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Christmas
Traditions
Strengthen
Family Ties

CONTENTS

How Do You Feel About Christmas?.....	3
How Can Christmas Strengthen Family Life?.....	4
What Are Some Traditions Which Strengthen Family Ties?.....	5
What is the True Value of Christmas Gifts?.....	6
How Does the Family Plan for Christmas?.....	8
What Do You Really Want for Christmas?.....	9
Christmas Worship Service.....	10
Let's Make Christmas Christian.....	11



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HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT CHRISTMAS?

As the Christmas season approaches, we can sense a changed attitude in people. The three most often expressed wishes—"Merry Christmas", "Happy Christmas", "Joyous Christmas"—seem to fill the world with a sort of kindness and happiness, but we realize there are as many attitudes toward Christmas as there are people! If you answer automatically to any one of the three Christmas wishes, "Same to you", you don't have to stop and think very deeply about it. The way a person feels about Christmas tells a great deal about that person! How do you feel about Christmas?

Some people say "Christmas is really for children." The matchless story of the babe in a manger, the angels' song, the shepherds, the Wise Men—holds a natural appeal for a child. Often we who have gone further on life's journey turn to a child's faith and wonder to keep the Christmas spirit alive in our own hearts. But, Christmas isn't *just* for children—it is for everyone. It is a special time to help us renew our faith.

Of course there are many people who would just as soon skip the whole season! They go through all the motions, but it's a chore to them. The mad rush exhausts many a seller and buyer. They complain so much that there is no joyous or happy spirit apparent. For others, the season brings to the surface old memories, and they wish they could get away from the happiness and joy that only make their personal grief and sadness more poignant. For some, this happiest of seasons emphasizes their despair, their failures, their weaknesses—and temptations to "take some other way out" overwhelm them. Alcoholism and suicide rates rise markedly during the holidays.

This season *could* be a time of renewing family ties. A family Christmas gives one a feeling of belonging, of being loved, of the worthwhileness of life.



HOW CAN CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS STRENGTHEN FAMILY LIFE?

Because Christmas is the birthday of the Christ Child, it holds a special meaning for the family. Christmas started with a baby in a manger--the Christ of History--but Christmas is kept alive when the Christ of History becomes for each person, the Christ of Experience. As families try to keep Christmas, they are reminding the world that Christ is a part of their lives today--not just a fact of history. As they offer their gifts of faith, hope and love, they are putting into practice this thought--

*"Not only at Christmas,
But all the year through
The joy you give to others
Is the joy that comes to you.*

*The road to Bethlehem runs right
through
The homes of folks like me and you!"*

Christian parents are becoming increasingly concerned over the need for making faith a family affair--of living day by day the religion they profess. Family traditions at Christmas time may include the tree, Santa Claus, gifts, cards, the big family dinner--but Christmas offers a rare opportunity to emphasize the spiritual more than the material values of the holiday season. Someone has said that Christmas can be a "hollowday" if we do not place emphasis on the true meaning of the season rather than on the festive holiday.



WHAT ARE SOME TRADITIONS WHICH STRENGTHEN FAMILY TIES?

Of course the time-honored tradition for the family inspiration is quite simply that of attending church together. If one's church has a special Christmas service, family attendance cannot be replaced by any other experience. Next best, and in addition, is a simple worship service at home, a tradition more and more families are establishing, and one which can mean a great deal to every member of the family from the baby to the elderly shut-ins.

There are beautiful Christmas devotionals for the family; there are Christmas carols that carry a message all their own; there are the wonderful stories of the first Christmas in Matthew and Luke. Families have various plans for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, but when a special worship service becomes part of the Christmas tradition, the family has put first things first, and strengthened its ties.

One family starts twelve days before Christmas, reading a verse or two of the Nativity story each day, and letting a child add a figure to the manger scene which they always place under the Christmas tree. The figure of Mary is placed first,



then Joseph, then the Baby, the animals, the shepherds, and the Wise Men are all added until the scene is complete.

While the Bible story will always come first, the Christmas carols become a part of the family's traditional celebration of Christmas. Many families enjoy gathering around the piano; others sing without accompaniment; and others have recordings of the carols to which they can listen. In addition to the Matthew and Luke accounts of the Nativity, there are Christmas classics that families always read during the season—Dicken's "Christmas Carol," and Van Dyke's "The Other Wise Man," have become a part of the Christmas celebration in many homes. There is something intangible but very valuable added when a member of the family reads a well-loved story, but if that isn't possible, there are masterful recordings to which we can listen.

"Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer" is familiar to most of us, but we wouldn't want to miss the thrill of the "Hallelujah Chorus", so the family, in this era of the T. V. and radio, has an opportunity to add to its traditions—not to do away with them.



