

# Creating Traditions That Point to the Real Reason for the Season

When I was young, I loved Christmas. I looked forward with great anticipation to all the delightful surprises that attended it: special cookies baked at that time of year, ribbon candy, a breathtaking tree, carols on the family record player and, of course, presents. I could hardly wait until Christmas Eve, when I was allowed to open one gift—the one from my grandparents on my mother's side.

In spite of my childish excitement over the trappings, however, I never lost sight of the real reason for the holiday—the birth of Jesus. I believe this was because I was blessed to have parents who, according to Roman Catholic tradition, celebrated the liturgical season of Advent.

Every year, we set aside the four weeks before Christmas as a special time of preparation and rejoicing. Each Sunday during that period we would light candles on an Advent wreath, one candle for the first Sunday, two for the next and so on. Then we would sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” a hymn that expresses the longing of God's people for their Messiah, and say a prayer.

In addition, on the first day of December we put up an Advent calendar that had little numbered doors on it, one for each of the days leading up to Christmas. My siblings and I would take turns opening the doors to reveal characters or scenes related to Jesus' birth. It was a wonderful way to both count down to Christmas and instill in us a sense of expectation about the coming of the Christ child.

We were taught that Advent was a time of waiting, during which we were to prepare ourselves to celebrate Jesus' birth. Just

as the Israelites had to wait while they made themselves ready for the Savior whose coming had long been prophesied to them, we had to wait while we prepared our hearts to receive the promised Son of God.

Of course, we knew that Jesus was not born into the world each year. The waiting was symbolic. But it served to help us focus on the magnificent gift God had given us that first Christmas.

I'm not recommending that you add these traditions to your current celebrations. I am simply pointing out that there is more to Christmas than Santa Claus and sleigh rides, trees and presents. Though the statement has become almost a cliché by now, it nevertheless rings true: *Jesus is the reason for the season*. Let's remind our children—and ourselves—of this fact, and take time to acknowledge Him in the midst of the holiday season.

In whatever activity you undertake, whether it be purchasing or wrapping gifts, decorating your home or attending a party, turn your heart to Him and thank Him for coming to earth to save us. Let Him know that you love Him and ask Him to prepare your heart for a fresh revelation of Himself. Teach your children to seek Him as the Magi once did and to cry out with the saints of old, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!" Build in them an excitement, not for the arrival of a jolly old man in a red suit, but for the advent of the Savior of the world.

In this season, I wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas. May the Lord bless you with an abundance of His love, His grace and His manifest presence. May He grant you the company of all those you hold dear and gift you, above all, with a greater measure of Himself.

### **Prayer Power for the Week of Dec. 3, 2017**

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of Christmas preparations, pray that more and more would stop to contemplate the true meaning of Christmas. Pray that the

Spirit of God would quicken the reality of His great gift, and that the songs, Bible stories and joy of the Lord would penetrate their hearts with the truth that sets them free. Continue to pray for the president and all those working with him to ensure the peace and safety of our nation. Remember the military and their families, and continue to pray for those still suffering from the effects of natural disaster, war, terror and disease. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the safety of those traveling there to worship. Read John 3:16.