

Treasures of the Heart

The

Christmas season is so hectic we can sometimes feel like contest winners who are given 15 minutes to grab \$500 worth of free groceries. But though not every activity we engage in during this special time is a spiritual one, we can learn to treasure the moments of preparation by keeping the right perspective.

First, there's the planning. How am I going to afford it all this year?

This question bounces around inside my head like tennis shoes in a dryer for about a month before the season actually begins. When I'm driving or showering I click out the number of names on my list and how much I can spend on each person, how I can make or bake some gifts to offset the cost of others, which names must go to the top of the list, who will just have to understand, and so on. At some point in my mental calculations, the Holy Spirit breaks through and reminds me that where God guides, He provides.

Then there's the

bake-a-thon. Every evening after work the kitchen fills with a cloud of flour.

Nuts are chopped in one corner of the room, trays are stacked in another, gingerbread boys and sugar cookies are decorated on the kitchen table, and rows

of filled, jellied, balled and candied cookies are cooled and stacked on another counter. They may not be perfect, but I'm comforted by the knowledge that man does not live by bread alone!

Next the tree must be bought and old decorations dragged out of their boxes. My son is delighted to find the special ornament he made in school last year—long since forgotten. He solemnly tells the history and genealogy of each hand-made item. "We got this one when I was very, very young," he—still a young boy—tells his even younger sister. "And I made this one before you were born."

The tree must go up. And no matter how perfectly full and even-branched it looked on the lot, I can't seem to turn it to find the perfect vantage point. Plus, the bottom of the trunk, instead of being straight, appears to be shaped at a right angle to the rest of the tree. Someone is going to need muscle surgery after holding it up until it is finally braced into the stand! But once the tree is in place, I realize my Herculean efforts paid off—the end result is a delight to my children and a perfect symbol of the Trinity.

Before you know it, it's Christmas Eve. I'll send the children on an errand to some corner of the house while I search through packages to find new socks for them to wear to church. Bows

will be tied, faces
washed, shirts buttoned, and belts fastened, and we'll rush
off to church for
the candlelight service.

I'll straighten my daughter's burning candle
over and over, worried that hot wax will drip on her arm. I'll
tell my little
boy to shush a thousand times—until the beauty of the
candlelit church and
singing choir fills us with a silent sense of awe.

But that's not the end
of the preparations. Driving home, I'll worry about putting
toys together.
Instructions become destructions in my hand. It's a good thing
the Master
Carpenter is there to direct me!

I'll reassure my daughter for the
millionth time that Santa will not get burned when he comes
down the chimney.
We'll fill plates with cookies, and the children will argue
over which ones are
Santa's favorites. We'll carefully decide where to place the
notes and cookies
so Santa won't miss them.

After the children have been shooed to bed a
dozen times and warned that Santa won't come if they're awake,
after the last
bows have been fastened to the packages, when the whole house
sparkles with the
aura of candlelight and shiny wrapping paper—I'll rest.

I'll stare into
the glowing embers of a dying fire and recall the sweet scenes
of the previous
weeks, the treasures of my heart: my daughter's hair filled
with flour and her
tongue hanging out of the corner of her mouth as she
vigorously rolls cookie
dough with her toy roller pin; my son's eagerness to give me
the gift he made at
school; the excited squeals when we lit up the tree; the
children wrapping tiny
gifts they bought with pounds of paper and tons of tape.

And in those
moments of reflection, I'll think about the reason we did all
the planning and
shopping and baking and decorating in the first place. I'll
think about the most
important treasure of my heart—Jesus—and I'll thank God for
Christmas.

This year, don't let all the demands of the holiday season get
you down. Try to treasure each memory you're making, and in
the midst of your
busyness, take time to reflect on the greatest treasure of
all—Jesus, the Savior
and Redeemer of the world.