

# EPISODE 83 • TSH OXENREIDER

## Why Advent?

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**WRITTEN BY: JEANETTE PASCUA**

## About Tsh

Tsh Oxenreider is a bestselling author, adventure seeker, and guide. She's a mom of three living in Central Texas. Her book *At Home in the World* tells the story of her family backpacking around the world and the lessons she learned while doing it. Her most recent book, *Shadow and Light, A Journey Into Advent*, guides the reader through the Psalms for the Advent season. Tsh also runs a popular newsletter called *Books and Crannies*, leads annual bookworm pilgrimages to London. She's a podcaster at *The Good List*. She believes that a library card, a Netflix subscription, and a passport are some of the greatest educational tools in the universe. You can find her online at her website, [tshoxenreider.com](http://tshoxenreider.com)



## Key Ideas

Advent is a season of preparation that begins four Sunday's before Christmas. It is intended to be a time of anticipation leading up to the celebration of Christ's birth as well as a time of anticipation for His second coming. During this Liturgical season, families can slow down and focus on what really matters.

It's easy to spend the weeks leading up to Christmas doing all of the typical Christmas traditions, only to be left feeling burnt out and ready to take down the tree on December 26th. But, when we realize that Christmas is a season, not just a day, we can free ourselves from the pressure to rush to do all the Christmas memory making in the beginning of December. Instead, we can slow down and allow ourselves the time to really prepare our hearts for Christ's coming.

Embracing the Liturgical calendar doesn't have to stop with Advent and Christmas. Living the whole Liturgical calendar is something that all Christians can embrace. It provides an opportunity for families to live the idea of the domestic church, or the church at home, allowing parents to take a prominent role in their children's faith formation.

## Actions For You

1. For families who already live the Liturgical season of Advent take time to reflect on your current Advent traditions.
  - a. Are you entering into the season of anticipation with your whole heart?
  - b. Does the Advent season feel rushed? Or, do you feel like you are doing too much? If so, is there a way to slow down this Advent?
  - c. Do you feel like your Advent traditions could use more? What simple thing can you do to fully live the season of Advent in your home this year?
2. For families who are new to celebrating Advent take some time to reflect on what you'd like to do this year.
  - a. How can you use the weeks leading up to Christmas to slowly prepare your home for Christmas?
  - b. What Christmas traditions or celebrations can be postponed and celebrated during the season of Christmas, starting on December 25th through Epiphany?
  - c. Even if no one else around you is living Advent, what can you do in your home to make Advent a priority?
3. Go to <https://tshoxenreider.com/advent/> to see the art and music resources Tsh has put together to correspond with her new Advent devotional *Shadow and Light: A Journey Into Advent*. If your family is looking for a simple, no stress way to live the Advent season, consider purchasing Tsh's book.

### Time Stamps

- 2:50 meet Tsh Oxenreider
- 4:30 Tsh explains what attracted her to the idea of Advent
- 8:35 Tsh defines Advent and gives some history
- 12:45 making Advent life-giving and not draining
- 22:35 embracing the whole liturgical calendar
- 26:05 Advent without the crafts
- 34:00 why 2020 needs Advent more than ever
- 39:05 the ecumenical nature of Shadow and Light
- 41:40 where to begin if you are celebrating Advent for the first time
- 46:40 living Advent while the rest of the world doesn't

# TRANSCRIPT EPISODE 83

**Pam Barnhill:** This is *Your Morning Basket* where we help you come bring Truth, Goodness, and Beauty to your homeschool day.

Hey there and welcome to episode 83 of the *Your Morning Basket* podcast. I'm Pam Barnhill your host. I am so happy that you are joining me here today. Well, today, we're kicking off a two-episode series all about the season of Advent. It's going to be so much fun getting prepared for the season of Christmas. That's what Advent is. It's all about preparing for Christmas. Our first guest is Tsh Oxenreider.

She has a brand new book out Advent this year. She has really contemplated how we can bring this season into our families and use it to help us have less stress instead of more throughout the Christmas season. I think you're really going to enjoy this episode of the podcast and it's going to bring you some peace. We're going to get on with it right after this word from our sponsor.

This episode of the podcast is brought to you by our Advent Morning Time Plans. These wonderful morning time plans are four weeks to help you prepare your heart for the holidays. In Morning Time, you can use these with your kids. They make a wonderful addition to your holiday morning time. The best thing about these plans is they are absolutely free. All you have to do to get them is come over to the website at [pambarnhill.com/advent](http://pambarnhill.com/advent).

Enter your email address and you can download your set of plans. Now, they are freshly revamped this year. They've gone from three weeks of plans to four weeks of plans to take you all the way through the Advent season. We focus on *Handles Messiah*, some Advent prayers, memorizing verses from Isaiah related to the Messiah, some Christmas theme math and some Christmas theme art for picture study, and also some art projects that you can do as well.

There's a little bit of nature study on the side. So, so many great Advent and Christmas theme activities in this preset of plans we have just for you.

[Pambarnhill.com/advent](http://Pambarnhill.com/advent) to get your set today.

Tsh Oxenreider is a bestselling author, adventure seeker, and guide. She's a mom of three. They live in Central Texas. Her book *At Home in the World* tells the story of her family backpacking around the world and the lessons she learned while doing it. Her most recent book, *Shadow and Light: A Journey Into Advent*, guides the reader through the Psalms for the Advent season. Tsh also runs a popular newsletter called *Books and Crannies*, and leads annual bookworm pilgrimages to London.

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**Tsh Oxenreider:** Thank you so much. It's so great to chat with you.

