

2nd Week of Advent – A survey of Christmas Traditions

In this second week of Advent we will briefly survey several Christmas traditions with the desire to improve our own celebration of the birth of Christ Jesus. As we move through the week we will look at Nativity scenes; Christmas wreaths, and more.

December 9, 2019 – The Nativity Scene

Shortly before Christmas 1223, St. Francis of Assisi wrote to his friend, "I would fain (desire to) make a memorial of that child who was born in Bethlehem, and in some sort behold with bodily eyes His infant hardships; how He lay in a manger on the hay, with ox and ass standing by." St. Francis organized a group of people to go on Christmas Eve and created the first live nativity scene that year. It has become a greatly practiced custom. Also from this re-creation came the celebrating or honoring of the crèche, the wooden model of the feeding trough holding the Christ Child. In some countries, this elaborately carved crèche, often taking years to complete and much wealth to buy, is placed as the center of the Christmas festival, replacing the customary Christmas Tree.

Scripture: Luke 2:6-12

Family Time Suggestion:

Perhaps your family can act out a Nativity Scene as well. If your family is small, let the children invite friends to participate. Spend some time asking how each character felt. "What was it like to be so close to baby Jesus?" Ask how each character honored God in their actions. If you are unable to act out a "live" nativity scene, let the children draw one, or use figurines etc...

Song: *Away in the Manger* (v. 1-2) – 204

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head;
The stars in the bright sky look down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes;
I love thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Prayer:

Thank you Lord, that you were willing to leave Heaven with all its beauty and splendor to come to earth and be born in a cattle stall. To exchange your heavenly robes for simple rags to be wrapped in. To move from your throne of majesty to a manger of hay. All because you love us. All because you wanted to save us, your children, from our sins. Amen.

December 10, 2019 – Sinterklaas – tradition of Gift giving

In the Netherlands, (Holland) according to legend, Saint Nicholas (in Dutch *Sinterklaas*) gives presents to children which they open the next morning. *Sinterklaas*, because he was a bishop, would be dressed in a red robe, which was sometimes fringed in white.

He arrives on a boat from Spain and rides down the streets on a white horse. Saint Nicholas goes down the chimney of each house and leaves gifts in the wooden shoes that the children have put by the fireplace.

This tradition derives from an actual Bishop who was very generous and each year around Christmas would travel with his helper to give gifts of food, clothes and candy to all the needy children. This is the background that in the last century became distorted into our jolly fat Santa Claus.

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

Family Time Suggestions

As you read this passage, think of your family's tradition of gift giving. Is there a way to improve it to truly show love to one another (as opposed to the mad dash to rip open packages for ME ME ME).

As a family, consider participating in the angel tree program (at the Mall) or arrange a gift of love and have one of the children dress up like *SinterKlaas* as you deliver your gift to a neighbor or relative. Perhaps you could also determine to participate in the next Feed the Flathead (our next opportunities are December 12th and January 9th).

Song: *What Child is This* (v. 3) – 213

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come peasant, king, to own him;
The King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lul-la-by;
Joy, joy for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you are the giver of all good gifts, and when you gave us the gift of your Son Jesus Christ, you gave us the greatest gift of all time. Help us to be more like Jesus, and to be willing to give gifts of love to one another, especially to those who are in need. Thank you for loving us. Amen.

December 11, 2019 – The Christmas Wreath

The Christmas wreath, like the evergreens used as Christmas trees, symbolizes the strength of life overcoming the forces of winter and death. In ancient Rome, people used decorative wreaths as a sign of victory and celebration. The custom of hanging a Christmas wreath on the front door of the home probably came from this practice as Christians began to celebrate Christ's victory over death. The Christmas wreath is also made up of the traditional colors of Christmas; which are green and red. Green represents the continuance of life through the winter and the Christian belief in eternal life through Christ. Red symbolizes the blood that Jesus shed at His Crucifixion.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Family Time Suggestion

Consider making a Christmas wreath, as you arrange the evergreen branches, consider its symbolism of eternal life in Christ. If you use red ribbons or accents, consider how they speak to us of Christ's blood shed on our behalf. Play a game for a day or so, that whenever you see a wreath you will say, "Victory in Jesus".

