

Bustle & Sew



Love to Sew and Sew with Love



Nativity Advent Calendar

Count down to Christmas with this machine-applique Advent calendar. A really fun project – and a great chance to use up all those scraps to create something totally unique.

If you are able to use your computer and printer to print on fabric that's great and I've supplied numbers 1 – 24 for you to use. But if you can't do this, then you could always stamp, write with fabric marker, or embroider the numbers instead. The little discs with the dates are applied to the background using Velcro dots – the sort offices use for noticeboard displays. They are self-adhesive and can be easily obtained from any good stationer.

I have mounted my calendar on an artist's canvas block, but you could use a piece of mdf, or frame yours (without glass) instead.



You will need:

Artist's canvas block A3 size (that's 297 x 420 mm or 11.7" x 16.5")

Piece of red gingham fabric measuring A3 size *plus* the depth of your block *plus* 1" all the way round.

16" x 10 ½" piece of white fabric (406 x 267 mm)

11 ½" x 9" piece of natural coloured fabric (292 x 229 mm)

56" (1m 42cm) red ric-rac braid

4" square piece of blue felt for Mary's robe

4" square piece of brown felt/fabric for Joseph's robe

6 x 4" piece of straw coloured felt/fabric for thatched roof of stable

2" square piece of white felt for dove

Assorted scraps of fabric for rest of the design.

Black, neutral and red thread for sewing machine needle

Neutral thread for bobbin

Embroidery floss in dark brown, dusky pink, yellow, gold and silver

Tapestry or 4-ply wool for straw in 2 shades of brown or yellow

Button for star (optional, you can embroider star if you prefer)

Note: All fabrics used must be non-stretchy

For date numbers:

Suitable white fabric to transfer numbers onto – usually white cotton – measuring

12" (300 mm) square

12" (300 mm) square piece of heavy duty interfacing

12" (300 mm) square piece of white or natural coloured felt

24 self-adhesive Velcro dots or squares (less than 1" square or trim to fit)

Spray fabric adhesive

Staple gun to attach fabric to artist's block or board

Temporary (eg light fade or washable) fabric marker

Make your applique picture:

Fold your piece of natural fabric into four quarters and press lightly with your hand to find the centre point. Transfer the design at the end of this pattern to your natural fabric using whichever method you prefer. This transferred design will act as a guide to help you position your applique shapes.

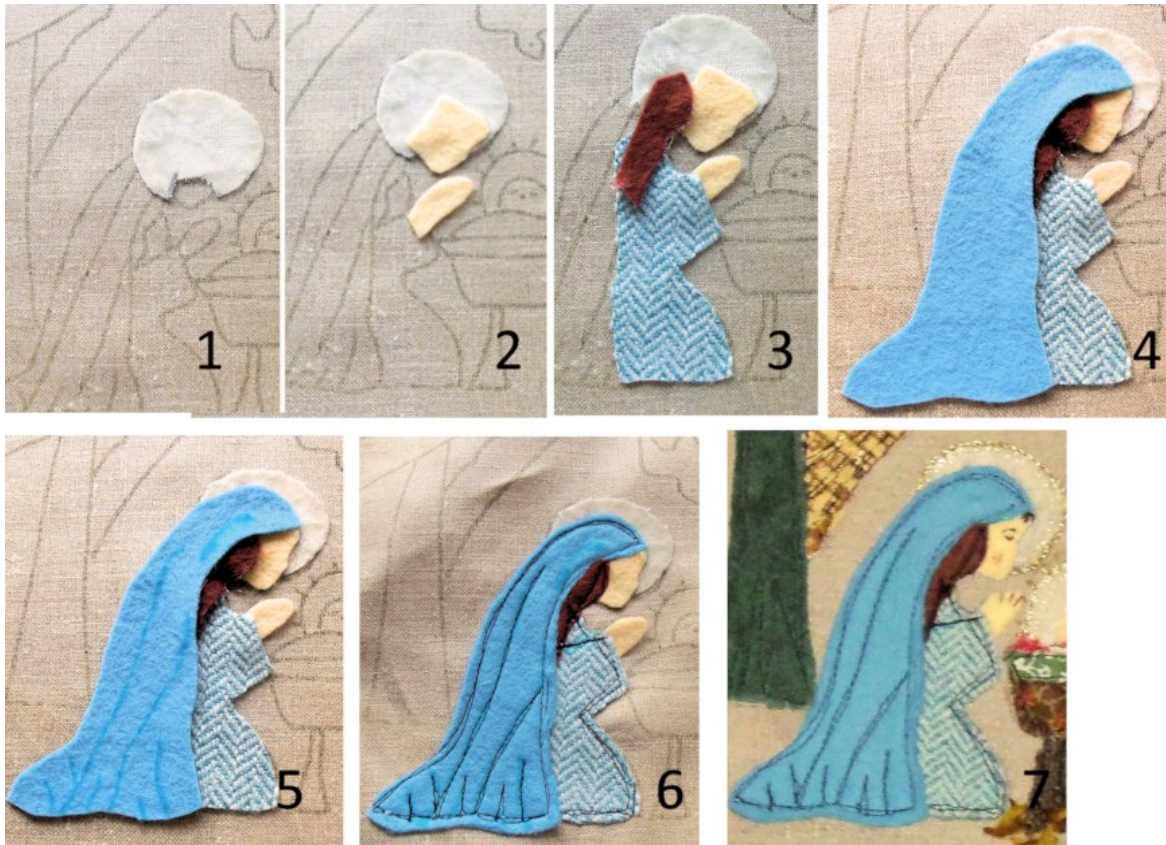
Before you begin, there are a few basic rules:

- Always begin at the “back” of the design and work forwards (eg start with Mary’s halo and finish with her robe – see illustration below)
- Always cut an “underlap” so you don’t have two cut edges butted up against each other – the bottom piece should extend a little way beyond the edge of the piece above.
- Use the largest scissors you feel comfortable with to cut your shapes (I always use dressmaker’s shears) and cut your shape in long smooth motions. This will give you a much nicer, smoother edge.
- Use black or a dark thread in your machine needle, but a much lighter thread in the bobbin. This breaks up the line – using the same colour in both appears much heavier.
- Go around the edges twice, but don’t try to follow exactly the same line, you are aiming for a sort of “scribble” effect.
- You may find it easier to reduce the pressure on your presser foot – or possibly machine with a darning foot or freehand – whichever you prefer.
- I prefer to use spray fabric adhesive for applique as it’s easier to peel off and reposition than Bondaweb if things are going a bit wonky. But again, that’s personal preference.

On the next page you’ll find detailed guidance for Mary, then work Joseph and Jesus in the same way. The stable and dove are easy, just simple shapes with almost no overlap.

Cut out your shapes with an underlap allowance for lower pieces. I recommend just cutting for one element at a time to avoid getting mixed up. Always use non-stretchy fabric and don’t worry about finishing edges, they won’t experience any wear so any fraying will be minimal.

It’s a good idea to print several copies of the picture for cutting out shapes as you may need to cut into other pieces when cutting underlap allowances. The templates are actual size.



1 & 2: Start with Mary's halo then add her face and hand. Notice how I've cut the halo a little larger so her face sits partly on top of it.

3: Then her dress which overlaps her wrist – again cut a little longer so it will “underlap” and her hair.

4: Finally add her robe – now you can see how the design begins to come together. When you're happy with the positioning, secure in place with fabric spray adhesive.

5: Using your temporary fabric marker, mark the fold lines on Mary's robe.

6: Stitch twice around edge of robe, dress and hair. Stitch fold lines and line of her arm.

DO NOT STITCH around her face, hands or halo. Secure these in place using tiny stitches in neutral coloured thread.

Work Joseph, Jesus and the manger in the same way as Mary.

Now take two strands of gold embroidery floss and work around the edge of Mary and Joseph's halos in stem stitch. Work around Jesus' halo in blanket stitch as shown.

Work eyes in a single strand of dark brown floss and Mary's fringe in 2 strands of dark brown floss all in straight stitch. Mark fingers on hands in a single strand of dark brown floss.

Work a couple of small straight stitches in dusky pink for rosy cheeks.

Work criss-cross stitches in wool for straw.



Apply stable pieces and machine around edges. Work zig-zags at the end to represent ends of thatch/pillars.

Apply dove and secure to background fabric with small straight stitches. Work eye in dark brown and beak in yellow floss. Stem stitch around edge of dove in two strands of silver floss.

Attach button for star (or embroider star) and work some long stitches in 2 strands of gold floss to represent rays.

Blot to remove marker lines if necessary, then press on reverse.