**Pam:** It's so nice to chat with you. Actually, again, we chatted a few years ago about homeschooling for a different podcast of mine. You've been busy since then.

**Tsh:** Yes. I don't even remember how old my kids were then. We've done a lot. We've moved a couple of times, probably.

**Pam:** Yes. I think it was just after you guys had come back from your around the world trip which was so exciting and such a great way to homeschool. And then, yes, I think you were just-- maybe just getting settling into Texas or getting ready to settle in.

**Tsh:** That's right.

**Pam:** Yes, about that time.

**Tsh:** Yes, we were. I remember that.

**Pam:** Now, you're branching out and writing about Advent. This is so much fun. Before we talk a little bit about what Advent is, tell me, why was it appealing to you to write about?

**Tsh:** Because it seems like quite a departure from what I typically write about. I've always been intrigued by the idea of old rituals and traditions, I guess. I grew up in a church environment that was pretty detached from that kind of stuff. Not that we thought it was bad or wrong, I just didn't know much about it. I was intrigued by it but didn't really know what to do with it, really. We used to live overseas. Before we traveled around the world, we lived overseas.

That experience, I guess, opened me up to a lot of different ways and cultures. I was exposed to the more ancient traditions regarding the liturgical calendar and holidays. I put on my backpack and thought, "That's just really fascinating and intriguing. I'm looking at it as an outsider."

But then when we were going around our little trip, I learned a lot about what matters to me and what doesn't so much particularly around the holidays as a parent. The holiday season before this, the one before we left, I just remember of having that feeling of like, "I am just feeling like a scrooge this year."

I just was not super feeling the merriment of the holidays. I was just exhausted. I felt like the culture was just expecting more and more of me. My kids at the time at the age they were, I can look back now and say, "Actually, they weren't really putting that pressure on you. You were putting it on yourself as the mom."

I think I thought in my head my kids want to do something fun and holiday-ish every single day. I just

felt burned out. I was actually looking forward to a year off from that where we had all the excuses in the world to not be much for Christmas, because we were living out of backpacks.

It was a delightful Christmas.

I learned a lot I think just as we traveled about more and more church history, Christian history. Fast forward, we moved back to Austin. We started going to a church that is liturgical. This is when I first really became introduced to the idea of Advent in the original universal church meeting. I'd always heard of Advent but I thought of it as December 1st through 24th and the calendars that you buy at the store that have not so great chocolate.

Discovering this gave suddenly the scaffolding that I had been searching for all these years before as a mom for how to anticipate Christmas with the right attitude and the framework and the posture to where it's not let's just dive right into the holiday so that by December 26th I'm sick of it and I want to pack up everything.

Really, the gift of Advent and really the liturgical calendar became a gift, an invitation for me to savor the season "correctly". I'm doing correctly in quotes because I discovered this whole time I didn't need to do all these things I thought the culture was telling me to do. I can actually anticipate the festive season which is what Advent is all about. It's anticipation leading up to Christmas. Not only Christmas Day but Christmastide for 12 full days and then truly enjoy it all.

**Pam:** There's a lot of freedom that comes from the idea. We can talk more about this as we go. Freedom that comes from the idea of, "I have 12 days to celebrate Christmas. It doesn't all have to be done in one day."

**Tsh:** Exactly, yes. That's right.

**Pam:** Just that longing in there and the things that you're talking about, I can so relate to it. Let's tell everybody or for anybody who might be unfamiliar, what is the idea of Advent, because you hit upon something that I think it's so funny. Twentyfour days of bad chocolate, that's not it.

**Tsh:** Right, not at all.

**Pam:** Give us a little chit-chit version of what Advent is, what you're talking about when you are saying Advent.

**Tsh:** Advent is simply-- It comes from the Latin word for arrival. We are waiting for something to show up in that sense. Advent starts four Sundays before Christmas. We're talking almost four weeks depending on when those dates actually fall. In the year 2020, it actually starts November 29th. The year before that, it was actually December 1st. Sometimes, you are right when it's December 1st. It changes every day, every year, the calendar date. It's always the fourth Sunday before.

That actually starts the liturgical calendar, sort of the church's New Year. When we recognize Advent, what we're doing is we're slowly anticipating the arrival of Christ both historically when he was born of the Virgin Mary and in the future when we recognize that one day all the rights will be wrong in our world. So there's a both-and posture that we take with Advent, both recognizing the gift we already have, and the gift of hope we have that, yes, we hope for Christmas in the same way that a child hopes with anticipation for that day, but we also hope for the world. When we look around and we hear all this stuff going on in the news and these natural disasters, and we feel so deeply, especially this year, how broken our world is that we're reminded that we have hope, and one day, it will not be this way.

I love that Advent plays into that. Well, especially during the holiday season, whenever we're looking so intently for some light. In fact, that's why I gave the book, the name *Shadow and Light*, because there's this historical idea of starting in darkness and moving to light as a way to recognize Advent, particularly with

the candles. It's a common tradition to light one candle a week leading up to Christmas day when you got all five candles lit on your Advent wreath before from the previous week and then your Christmas day candles. There's something really literal about anticipation during the season.

**Pam:** Right, and that coming of the light. Yea, I love it. Where did this start historically?

**Tsh:** It started many moons ago. We have documents from early church fathers that recognized Advent as a season. I'm trying to remember the exact date and I feel like someone's going to listen to them and look it up and say it correctly. It's out there. It started many, many centuries ago. We have documentation that the early church fathers were talking probably like third through fifth century, maybe up to the eighth century, recognized Advent as a season.

