

Christmas Family Ritual Ideas

Alternative Gift-Giving

Gather as a family to think about the persons to whom you want to give. Begin by reflecting about your past Christmas celebrations. What is the significance of gift giving in your family? What was it about Christmas and gift giving that each of you found frustrating or troubling? Discuss your feelings with one another. Take control of your spending and ask the important question: Does a meaningful gift have to cost a lot? Solicit ideas from each family member about giving gifts to relatives or friends.

Christmas Card Prayer Link

Use Christmas cards as a link to real people and their needs through the Christmas season and the month of January.

- † Choose one Christmas card each day from those received. Read the whole card aloud and pass it around the family circle. Do this at a regular time like breakfast time, after dinner, or at bedtime.
- † Have a special prayer together for each person in the family that sent the card.
- † Send a postcard to that family to tell them about your Christmas-card prayers and that their card was the one chosen on this day. They will appreciate knowing that your family prayed for them today.

Ring the Bells

Christmas bells ring out the Good News of Jesus' coming into our hearts, into our homes. Give a bell to each child to ring hourly on Christmas Eve day.

Christmas Traditions

- † Plan a family outing to cut down your own Christmas tree at a Christmas tree farm. Make it a full day: plan a scenic drive, pack a lunch and cut the tree together. If this

is not possible, make some kind of special plans for buying and setting up the tree together.

- † Start a tree-decorating tradition. Serve the same menu each year as you trim the tree. The children will look forward to it.
- † Every Christmas, ask each family member to choose his/her own tree ornament to hang on the tree which becomes a keepsake in later years.
- † Have a party in honor of Jesus whose birth we celebrate. Invite an older person who would otherwise be alone, a young person away from home and special friends who are important to your family's life.
- † Gather together all the Christmas paper, ribbon and boxes, tape and string that you want for wrapping packages. The older children can help the younger ones, so everyone can participate. The giving of gifts is beautiful. Remember that Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least important of these, you did it for me!" (Matthew 25:40). What we do for others we are doing for Jesus. Give with open hearts full of love, for it is an extraordinary opportunity. After the packages are all wrapped enjoy a cup of hot cocoa together.
- † Do some early shopping! Find out if there are people in the parish who need transportation and invite them to join you.
- † Set a date with another family to go caroling in the neighborhood or nursing home. Close the evening with refreshments.
- † Begin writing Christmas cards early and pray for the special people on your list. Keep the list in a prominent place -- on the refrigerator or bulletin board -- and mail cards to the people in the parish who may not receive many cards.
- † Prepare a meal for a needy family in the parish. Call a few days in advance and then deliver it as a family at meal time.

A Christmas Creche

A Christmas creche is a wonderful visual for children. They can use it to see, touch and talk about the key characters in the Christmas story. Your family creche can be made together, or selected together from the variety of creche sets available for purchase in religious goods stores, Christmas shops and department stores. Many religious goods stores and museum shops now offer creche sets from different parts of the world featuring, for example, clay figures from Mexico, brightly painted wooden characters from El Salvador and sturdy plastic, classical reproductions from Italy and France. Pick a set that fits your tastes and that is large and tough enough to be regularly handled by young children.

Set aside some special time as a family, during Advent or on Christmas eve, to set up your creche. Use the following process or create one of our own:

- Read the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem from a children's bible or a good children's picture book.
- Discuss the story together, trying to breathe life for young children into the characters and events. Ask simple questions like: What do you think the city was like that Mary and Joseph were traveling to? How did they feel as they walked around looking for a place to stay? How did they feel when they finally found one? Where do you think the shepherds thought the music was coming from? How did they feel when the angel appeared? How would you feel if an angel suddenly appeared here! Why are we happy that Jesus was born that night?
- Choose and arrange the spot where your creche set will be displayed for the Christmas season.
- Take the creche figures out one at a time, identifying them and the role they play in the Christmas story. Allow children to carefully hold and touch the figures. Decide together where each figure should be placed.
- When all the figures are in place, light a candle and have one of the family members read the following prayer:

Lord, bless this creche. Help us always to be like the Christ child who is in love with his God. May the presence of the creche in our home remind us of how much God loves us. May we grow, every day, in love for one another, for our family, for our friends and for all the people of the world.

- Close by singing together a Christmas carol like *Silent Night*.

Yesterdays of Christmas

Grandmothers and grandfathers, uncles and aunts, as well as parents, can tell what their Christmas holidays were like when they were children. Here are some questions your children can ask. And they'll think of more!

