEEK ONE– WELCOMING THE LIGHT

Optional Family Activity: Winter Window Stars

As the days grow shorter, many Scandinavian families hang handmade paper stars in their windows to remind them that light always returns. This gentle craft can fill your home with color and meaning – a visible symbol of hope.

Supplies:

- Colored tissue paper (yellow, gold, red, blue, or white)
- Scissors
- Glue stick or double-sided tape
- A ruler or cutting mat
- Clear tape or string for hanging



Instructions:

1. Cut 8 squares of tissue paper, each about 4 inches wide.
2. Fold each square in half diagonally to form a triangle, then unfold.
3. Fold the two outside edges inward to meet along the center line, forming a kite shape.
4. Repeat for all 8 pieces – these are your “star rays.”
5. Arrange the points in a circle so they overlap slightly, forming an 8-pointed star.
6. Glue or tape the overlapping edges together carefully.
7. When dry, place the star on a sunny window with a bit of clear tape or hang it from thread.

Reflect & Discuss:

- What does the star symbolize to you?
- How do we see light return after darkness – both in nature and in our hearts?
- Who might need a little “light” from you this week?

Variation for Little Ones:

Use larger squares and pre-fold shapes so young children can easily assemble their stars. You can also make mini stars and string them together as a “garland of light.”

Cultural Connection:

In Sweden, window stars are part of Adventstid – the time of waiting and preparing for Christmas. They remind families to welcome light, warmth, and kindness into their homes during the long northern winter.

DECEMBER–WEEK ONE– WELCOMING THE LIGHT

Optional Faith Study: A Promise Begins

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6

“For unto us a child is born . and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Reflection:

The beginning of December is full of expectation – lights go up, music fills homes, families prepare for celebration. The Christmas story begins with the same quiet hope: a promise of a Savior, given long before His birth.

As winter settles in, let your heart lean into the hope God offers – the promise that light would come, that Christ would be born, and that His coming would bring peace to a waiting world. The slow rhythms of early December invite us to pause, prepare, and look forward with faith.

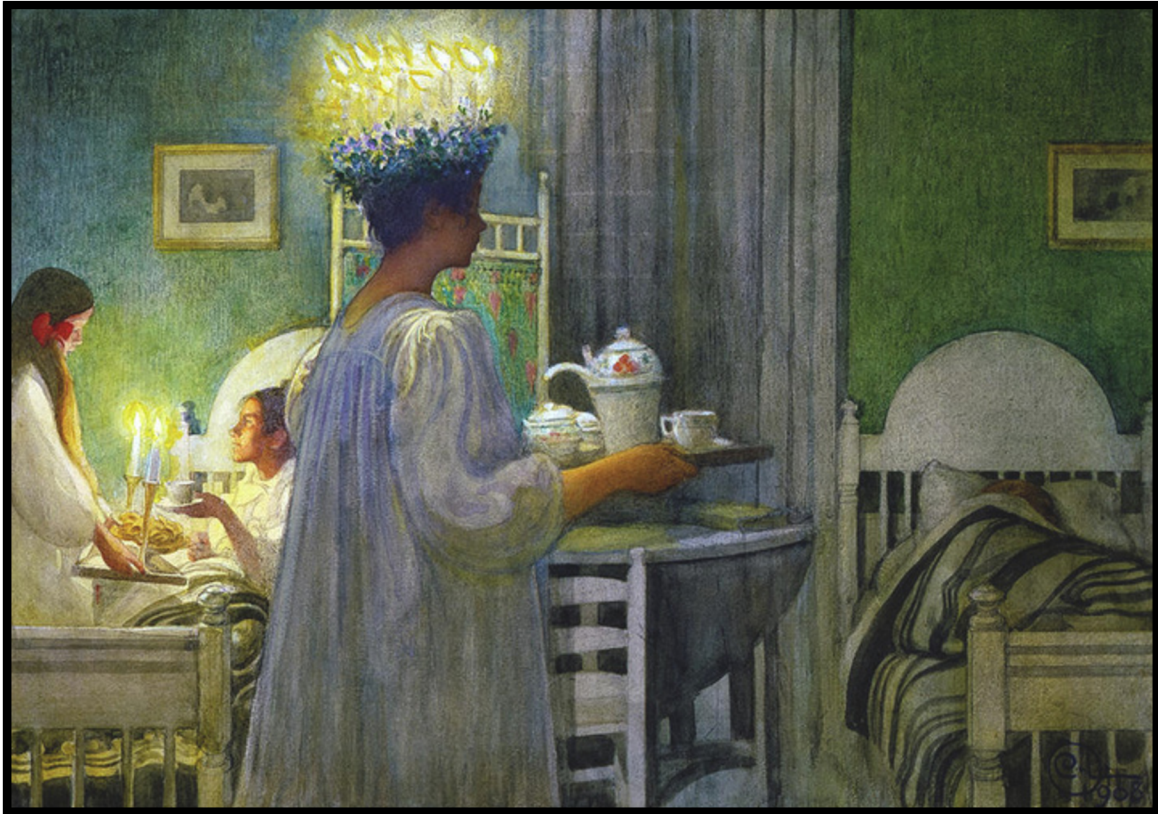
Act of Reflection:

Write down one thing you are hoping for – something good, simple, or holy – and pray over it this week.



DECEMBER–WEEK TWO– THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Artist Study: Carl Larsson - The Feast of Saint Lucy (1913)



Soft candlelight glows against the deep tones of winter morning. In this painting, Karin Larsson stands as Lucia with a crown of candles, her white gown flowing as she carries a tray of sweet saffron buns and coffee to her family. Carl Larsson captured this tender Swedish tradition with reverence: the light-bringer walking through the dim house, offering warmth and nourishment.

Discussion Prompts

- What do you notice about the light and the faces in this scene?
- How does Larsson make candlelight feel alive and peaceful?
- Why do you think this tradition became so beloved in Sweden?
- What acts of service bring “light” to your home?

Geography & Culture Connection

St. Lucia's Day (December 13) marks the coming of light during Sweden's darkest season. According to tradition, the eldest daughter, dressed in white, awakens the household with singing and saffron buns (lussekatter). The name Lucia means light, and this day honors both the Christian martyr St. Lucy of Syracuse and the triumph of brightness over winter's shadow.

DECEMBER–WEEK TWO– THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Composer Study: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky **Dance of the Reed Flutes from The Nutcracker Suite (1892)**



Scan to find the song on YouTube.

Delicate flutes weave together in soft harmony, like candle flames flickering in rhythm. The melody rises and falls gently, as if carrying light from one hand to another. In the ballet, this dance celebrates quiet grace – a perfect echo of St. Lucia’s tradition of offering light through peaceful service.

Listening Prompts

- Which instruments sound most like breath or light?
- How does the music make you feel – calm, happy, peaceful?
- What kind of scene could this music accompany?
- How do the instruments work together, like people sharing one song?

Reflection:

In The Nutcracker, “Dance of the Reed Flutes” takes place in the Land of Sweets, where Clara is greeted with gifts of movement and joy. The dancers shift in soft circles, weaving patterns as delicate as frost on a window. Their fluttering steps feel like a warm glow after Clara’s long journey – brightness created not by lanterns or stars, but by harmony, gentleness, and shared delight. Just as St. Lucia brings light into winter’s darkness, this dance reminds us that beauty grows when we move together in kindness.

SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK TWO– THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Literary Study Study: Hans Christian Andersen Excerpt from: The Snow Man (1845)

Story Summary: In this tale, Andersen introduces a Snow Man who loves the frost, and everything cold. But at dusk he notices the warm glow of a stove shining through a nearby window and feels drawn to it, not understanding why. The animals warn him that warmth will destroy him, yet the Snow Man can't help longing for the light. His quiet yearning mirrors the way winter hearts sometimes reach toward warmth and comfort without fully knowing what they seek.