Song: *Go Tell it on the Mountain (vs. 3) – 224*

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born

Down in a lowly manger our humble Christ was born,
And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we rejoice that we can celebrate the victory over death that is ours when we are yours. You came to earth and you conquered death so that we might live! Help us to live for you. To love you and obey you and worship you with all our strength. Help us to Go tell of that love on the mountain tops. Amen.

December 12, 2019 - The Candy Cane

In the late 1800's, a candy maker in Indiana wanted to express the meaning of Christmas through candy. First, he used a plain white peppermint stick. The color white symbolizes the purity and sinless nature of Jesus. Next, he added small red stripes to symbolize the pain inflicted upon Jesus before His death on the cross. There are three small stripes to represent the Holy Trinity. He added a bold red stripe to represent the blood Jesus shed for mankind. He came up with the idea of bending one of his straight candy sticks into the shape of a Candy Cane. When looked at with the crook on top, it looks like a shepherd's staff because Jesus calls Himself the Great Shepherd. If you turn it upside down, it becomes the letter J symbolizing the first letter in Jesus' name.

The candy maker made these candy canes for Christmas, so everyone would remember that Christmas is all about Christ's life, love and sacrifice.

Scripture John 10:7-18 - the Great Shepherd

Family Time Suggestion

If you have little children play a game having one person be the shepherd guarding the sheep from a wolf or a thief. If your children are older ask them to reflect on the attributes of a shepherd. What is it that makes a shepherd a particularly "Good" one?

See if you can remember what the colors and patterns of the candy cane stand for. Some we see have green in them, what could that signify? (remember the wreaths?)

Song: *Go Tell it on the Mountain (vv 1-2) - 224*

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born

While shepherds kept their watching, o'er silent flocks by night,
Behold throughout the heavens there shone a holy light.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born

The shepherds feared and trembled, when, lo! Above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born

Prayer:

Lord, the Great Shepherd, please teach us to rely on your protection. Please help us to trust in you to lead us and guide us. Help us to feed in the riches of your Word. Help us to drink from the living waters that you offer in Christ Jesus. Help us to care for one another as you call us to shepherd each other. Amen

December 13, 2019 – The Holly

Like the Pines and Firs that retain their rich green color all year round, the Holly is an evergreen tree with sharply pointed glossy green leaves and bright red berries. It is used in making Christmas wreaths and other decorations. Its unique characteristics make it an appropriate Christmas decoration. The needlelike points of the leaves were thought to resemble the crown of thorns that Jesus wore when He was crucified. The red berries symbolized the drops of blood that Jesus shed for our sins. When the Holly blooms, its flower is a pure white, recalling Christ's purity and sinlessness. The Composer John Henry Hopkins captured this imagery in his Christmas carol *The Holly and the Ivy*. Some of its verses are as follows:

**The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.**

**The holly bears a blossom
As white as lily flower;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To be our sweet Savior.**

**The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood;
Any Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.**

**The holly bears a prickle
As sharp as any thorn;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas day in the more**

Family Time Discussion:

Discuss ways in which the imagery of the Holly can improve our celebration of Christmas? Reflect on the benefits of focusing on the whole of Jesus' life and not just His birth. Ask the children to look for ways other items (in nature etc...) can remind us of Jesus. Try to write a family poem about how that "something" points to Jesus.

SONG: *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen* (v. 1) - 211

God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day,
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray;

O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Creator of the heavens and the earth, help us to see you in all that we do. Help us to look for your glory in all of creation. Help us to wonder and marvel at your beauty. Remind us through the wind, rain and the flowers of the field of your love for us – your dear children. Help us to have grateful hearts. Amen.