



# Season's greetings

WELCOMING CHRIST  
THROUGH THE TRADITIONS  
OF CHRISTMAS

Stephenie Hovland

## A Note to Families

*Season's Greetings: Welcoming Christ Through the Traditions of Christmas* encourages reflection on Christmas traditions your family already enjoys (or may plan to enjoy for the first time this year). If you've never done devotions before or aren't consistent, this is a good place to start. You can use as many of the topics as you like, in any order, whenever it works for your family.

So, let's get started. Choose a topic from the *Table of Contents* on the facing page, read through the Bible verse and following paragraphs aloud and then see which discussions and activities suit your family. The prayers are just meant to get you started. Read them aloud and see where the Lord leads you.

I pray your family enjoys this holiday season and grows together through your shared traditions and God's Word.

*Stephenie Howland*



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# Holiday Housekeeping

*A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* **ISAIAH 40:3**

Quick! Grandma's coming! Clean! Last-minute cleaning before guests arrive can be very stressful.

Holiday cleaning feels a bit different. We put away regular clutter to make room for Christmas clutter—I mean, decorations. We don't scramble to "fake clean" (like when you throw anything and everything in a closet, hoping nobody will open it). Instead we prepare our homes to take on a different feel, a celebration.

We decorate in ways that are meaningful to how we view Christmas. The religious reverence of one family may look different than the fun, snowy Santas of another. We seek to set a mood.

We also want the house to feel welcoming to others. We want to bring them into our sense of Christmas.

Did you realize that these days before Christmas are also the perfect time to prepare your heart? In Advent, we think about what it was like for people in the Bible to wait for the Messiah for so many years. Like John the Baptist, we search ourselves for an attitude of repentance—turning away from our selfish, sinful nature in order to be ready for the Baby Jesus.

This is the time to prepare our hearts and our homes for the Savior.

## **FAMILY DISCUSSION**

What are your favorite things to do to get things ready for Christmas? What are your least favorite?

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## **FAMILY ACTIVITY**

Plan a family cleaning or decorating session. Everyone works together for a set period of time to get the house ready for Christmas.

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## **PRAYER STARTER**

*Holy Spirit, help us get our hearts ready for Christmas. There is something inside each of us that needs to be cleaned up. Hear us as we silently pray to you to clean those things from our hearts ...*

## Light One Candle

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* **JOHN 3:16**

An Advent wreath is a ring that can be made out of branches, metal, or other materials. It lies flat on a table and holds candles. They can be found in some churches and in some Christian homes. The circle shape helps remind us of God's love that never ends. The candles are lit with each week of Advent, one candle the first week, two the next, and so on until the fourth week when all four candles are lit at the same time. Some Advent wreaths have a fifth candle, the Christ Candle, to light on Christmas Day.

When you light the candles, focus on different thoughts that help prepare your heart for Christmas. Think about the hope we have for a Savior—the peace, joy, and love he brings to our homes and hearts. Read the prophecies in the Old Testament, the promises that God would send the Messiah. Notice the light of the candle and know that the Light of the World is Jesus. And, just like the shepherds told their village about Jesus' birth, we can also share that joy with the people we know.



### **FAMILY DISCUSSION**

Do you have any traditions, like the Advent wreath, that keep you focused on God during this season?

### **FAMILY ACTIVITY**

If you don't have an Advent wreath, find a candle to light during the devotions in this book.

### **PRAYER STARTER**

*Dear God, help us to stay focused on you during Advent and Christmas, especially when ...*

## The Gift Exchange

*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 CORINTHIANS 9:7*

Secret Santas and secret angels are fun ways to give others gifts. No matter what you call it, the idea is the same. A group of people exchange names so that each person has another person's name, but nobody else knows. They agree on a few things, like how often to give little gifts, when to meet again to give bigger gifts, and how much to spend. While it is fun to give others presents, it's even more fun



when you try to keep it a secret. You might sneak into someone's office and leave some chocolate on her desk and sign it "your secret angel." Someone else could send you something in the

mail, with only a note from your secret Santa. Then, on the appointed day, you all get together and get to reveal who had whose names. It's great fun to get unexpected gifts at unexpected times.

God loves a cheerful giver. Wouldn't it be nice if we always had the enjoyment we do when we get to be a secret giver at Christmas? We can keep that joy all year long as we secretly put away the dishes or sneak a thank-you note to Mom and Dad. Even not-so-secret hugs and smiles can be unexpected and appreciated.

### **FAMILY DISCUSSION**

If you were to do a secret angel/Santa activity with your family, what kinds of things would you enjoy getting?

### **FAMILY ACTIVITY**

You could do a secret angel/Santa program in an organized way, but you can also just look for opportunities to leave little gifts and notes for one another for the rest of this week.

### **PRAYER STARTER**

*God, you give us your love even when we don't expect it or deserve it. Help us share that love with others. Please help us show love this week when ...*

## The Mailing List

*I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers.*

### **PHILEMON 1:4**

Some families make homemade cards, lovingly crafting them with stamps, stickers, and special paper. Others send pre-printed photo cards. Still others write a rhyming tome of their family's escapades.

Are you one of those people who hasn't sent a card in a long, long time? Me either!

Guess what? There's hope for people like us. We can still remember our family and friends. How?

- Pray for them whenever they pop into your mind.
- Share pleasant memories with your family as you think of Christmases past.
- If you do send cards, pray over each one as you send it.
- Choose a different time of the year to send cards. Maybe Epiphany or Valentine's Day will work better.
- Forgive yourself. For all the projects that never happened, give yourself grace.

How does your family connect with others during Advent and Christmas? Do you ever suffer from envy and jealousy when you receive cards and photos from others? Remember, this is not a time of vanity, but a time to prepare for the ultimate gift, the Christ Child. Mary and Joseph had a humble Christmas that year. They focused on the baby. Your family can too!

### **FAMILY DISCUSSION**

Share memories of the friends and family from whom you've already received Christmas greetings

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### **FAMILY ACTIVITY**

As you receive cards, pray for each person who sends one to you. If you're super busy, save this for January. Pull out one card and bring it to dinner. Pass it around and share good memories, then pray for that family together.

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### **PRAYER STARTER**

*Dear Jesus, help us remember to pray for our friends and family, like ...*

## **Christmas really is the most wonderful time of the year!**

From making Grandma's famous cookies to knitting scarves to watching the Sunday school pageant at church, we all have our favorite Christmas traditions.

This booklet walks alongside your family as you drive around looking at the neighborhood light displays or sit at home drinking cocoa. Let's read about the inspiration of Christmas worship and the struggle of too many things to do. Gather together as a family to spend a few minutes each day reading a Bible verse, listening to a short devotion, then discussing and praying about it. Optional family activities are included on each page.

Be encouraged as you continue to welcome Christ through your family's Christmas traditions.



This book, along with many other *Creative Communications for the Parish* products, is available on [amazonkindle](#) and [nook](#).

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