Excerpt from: The Snow Man (1845)

“How wonderfully the sun shines!” said the Snow Man.
‘And how beautifully cold the air is! I feel as if I were made for it.’

He stood there, stiff and proud, gazing at the weathercock on the rooftop, which he thought was alive like himself. As evening came on, the Snow Man saw a glow from the room in the house nearest to him. The stove inside threw its light upon the floor and sent a warm glimmer through the window. ‘That is a beautiful creature,’ said the Snow Man. ‘How it shines!’

But the Yard-Dog barked: ‘Keep away from the stove. It is a fierce thing. If you go near it, you will melt.’

Yet the Snow Man could not take his eyes from the warm light. ‘It looks so gentle,’ he said. “I wish I could get closer to it.”

Cultural Connection

Scandinavian winters are long and dark, with only a few hours of sunlight. Andersen's stories reflect how northern cultures cherish warmth and brightness—lamps in windows, fires in hearths, and the comfort of gathering indoors during winter nights.



Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think the Snow Man admires the cold but still feels drawn to the stove's glow?
- What does Andersen seem to be saying about longing, curiosity, or the search for light?
- What kinds of winter light make you feel peaceful or hopeful?

DECEMBER–WEEK TWO– THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Folktale: The Tomte's Lantern

In a snowy Swedish forest, a small farm stood at the edge of a clearing. Every winter, the family who lived there left a bowl of porridge on the doorstep for the tomte – the tiny guardian of the homestead who watched over animals and barns.

One especially cold night, the youngest child, Livia, awoke and saw a faint glow outside. Curious, she bundled herself in a blanket and peeked through the window.

There, crossing the yard, she saw the tomte himself – a small figure with a wool cap, gray beard, and a tiny lantern glowing like a firefly in the dark. He made his rounds quietly: checking the barn door, patting the old horse's neck, brushing snow from the chicken coop roof.

Livia whispered, “Why do you carry a lantern?”

The tomte paused, his lantern casting a warm circle on the snow. “To see what needs doing,” he said. “Light shows us the work that matters.”

Then he disappeared into the stable, leaving tiny footprints behind – and a gentle glow Livia remembered all her life.

Moral: Light helps us notice what needs care – and whom we can help.

Reflection Questions:

- What kind of work did the tomte do in the night?
- Why did he carry a lantern?
- What “small things” can we notice and care for this week?



Cultural Note – The Tomte in Swedish Tradition

For centuries, Swedish farms believed in a small guardian spirit called a tomte. He lived in barns or attics, watched over animals, and wandered the property at night with a lantern. Families honored him with a bowl of Christmas porridge, thanking him for his quiet care. The tomte wasn't a Christmas elf, but a symbol of attentiveness, stewardship, and the warmth of light in long winter nights.

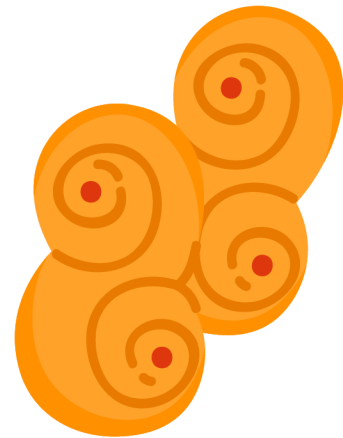
DECEMBER–WEEK TWO– THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Recipe: Swedish Saffron Buns (Lussekatter)

These golden buns are traditionally enjoyed around St. Lucia's Day, symbolizing light conquering winter darkness. Share some with a friend!

Ingredients

- 1 cup warm milk
- ½ cup butter
- 1 tsp saffron threads, crushed
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 4 cups flour
- 1 packet yeast
- Pinch of salt
- Raisins (for decoration)



Directions

1. Warm milk, butter, and saffron together until butter melts.
2. In a bowl, combine flour, sugar, yeast, and salt.
3. Pour warm mixture into dry ingredients. Add egg.
4. Knead until smooth, let rise 1 hour.
5. Divide into ropes and curl into “S” shapes.
6. Add raisins to each swirl.
7. Bake at 375°F for 12–15 minutes, golden and fragrant.

