

Meaning of the Season

The Christmas season is called "Advent" which means "the coming of Christ the Messiah into the world." The official season begins four Sundays before the holiday as believers prepare their hearts for the arrival of the Savior and celebrate the moment when "God with us" became literal reality. We celebrate more than a special baby's birth; we celebrate "Incarnation," which means "God becoming flesh and living among us." (John 1:14)

Meaningful Gift Giving

Three Gifts: This creative approach to gift-giving limits everyone to three gifts, each representing one of the three gifts the Wise Men brought to a baby king.

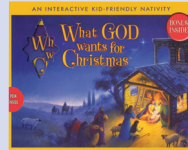
- Gold (a precious metal): The gift that would be most precious—possibly the biggest item or something they've wanted for a long time. Place a Gold bow on red wrapping paper to symbolize the most costly gift God gave when Jesus shed his blood for our sins. Before opening read John 3:16 together.
- Frankincense (a sweet-smelling perfume): This item would be the "sweetest" to them; something that fits their personality, their passions, their interests or hobbies. Many choose a favorite food item for this gift. Wrap it in silver paper, representing the fulfillment of the promised Messiah. Read Isaiah 9:6 together before opening.
- Myrrh (an oil used for many practical purposes, like anointing): This gift is a highly practical item. Although it may not be exciting, some things simply need to be replaced. One year you might give each child new bedding; another years fun pajamas. A sweater, socks, t-shirts, tights and the like can be bundled together in one big box. Wrap this gift in green paper, representing Jesus as the everlasting hope of mankind. Read Titus 2:13 together before opening.

Gifts from the Heart: During the first week of December, call the family together to talk about the meaning of Christmas as you make paper ornaments with construction paper and ribbon. Place them in a basket or gift box. Let the family know that during the rest of the month you will give "gifts from the heart"— gifts that money can't buy, such as Dad getting the newspaper for a sick neighbor or daughter helping little brother pick up his room. Each time you catch someone giving a "gift from the heart," write it on a paper ornament and hang it on the Christmas tree. On Christmas Eve, gather the ornaments and wrap them. Put a label reading: *To-Jesus, Love-* and insert your names. Before unwrapping presents take time to give these "gifts from the heart" to Jesus in celebration of his birthday. Open the gift to Jesus and take time to pull out each ornament and read it aloud. You can have a birthday cake, donut or cupcake with a candle to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus or thank God for giving the best "gift from the heart" on that first Christmas.

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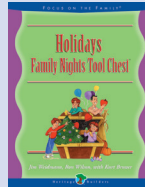
Going Further Resources

Use these recommended resources to become even more intentional this Christmas season.



*What God Wants For Christmas

An interactive nativity set designed to be used the seven days preceding Christmas. Available from familylife.com



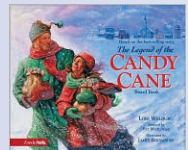
*Holidays Family Nights Tool Chest

Activities for each key holiday throughout the year, including Thanksgiving and Christmas. Available amazon.com



*The Legend of the Christmas Tree

A story of how the first Christmas tree became a symbol of Christ's birth. Available from Kokomo Howard County Library or from amazon.com



*The Legend of the Candy Cane

A story about the symbolism found within the candy cane. Available from Kokomo Howard County Library or from amazon.com



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CHRISTMAS @ Home

A Family Guide to Celebrating the Birth of Christ



Finding Baby Jesus

Gather as a family and read the Christmas story in Luke 2. Go through your nativity set and talk about each piece as described in the Bible, ending with baby Jesus. Let your family know that you want to remember to “find” the true meaning of Christmas during this season, so every day baby Jesus will be hidden somewhere around the house. Each day, the children can search and find Christ to put him in the manger. This reminds us to seek to find Him throughout the season.



Christmas Card Prayers

The Christmas season is filled with wonderful wishes from family and friends. Each time you receive a special Christmas card or annual Christmas letter, take a couple of minutes to talk about the blessing that God has given you in those friends or family. Then, thank the Lord for those individuals and pray for them. Instead of throwing these beautiful pictures and thoughtful cards in the trash, put them in a special box or basket. Place the box/basket near your table. Throughout the year, pick a card as your family prays before a meal and spend some time praying for the family that sent the card.