Turn under $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1 cm) seam allowance all the way around, press and stitch with natural coloured thread in needle.

Assemble panel:

- Take your rectangle of white fabric and turn under $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1 cm) seam allowance all the way around, press.
- Centre on red gingham fabric and pin or tack in place, then machine to background fabric.
- Apply red ric-rac braid all around the edge with red thread in machine needle.
- Press on reverse.
- Centre on artist's block. Fold excess fabric to back and attach to block at the back with staple gun. Work from the centre of each side outwards and keep your fabric taut but not stretched. Mitre the corners.
- Apply the white part of your velcro dots to the white fabric borders, spacing them evenly. When you're happy with the positioning press down firmly to make sure they're securely attached.

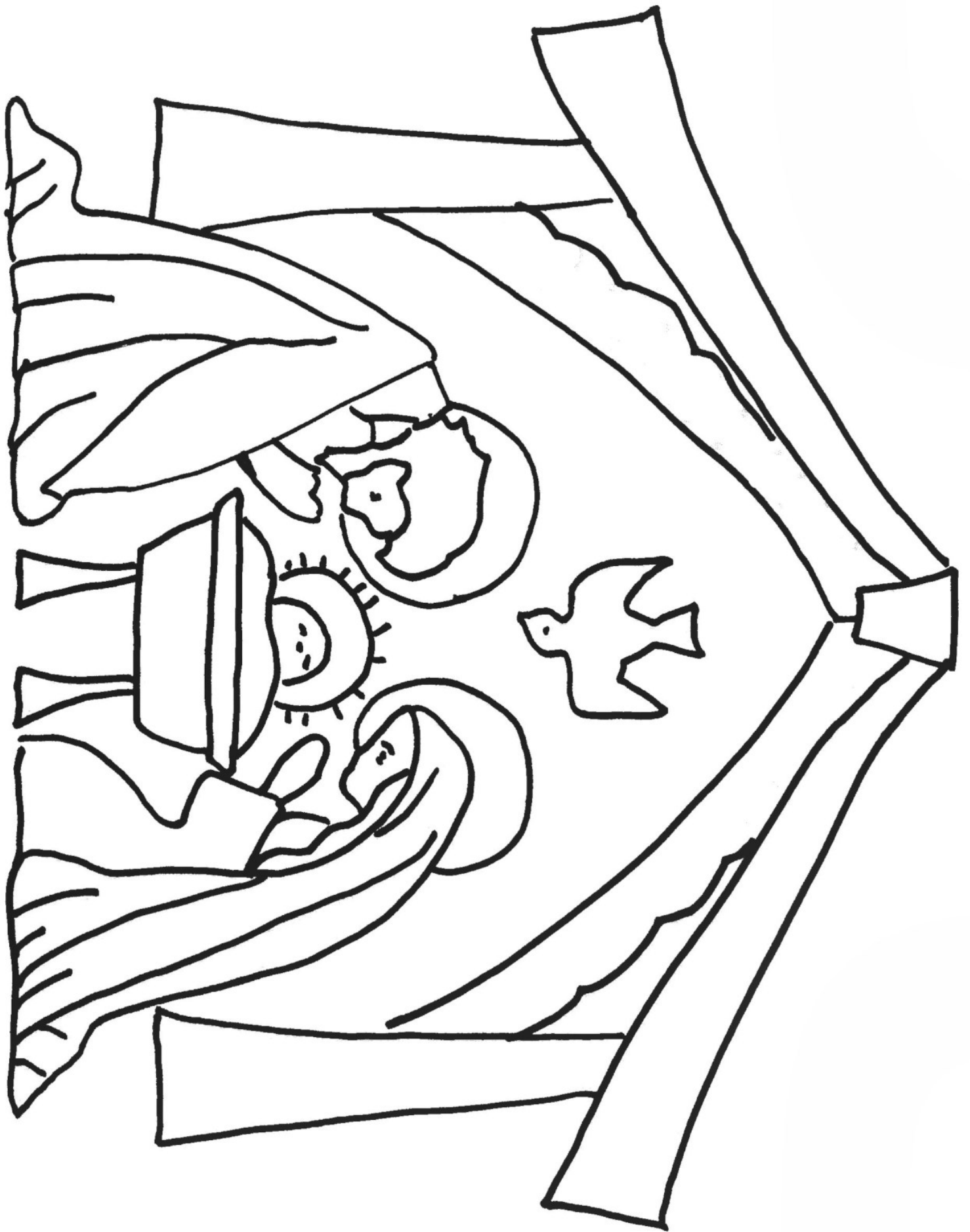


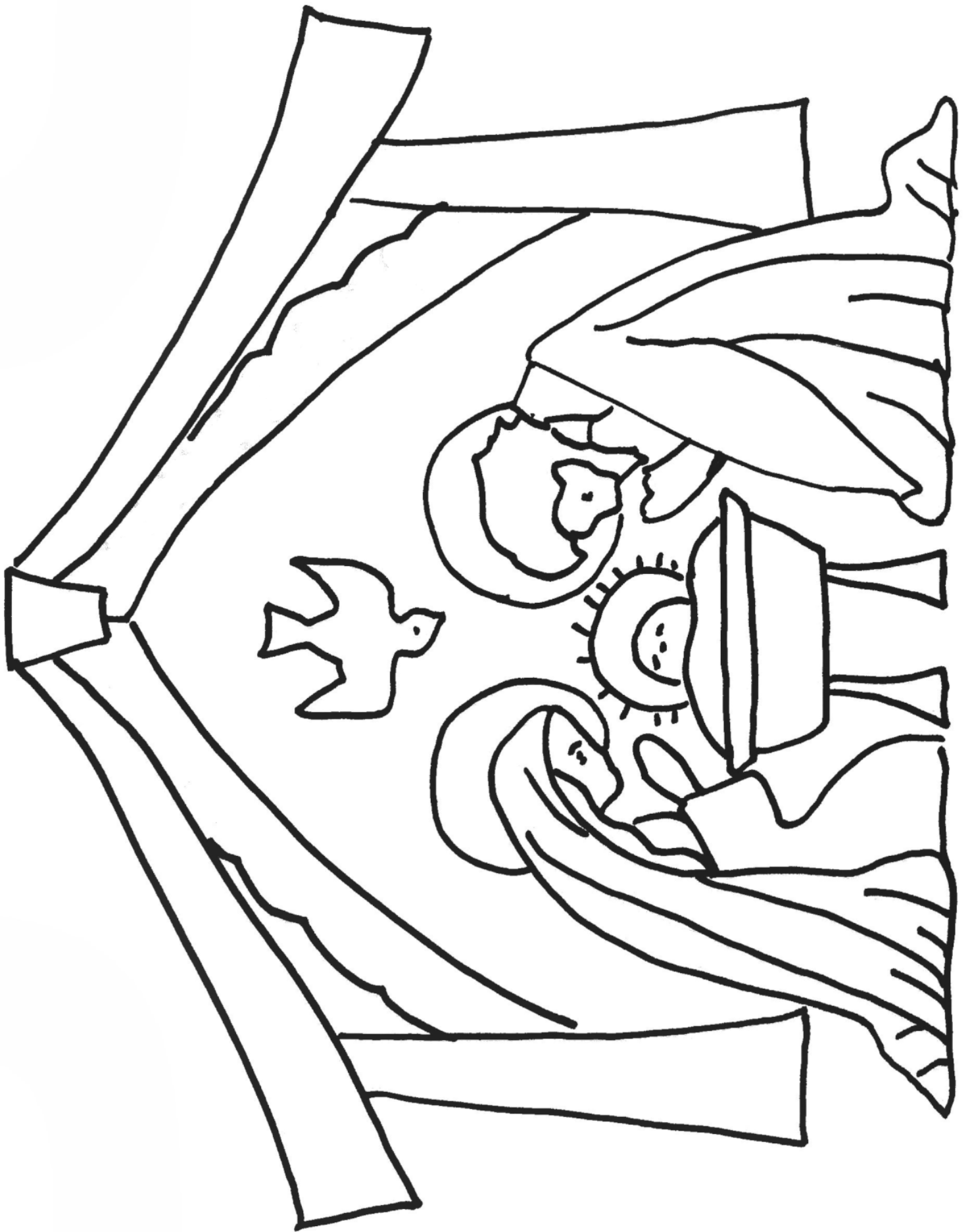
Make date numbers:

- Print numbers at the end of this pattern onto 12" square of fabric. (or embroider/stamp numbers if preferred)
- Make a sandwich of your printed numbers, heavy duty interfacing and backing felt. Join together using fabric adhesive.
- Cut out discs and secure the three layers together around the edges with machine zig-zag stitch.
- Apply one square/dot of Velcro to the back of each disc.