DECEMBER–WEEK TWO– THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Grace Note: Carry Your Own Light

Everyone has small tasks that belong to them alone – a corner to tidy, a routine to remember, a job to complete without reminders. Carrying your own light means taking ownership of these things with steadiness and maturity. It builds trust, strengthens confidence, and teaches reliability.

Manners Moment: Finish what you begin. Complete tasks fully – put things away, follow through, close the loop.



Family Reflection: Bringers of Light

Talk about what it means to carry light to others, just as St. Lucia shared brightness in a dark season.

Discuss:

- Who has brought light into your life recently?
- How can we bring that same light to someone else?
- What small kindness could we offer this week – quietly, gently, like carrying a candle?

Choose one simple act of light to share as a family in the coming days.

DECEMBER–WEEK TWO– THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Optional Family Activity – Lucia Candle Crowns

Make simple candle wreaths like those worn on St. Lucia's Day.

Supplies:

- Green paper or faux evergreen garland
- Battery tea lights or white birthday candles (battery lights for children)
- Glue, tape, ribbon

Instructions:

1. Measure a strip of green paper to fit around the head.
2. Attach faux leaves or paper cutouts.
3. Add 4–6 battery tea lights (use tape or small cups).
4. Tie with ribbon in back.

Wear during breakfast or evening reflection as a symbol of bringing light wherever you go.

Reflection:

Talk about how Lucia carried her light to others – not just in candles, but in kindness.



SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK TWO– THE GIFT OF LIGHT

Optional Faith Study: Light of the World

Scripture: John 8:12

“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

Reflection:

St. Lucia’s crown of candles is a beautiful symbol of what Christmas celebrates: Christ entering the world as Light. The long Scandinavian nights mirror the spiritual longing we all feel – the yearning for something bright and steady to guide us.

As you listen to gentle music, bake warm breads, or watch candles flicker in the evening, remember the greater Light that Christ offers. He doesn’t chase away winter darkness, He transforms it into a place where love, warmth, and service glow.

Act of Reflection:

Offer a quiet act of light this week – help someone without being asked, bring warmth to a lonely neighbor, or speak words that lift a heart.



SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK THREE–JOY IN WINTER

Artist Study – Carl Larsson – In the Snow (circa 1901)



Two children cross a wide, white landscape, their small footprints trailing behind them like a story written in snow. The world around them is hushed – a frozen river, distant cottages, evergreen branches heavy with powder. Larsson paints winter not as bleak or lonely, but as a season where warmth is carried in the closeness between people.

The children's bright clothing glows against the pale snow, a reminder that color and joy stand out more vividly in winter's quiet. With hands clasped and cheeks rosy, they walk forward with a sense of purpose and togetherness, as if winter itself is something to journey through side by side.

Discussion Prompts

- What feelings does this quiet landscape create?
- How do the children bring warmth or color into the painting?
- Where do you imagine they are going?
- How does this painting show companionship during winter?
- What sounds might you hear if you stepped into this scene?

Cultural Note

Larsson's Swedish winters were long and snowy, yet full of movement – children walked between homes, visited friends, and helped with small errands. Bright traditional clothing stood out against the white landscape, turning even the simplest journeys into moments of beauty.

DECEMBER–WEEK THREE–JOY IN WINTER

Composer Study – Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Waltz of the Snowflakes from The Nutcracker (1892)



Scan to find the song on YouTube.

This shimmering waltz feels like stepping into a snowstorm full of magic. Light, swirling melodies create the sensation of snowflakes twirling in wind. Bells shimmer, choirs rise, and the whole piece feels like a moving winter painting.

Listening Prompts

- Which sections of the music feel like falling snow?
- Does the music ever feel heavy, or always light?
- How does the rhythm create the feeling of movement?

