

Trace Out Your Traditions and Transform Your Holiday

Have you ever practiced a tradition without knowing why or how it started? Does it matter?

One friend celebrates half-birthdays in her family. Another organizes an egg hunt every Easter for the children in her family. Still another friend serves pizza for dinner every Friday night.

The Christmas season overflows with traditions. Every year we sing the same carols. We attend a candlelight service on Christmas eve. Perhaps you open presents Christmas morning. Or maybe your family opens presents the night before. Is Christmas eve dinner traditionally a fish dinner at your house? Maybe your family would be horrified if you didn't make the traditional Christmas ham or your grandmother's apple pie recipe.

But does it matter?

Yesterday, I repeated a tradition I've been practicing with friends for several decades. A family of three children spent the afternoon decorating home-baked gingerbread houses. The first time I did this, 30 years ago, was with a family of four children. Those kids are grown with children of their own. Last year, we started the tradition with a new family.

As I think about the place traditions have in my life, I wonder how many annual Christmas traditions begin with spontaneous joy, only to transform into obligatory chores with each passing year. Does the thought of putting up the tree—again—leave you with dread? Is there a mound of presents in your bedroom that still need wrapping?

Churches have split and new denominations formed because of

disagreement over traditions. Families have divided because individuals hold so tightly to traditions that they're willing to sacrifice relationships. Marriages have ended because spouses place a higher priority on the traditions of their birth family than on beginning fresh traditions in their new family.

As we celebrate the birth of the Son of God who came to save us from our sin, will you take a fresh look at how you celebrate Christmas? Why do you attend a candlelight service? Or exchange presents? Why put up a Christmas tree?

Explain the reasons behind our Christmas traditions to your children and grandchildren. Help them appreciate, not just the how, but the why. Examine your own traditions. Maybe it's time to change things a bit. Eliminate one or two that have lost their meaning, and replace them with traditions that affirm the "reason for the season."

This is the season of joy. Joy to the world for the Savior is born. Joy for the relief that our sins have been paid for in full and our relationship with the Father has been restored. And overflowing joy for those who don't just celebrate the birth of Jesus, they know Him intimately as Savior and Lord.

As for me, I'll continue to bake gingerbread houses and have children we love decorate them. Why? For the joy on their faces—and on mine—and their giggles as they create works of art. For the twinkle in their eyes and the icing stains on their fingers as they craft edible designs. Most of all, for the joyful memories we're creating—memories that may last another 30 years or longer. Joy they will long associate with building houses—and lives—on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

What traditions do you treasure that affirm the meaning of Christmas? {eo}

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This article originally appeared at .