

Christmas it is a time to reflect on the way that Christ has already come and will come again. The following suggestions are made having in mind the goal of making Christmas a joyous time; and making Christmas (12 days) the times of celebration and feasting. Therefore, all the activities for Christmas are "preparations" for celebration.

I. Christmas Preparation. Nov. 23-30

- A. All Christmas shopping should be completed by Nov. 23. in order to devote ourselves to Christmas.

B. Christmas Wreath.

Make or purchase one that will last thru 4 weeks. Don't just make do-use care and creativity. As you prepare your wreath, take time to explain its meaning to your children.

1. Symbolic meaning.

- A. CIRCLE: The unending love of God; cycle of thousands of years from Adam to Christ; and the cycle of years that we have been waiting for His second coming.
- B. GREENS: Suggests life, growth and hope; Laurel is a symbol of victory (Christ's victory over sin and death).
- C. CANDLES: The light reminds us of Jesus the light of the world; the increasing light as each week one more candle is lighted recalls the world's long years of waiting for Jesus Light.

CANDLES:

FIRST WEEK-- Prophets candle reminds us of those who spoke God's word hundreds of years before Christ was born; them is expectation.

SECOND WEEK-- Bethlehem candle reminds us of the time when Christ came to earth as a baby and was born; the theme is joy of the incarnation and Christ's coming again.

THIRD WEEK-- Shepherd candle (rose) reminds us of what the shepherds did-- they saw and believed and told all what had happened to them; the theme of the week is hope. (Jesus

brought us hope and salvation)

FOURTH WEEK-- Angel's candle reminds us of God's actions to save His people; the theme is acceptance.

- D. **COLORS:**three purple candles-- royal color symbolizes the coming of a king; also represents humility and repentance which we should feel during Christmas. One rose-colored candle symbolizes the love and faithfulness of God. The Christ candle is a free-standing white candle in the center of the wreath to represent the purity and perfection of Christ.

C. CHRISTMAS SCENE.

It's use will help children anticipate and visualize the unfolding drama of Christmas.

1. Components

A. Flat board

B. Child-proof nativity scene

C. Uniform-sized, flat pebbles for a path leading to the manger. (or cardboard discs.)

2. Place in location suitable to be left for the duration of Christmas. Place 22 or 23 pebbles on the inside edge of the path and 27 or 28 pebbles on the outer edge depending on the number of days before Christmas.

3. USE OF THE SCENE.

A. First Sunday in Christmas set up the scene. Animals near the stable; shepherds out in "fields" or "hillside" and Mary and Joseph at the farthest edge of path.

B. Children move Mary and Joseph one pebble's length closer to the stable each day. (during devotions)

C. Christmas Eve, Mary and Joseph should arrive at the stable; the baby Jesus is placed in the manger and the shepherds are moved from the "hills" and placed before the manger.

Explain fasting to your children and decide on a joint family plan. Their understanding may be limited, but they will accept it as something that their family does during Christmas.

1. Consider the following:

As you try to come to a decision about how your family will fast, you should do the following:

1. Consider the ages of your children; their ages should make a difference in what you choose to do. Don't expect preschool or early elementary school children to be capable of the sacrifices that you can expect of older children.
2. Make a joint plan. It's easier to execute , and you can reinforce one another.
3. Keep it simple. Don't let initial enthusiasm carry you off into an elaborate plan so rigorous that you'll all abandon it before the second week of Christmas. (If your joint fasting plan is not very demanding because your children are small, you and other adults in the family may wish to quietly adopt other restrictions for yourselves in addition to the family plan.)

Here are several fasting suggestions which you can adapt for use in your home. Growing children should not attempt the last two suggestions.

- * Eliminate all between-meal snacks and bedtime snacks.
- * Eliminate all junk food from your diet (pop, chips, crackers, some cold cereals, sugary desserts)
- * Limit your meat intake to two or three meals a week.
- * Have two or three evening meals which consist solely of soup, bread and beverage.
- * Limit your diet to one meal a day. The rest of the day encourage family members to drink milk, juice or broth.
- * Fast totally, except for liquids, for one twenty-four-hour period each week.