Reflection

In the ballet, this waltz leads Clara through the Land of Snow – a breathtaking moment of wonder before the sweetness of what lies ahead. Winter’s beauty becomes part of the journey.

DECEMBER–WEEK THREE–JOY IN WINTER

Poetry Study – Hans Christian Andersen The Christmas Candles (c. 1860s)

The Christmas Candles

The Christmas candles gleaming
Make all the house so fair,
The child-heart glows with dreaming
While love is everywhere.

The Christmas stars are shining
Above the frosty night,
The little ones are pining
For morning's golden light.

Oh bright the joy of giving,
And glad the songs we raise,
For Christ is born, and living
Within our hearts always.



(Note: This poem appears in various translations, wording may vary slightly depending on source.)

Discussion Prompts

- What kinds of light does the poem mention? Candles? Stars? Morning light?
- How do the children in the poem feel on Christmas Eve?
- What does the poem say about giving?
- How does this poem connect to your own favorite Christmas memories?

Cultural Connection

In Denmark and across Scandinavia, candles are central to Christmas celebrations. Families place candles in windows, carry them in processions, and light them during long winter evenings. Andersen grew up surrounded by these traditions, and his poetry often reflects the tenderness and beauty of candlelit winter nights.

DECEMBER–WEEK THREE–JOY IN WINTER

Folktale: The Snow Child

In a small valley nestled between snowy hills, winter arrived early. The air grew crisp, snow piled high, and the forest turned silver under a pale sun. Two woodcutters, Erik and Marta, lived alone in a little red cottage at the forest's edge. Though they were content, they longed for the sound of laughter in their home.

One morning, after a fresh snowfall, Marta said, “Let’s make a snow child.” Together they rolled great balls of snow, shaping a girl with gentle features, a hood, and a cloak of frost. Erik tucked a small pine branch into her hand. As they stepped back, the snow child blinked.

Her eyes sparkled like icicles, and with a bright laugh she leaped into their arms. “I am here for the winter!” she said. “The winds have brought me.”

From that day on, she filled the valley with joy. She played with the village children, racing across frozen ponds, catching snowflakes on her tongue, and tracing frost patterns on windowpanes. The Snow Child had a gift: wherever she went, the cold felt friendlier.

On warmer days she drifted into the forest and returned only when the winds grew cold again. As spring approached, her visits grew shorter. One morning, as the snow was melting, she kissed Erik and Marta on their cheeks. “Thank you for giving me shape,” she whispered. Then, she vanished into the forest.

Every winter thereafter, the first frost painted a small snow child on the couple’s window – a reminder that fleeting joys still warm the heart for years to come.

Reflection Questions

- What did the Snow Child bring to the village besides fun?
- Why do you think she appeared only in winter?
- How can fleeting moments – holidays, seasons, or simple joys – leave lasting warmth?



DECEMBER–WEEK THREE–JOY IN WINTER

Recipe: Swedish Pepparkakor (Ginger Cookies)

Thin, crisp ginger cookies with warm spice – perfect for shaping into stars, snowflakes, or hearts.

Ingredients

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup molasses
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp ginger
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cloves
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt



Directions

1. Cream butter and sugar. Add egg and molasses.
2. Whisk dry ingredients separately.
3. Combine to form dough, chill 1 hour.
4. Roll thin and cut into shapes.
5. Bake at 350°F for 8–10 minutes.

Cultural Note

Pepparkakor were traditionally believed to “make you kind,” so families shared them at gatherings and celebrations.

DECEMBER–WEEK THREE–JOY IN WINTER

Grace Note – Make Room for Play

Playfulness opens doors to creativity, laughter, and connection. Winter is a wonderful season for imaginative indoor games, outdoor adventures, and simple family fun.

Play is not a distraction – it is a way of seeing the world with curiosity and delight. Winter offers gifts of play: snowfalls, warm kitchens, imaginative afternoons indoors. Let joy be a part of your week, not an afterthought.

Manners Moment: Invite others in – include, share, and collaborate.