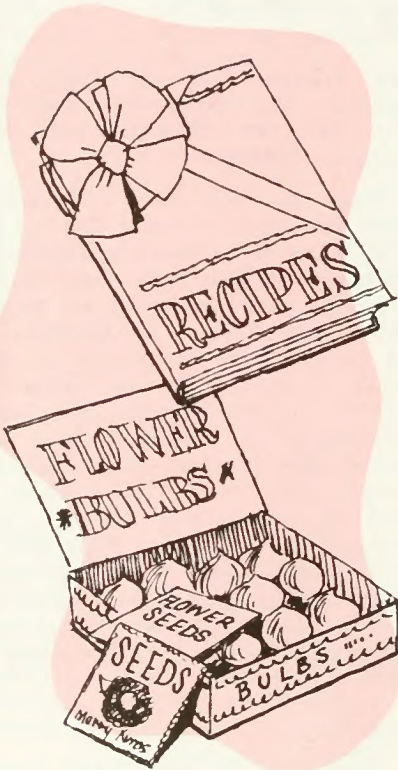
WHAT IS THE TRUE VALUE OF CHRISTMAS GIFTS?

Christmas gifts can be a burden or a lot of fun. More and more families are making their gifts. Sometimes this is to help the budget—sometimes not—but the resulting joy of creative activity and the feeling of togetherness that comes from doing things as a group, are a very definite

reward. One family made its own Christmas cards, and each person who received one of the cards appreciated the trouble and time and thought that had been spent to send that greeting. Other families enjoy making tree ornaments, decorations for the table, for the mantle and for the windows. It's fun for members of the family to get the tree as part of a family outing, whether they go to the woods and cut it down or have to select and buy it. The pleasure of working together is the main idea.

Here are four excellent ideas for gifts that cost "only time".

1. Copies of favorite recipes, including variations and short cuts, can be made into small scrap-books, tied into small packages of file cards, or placed on the back of Christmas cards.
2. Prized seed and bulbs, carefully selected and saved, make ideal gifts for a flower-loving friend or relative. Seed packets can be made from old Christmas cards and colored gummed tape, and carefully labelled. Bulbs can be carefully packed in small cookie boxes or old egg cartons, covered with gay wrapping paper. Instructions as to necessary planning precautions can be enclosed.
3. For "career women" who haven't time to make cakes, pies or hot rolls, one woman sent this verse wrapped in a small box with the fanciest of wrappings.



"I know how hard it is to cook and scrub and bake,
To sew and iron and sweep and have the bed to make
Knowing this first hand, my friend, my gift to you this year
Is to share my leisure time to lift your morale my dear!
So on every Wednesday that's the fourth one down the line
You can expect some sweetness from this ol' oven o' mine.
Merry Christmas the year through!"

4. One group of gifts can be certificates of service.

Boby Sitting Coupon

Good for one evening of baby sitting.

To.....

Date.....

Meol Ticket

A week's meals for.....

while his wife is away.....

Home Permanent Coupon

You get the solution, I'll wind the
curls! You can set the date.

HOW DOES THE FAMILY PLAN FOR CHRISTMAS?

Of course the secret of a successful family Christmas is to make plans *together*, and far enough ahead of time to avoid the last minute rush and hurry.

With adolescents, things must be done *with*, and not *for* them! It is necessary to use skill and a deliberate casualness as plans are made for the family group. No one person--mother, father, young person--should do all the planning for the family, but each person should have a share in discussing the giving of gifts and

the social activities of the holidays. This results in a "togetherness" which strengthens family ties. Pre-Christmas planning--long weeks of talking over plans, working on projects--adds to the joy of family living. Many parents find that a pre-Christmas outing with each child separately--a shopping expedition, secrets shared--is a Christmas tradition that means a great deal all through the years, and imparts the true spirit of sharing oneself without stint.



WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT FOR CHRISTMAS?

If the anticipation of Christmas worries you, aren't you missing the real point of this happy season? Stop right now and ask yourself, "What do I want for Christmas?"

1. *I want this Christmas to be different.*

I will not get so rushed doing outside things that I haven't time for my home and children. I know that my disposition sets the climate for my home, and if I am short-tempered, tired, impatient, my family will not have a happy holiday. I want to stay serene and happy this Christmas.

1. *I want to feel the true Christmas spirit.*

My gift list will represent giving myself, rather than just "paying back" someone who remembers me

with a gift! This will mean that I can enjoy giving Christmas gifts instead of thinking of them as a duty and a burden.

3. *I want time.*

Someone has said that each person "spends" his allotted time by doing the things that seem most urgent to him. I am going to enjoy this Christmas season for weeks ahead--and long afterward--by filling each minute with tasks that help me share myself with those I love.

4. *I want to "recharge" the batteries of my faith.*

I will keep Christ as the main figure in this celebration of His birthday, and renew my faith, courage, and hope for the year ahead.



