



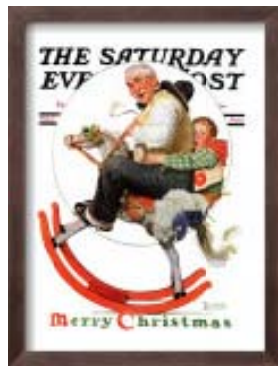
Building Christmas Traditions All Saints Presbyterian Church (2011)

In the midst of the whirling change and busyness of our modern world, we need traditions. But then, God's people always have, throughout time. Traditions offer stability and continuity, and can teach us truth. The realm of tradition is not just the concern of historians and social scientists. It is not purely academic; it is the very stuff of life and, in fact, is the very stuff of faith. Indeed, God commanded that His people continually use traditions, full of symbols and engaging the senses, to remember what He had done and would do for them. To name just a few: the Festival of Booths when Israelites lived in tents, the Passover meal, the entire sacrificial system and, of course, our sacraments of baptism and communion. Traditions practiced year after year, which are highly physical and tangible, drive home the deep truths of our faith and help to make them more than mere intellectual propositions. Traditions, which by their very nature are repetitious and sensory, can be instrumental in teaching our children the essentials of our faith. Traditions also bind us together as a family (both our primary family and our world-wide church family). Incorporate traditions into your Christmas celebration to emphasize the truth, beauty, and joy of this season. And remember, some traditions may be simply fun and inspire awe and wonder, delighting young and old alike.

This booklet of Christmas Traditions has been divided into three sections:

- Section I includes traditions which help to teach truths about the Christmas story and the gospel (Pages 3-8.)
- Section II includes traditions that build family relationships/bonds, that help us to show love to our family and others, and some that are just plain old fun and exciting (Pages 9-15.)
- Section III lists recommended books for the Christmas season (Pages 16,17.)
- Appendices A (Page 18-20) and B (page 21) give detail on the Advent Chain and Gingerbread Houses, respectively.

Some perfect Norman Rockwell family scenes!



How about a "simple" Martha Stewart Christmas tree?



“Take inspiration from our themed trees embellished with garlands, ornaments, and tree toppers. Up the elegance of this year's evergreen with beautiful celestial symbols. Delicate silvery angels flit among hand-tied ribbon stars.” – From the Martha Stewart website

(Valerie Logwinuk) You may be envisioning family scenes that are a mix of Martha Stewart and Norman Rockwell: A room filled with beautifully hand-made decorations and children sitting quietly and entranced with the spiritual lessons being taught by June Cleaver, adorned in pearls and pumps. However, don't be heart-broken if children are restless, don't pay attention, and argue about whose turn it is to do something, or if preteens/teens sigh and roll their eyes, or if you find yourself impatient and not having a perfect attitude when your efforts are resisted or unappreciated. We are all sinners, we get tired and bored, and children are not adults. **Be practical, choose what fits your family and don't have unrealistic expectations. Pray that God will bless your efforts as you faithfully teach and practice these traditions, with the intent of honoring God and blessing your family.** Remember, there is no perfection this side of heaven!

(Neda Mays) **Change isn't as bad as I thought: Instead of being able to hold tightly onto fixed traditions every year, I have learned as my daughters have grown and left the house, that I have to "let go" of some of those things. What worked when the girls were younger and we had less complicated lives, cannot really be sustained as they grow older, so it's helpful to flex and change with the every changing dynamics within the family.**

I. TRADITIONS THAT HELP US FOCUS ON AND TEACH SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

- Jesse Tree (Pages 3, 4)
- Advent Chain (Page 5)
- Advent Wreath (Page 5)
- Nativity Advent Calendar (Page 6)
- Nativity Scenes (Page 6, 7)
- Performing a Family Christmas Skit (Page 7)
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- Read Luke’s birth narrative on Christmas morning (Page 8)
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A Jesse Tree

(contributed by Amy Palmer)

I actually got a large group of women together and assigned each of them one or two ornaments to provide one for each person participating. So instead of everyone making 26 different ornaments everyone made 14 of the same ornament. It worked out great and was a lot easier to put it together. So some of the ornaments are made and others are bought. It just depended on the advent theme and the person assigned to provide it. Being a non-crafty person myself, I bought.