This is an old, old practice that we can join with those who went before us into recognizing it. Interestingly, we see this historical disinterest that the volume was turned down, not only on Advent, but Christmas. Sometime around the 17th and 18th centuries, we're not entirely sure why, but weirdly enough, who brought it back to the forefront was Charles Dickens, at least in the Western world.

His book, a *Christmas Carol*, and the Victorian Era, in general, dusted off the idea of Christmas being a big deal. We see this revitalized interest in Christmas and, therefore, at least with some church traditions, Catholic and whatnot, bring it back to the forefront, not so much of the church, because it had always been there, but for the everyday families, the people just doing their best to live faithfully. We see this revitalized interest.

**Pam:** Yes. Here's the deal though. I am so busy in December. Like there's so much that I am having to do, and the idea of adding something to this busy holiday season is a little overwhelming. How can we make this Advent time more life-giving instead of an energy drain?

**Tsh:** Because one of the reasons I was so burned out was because the thought of just doing one more thing made me want to curl up, and just hide from my children and not do anything else. I completely get it that when you're thinking about the idea of introducing a recognition of Advent in your home, when you hadn't before you're trying to do the math and thinking, "How can I do more for the holidays, I'm already trying to do less?" Well, when I say Advent is a gift, what it's done for me is the scaffolding it's provided, gives me permission to do largely that, which I would do anyway, but slowly.

Just practically speaking, when we do Advent in our home, we started off before trying to do these other things. Like, I don't know if anyone's ever done. At Jesse tree, this is a tradition some people do where you hang an ornament on a separate tree one a day, and you read something from the Bible, starting from Creation all the way to the birth of Christ. Well, I liked that idea in theory, but I found myself if we had some church event to go to, or some work party, as soon as we had to skip a day, the next day we had to then do two.

Then if the kids were up late one night and they needed to go to bed and we had to skip doing Advent, then suddenly we're like three days behind, and before I knew we were a week behind, and it just did not feel life-giving, it felt very draining. I knew I wanted something very open and go, and very much like if we have to skip a date, no big deal because real life, and we can just turn the page and do whatever we needed to do that day with a fresh beginning. I couldn't find anything like that out there. I wanted something that was ecumenical, something that recognized the busy-ness of a typical family yet wasn't watered down or dumbed down.

My children were starting to get a little bit older and just the simple one line or two-liner story and a craft, wasn't going to cut it, plus I'm not a crafty mom. I was really searching for something. What I discovered is the gift of the songs is that it's poetry that it's prophetic and that it recognizes both the dark and the light of life, the hope that we have, and so we can

enter into the beauty written in the Psalms in a fairly open and go way.

For us and our family, we literally do the Psalm reading, we listen to music, we light a candle. We maybe, look at a particular work of art for the day, and that's "it". We practice Advent in all sorts of other ways throughout our just daily life in the holiday season. For example, like I was talking about it being an anticipatory posture, we do things like instead of just tossing up the Christmas tree in one night, we perhaps put up the tree and then a few days later, we put on the lights and then a week later, we start decorating the tree with the ornaments a little bit until Christmas Eve and the tree is fully decorated.

I don't know if anyone's ever had that experience of like December 26th you want to take the whole thing down because you just want to declutter your house. The gift of that had been like, "Oh, now all the tree is fully on display. I want to enjoy it, and I want to keep it up for the full 12 days of Christmas because I'm finally enjoying it." That's just a simple example. There's other ones out there of how we can recognize Advent. It's not doing more, it's structuring what you're already doing through the lens of anticipation instead of just clamoring all for it right away.

**"It's not doing more, it's structuring what you're already doing through the lens of anticipation instead of just clamoring for it all right away."  
Tsh Oxenreider**

**Pam:** Okay. I love this. First of all, I didn't realize there was anybody else out there who decorated a tree like I do, because that's exactly how I already do it. Well, for one thing, it's overwhelming to do it all at one time and you're right. I would get to December 26th and just be completely ready to take it down. There

was no way it was going to make it through Epiphany. It was when I started doing that whole process of putting up just the tree part and then fluffing for a while.

Ours is pre-lit now, but we do let it sit for a few days before we then plug in the lights and then just adding the ornaments gradually. Yes, I love the idea of doing it like that. I will tell you, my Advent wreath comes out and is usually still sitting amidst all the fall decorations for a few days before I finally put those away and pull those in. I don't feel the need to take all of the Thanksgiving decorations down in one day and then whip out all the Christmas decorations at one time. The Advent candle can sit there by the pilgrims for a few days.

**Tsh:** I think it's helpful to remember that the recognition of holidays is a gift to us. It's not because God needs it or something. It's not like this is some ritual that we're "supposed to do". This is truly for our benefit, and so to recognize it as our benefit means we can do the things that are life-giving to us, and then just set aside the things that just feel like a burden with no sweat.

It's no big deal. Because when my kids were much younger, I don't think we could have done more than light a candle and maybe say a quick prayer and then blow it out or something like that. This day, I've got teenagers, and so it's a whole different story. It's helpful to remember that, it's okay if decorations mix and mingle or that things aren't exactly set up the way you want, and to me, that is the true gift of Advent. There's no hurry on any of this.

**Pam:** Well, and I love this idea that it talking about the book now that it is an open and go thing and it's okay if you miss a day. I had the same experience with the Jesse tree. It's like we would start off gangbusters, and usually, by about at least by two weeks in, we would have missed a couple of days. Then you have this avalanche of ornaments sitting there waiting for you and you have to do the readings.