Now they're ready to apply to your calendar throughout December – and you're done!!







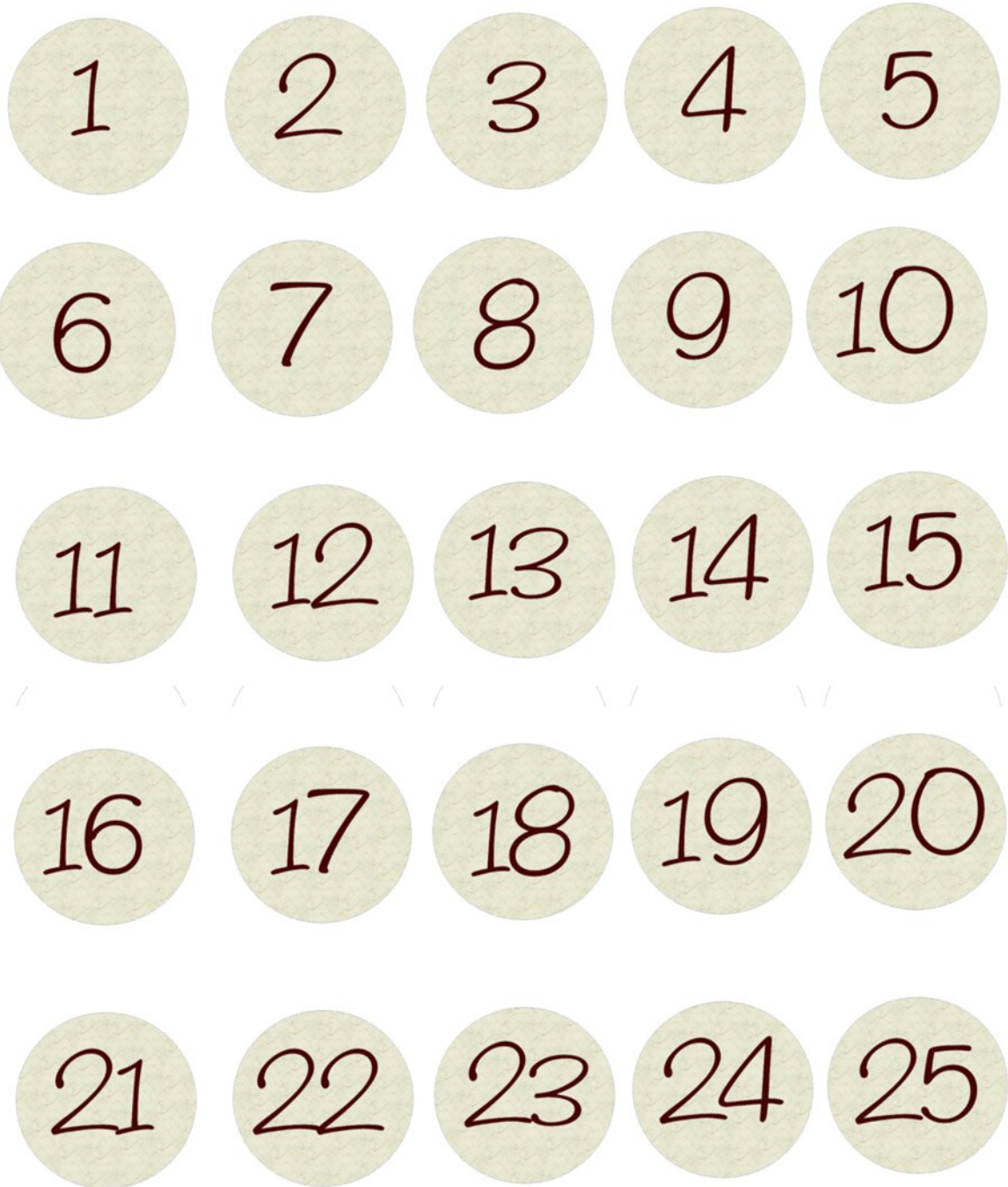
1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 10

11 12 13 14 15

16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25



Yes, there are only 24 days on my calendar, but a recent poll on my blog was split between 24 and 25 days for Advent calendars – so I thought I'd include 25 numbers so you could choose which you preferred!

NOTE: The templates for the picture are actual size.