Some Jesse Tree books you might want to use:

The Jesse Tree: Stories and Symbols of Advent by Raymond and Georgene Anderson [http://www.amazon.com/Jesse-Tree-Stories-Symbols-](http://www.amazon.com/Jesse-Tree-Stories-Symbols-Advent/dp/B002SG7OWQ/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320630870&sr=1-3)

[Advent/dp/B002SG7OWQ/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320630870&sr=1-3](http://www.amazon.com/Jesse-Tree-Stories-Symbols-Advent/dp/B002SG7OWQ/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320630870&sr=1-3)

Jesse Tree Devotions: Family Activity for Advent by Marilyn S. Breckenridge http://www.amazon.com/Jesse-Tree-Devotions-Family-Activity/dp/0806621540/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320630983&sr=1-1

(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)

We have used a devotional book, The Advent Jesse Tree (Devotions for Children and Adults to prepare for the coming of the Christ Child at Christmas) by Dean Lambert Smith. Click on the link to see the book as sold on Amazon.

http://www.amazon.com/Advent-Jesse-Tree-Devotions-Christmas/dp/1426712103/ref=pd_sim_b_1#

Click on the book cover to read about what a Jesse tree is and see page 12 for a list of the 25 ornaments that are needed. When my children were younger, we used the children’s devotion, but now that they are teenagers, we use the adult version.

Jesse Tree (cont.)

Practical “how tos”:

- We do this right at the dinner table, since as the children get older, it is harder to find a time to gather in the evening.
- Our family does not wrap the gifts to open each day (less time consuming for me – remember keep it practical and easy and what works for your family.) We just hang them all on a three foot artificial tree beginning December 1st. The children take turns getting the appropriate ornament for the day, reading the devotion, the referenced scriptures, and the prayer. We actually keep a chart of whose turn it is to do various traditions (Advent calendar, Jesse Tree) to eliminate arguments!
- We put our Jesse Tree near our front entry so that all guests see it when they come to the door during the holidays. It often gives me an opportunity to tell people about the tradition and speak of the gospel to our guests.
- When preparing these ornaments, I carried the list of ornaments in my wallet and kept an eye out for ornaments I could buy and to get ideas for ones I could make.
 - I bought the following: ark, camel, lamb, lion, a cluster of grapes, sheaf of wheat*, scroll*, a piece of brick wall*, an angel, the baby in the manger, a small white candle. (*Fortunately, I found an elaborate Nativity scene with lots of accessories sold separately so I could buy a sheaf of wheat, a scroll, and a portion of a brick wall. You could easily make these: wrapping straw with yarn, rolling a piece of paper to be a scroll and having one of your children draw a brick wall on brown paper and gluing it on a thick piece of cardboard.)
 - We made: a styrofoam painted globe, a store bought fake apple with a snake glued on it, a ladder made out of twigs, Joseph’s coat made out of felt, a slingshot, a wooden stump with green tissue shoot, a painted wooden heart (bought at Michaels), a wooden cross, a store bought dove with a glittery paper crown, a cut out of Bethlehem, a fiery furnace (inverted apple sauce container, covered with black construction paper, with an opening cut) with orange/red/yellow tissue paper flames, a cut out star, a pipe cleaner staff glued to a lamb, two rectangular thin painted pieces of wood numbered 1 to 10 (10 commandments).
- Let your children make and draw as many ornaments as possible. My youngest children rolled items in glitter, glued on items, attached tissue paper and the boys went out with their Dad to find the twigs and sticks and had a father/son effort to make the ladder, cross and slingshot (y-shaped stick with a rubber band sling.)

Advent Chain *(contributed by Virginia Rogan)*

The Christmas Advent Chain may be a more appropriate daily devotional tool for very young children than the Jesse Tree. A one sentence summary, tying a Bible verse to a truth about Christ, is wrapped with a symbol of the truth inside a green or red tissue square and tied with a piece of yarn. Each surprise has a numbered sticker on the outside indicating the day it should be opened. Each “tissue surprise” is then tied onto a chain (a colorful ribbon.) The tissues are tied in random order to make it more fun for the children to find the corresponding tissue surprise for the date. Children open one surprise each day. The parent reads the one sentence summary and the referenced Bible verse. The item illustrates the truth. See Appendix A for a list of the Bible verses and items.