If you're a perfectionist, you can't just let it go, and so it does definitely become a burden or even some of the books and they're lovely books. I'm sure, but some of the ones where you have to do a reading every day and the story builds on itself when you get behind, you're like, how are we ever going to catch up? I know a lot of moms out there who struggle with perfectionism, throw up their hands, and say, "Well, we might as well just stop because we haven't done it right."

**Tsh:** That's right. Our kids, we go to a co-op that's several days a week. We have some mornings that are nice and leisurely and we call it symposium, our Morning Time. We have our symposium, other times we are trying to get out the door. There are some days during Advent where we get to savor it and we do the reading. We listen to the song, we look at the artwork, we talk about it. It could take like 30 minutes to an hour and it's fun.

Other days, it is two minutes or not at all. It's at night and everyone's exhausted. We gotta make lunches. We gotta get ready to head out the door early. We're just like reading the song, lighting the candle and that's about it, and it's totally okay. I basically created the thing I needed as a mom because I could not find it out there. I wanted something that really was rich and meaningful, but also did not add this burden of behindness that we can so often feel during the holidays.

**Pam:** Yea. I love it. I love the Psalms and you're right. There are Psalms that deal with darkness and lead us into light and then we get into the songs of praise and Thanksgiving. There are 150 of them, so there's a breadth of, you can handle all of the ups and downs and the emotions and there are so many things that they talk about. They're not horribly long. They're beautiful, beautiful words. It's almost like music to listen to and the poetry of them. I think it was a fabulous choice for something of this nature.

**Tsh:** I wanted something like that because every day has a small discussion question which for parents with little children, they can do on their own, just

journaling or maybe talk with their spouse. Then I wanted something if you have slightly older kids, you could talk about, and I didn't want to focus so heavily on all the happy parts of the holidays as though like, what are you looking forward to about Christmas. Although that's definitely there. I wanted to also recognize that second meaning of Advent, the already, not yet, that the world is not yet as it should be so that we can have these discussions with our kids, even during the holidays.

Talking about the orphan and the widow. When it feels like God is not there amongst all the chaos we're hearing, that's important to sit and park on and not ignore with our children. Because these are important discussions that we can have throughout the day with them and this book is an invitation to do just that even during the holidays.

**Pam:** I love it. I love it. Let's talk a little bit about your experience with the liturgical calendar. You're leaning into Advent, have you embraced some of the other parts of the liturgical calendar as well?

**Tsh:** Yes, for sure. We're pretty much all in and sold and it takes a little bit of time, especially if you didn't grow up Catholic or grow up in a high church environment, but we slowly integrated more and more into our lives where it's now a solid part of our routine. We mentioned after Advent comes Christmastide and that's 12 days long ending with Epiphany and then you've got a season of Epiphany or Ordinary Times. Some people recognize into Lent.

We do things as a family with Lent as well. Our kids are a little bit older as well, but we usually focus on some issue along with fasting, what we're used to from Ash Wednesday on but also the almsgiving part, we collectively decide as a family, what are we going to focus on? We talk about it over the dinner table.

Now I'm making it sound much more structured than it really is. We're talking very organically throughout our day, over the dinner table, during lunchtime when

we're breaking before or after storytime, during symposium, that kind of stuff. We recognize Lent, and then the 50 days of Eastertide, all the way to ordinary time. We really lean into it.

I find, as a mom, it really helps give some, like I said earlier, the scaffolding, but also a sense of time moving forward. One of the reasons we like the seasons is because there's a certain way they feel. Fall feels differently than the spring where we have the renewal and the liturgical calendar helps us embrace those seasons even more because we get to think through the different parts of what the church recognizes every single year again and again, and has been for 2,000 years.

**Pam:** Yes, it's that journey too. You go on that journey and then you end up on the way to Jerusalem, with Christ and it ends with the Resurrection on Easter. Yes, it's just a wonderful before you head back to ordinary time again. It really is a wonderful recognition and I live in a place where there aren't seasons.

That's one of the beautiful things about the church calendar for those of us here is that it really does help bring some of those seasons in a place where the outside temperature, we really don't get that fall. We really don't get that spring, but it does help move us through the year and recognize that there is a passage of time. There are high times and low times and things going on and so it really does make a difference.

**Tsh:** Yes. I live in a similar environment too in central Texas. We always, every lent, we work on our backyard garden and I find that that's a really great way to connect the outdoors with what's happening inwardly because Lent is about rebirth and is about from ashes to life and that's pretty much what we're doing with planting a garden. We like to take advantage of, even if it doesn't literally feel super cold to warm by Easter, we're already warm when it starts, we take advantage of it as best we can and we make it work.

**Pam:** One of the things, when I think about the liturgical year, if you were to go on to Pinterest and type in the liturgical year, you're going to end up with a lot of crafts. You mentioned yourself that you're not a crafty mom. I'm not a crafty mom. What do we do with little kids? Your book is absolutely lovely. I love the fact that you have in here, something to listen to, something to gaze upon. You're really hitting on a number of the different senses in here and worshiping with all of our senses. How can we incorporate little kids into this without having to necessarily resort to the craft?

**Tsh:** We have a craft cabinet in our house. We have, since my oldest was a toddler where it lives out in front and center of our home so it's in the living room and they can craft as much as they want. I can not enthusiastically and hang things on the fridge whenever they want to take part in crafts. Because I had two out of, three of my kids were super into crafts and one of them still is, and I am talking like random bits of cardboard and, glue and the hot glue gun and nothing fancy.