Cut the slips apart, put in a container and draw out, one at a time. Do this through the holidays whenever relatives or friends visit and see how much better you get to know them! As an added treat, tape each question to a candy mint.

What do you remember most about Christmas?	How did you get your Christmas tree?	Who visited your home at Christmas time?
Did you sing carols and go caroling?	When did you open your Christmas presents?	Did you visit relatives and friends?
When was your favorite Christmas? Why?	What kind of presents did you give?	What kind of presents did you receive?
What decorations did you have?	What time did you go to Church?	When did you exchange gifts?
What was your favorite gift?	Did you have a special meal? What did you eat?	Did you have a stocking?

Christmas Tree Blessing

When the tree has been prepared, the family gathers around it. All make the sign of the cross.

Leader

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All Now and forever.

Leader

This tree is a blessing to our home. It reminds us of all that is beautiful, all that is filled with the gentleness and the promise of God. It stands in our midst as a tree of light that we might promise such beauty to one another and to our world. It stands like that tree of paradise that God made into the tree of life, the cross of Jesus. Let us listen to the words of the apostle Paul to Titus.

Scripture Reading

Titus 3:4-7

Leader

Now let us pray for God's blessing upon all who gather around this tree.

Lord our God, we praise you for the light of creation: the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night. We praise you for the light of Israel: the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures. We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son: he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree. May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts. May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The lights of the tree are then illuminated.

Manger Scene Blessing

The manger scene has a special place near the Christmas tree or in another place where family members can reflect and pray during the Christmas season. It is blessed each year on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Leader

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All Who made heaven and earth.

Leader

We are at the beginning of the days of Christmas. All through the season we will look on these images of sheep and cattle, of shepherds, of Mary and of Joseph and Jesus. Let us listen to the words of the holy gospel according to Luke

Scripture Reading

Luke 2:17.

Leader

Pray now for God's blessing as we look on these figures. God of Mary and Joseph, of shepherds and animals, bless us whenever we gaze on this manger scene. Through all the days of Christmas may these figures tell the story of how humans, angels, and animals found the Christ in this poor place. Fill our house with hospitality, joy, gentleness, and thanksgiving and guide our steps in the way of peace. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader

Let us bless the Lord.

All Thanks be to God.

Christmas Table Blessing

Family and friends gather around the Christmas table, upon which there is an unlighted candle.

Leader

Glory to God in the highest.

All And peace to God's people on earth.

Leader

As we light our candle on this feast of light may the Spirit of God that shone on the star of Bethlehem grow even brighter in our hearts and home(s) as we live our lives together.

A child lights the candle.

1st Reader

Listen to the words of the holy gospel according to John: And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of God's only Son, full of grace and truth. This is the Word of the Lord.

All The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

Blessing Prayer

The blessing may be read by one person or by a number of persons, each reading a paragraph.

Oh God of gentleness, in love you gather us at this table for our Christmas feast. We rejoice in being together to celebrate our joy in your great gift to us Jesus Christ your Son.

Lord Jesus hold us close to each other, unite us in spirit with those who are distant and with those who have died.

In the peace of this season may the hungry be filled and the homeless sheltered, and may the unremembered be united especially through your love and peace at work in us.

We remember especially those who have loved us in a special way this past year
- who have been bearers of Jesus' love to us. (*Names may be said aloud or in silence*).

All Lord bless our food, our family, our friends. Help us to share our
love.

Leader

Glory to God in the highest.

All And peace to God's people on earth.

Blessing Before or After Opening Gifts

Leader

Lord, we gather today as a family with a past history and a future hope. Be with us as we share our gifts with those we love. May this sharing bring us closer to you and each other. Let us see each other as a special and unique gift and as a sign of your love to this family.

Option 1: Remembering

Leader

Let us pause for a moment in silence to appreciate the Christmas tree and the gifts around it, and to remember a special joyful Christmas memory. If anyone wishes to share this memory, please do so.

Option 2: Appreciating

Leader

We are all gifts to each other. Each person has been given unique gifts by God. Let us call to mind the special gifts that each person here brings to our family. Let us recognize each person by name and tell what gifts they bring to us as a family. *(Allow enough time so that each person is affirmed and appreciated.)*

Blessing

Leader

Gracious God, we praise and thank You for all the many gifts and blessings which you have given us. Today, we especially praise and thank you for Your Word of Love to us, Jesus Christ. Be with our family today and every day, so that we may continue to be a family which always loves, forgives and appreciates one another.

All Amen.