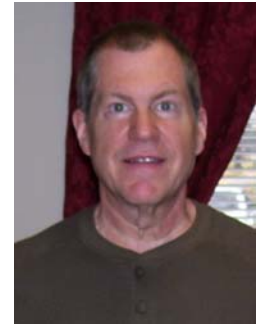




Family Action Ideas



Experiencing God With Us- Or, recapturing Christmas

“It’s the most wonderful time of the year,” or at least that’s what Bing Crosby, Amy Grant, Johnny Mathis and countless other singers would have us think. Well, in a sense it is – across the globe, all of Christendom celebrates the birth of Christ. Or do we? **Have you ever stopped to think about how much time we actually spend contemplating the birth of Immanuel, the Savior promised in scripture as early as Genesis 3:15?** It’s easy for us to become so engrossed in the festivity of the season that the guest of honor has no seat at his own party!

As Christian parents, we certainly want to let our children know that the focal point of the Christmas season is Christ. Our eyes and hearts should be fixed on him. I’ve thought many times about what we can do in our own family to keep our focus on Jesus. Over the years, we’ve done several things to remind our children (and ourselves) that the “getting” aspect of Christmas is far less important than the “giving” aspect – God gave us a savior. If you stop and think about it, that’s really the only thing we need.

But what can the average family do to make the celebration of our Savior’s birth more meaningful? How can we avoid some of the traps our culture sets for us at this time of year? Following are some suggestions, but this list is not exhaustive. You are limited only by your creativity.

- **This Christmas, make a birthday cake for Jesus for dessert** (have the kids help!). Beforehand, take some time as a family and as individuals **and think of “gifts” you can give to the Lord.** For example, you can give a Saturday each month to volunteer at a local mission agency. Children can set a goal of a particular amount of money they can raise to be used for Kingdom work. There are many possibilities. When you eat dessert, talk as a family about these “gifts.”
- **Watch “A Charlie Brown Christmas” together. Then, talk about the true meaning of Christmas** and use a concordance or study Bible to help you **locate Old Testament prophecies that foretell Jesus’ birth.** Beginning two weeks before Christmas, have each child read a verse before dinner. Talk about this with your children enough so they can explain in their own words why Jesus had to come to earth. Read accounts of Christ’s birth from Matthew and Luke.
- **Research the origins of how we celebrate Christmas.** What cultural aspects help mold the Christmas holiday we all know today? Assign older children the task of researching these practices, such as the tree, etc. and sharing what they find with the family. Discuss what is *good* about certain Christmas traditions? What traditions are not particularly God-honoring? How can believers today help make the holiday more Christ-centered?
- **Focus your giving toward people outside your family** – those who are usually not remembered. Find out where missionaries supported by your church live and serve. Learn about these areas and find out if you can send something to help them in their work or to bring joy to their family.
- **Contact Wycliffe and find out how you can send Bibles to people who do not have one.** They have a list of missionaries in various locations who would like Bibles to give to those to whom they minister.
- **Take time during each day of the Advent / Christmas season to read scripture and pray.** Focus on the prophecies about our Savior. Don’t forget that the babe in the manger grew into the One who bore our sins on Calvary. Look at the life of Christ and his sacrifice on the cross.

- **Learn about believers around the world and what their Christmas experience will be this year.** Look for information on those living in Muslim lands, refugees, or war torn areas. They are the body of Christ and we should be aware of what they are encountering. What is our responsibility to them?

Contact someone at your church or local mission organization and see if you can give your time as a family to serve others.

Finally, don't let your giving spirit end on December 26. Search for ways you can give your time to serve others. Make a commitment to give financially to mission organizations. Discover ways you can use your God-given talents to serve Him. Every day of our lives should bear witness to the world that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Resources to get started.

Here are some scripture passages you can read with your family. In each pair, the Old Testament passage provides the prophecy, and the New Testament passages shows how it was fulfilled. There are many more passages like these – search the scriptures and see how many more you can find.

Genesis 3:15, Galatians 4:4

Genesis 12:3, Matthew 1:1

Isaiah 9:7, Luke 1:32-33

Micah 5:2, Luke 2:4-5, 7

Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:26-27, 30-31

Hosea 11:1, Matthew 2:14-15

Isaiah 40:3-5, Luke 3:3-6

Isaiah 35:5-6, Luke 7:22 and Matthew 11:3-5

Isaiah 42:2-3, Matthew 12:18-20

Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 12:18-21

Check out the following websites to find out how you can become involved in spreading God's great news to the world:

www.wycliffe.org (Wycliffe Bible Translators)

www.ywam.org (Youth With A Mission)

www.worldvision.org (World Vision – opportunities to help children and families in under-developed parts of the world)

www.globalprayerdigest.org (a guide for praying for unreached people)

Again, this list is far from exhaustive. You can also search the internet and check out opportunities through your own church or denomination.

Giving Glory to God in the Highest,

The staff at *Mustard Seeds and Mountains* and *Mission As Life*