I just say that as a little addendum to the crafty mom thing, I am all about the tactile experience kids might need for leaning into something like the liturgical calendar that I have had kids that need it. My son, my youngest, he still does the whole making construction paper, holiday decor, and putting it all over the house during the seasons, and that's great with me. I don't mind. I find I'm a storytelling mom. I think it's really great to lean into the thing you are good at. We're big, book nerds over here and I love a good story. We really lean into read-aloud time and storytime in our family. I go with that as my go-to resource for teaching the kids about the liturgical calendar.

In my household, we do a lot of saint stories. We read about the saints, we read about certain festivals and feasts, but through storytelling avenues, not necessarily, yes, of course, we read the Bible, but it's not a didactic preaching kind of method that we do. That's one of the reasons I love the saints so much just

because we can use their literal lives as fascinating stories to frame certain events in the liturgical calendar and there's lots of great books out there. I have one that was just published this past year that I just think is remarkable with its illustrations and its storytelling for the saints.

That's a method I use, but if a mom is more into art or music, I think they can lean into those avenues with having a lot of that sensory input with the sights and the sounds. My advice usually to moms who are with littles who don't feel like they can do what they "want to do" which is have some kind of deep theological discussion or just say, "Kids, let's sit down, let me just show you how it works," is to just lean into the thing you're good at as a mom.

Because you're the mom for these kids and that was on purpose and so it's a good thing to do the things you're good at for your kids. They will appreciate that more than you trying to do the thing that is hard for you and, therefore, you do it begrudgingly. That's been my take on it, especially in the early years.

**Pam:** I think that's such excellent advice because there are ways to do this with food. If you're the mom who loves to cook and that's your thing, there are so many feast days throughout Advent, and then just there are definitely ways to have some special food or you're the storytelling mom and I think we have the same saints book.

I'm trying to think of the name of it. It's in my Morning Time basket.

**Tsh:** Yes. It's over in our little thing in the living room as well.

**Pam:** You said wonderful illustration and I think we'll have to find it and put it in the show notes, but I bet it's the same one because it came out this year. Telling those stories and one other thing that you just said that I want to touch on, I mentioned that you have something to listen to and you have a piece of art to

look at, but that doesn't mean you have to do everything.

**Tsh:** That's right.

**Pam:** If you're the art mom, choose looking at the art and talking about it with your children. If you're the listening mom, if music is your thing, choose that piece. You don't have to do everything. You can choose the things that you like. Then I also love the idea of if you're not crafty, throw the art stuff out for your kids and give them permission to make whatever the reading of the day leads them to make. You don't have to come up with something specific and they're going to be able to get that tactile input that they're after.

**Tsh:** That's right. I like to tell moms if they feel overwhelmed at the thought of starting Advent or anything in the liturgical calendar, just pick two things. Pick lighting of the candles and reading. Or reading and listening to the music. Or the art and the candles or something like that. Don't feel like you need to do it all unless you just want to and then you gradually add more.

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**Tsh Oxenreider**

I think it's helpful for us to remember, especially when they're younger, that a lot of times we put so much pressure on making the holidays magical and memorable for our kids and we forget that kids are pretty good at doing that on their own. That, especially when they're younger, that the holidays just by nature of what they are, are magical to them. Our job as parents is just to

provide the space to let that magical imagination flourish.

For me, that looks like focusing on the five senses and that sounds almost too easy, but it really truly is having great music playing in the background. Not that you need to have a soundtrack for your life, but just have a few good go-to playlists for the holidays, have some nice-smelling candles around, have that craft cabinet available for them to make whatever they want. Proudly display their paper snowflakes all over the place and they will remember how your home felt during the holidays so much more than the specific thing you did or didn't do that one day when you felt like you should be doing more and didn't feel like doing it or whatever that is. Because kids are pretty great at almost creating all the stuff themselves if you just get out of their way.

**Pam:** Well, and something else that takes the pressure off is when you think back on your memories of the holidays when you were a kid, and my mom was always pretty great at it, but there are like one, two, three things, maybe, that stick out from my childhood. It's like these wonderful holiday memories. I have wonderful holiday memories, but I don't have millions, I just-- Your kids, they don't need millions of memories. They just need a few that they can remember really well and they're going to be like, "I had the best holidays. I had wonderful memories."

**Tsh:** Yes. I usually tell people, "Okay, try and remember, what was your favorite gift you got on your ninth Christmas?" And most people would be like, "I have no idea." It's true. We don't remember, but you might remember how your house smelled during the holidays or that one thing, your mom baked every year or that one tradition your dad did every year that just, you thought was so much fun and that's enough. We don't need to make everything exactly right in order for our kids to have a great Christmas looking back.

**Pam:** Yes. Very much so. Very much so. Well, why do you think 2020 is the year for this book to come out?

**Tsh:** Yes, it's funny. So many fellow authors I know that have books coming out in 2020, we laugh because no one would have picked having the pandemic we've had for releasing a book because the release dates and the book tours and the plans have all just gone by the wayside. We've had to rethink how to release a book out into the world, but I keep hearing from more and more people, "Oh my gosh, I cannot wait for Advent this year, more than ever, or the holidays. I am so eager for the holidays."

I think the reason is because in this year of uncertainty, we've all heard "in these uncertain times" enough. In this year of uncertainty, we at least can hope on the surety that our year's going to end with the holidays that we have Advent to look forward to that leads to Christmas. There is something life-giving about knowing that these are things we can look forward to, even if they don't look the way we would want them to.

