



The Stocking Tradition

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by Karen H. Whiting

As I stitched an angel design on a Christmas stocking for our newborn daughter, she slept peacefully in the bassinet. I wondered, "Would this stocking, filled with toys and goodies, diminish the meaning of Christmas?"

I prayed for guidance. My husband and I wanted to instill faith in our five children. We did not want our children to get caught up in material things. I grabbed my Bible, flipped the pages and started reading about Elizabeth and Zechariah. I read where Elizabeth's unborn baby leapt in her womb as she greeted Mary, pregnant with Jesus, and my own heart leapt with an idea.

If I wanted God's Holy Spirit to fill us, why not compare the filled stockings to how God fills our lives with good gifts? Months later, as Christmas approached, we prepared for a new tradition.

During Advent, we read about Elizabeth's joy at the upcoming birth of Jesus. We shared with our children how we wanted them to be filled with joy and that we had a new surprise in store for that year.

On Christmas Day, holding our stockings filled with fruits and treasures, we gathered around the tree. We asked everyone to share how the surprises we had carefully chosen reminded them of God's love and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Becky held up a watch and said, "Look, my watch tells time. God loves me all the time!"

James pulled a toy car out of his stocking and said, "God goes with me in our car."

Sometimes we puzzled over how an item could help us think of God — especially when each child received the same gift. I remember laughing after the fourth banana was pulled from a stocking. Our creativity was definitely stretched on those! Yet the moments of laughter and sharing helped us keep God in our celebration.

Over the years, we kept the tradition, and as the children grew, the comments changed, adding more depth. Last Christmas we received a gift in return. Our daughter Darlene's fiancée joined in our Christmas stocking tradition. Darlene exclaimed, "I can hardly wait until we have children and celebrate this custom with our own family."

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