Family Reflection: The Joy in Winter

Discuss which part of this week stayed with you most.

How do play and imagination bring light into a dark season?

What does it mean to “keep a small light burning” in your own heart, even when days feel cold or busy?

Invite each person to share one “snow story” from their own life – a memory of winter joy, a time they helped someone, or a moment when the world felt quiet and beautiful.

End by choosing one simple way your family will bring warmth and light to someone else this week – and write it down to remember.

SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK THREE–JOY IN WINTER

Optional Family Activity – Snowflake Paper Lanterns

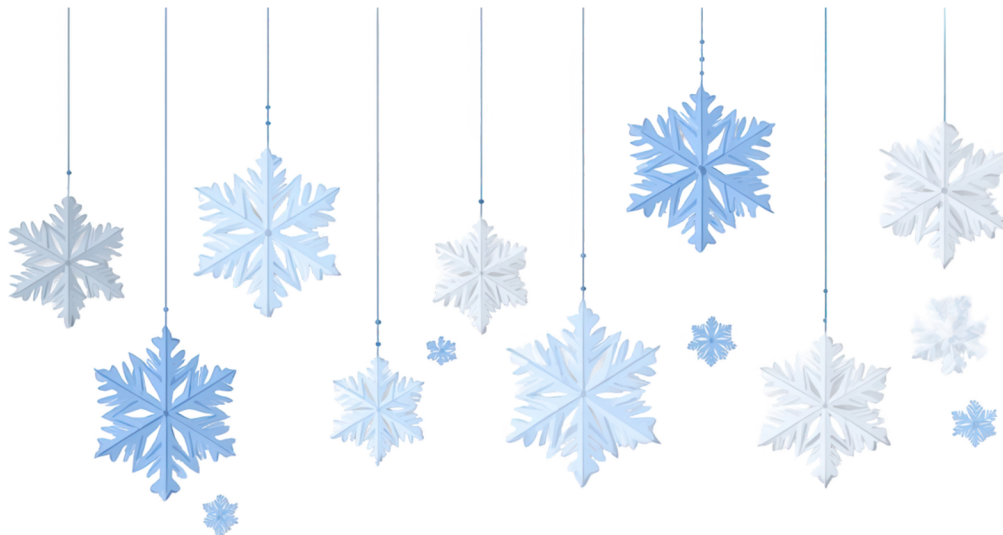
This is a cozy craft that brings soft winter light into your home.

Supplies:

- White or pastel paper
- Small LED tea lights
- Scissors
- Tape or glue

Instructions:

1. Fold papers accordion-style.
2. Cut small snowflake shapes along the folds (like cutting a paper-snowflake).
3. Form into a cylinder and tape or glue the ends together.
4. Place an LED tea light inside to cast snowflake patterns on the walls.



DECEMBER–WEEK THREE–JOY IN WINTER

Optional Faith Reflection – Good Tidings of Great Joy

Scripture: Luke 2:10–11

“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. for unto you is born this day. a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

Reflection:

Joy blossoms all around Christmas – in children’s laughter, family traditions, sparkling snow, kitchen warmth, and favorite songs. But the joy at the heart of Christmas is deeper than excitement. It is the joy of knowing that Christ came for all people – gently, humbly, and with love beyond measure.

As you savor winter beauty this week, let every moment point to the joy Christ brings: steady, generous, and strong enough to warm cold days.

Act of Reflection:

Share a bit of joy with someone who needs it – a note, a handmade cookie, a phone call, an invitation to join in something fun.



DECEMBER–WEEK FOUR– PEACE & TRADITION

Artist Study: Carl Larsson Christmas Is Here Again (Swedish: Jul igen)



Carl Larsson's *Christmas Is Here Again* is a joyful celebration of Swedish holiday tradition. The room is alive with warmth: evergreen garlands arch across the ceiling, candles glow softly along the walls, and a crowd of family members fills the long dining table. At the center, a woman stands ready to guide the festivities, her presence steady and welcoming.