If some of us always go somewhere in particular like grandma's house or some beloved place, and you can't this year, there is some disappointment to be had, but there's something really inviting about turning our homes into the haven we want them to be in a world that just feels really fraught, and that's actually what Advent does. Advent is inviting us to stop, to slow down, and to remember what actually matters. To me, 2020 is just screaming for that. It's screaming for all of us to stop and remember what actually matters. Advent feels like the perfect invitation to do just that to me.

**Pam:** Such a great reminder, Christ is what we need and he's going to come. Like you said, Advent is the preparation for not only the first coming of Him as the baby in the manger but also the second coming as well and so just remembering that he is still there, he is coming. It brings reassurance for a year that's been really, really tough.

**"Advent is inviting us to stop, to slow down, and to remember what actually matters. To me, 2020 is just screaming for that. It's screaming for all of us to stop and remember what actually matters. Advent feels like the perfect invitation to do just that to me."**

**Tsh Oxenreider**

**Tsh:** That's right. Even if our holidays look absolutely nothing like we want them to, or like, we feel like they should, there is reassurance that the thing that has truly been recognized during the holiday season for the past almost 2,000 years, that's still true and we need that reminder.

**Pam:** Yes, very much so. There's an assurance in there. There's something that brings us hope in that idea. Easter was bleak this year.

**Tsh:** Yes. It really was.

**Pam:** It really, really was. That's the biggest holiday in the church calendar, usually coming out of Lent. I'm Catholic and so we go home on Good Friday and the church is dark and it's stripped bare and there's nothing in there and we normally walk into the church on Easter morning and it's just overwhelming. I go on Easter morning, a lot of Catholics go on Easter vigil. By the time my kids got big enough that we could actually go to Easter vigil, then my daughter and I were singing in the choir that sang at 7:00 AM.

I was like, "We're not going to do both. We're just going to get up. We have to be there at 5:30 to get ready, so no." It's just like it's so beautiful and so wonderful, and the church, I will say the church was still the same this year. They went in and they decorated and I was watching it on YouTube. It's still the same, but there was a sadness there. That idea though, that the church stayed the same.

**Tsh:** That's right.

**Pam:** Even in the midst of everything. I think that's one of the things that we have to remember, is like this is not getting at Christ. This is not getting at the church. It remains the same. Just to have that daily reminder from that fourth Sunday before Christmas, all the way up to Christmas, I think is something that we can all really benefit from this year.

**Tsh:** Yes. I love how the Catholic church really teaches well the idea of the domestic church and that that is one of our jobs as parents, is to shepherd our kids through this domestic church idea. That's what we can do during Advent. If your parish is still closed, if you still can't embrace the traditions that you normally do out in your community, that you can turn your home into the little haven that it's supposed to be anyway. It's a reminder of our solemn call as parents to shepherd these kids.

**Pam:** Well, that brings me to the question, how is *Shadow and Light* ecumenical? How is it friendly to Catholics, Protestants, and then people, just any kind of Christian?

**Tsh:** The framework for the Psalms actually comes from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, where it's the Psalms prescribed to read every day during Advent on some of the years. I started with that, but then I made sure that all the translations of the Psalms were also in the version approved by the USCCB from the United States Council of Catholic Bishops because I wanted Catholics to feel like this was speaking their language just as much. I lean quite heavily into the Marian perspective of who she is as the mother of God. I, at the same time, don't use a lot of Christianese. I purposely wanted this to be a book even for someone who hasn't stepped foot in a church in a long time but likes the idea of having more of this focus during the holidays. I want them to feel like they are included and welcomed. They don't have

to be a certain way in order to open up the Psalms and dig into it. I purposely leave out a lot of that language that, depending on what faith tradition you grew up in, feels so familiar, you don't even notice it, so that it's fairly simple and clear, and open and go, and welcome to anyone.

Ecumenism is a really high value of mine, so I wanted to make sure that all of us could find value and not feel like, "Well, this is almost the right book for me, but it's written by someone like this or someone like that, or they use language a little bit like this that I'm not familiar with." There might be some of that, but on the whole, I try to keep it as wide a berth as possible.

**Pam:** I think you've definitely done that, as I'm looking through the book. Also, there's a definite literary bit to a lot of the reflections that are in here. I'm seeing references to Dante and Dorothy Sayers. You mentioned book nerdiness earlier, and I think book nerds are going to get this and go, "Oh, yes, she's speaking my language."

**Tsh:** I basically spoke the language I speak. If you speak book nerd, then you will understand my accent and love it.

**Pam:** It's so much fun. What about if somebody is celebrating Advent for the very first time? You mentioned you try to make it friendly to them and leave out a lot of that Christianese, you wanted to make it comfortable for anybody to just pick up. Where do you recommend they begin? I'm scrolling through the bookstore, I have no idea, but it appeals to me. I pick it up and flip it open. Where should I start?

**Tsh:** At the beginning of the book, I talk a little bit about my brief history with Advent. Then there is an entire chapter going through the five Ws and H of Advent. The who, what, when, where, why, and how,

because I don't want anybody to assume, or I don't want anyone to think I'm assuming you already know this and that's about it. It is truly an explanation of, "What does the word mean and why do we celebrate it? What resources do you recommend?" I have it linked to the book's website, where it's all these resources you can use, including the playlist and the art, you can just click on.

I try to make it as simple as possible so that if you're celebrating Advent for the first time, you can open it up to day one. It says at the top, "Light the first purple candle," for example, or a blue candle. Then read this out loud, and then read this. Here is the song that you can listen to, and it's linked to the book's website. Here's the art you can look at, and it's linked on the book's website. I wanted as little friction as possible for someone who has never done this before and doesn't want to feel dumb like they're not speaking the right language or something for them to know exactly what to do and just see how that feels. Does it feel like too much?

