



Preparing Room for Jesus

• Karen Whiting •

Our family trudged through snow and blustery wind to find the perfect Christmas tree. We chopped it, dragged it to the car and loaded it on top. The next day I overheard my older children discuss the tree.

Michael said, "Too bad dad ruined the tree."

James replied, "It looks pretty. It's tall like daddy."

"But there's no room under it for presents."

Rebecca, the oldest, said, "Maybe there won't be many presents this year."

I cringed as I realized they viewed the tree in terms of gifts they might receive and forgot all about the reason to celebrate.

I made new plans to bring Jesus into their hearts. We used an Advent wreath to gather together and reflect on Jesus. I planned more meaningful, but easy, activities.

Making room for Jesus starts with being intentional. Consider how to connect Christ to planned activities. For example, before putting up a tree, read Hosea 14:8 where God compares Himself to the evergreen tree. Or read some of the genealogy of Jesus and talk about His family tree and your family tree. Our family made a family tree wall-hanging. Read John 1:12 as a reminder that we are all part of God's big family tree. We hung ornaments with our names or photos.

Little things matter too. The circle shape of a wreath reflects God's eternal love, so let hugs be human Christmas wreaths you pass out generously.



Advent Wreath

Celebrate the coming of the Light of the world with the glowing candles of an Advent wreath. Each candle has a name and associated word that provide themes to celebrate each day. Look up Scriptures and sing songs to focus on each week's theme, such as "O Little Town of Bethlehem" for the Bethlehem candle. Let the daily adventure help you slowly reflect on the entire account of the birth of Jesus.

- The first candle is the prophecy candle, representing hope. It's an opportunity to examine many fulfilled prophecies.
- The second candle is the Bethlehem candle, representing love. Focus on the meaning of Bethlehem (house of bread), the humble place of birth, and ways to show love.
- The third candle is the shepherd candle, representing joy, the joy the shepherds felt when they heard the news and saw Jesus. Rejoice with music.
- The fourth candle is the angel candle, representing the peace the angels proclaimed. Share the news the angels shared and find ways to sow peace.
- On Christmas Day (or Eve) add a large white candle to the wreath's center. This is the Christ candle. The wisemen looked in the sky and saw a larger light than the other stars, recognizing that the heavens declared the birth of this King!

Nativity Sets

Display one or more nativity sets. Use unbreakable pieces and move them toward the stable each day to reflect the journeys of Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the wisemen. My children loved hunting for the figures each day. It becomes a simple game.

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Let children use a nativity to retell the birth of Jesus. Talk about each piece and how it helps you think of Jesus.



Decorations

We held a decorating party and let our children invite friends and pass out Christmas cookies. Before hanging the lights and ornaments, read Scriptures related to each type. It's an easy way to share your faith with guests. For example:

- Read the words of Jesus about being fruitful in Matthew 7:17, and add apples and fruits or pictures of family members doing something to help others.
- Read about animals at creation and discuss how God knew about Christmas from the beginning of the world. Then hang up animal ornaments.
- Make some hangers for doorknobs with words, "I have room for Jesus."

Shop for Signs of Jesus

Look for symbols that connect with Jesus and the Christmas story—from stars and angels to candy canes and lights. Write out a list and find Scriptures to pair with each item. See if you can check them all off. That always added excitement to our shopping trips and lessened cries of "I want that."

Acts of Love

Celebrate acts of love each person does for Jesus. Add to a paper chain you can later wrap around the tree to encircle it with love. Or add a piece of straw to a crèche to make a soft bed for Jesus. You'll see that actions add up.

Gifts of Love

Read John 3:16 as a reminder of God's extravagant love. Choose a name from an angel tree and shop for the person. Add surprises to the requested gift. For clothes, tuck tiny treasures into pockets. For toys, add a related book.

Capture the Memories

Snap photos throughout the season and journal about activities. Record words of family members related to Jesus and Christmas. Ask each one to give a reason that makes him or her happy Jesus came and one new thing learned about God.

Christmas Stockings

Hang the J-shaped stockings up and chat about being filled with God's love, joy and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Invite family members to add notes. One granddaughter makes a gift for each person's stocking. As you open contents, talk about how the treasures illustrate being filled with God's love or gifts of the Spirit, like the power in batteries reflects being empowered by the Spirit.

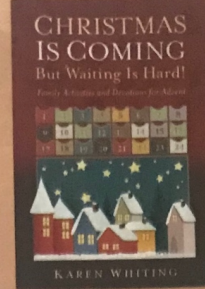


Focus on Jesus, Not Busyness

Relax and eliminate some of the stress with simplifying the season.

- If you can't find a specific gift, or the budget is tight, wrap a promise note with a coin to redeem in the New Year.
- Choose activities wisely to avoid over-committing everyone's time.
- Displaying every decoration isn't necessary. Use some this year and others another year.
- Listen to carols and reread the passages about the nativity throughout the season.

Be wise enough to look beyond the commercial sparkle to see the brighter light—Christ who gives eternal light.



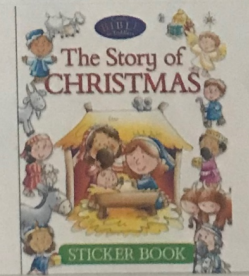
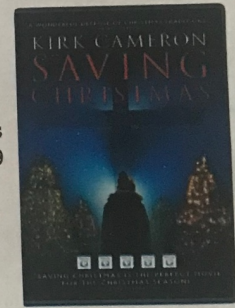
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