

Keeping Christ in Christmas

Greetings!

If you've noticed that the Christmas season comes earlier each year, you are not alone. Before the Halloween candy is off the shelves at local stores, the green and red decorations are up, the holiday sales are being announced, and the path to December 25th is laid bare. How do we keep Christ in Christmas when for months every aspect of the secular celebration of Christmas is fighting for our attention and that of our families?

A powerful first step in keeping Christ in Christmas is to take the time to observe Advent. In these weeks, the days get darker, and we journey to the birth of Christ, the Light of the World. We can light an Advent wreath, use an Advent calendar, or create a Jesse Tree.

Make Christmas about giving, not getting.

At the start of Advent, read the story of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2:1–14 and Matthew 1:18–2:12. Then, set up your Christmas crèche early. Place it in a prominent place, and add the figures as they emerge in the story of Jesus' birth. At the start, the stable is empty except for the figures of the ox and the cow. Mary and Joseph arrive next, and then the baby Jesus. Next, the shepherds and their flocks arrive. Let the Wise Men travel around the house from the very start. Make it a game to see where they are in their journey. Maybe today they are on a windowsill, tomorrow on the top of a dresser!

Try to decrease the focus on Santa and increase the focus on Jesus. Find an age-appropriate Advent daily or weekly reflection book and incorporate it into family life. This can be done by taking turns reading after a short prayer, or in the quiet of the evening as bedtime approaches. If you find there's a lot of Santa talk, read about Saint Nicholas and celebrate his day with the humble gifts brought to shoes.

Supplement the media consumption that inundates your household. Rent a movie such as *The Nativity Story*. Or watch classic movies such as *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A Christmas Carol*, or *Joyeux Noel*, and talk about the Christian values they display, such as selflessness and generosity.



Families can ask themselves what they put before Christ during the season.

Make Christmas about giving, not getting, by volunteering or baking for elders. Consider choosing a gift as a family that will serve someone in need, such as a donation to a local agency or an animal from an organization such as Heifer International. Go caroling, or sing carols as a family. Have a birthday cake for Jesus on Christmas. Hang a stocking for Jesus, and ask each family member to place in it a note with a gift they will give to him in the year ahead. Read these before opening presents.

We don't need to put Christ back into Christmas; we simply need to remove the clutter we have placed over him.