

DISCIPLESHIP | MATTERS

Making Christmas Meaningful

The pressure of the holiday shopping season coupled with numerous special events may make it difficult for families to keep the deep significance of Christmas at the center of their celebrations. Even in the most faithful families, children may perceive more emphasis on Santa Claus than on the Christ child. Consider using an unbreakable crèche set that children can handle. Set up the empty stable. Encourage children to “journey” Mary and Joseph through the house the week before Christmas, and then place them in the stable on Christmas Eve. Then place the baby in the manger, and add the shepherds. Tell the story from scripture or from a good children’s Bible storybook. In the days that follow, the Wise Men can journey through the house to visit the child.

The best time to plan for changes in observing Christmas is just after a family has experienced it. Talk together about what activities enhanced the celebration of the birth of Jesus, and which ones detracted from its significance. Think about how you might extend the meaning of Christmas into the New Year. For example, if children made Christmas cards for a nursing home, for what other occasions during the year might family members make cards, deliver small gifts or visit residents?

— *Martha Bettis Gee is a writer, editor and educator with more than two decades of experience in curriculum development and children’s ministries.*



Incarnation means that all ground is holy ground because God not only made it but walked on it, ate and slept and worked and died on it.

— Frederick Buechner

Santa may not be as harmless a myth as many like to assume. According to psychologists, it can be traumatizing for children to learn that the people they trusted the most in the world have systematically lied to them. Some children then assume that the *other* Christmas personality, Jesus, is also a myth. And children who have meager Christmases can easily internalize being bad girls and boys because they did not receive their requested gifts.



A reproducible children’s Christmas activity sheet for use in church or at home can be downloaded at abhms.org > Publications & Resources > Discipleship Matters.

The holidays can be fraught with family stress—sometimes even more so for families of divorce or blended families. Here are some guidelines for making the season festive and peaceful.

- **Focus on the children**, considering what will work for them while taking care not to put on them the responsibility of pleasing adults.
- **Work out a detailed schedule** with former spouses, in-laws and extended family members to minimize stress for the children as well as yourself.
- **Don’t compete**—for time, best gifts or maintaining former traditions (and set boundaries with family members who want to compete).
- **Create new traditions** that incorporate and celebrate the way your family is now.
- **Avoid whatever does not serve** the purpose of celebrating God’s love and enjoying family and friends.



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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.