

# Just Add JESUS

**Reflection, Remembrance  
(and Recipes!)  
for Holiday Gatherings**



# Introduction

Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.

**JOHN 2:10 (NIV)**

Christmas is, at its heart, a season of gathering. It's a time to get together with friends and family to celebrate, to rejoice, to party.

As a result, we often bring out the *best* for the occasion. We don our nicest clothes for Christmas services. We serve our most delicious dishes on the antique china with the fanciest cutlery that's been in the family for generations. We purchase expensive gifts to show our loved ones how beloved they are.

During the wedding at Cana, Jesus also brings out the best: a miracle. When all the original wine had been drunk, Jesus transforms water into a fine wine at the request of his mother (John 2:3-9, NIV). Importantly, it's not the cheap, bottom-of-the-barrel swill but the high-end, top-shelf wine, a *divine vintage* reserved for special events—in this case, Jesus' first miracle, which kicks off his public ministry.

When Jesus is added to the occasion, it becomes miraculous. Jesus brings out the best at Cana because he *is the best*. As the Son of God, his birth on Christmas is among the holiest of occasions.

The long-promised and awaited Savior, he *is God's finest*, the greatest of gifts and blessings to show how *beloved we are*.

So send out the invitations! Reach for *the good stuff*! *Just add Jesus!* In the following reflections, recipes, activities and discussion questions, you and your family will discover we have much to gather around and celebrate.

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# Highly Favored

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**GENESIS 1:31**

There's a thick folder full of recipes stored high in my pantry that comes out just this time of year. It is filled with dozens and dozens of dog-eared sheets, some photocopied, some torn from magazines or cookbooks, some (the most cherished) written by hand. These are the "highly favored" treats and treasured meals that my family prepares only during the holidays. I feel as much joy reading through them as I do preparing and sharing them.

The first chapter of Genesis reads a lot like a recipe: a metered and measured (it's listed in numbered steps!) guide to bringing God's artisanal creation to life.

Like a baker preheating the oven to 375°, "Let there be light," God says, all while taking care to separate the wet and dry ingredients. Even amounts of sun and moon are added to the mix, and a sprinkling of stars is tossed in for accent. Each step is given its proper time, and each ingredient is considered a "must-have," from vegetation to livestock, right down to the last beloved bit, you and me. And when it was done, God takes time to enjoy what was made, savoring it. "Very good," God says.

Take time this season to enjoy all of *your* family's favored foods and festivities. As you do, remember that you too are highly favored.

Created from scratch and lovingly prepared by God to be shared into his world.

## Reflection Questions/Activity

- As a group, go through your favorite holiday recipes together. Which ones are the highly favored “must-haves” each year?
- Talk about where each individual recipe came from. How did each morsel or meal become a tradition in your household?
- Are any of the recipes you use handwritten? Is there a story behind that?
- Use the space below to write, by hand, one of those most treasured recipes. When you are done using this book, tear out the recipe and share it with someone.



## Messed-Up Recipe

I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

**GENESIS 3:15**

One time, I burned the popcorn in the microwave—popcorn meant to be eaten by friends and family for a Christmas movie night gathering. You could smell the burning kernels all throughout the house. There was no denying that I had done something wrong.

That burnt popcorn makes me think of Genesis. When God put the recipe of creation together, it was perfect. But then humans got involved, and they burned the popcorn, so to speak. They sinned by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had forbidden them to eat. Things went wrong with the recipe for creation, and there was no denying it. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden to live in a broken creation.

But God has a fix for the messed-up recipe. He has a secret ingredient—Jesus. Jesus is born at Christmas to redeem the recipe of creation and make it perfect again through his life, death and resurrection. The stink of our past mistakes has been taken away because of him. We can now taste and see that the Lord is good and know that the glory of heaven awaits.



## Popcorn Balls

Add these special ingredients to popcorn to make festive popcorn balls for Christmas. (Remember, if you mess up making these, you will be forgiven!)

### Ingredients

- 5 quarts plain popped popcorn
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup light corn syrup
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup butter or margarine
- 2 teaspoons cold water
- $2\frac{5}{8}$  cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 cup marshmallows
- cooking spray

### Directions

1. Place popped popcorn into a large bowl.
2. Combine corn syrup, butter, water, confectioners' sugar and marshmallows in a saucepan over medium heat. Heat and stir until the marshmallows have melted and the mixture comes to a boil.
3. Carefully pour the hot marshmallow mixture over the popcorn, and toss together to coat each kernel evenly.
4. Grease hands with cooking spray, and quickly shape the coated popcorn into balls before it cools too much to shape.
5. Wrap balls with cellophane or plastic wrap, and store at room temperature.

### Idea for the Season

Consider stringing popcorn kernels together and wrapping them like a hug around your Christmas tree as a reminder that Jesus loves you and forgives you even when you mess up.





## Preparing a Place

So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.”

**LUKE 22:8**

Let’s start with something perhaps *too obvious*: Food tastes *good*. Well, *duh?!* Who would disagree with that trite statement? We all like our sweet and savory morsels this time of year, indulging in a veritable marathon of cookies and candies, hams and yams for our stomachs. But what good is delicious food without good company?

It’s important to not confuse flavor with friends and family. Every year, someone cooks, cleans, coordinates and decorates to make his or her home hospitable and cozy to the beloved guests that come over. These people selflessly have to prepare a place so all can gather and enjoy the festivities together.

This prerequisite to party was also true in Jesus’ time. He sends Peter and John to secure accommodations for a meal so that he and his disciples can celebrate Passover: God’s deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt.

The disciples’ sacrifice of time and effort isn’t anything Jesus wouldn’t do himself—as the events of the following days would overwhelmingly prove. He had told them as much (see John 14:2-3).

Jesus’ selfless “prepar[ing] a place” (John 14:2) on our behalf, which all began most humbly in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, is why we toil to gather, eat and be merry today.






## Reflection/Discussion Questions

- Where do you gather? Who makes the plans?
- Who does what when preparing for these gatherings? What are some ways family members can better show appreciation for one another during the preparation for Christmas throughout Advent?
- What are some of the fondest memories you have as a family at Christmas or other holiday gatherings? What made those times so memorable and enjoyable?





As we enter into the season for gathering, it is good for us to savor the many moments we have together and to remember that Jesus makes each gathering special. The happy memories, classic food traditions and treasured heirloom recipes shared in this booklet help to celebrate a Savior and a Friend who always has a place at the table each time we meet and eat in his holy name for the holidays.

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