To the right, a young boy in a red cap stands near the freshly lit Christmas tree, gazing upward in awe. Children and adults mingle together – talking, laughing, preparing to bless the meal. Nothing feels rushed. Instead, Larsson captures the moment when everyone pauses before the Christmas feast, filled with gratitude, anticipation, and the feeling of being home.

This painting is both grand and intimate. Though the room is full, the warmth is personal. The soft glow of candlelight unites generations, reminding us how holiday traditions bind families together across time.

Discussion Prompts

- What details show that this is a festive, special evening?
- How does Larsson use light – from candles, lamps, or windows – to create a cozy Christmas feeling?
- What emotions do you notice on the faces of the people gathered?
- Which part of this scene reminds you of your own family traditions?
- If you could step into this painting, where would you stand and why?

Cultural Note

Swedish Christmas celebrations have long centered on family gatherings, candlelight, homemade decorations, and shared meals. Larsson's *Christmas Is Here Again* reflects the heart of a Nordic Christmas Eve: togetherness, gratitude, and festivity filling the home before the main holiday meal.

DECEMBER–WEEK FOUR– PEACE & TRADITION

Composer Study: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky **Waltz of the Flowers – Finale from The Nutcracker**



Scan to find the song on YouTube.

The final waltz of The Nutcracker is expansive and joyful – a musical celebration. The sweeping strings and bright brass feel like Christmas morning opening up: warm, generous, full of movement. After the sparkling winter scenes of Act II, the finale gathers every theme into a triumphant close.

Listening Prompts

- Which instruments feel the most festive or warm?
- Does this piece feel like an ending, a celebration, or the beginning of something new?
- How does the music reflect the feeling of Christmas Eve turning into Christmas Day?

Reflection Connection

The finale reminds us that Christmas is a culmination of preparation, beauty, and generosity – just like Larsson’s quiet domestic scene.

Geography Note

The Nutcracker premiered in St. Petersburg in 1892 but has become a worldwide Christmas tradition, especially in Europe and North America.

DECEMBER–WEEK FOUR– PEACE & TRADITION

Literary Study – Hans Christian Andersen

The Fir Tree

Story Summary

In this early scene from *The Fir Tree*, Andersen describes a moment of pure Christmas wonder. For the first time, the little tree is brought indoors, decorated with candles and ornaments, and surrounded by joyful children. Though the story later grows somber, this passage captures the beauty of tradition – the glow of candles, the joy of family, and the sense that Christmas light can make even an ordinary tree feel extraordinary.



Excerpt from *The Fir Tree*

Now all the candles were lighted, and what brightness they gave! The Tree trembled in every bough, never had it felt such joy. It wished that this shining moment might last forever.

The children danced round it, shouting for gladness. And the old people nodded and said, 'This is the most beautiful Tree we have ever seen.'

Discussion Prompts

- What details in this scene help you imagine the glow and excitement of Christmas?
- How does the fir tree respond to being part of a family's celebration?
- What Christmas traditions help you feel the same sense of joy and light?

Cultural Connection

In this time period in Denmark, Christmas Eve was the heart of the holiday – the night families lit their tree, gathered for songs, shared simple gifts, and celebrated the birth of Christ. Candles were placed carefully among the branches, turning the room into a warm, shimmering space.

SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK FOUR– PEACE & TRADITION

Folktale – The Gift of the Red Mittens



In a snowy Scandinavian village lived a girl named Elin who wanted to give handmade Christmas gifts. All autumn she saved scraps of red wool and quietly knitted three pairs of mittens – one for her mother, one for her father, and one for her sister.

When she finished wrapping them on Christmas Eve, she realized she had no yarn left to make a pair for herself. Still, her heart felt warm knowing her family would have something made with love.

That night, as the lanterns glowed along the snowy path, Elin noticed an elderly woman shivering near the woods. Without hesitation, she unwrapped one of the pairs she had made and placed the mittens in the woman's hands.

“These were meant as a gift,” she said softly, “and tonight, they’re meant for you.” The woman whispered a blessing and disappeared into the falling snow.

