

Eight Practices for Home and Family during Advent and Christmas

Here are some practices that can become a part of family life and assist in keeping the focus of the season on the birth of the holy baby.

1. Let an Advent wreath serve as the center of your dining table.

This wreath may be as simple as four purple candles and candle holders arranged in a circle surrounded by greenery with a white candle placed in the center. Or it may be an elaborate wreath you have purchased. Regardless of the type of wreath used, let it serve as a reminder of the waiting we do during the season of Advent for Christ's birth. Light one additional candle each week of Advent and read Scripture, share a devotional, tell stories, and pray.

2. Include an Advent calendar as part of your family worship experience.

Take time to gather around a family Advent calendar that contains Scripture and illustrations related to the Advent and Christmas seasons. Many stores sell calendars that contain windows whose numbers correspond to the number of days of Advent, but families can also make their own. Family members may use Scripture verses to make small illustrations that can then be covered with a large piece of poster board. Windows can be cut over each picture; the family members "open" the window and read the Scripture, one each day during Advent.

3. Use a crèche to depict the story of Christ's birth.

Put a crèche, or nativity scene, in a prominent place in your home. If young children are present, be sure it is one that can be played with rather than one that is too fragile or sentimental to be touched. Instead of putting out all of the figures on one day, make their arrival to the stable gradual, demonstrating that the characters did not arrive all at once.

Save and add baby Jesus to the scene on Christmas Eve and keep the Magi out of the scene until Epiphany (January 6). You may also consider inviting each family member to add a piece of hay to the manger for each action in that family member's life that demonstrates God's love. By the time the baby is added to the manger, it should be full of hay.

4. Share stories while decorating for the season.

Find a time when family members can be present to help decorate the Christmas tree or other areas of the home. While unpacking ornaments and decorations, recall aloud the stories about those treasured items. You may also consider purchasing or making a new ornament or decoration that symbolizes the family that year (special vacation, rite of passage, or certain occasion) and adding it to the festivities. Consider making your decorating a gradual process through the season as you practice the discipline of waiting.

5. Decorate and share cookies.

While this time of year is joyous for many, others find it a sad and lonely time. Use your joy to help those who may be less fortunate or may not have family with whom to celebrate. Make and decorate cookies and, as a family, deliver them to these folks. Create festive plates of goodies and include a note from your family about how glad you are that they are members of your family through Christ.





6. Downplay Santa Claus.

By looking at any store window, street corner, or television show, it is clear that eliminating Santa Claus from Christmas is not possible. Instead, consider downplaying the role of the gift-giving Santa in this season. If your family uses stockings and gives gifts from the jolly old elf, fill children's stockings with small gifts (little toys and candy canes) and designate larger gifts from the giver. Children are then able to appreciate and thank the giver while Santa plays only a secondary role.

7. Take turns opening gifts.

The celebration of Christmas mornings in many households is a brief activity as family members rip through gifts and move on to the rest of the day.

If your family opens gifts together, make this time more significant by taking turns. Find a pattern that works for your family, such as youngest to oldest or vice versa, and wait until each person has had

a chance to open one gift before moving on to the next person. Givers are then able to share in the joy of the receiver while the receiver is able to acknowledge and appreciate the giver.

8. Make a birthday cake for Jesus.

As a part of Christmas Day activities, join in baking and/or decorating a birthday cake. Family members of any age are able to participate in such an activity and can be reminded that this day is the Christian celebration of a uniquely special birth.

Then, of course, join in singing to Jesus and enjoy eating the cake as a family.

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