Then the next day, skip the music and art or whatever it is. If it feels just right, you can consider maybe adding another scripture or reading or whatever. I also include in there, there's a section for 25 days of gospel readings about the birth of Christ. If you really truly would prefer to read from say Matthew or Luke because you really want to lean into the story of Christ, then you absolutely may. You can add that on if you want. Just test it out and see what feels right to you and your family and your situation, starting with day one.

Then when you're done, move the book to day two and just pick up there and then just do exactly what the book tells you to do because I've gone all the way down to the last week of Advent. It can get a little confusing because it just depends on when Christmas Eve and Christmas Day falls on that fourth Sunday of Advent and it will tell you, "Go to December 18 or day this." It's almost like a Choose Your Own

Adventure book where you just do what the book tells you to do and then you'll be fine.

**Pam:** I love that. I think it was last year, we had no fourth week of Advent at all.

**Tsh:** I think Christmas Eve was Sunday or something like that. I can't remember what it was, but it was a very short Advent. Every year it's different. You never know.

**Pam:** It is different. As Catholics, we go to church on Sunday and we go to church on Christmas Eve, and you didn't get to double-dip.

**Tsh:** That's right.

**Pam:** We had to go Saturday night and Sunday night.

**Tsh:** That's right. That's funny.

**Pam:** It's like no double-dipping. You have to go both days.

**Tsh:** Right, that's hilarious.

**Pam:** It was so much fun. Oh, boy, I'm so glad you said that about the music and the art because that was going to be my question for you. It says here, "Listen to this." I'm like, "Where am I going to find this? Is this going to be a lot of work for me?" You've actually linked it up.

**Tsh:** There's an actual Spotify playlist that is part of the book. If you have a Spotify account, you can even just save it to your own account, and then just use that playlist, just day one, day two, but you don't even need that, you can just go to the website and click play. Of course, some of these old hymns or carols, there's many versions of them.

If you don't like the version that I've picked, no big deal, you go find the one that works for you. Personally, I love music, I pick the ones that were most personally enjoyable to me and I think are more universally appreciated. I have a lot of old stuff on there on purpose. I'm a purist when it comes to holiday music. I like it done traditionally and I like it done well.

**Pam:** Do the hymns correspond to the Psalm for the day?

**Tsh:** Yes. The art and music all somewhat correspond to the topic of the day per the Psalm. There is a difference between Advent music and Christmas music. A lot of these songs you might not either recognize, or you might associate with some other time other than the holidays. I don't have some of the more traditional holiday songs on there. That's on purpose because you'll find those everywhere. There's no shortage of Christmas playlists you can find, but there's not a lot of Advent ones out there. This is for Advent in particular.

**Pam:** What about the person who, and I'm asking for a friend here. I grew up not a Catholic, and my family still does not recognize or do anything with the liturgical year. One of the things I struggle with, and this is just me and you talking right now, is I'm already, I'm all in on celebrating the 12 Days of Christmas, but we get to the 26th and I feel like the world has just left me. Christmas is over. You got anything for that one?

**Tsh:** Me too, because my family-- I did not grow up and in any tradition that recognized 12 full days of Christmas. For me, it's a bit tricky because my husband and I feel a little bit of the outliers among the extended family. What I tell people, because I tell this to myself, give grace upon grace upon grace here. Again, the liturgical calendar is a gift to us. It's not some magic lamp or something we need to do to appease God. That's not how this works. If for

whatever reason, you're with extended family, and they have moved on, it's okay.

You don't want to be that person that says, "Guys, it's Christmastide. You can still say Merry Christmas up to January 6th." I advise, do it in a way that's enjoyable to you and to those who also recognize it and let your winsomeness be attractive enough to where other people see the appeal to it without you being dogmatic and preachy. Yes, that looks like, in our family every now and then we will go to a holiday-themed event during Advent that is actually Christmas. We are going to go ahead and eat the Christmas cookies and listen to the Christmas carols and say Merry Christmas because we're not purists about this.

This isn't a dogmatic thing. We notice and lean into the things that we can control, which is what happens in our house. In our home, we will recognize Advent the way is most life-giving to us and do it the way we enjoy, but not sweat the details. In our home, that looks like waiting perhaps till the 12 Days of Christmas to enjoy those Christmas movies at home. If my parents invite us to come over and watch a Christmas movie on December 14th, we're not going to say, "No, it's Advent," we're just going to enjoy it because that's okay. That's who we are.

At home, we might do something differently. We have a group of friends and we do a Christmas cookie trade every year among friends, but we don't do it till the 12 Days of Christmas. That's something we can look forward to because we at least know there're a few people out there who prescribe to the same philosophy that we do. Then I've never yet done this, but I know some families that do a 12th night party for the last night of Christmas leading to Epiphany. It just sounds like so much fun and I've always wanted to do that.

**Pam:** It does.

**Tsh:** I guess my advice to people is, you do you and enjoy it and hopefully maybe the extended family will see the enjoyment and want to partake but if they don't, that's okay, because you do you and they do them.

**Pam:** I think you've hit upon something there that finding people in your community, in your faith community or, just like-minded people who are celebrating in the same way and then being able to do some things with them after the holidays or during the holiday, yes, I even do it myself during the holiday season to continue the celebration. I'll tell you, one thing that I've discovered is that all of the Christmas, like a gingerbread house, decorating kits go on sale, December 26th. So you can go out and buy all kinds of things to continue your 12 days of Christmas celebration at a great discount.