SUGGESTED BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS READING

The Gospel of Matthew – Chapter 2:1–12

The Gospel of Luke – Chapter 2:8–20

A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens

A Birds' Christmas Carol, by Kate Douglas Wiggin

The Other Wise Man, by Henry Van Dyke

The Gift of the Magi, by O'Henry

Christmas Everywhere, by Phillips Brooks

The Christmas Book of Legends and Stories, by Smith and Hazeltine

Yule-tide in Many Lands, by Mary L. Pringle

The Night Before Christmas, by Clement C. Moore

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICE

(The church of your choice will have Family Worship Services available for you to use.)

On Christmas Eve you may want to use this Christmas Light service, adapted from a service by Catherine Marshall.

LEADER: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."—Isaiah 9:2.

(As one of the children lights the candles, he can say:)

"Dear God, 'twas Thou didst light the stars;
Like candles in the night,
And Thou didst send Lord Jesus down
To give the whole world light."

(Lou Lillian Piper – from 'The Hymnal for Boys and Girls')

MOTHER reads Luke 2: 8–20.

THE FAMILY sings a favorite Christmas carol, perhaps "Silent Night."

FATHER reads Matthew 2: 1–12.

As another child turns on the lights of the Christmas tree, the LEADER reads this prayer of Peter Marshall:

"As we light this tree, may it remind us of the Light that came into the world – the Light which the world could not master or ever put out – the Light that shone in the face and in the spirit of Jesus Christ, Whose birth we celebrate.

"May the spirit of Christmas that softens our hearts and kindles our love, linger with us throughout the year.

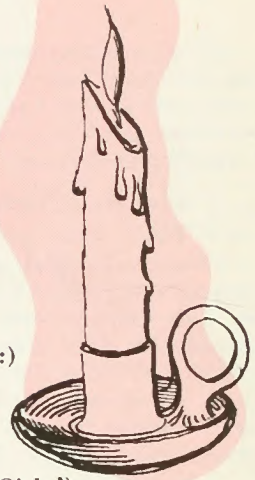
"As the spell, the beauty and the mystery of this holy season steal into our hearts and our homes, may they remind us of the angels' song and the message they sang, the message our torn and troubled world needs so much.

"Because of His great love for all men, may we be given grace to love Him more, that we might learn how to love one another.

"So may our hearts and minds express, this Christmas, a spirit that will please and honor Him, and make the angels rejoice that men have not forgotten the song they sang, nor human hearts surrendered the hope they brought.

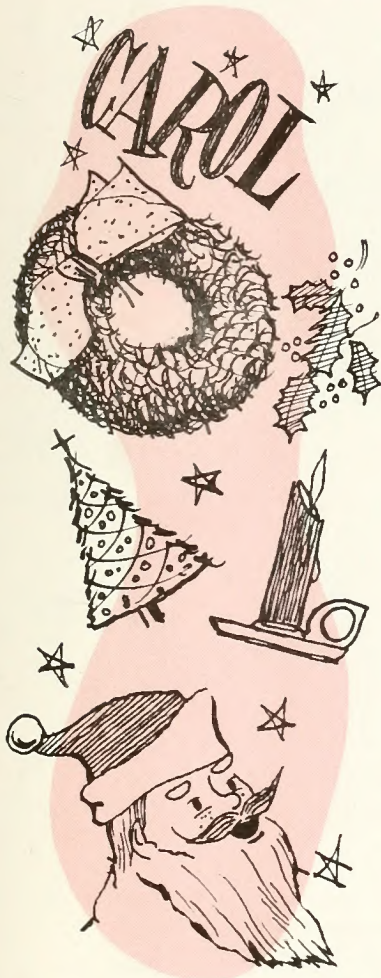
"May the wise men of the West be willing to follow the wise men of the East, in coming to Him Who is the Prince of Peace, that being in right relations with God, each of us may then establish right relations with our fellow men.

"God bless us every one, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."



LET'S MAKE CHRISTMAS CHRISTIAN

We have mixed materialism with the mercy of God in such a way that the real meaning of the Christmas customs and symbols have been lost to most of us.



Take the word, CAROL. A carol is a song inspired by joy. "Noel" we sing! This means news, the good news of the birth of Christ. Christmas carols are the songs celebrating the good news--the gospel--to mankind.

The gay WREATH we hang on the door or in the window at Christmas time tells of the love of God. As the wreath has no beginning--no ending--so the love of God goes on endlessly.

Christmas HOLLY reminds us of the crown of thorns Christ wore--with the red berries a symbol of drops of blood.

The very Christmas TREE--the evergreen is symbolic of the love of God that is ever fresh and vital. The star at its top recalls the Star in the East that appeared on that first Christmas night.

The Christmas CANDLE tells us of the Christmas Christ who is the light of the world. As a candle burns it gives light, and at the same time it is giving itself.

Even SANTA CLAUS is a symbol of the good will, the kindness, the generosity that are typical of this happy season. Santa Claus is our name for good Saint Nicholas who lived in Asia Minor 300 years before Christ was born. He was so kind to little children that we associate him with the spirit of Christmas giving.



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