Jesus is the Christmas Light

Get a strand of lights. Turn out the lights to show the darkness and then plug in the lights to show its glow. In John 8:12, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Read this passage together and briefly discuss ways in which we can follow Christ. Then have everyone get in their pajamas, load up on hot cocoa/apple cider and drive around to look at Christmas lights. Play some traditional Christmas music as you drive and sing Christmas carols together. Notice how beautiful and brightly lit the homes with lights are. Point out the homes that don’t have any lights at all and how dark it is. Have everyone vote on which house with lights was his or her favorite; then pray for the family that lives in that home and pray that those who see that house will remember that Jesus is the light of the world. Before you head home, thank God for sending His Son to shine His light for us.



Tree Decorating Tradition

Turn on Christmas worship music. Decorate the Christmas tree. Take turns putting on the star or topper. Sit and read [The Legend of the Christmas Tree](#). Children ages 4 to 8 will discover the wonderful story of how the evergreen tree first became a symbol of Christmas and a way to tell people about God.



The Greatest Gift— Christmas Family Night

Try this family night activity to help children connect the dots between the birth of baby Jesus and the reason He came.

- Before opening gifts, have the children help you create a large cardboard cross. You can also use wooden boards to nail together if the children are old enough.
- Give each person a stack of index cards and a marker and invite them to write a word or draw a picture that represents something they do wrong that the Bible calls “sin.” Younger children might draw a mean face to represent temper tantrums or the word “NO” to represent disobedience. Ask the oldest child to read allowed Romans 3:23 which says “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Explain that sin means “to disobey God.”)
- Ask the children “How many of us sin according to this verse?” Then have the child read Romans 6:23 which says “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Explain that “wages” means punishment. Then explain that the most important “gift” of Christmas is that Jesus came to pay the “wages” for our sin!)
- Invite each person to tape or nail their index card “sins” to the cross while mom or dad reads John 3:16, which says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
- Now use a big red marker or crayon to write the word “Jesus” across each image and word on your cardboard cross, explaining that God no longer sees our sin — He only sees what Jesus did for us!
- Give thanks to God for the gift of Jesus and memorize Romans 6:23 together.

A Christmas Carol - Movie Night

Everyone loves *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Rent your favorite version of the film for a family movie night discussion with your older children. After watching the film together, discuss key scenes and themes from a Christian perspective. Take turns asking one another the following questions...

- Question: Was Scrooge made in the image of God?
Answer: Yes, but he certainly didn't live like it!
- Question: In what ways did Scrooge show he had a sinful heart?
Answer: He was selfish, stingy, mean, etc. - all of which show the dark side of people.
- Question: After he realized he was wrong, what did Scrooge do?
Answer: He turned away from the wrong toward the right. He repented — and showed it by changing his ways!

Go further by downloading a free discussion guide at movienightchat.com



Legend of the Candy Cane

Share the Christmas message with others. Purchase some candy canes and attach a tag to each with the following text. . .



A Gift for You. . .

I hope you enjoy this candy cane. As you take it in your hand turn it upside down and you will see the “J” that reminds us of Jesus who was born on Christmas day. Turn it back upright and you will see the crook of the Good Shepherd. The stripes are a reminder that He was beaten for us and the red color reminds us that He shed his blood for us on Calvary. The white tells us how He can wash our sins white as snow. As you taste this candy cane, be reminded that fellowship with Christ is ever so sweet.

I am glad you accepted this candy cane gift from me but even more I hope that you have accepted God’s gift of eternal life found only through His son Jesus.

Read the legend on the tag together or get a copy of the book, [The Legend of the Candy Cane](#). Then spend time together tying the tags on individual candy canes using ribbon or string. You can put them in a basket and give one to those that visit your home during the holidays, or take them to neighbors with an invite to attend Christmas Eve service with you at church. You can also use them to bless others at places like the nursing home.

Other “Faith@Home” Christmas Ideas...

- Bake some Christmas cookies, decorate and take to a neighbor or friend with an invite card to the Christmas Eve service at church.
- Have everyone in the family give a gift of time/service to someone else by wrapping it as a gift to give away. This could be a date night for your spouse or helping your child work on a project they have wanted to do together.
- Go shopping in a different kind of catalog this year. Check out programs like Samaritan’s purse (samaritanaspurse.com) for “gifts” your family can request to change someone else’s life.
- Make your own garland using strips of paper. Write or draw the things that you are thankful for on each strip. Staple or tape the strip of paper together to create your garland. Use it to decorate your tree or put over a door as a reminder of God’s many blessings.
- Adopt a struggling family for the Christmas holidays. Try to choose children that are similar ages to your kids. Shop together to find the gift. Pray specifically for their family. Ask about needy families to adopt at the church or through the Angel Tree program sponsored by Prison Fellowship, visit angeltree.org