Your goal is to plan a diet that is nutritionally sound but noticeably sacrificial, so that you r family will feel in their bodies that Christmas is a time set apart.

E. PLAN CHRISTMAS DEVOTION.

Take time to plan activities, stories and songs that will make the nightly Christmas readings special memorable times.

- F. Plan enjoyable family or church times for preparing foods and gifts that will be put away!! and saved til Christmas.

II. CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION (NOV. 30-DEC. 24)

- A. Devotions- Begin with creation and trace God's redemptive plan.

1. **FIRST WEEK**--Theme is expectation. Light the Prophets candle. Stories of creation and the Fall, Noah. Bring out the theme in the Scripture.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- a. Tell the origin of the Christmas Tree (material available).
Make tree ornaments of apples; pastry wafers or animals; dough art ornaments.
- b. Dec. 6 Tell the history and legends of St. Nicholas (material available)
- hang stockings
- make small gifts for children's friends
- have each family member write down a special favor to be done for someone else and follow thru in the next few day.
- make a sacrificial gift to the poor.
- c. Sing some songs:

It came upon a Midnight Clear

2. **SECOND WEEK**-- Theme is Joy. Light the Bethlehem candle. Bring out the theme -- Joy in knowing Christ, sharing with others, planning for Christmas. Stories

of Isreal -- law judges, ect.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- make ornaments with tissue paper
- Children do special favors for parents like serving the breakfast in bed.
- Sing carols by candlelight using lots of candles.

c. Sing songs:

Joy to the World

O little Town of Bethlehem

3. THIRD WEEK-- Theme is Hope. Light the Shephard's Candle. (this week you light the rose candle which means happiness-- the purple candles are for sorrow because of our sins but the rose means Christ brought hope and Salvation.) Stories about David.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

A. Read the Shepherd's story

B. Sing songs:

The First Noel

4. FOURTH WEEK-- Theme is acceptance. Light the Angels candle. Stories about the coming King; John the Baptist; Mary.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

A. Read the account of Mary (Luke 1:26-56)

B. Have family members and or children act out the parts of the angel and Mary.

C. Sing songs

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

5. EXAMPLE OF CHRISTMAS DEVOTION:

A. Gather the family around the table, and light the appropriate candle.

- B. Sing carols appropriate to the week's theme.
 - C. Read the story out of a children's Bible storybook in chronological order beginning with creation thru redemption.
 - D. Read actual scripture readings.
 - E. Do an activity that will help children conceptualize what they have heard.
 - F. Praying with family -- encourage each member of the family to say a short thank-you prayer for anything that comes to mind. Since Christmas is a season of repentance, stress prayers of confession always being careful to emphasize the unending forgiveness that God gives to us. Could include the Lord's Prayer.
- B. Prepare foods for Christmas parties and feasts.
- 1. Choose foods with symbolic meaning or traditional value. Have fun making cookies, breads and other items. Explain their significance but resist the urge to eat the now! This will help bring about a true attitude of preparation and make the celebrations to come that much more exciting because of the anticipation.
 - 2. Make decorations for the Home.
- C. Plan now actual Christmas celebrations: parties, carolling, family or church feasts, open houses, housewarmings.

III. CHRISTMAS EVE.

- A. Make this night relaxed and unhectic time at home. Sing carols, read the Christmas Story.
- B. Maintain your fast thru Christmas A.M.. Have a simple but traditional supper. Seafood or other fish are often eaten (i.e. oyster stew, crackers, salad). Have a simple Christmas A.M. breakfast.

IV. Christmas -- This is a time to pull out the stops. Bring out all the foods, gifts that were thoughtfully and carefully prepared.

- a. Worshipping- Spend joyful time of prayer, praise, singing, breaking bread together. Make Christmas the climax of the Christmas season
 - 1. Light the Christ Candle in the Christmas Wreath with rejoicing.
 - 2. add fresh greens to the wreath and white ribbons as a symbol of victory and purity and hope of new life.
- B. Feasting-- Celebrate the coming of the King with foods fit for a king. The weeks of preparing and storing foods for this time will now have their fulfillment.
- C. Gift-giving-- make gift giving a special time. To remind us of the Greatest Gift ever given Jesus Christ.