**Tsh:** That's a great idea, I've never even thought of that. We're going to have to look for that this year. I think that's so true. Sometimes we think the idea of 12 days of Christmas sounds a little stomach-turning whenever you were already used to celebrating Christmas beforehand. If you imagine the Advent as a gift being a delay on that kind of stuff, you're not sick of it by December 25th. You actually want to lean into it and enjoy it all the more, so the idea of gingerbread houses on December 29th actually sounds great fun instead.

**Pam:** It takes a lot of pressure off of you as the mom. If you're giving yourself the 12 whole days to celebrate, then you can prepare during Advent and take it nice and slow and get the things you need. Even if the world around you, they're doing all of their Christmas celebrations and plays and things like that before the 25th, then you can take that time between the 25th and the 6th of January to do those home celebrations and really have time to do them without having to feel you've got to cram them in between the 1st and the 24th.

**Tsh:** Exactly. I tell people sometimes that we recognize Advent, not because we don't like Christmas that much, but because we love it so much. It gives us permission to really enjoy Christmas and not just have that-- we all have had that let down on December 26th where it's like, "Well that was it." You don't get that when you recognize 12 full days of Christmas, it's almost like a slow off-ramp into Epiphany. That's just really enjoyable. It's like a road trip where you can just enjoy the ride instead of trying to hurry, hurry, hurry and then you're exhausted, crashing into bed and you're so ready for a normal life again.

**Pam:** Looking at the weeks that you've set up in the book, the first week is expectation. The second week is preparation, and you're not just talking there about preparing your house, but you're also talking about preparing your heart and then anticipation is the third week. That last week there is gratitude and so I think it's very important as we're talking about all the practical aspects of Advent and Christmas to realize that this preparation we're doing is a preparation of our internal selves for the coming.

**Tsh:** Yes, and what's nice about that as a mom is that you can actually recognize your kid's feelings a lot, or you can identify with it a lot more than if you're just a mom trying to hunker down and endure it. Whenever you've got this kid that will say, two more weeks till Christmas, and they're saying it with excitement and you hear it with dread like, "Oh my gosh, I've got so much to do." That causes you to panic. Instead, you can enjoy the anticipation with them because there's less of this urgency to it all.

There is this inward journey that you go through. In fact, there's even a little bit of that when you start feeling this, "Okay, I'm ready for things to be over," because what you're ready to be over is that anticipatory feeling, you're just ready for it to go ahead and be here. Once it arrives, you don't have to just dive in the deep end on one day and then be done with it, you can actually just enjoy it instead.

There's a lot of that inward peace that comes from this.

**Pam:** Reflecting on years past, there have been some years where we have been very consistent with our Advent candle and our prayers and then there have been other years where we haven't been for whatever reason. I can remember meeting together as a family to do this. We would usually do it at night before dinner. We would light the candles and say our prayers and just feeling after the Advent season, a little let down because it was such a beautiful practice of us meeting together for those extra prayers every day. I think as families embrace this, they're going find that it's something that they really enjoy.

**Tsh:** Yes, especially because you can still make it however it works best for you because it's so open-ended. If you need it to be a certain way, then let it be a certain way and let it be the gift that it is.

**Pam:** I love the reminder that this is for you, God doesn't need this. This is for you, you're not going to displease him.

**Tsh:** Exactly, there's not some wrong or right way to do this.

**Pam:** Tsh, tell us where we can find the book.

**Tsh:** The main website for the book is [shadowandlightadvent.com](http://shadowandlightadvent.com). That's not only where you can buy the book, but that's where you can find all the things that go with it such as the playlist and the artwork to listen to. The playlist to listen to, the artwork to look at. We also have a few things for people who are able to get it in time for Advent such as, I've got a little three-part series, audio series of 101, helping explain the ins and outs of the Advent and how we recognize it. Then I've got a bonus conversation with my friend, Haley Stewart who has slightly younger kids than me. We talk about how we do Advent practically with our kids' ages. All of that is

at [shadowandlightadvent.com](http://shadowandlightadvent.com) where you can find all the goodies that go with it.

**Pam:** Love it, love it. Well, thank you so much for coming on and sharing this with us. I think it is a beautiful book and it's really going to be a gift and a blessing to families this year.

**Tsh:** Thank you so much, it was great chatting with you.

**Pam:** Now, if you would like links to any of the books and resources that Tsh and I chatted about today, including the link to Tsh's own book and all the wonderful resources available on her website, you can find them on this show notes for this episode of the podcast, that is [@pambarnhill.com/YMB83](https://pambarnhill.com/YMB83).

Now, also on the show notes, we have the transcript for the podcast and downloads to help you get the most out of listening to the podcast. We include things like key takeaways, some action items for you to do, and just some other ideas that you can use to bring the contents of this episode to life in your own homeschool.

Don't forget to go and download those, [pambarnhill.com/YMB83](https://pambarnhill.com/YMB83). We'll be back again in a couple of weeks with another Advent interview. This time, we're going to have Genie Shaw on. Genie is the author of our *Catholic Morning Time Plans* here at *Your Morning Basket*. Plus, she is also a music major and she has a wealth of knowledge all about music.

She's going to be talking to us all about Advent music and how we can use music that's a little different from the traditional Christmas music we know to bring more of this holiday spirit into our Morning Time. You're not going to want to miss this one. Until then, keep seeking Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in your homeschool day.