On Christmas morning, at the base of the Christmas tree, Elin found four pairs of red mittens – beautifully finished, soft, and warm. The smallest pair fit her perfectly, with a tiny stitched star inside the cuff.

Her family didn't know where they came from. But Elin remembered the woman's blessing and understood: Kindness often returns home in unexpected ways.

Moral: Generosity multiplies. When we give from the heart, we are never left empty-handed.

Reflection Questions

- What made Elin give away the mittens she worked so hard to make?
- What does this story teach about Christmas giving?
- How might we practice quiet generosity as a family this season?

DECEMBER–WEEK FOUR– PEACE & TRADITION

Recipe: Cinnamon-Dough Ornaments

Simple, fragrant, and perfect for Christmas Eve crafting.

Ingredients

- 1 cup applesauce
- 1 cup ground cinnamon
- Optional: 1 tablespoon white glue for durability

Directions

1. Mix cinnamon and applesauce into a firm dough.
2. Roll to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thickness.
3. Cut into shapes with cookie cutters.
4. Make a hole for hanging.
5. Dry 24–48 hours or bake at 200°F for 2 hours.

How Long Will They Last?

If fully dried and stored in a cool, dry place, these ornaments can last 5–10 years. Their scent fades gently but remains warm.



SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK FOUR– PEACE & TRADITION

Grace Note: Practice Inner Tidying

As the year winds down, take a moment to tidy not just your rooms, but your thoughts – forgive small hurts, release comparisons, choose one thing to let go of. Creating inner order makes space for hope and clarity in the new year.

Manner Moment: Speak with intention. Choose words that are thoughtful, measured, and true – especially in moments of excitement or frustration.



Family Reflection: Peace & Tradition

As you finish this week, gather together and take one last look at Carl Larsson's Christmas Is Here Again. Every candle, garland, and place at the table hints at traditions carefully kept and lovingly shared.

Discuss:

- Which of your own Christmas traditions mean the most to you? Why?
- How did you notice peace showing up in your home this week – in quiet moments, in helping one another, or in simple routines?
- How can we carry this same sense of peace into the new year?

Reflect on the activities you did together this week. Remember that traditions are often simple, handmade, and repeated year after year because they bring warmth to ordinary days.

SUPER TEAM

DECEMBER–WEEK FOUR– PEACE & TRADITION

Optional Activity – Handmade Christmas Tree Garlands

Supplies:

- Paper strips or felt pieces
- Glue, tape, or string
- Optional: dried orange slices, cranberries, beads

Instructions:

1. Make simple paper chains OR thread felt shapes onto string.
2. Hang across a mantle, doorway, or Christmas tree.
3. Let each family member take turns adding pieces.

Reflection:

Handmade decorations remind us that beauty doesn't require extravagance – only presence, care, and togetherness.



DECEMBER–WEEK FOUR– PEACE & TRADITION

Optional Faith Reflection – Peace on Earth

Scripture: Luke 2:14

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Reflection:

As December draws to a close and Christmas arrives, the message of the angels still rings across the centuries: peace – not the absence of noise or trouble, but the deep, settled peace that comes from Christ Himself.

This final week is a chance to breathe, to slow down, and to honor the gift of God’s presence. Let Christ’s peace rest on your home as you gather, reflect, and celebrate. His peace softens hurried hearts, heals small hurts, and renews hope for the year to come.

Act of Reflection:

Choose one place in your life to invite Christ’s peace – in a relationship, a routine, or a quiet moment of prayer.



DECEMBER REFLECTIONS

As December comes to a close, pause for a moment to write about what you've discovered, the beauty you noticed, and the small moments that brightened your home. Think about the stories, music, art, and traditions that shaped this month – and the ways you felt or shared goodness with others.

- Which painting, story, song, or poem touched you the most this month?
- Where did you notice light in the darkness – moments of peace, kindness, or hope?
- What traditions or simple joys helped you feel closer to one another?

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