Advent Wreath *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)*

“Advent begins four Sundays prior to Christmas. Advent is a Latin word meaning ‘the coming.’ Officially established by church leaders in the sixth century, Advent was originally meant to be a time when Christians reflected on the meaning of Christmas...Advent was essentially four weeks set aside to contemplate what the coming of Jesus meant not only to the world but to every individual’s soul.” (Stories Behind the Great Traditions of Christmas, p. 21.) For centuries, Christian families (and churches) have celebrated this season of preparation with the lighting of one candle in a small table-top evergreen wreath each Sunday, accompanied by an appropriate Scripture reading, singing of hymns, and a prayer. The candles vary in color from culture to culture, but generally the first four candles are red or purple and the fifth one, lit on Christmas Eve, is white or golden. Alternatively, the first three candles are purple to symbolize hope, peace and love. The fourth candle is red to symbolize Christ’s sacrificial death which gives us new life. The white candle in the center, lit on Christmas Eve, symbolizes the birth of the sinless Christ child. This tradition sets the tone for the holidays and helps us to put the focus on the real meaning of Christmas.

Some suggested books to use to lead the Advent devotion are:

- Christ in Christmas – A Family Advent Celebration by James Dobson, Charles Swindoll, James Montgomery Boice and R.C. Sproul (NavPress 1989) This book includes a devotion to read, questions to ask children, an activity to illustrate the truth, a prayer and a song. There are also daily scripture readings for each day of the week. This book is available on Amazon to order.
- Christmas Spirit: The Joyous Stories, Carols, Feasts, and Traditions of the Season by George Grant and Gregory Wilbur. This book includes an extensive section on how to celebrate Advent (scripture reading, songs, traditions, treats, the background story on St Boniface.) This book is available on Amazon to order.

Nativity Advent Calendar *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)*

Although the most common calendars that are seen nowadays are secular holiday ones, an Advent calendar of the Nativity scene can help be a daily reminder for young children of the real meaning of Christmas. This is a great gift for grandparents to give a family. Years ago, my Mom gave us a Nativity calendar made by Pockets of Learning and available through CDK – Kids:

<http://www.cdkenterprises.com/pol/4147.shtml>. The calendar now available looks very different than the one we have; it is much improved. That website also shows another calendar made by Kubla Craft. My kids loved pulling a felt stuffed animal/Nativity character out of its pocket each day and placing it on the manger scene (with velcro backing.) This calendar gives a very practical, daily way of reinforcing the birth story and helping little children to learn about it in daily bits. When we went away for Christmas, I folded up our Nativity Advent Calendar and took it with us – doing it at the hotel, in the car and later at our relatives' house. This way we could continue our tradition and focus on Christ even with travel and visiting non-Christian relatives. Practical tip: keep a chart of whose turn it is to place the Nativity character.

(contributed by Neda Mays) We use an advent calendar (sometimes with a special treat hiding behind the door or maybe a scripture to read, with the kids taking turns reading or getting the treat.)

Story Book Set and Advent Calendar by Carolyn Croll. (Valerie Logwinuk notes: that this is the most beautiful, detailed advent "tool" I've seen! I'm buying it as a gift for my married nieces and nephews! Neda brought this to our coffee Nov 5th – it is marvelous.)

http://www.amazon.com/Story-Christmas-Book-Advent-Calendar/dp/1563055473/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1320772459&sr=1-1

Nativity Scenes *(contributed by Joanne Moore)*

I collect Nativity scenes which eventually took over the house during the holiday season—and most were ones that were not kid-friendly. I finally got smart and bought several scenes that the kids were allowed and even encouraged to play with. Often, as we read the Christmas story, the younger ones would act out the story with the nativity set. I plan to give all my grandchildren a wooden "Doug & Melissa" nativity set this year. I want them to have the same pleasure. http://www.melissaanddoug.com/dyn_prod.php?p=3858

Out of the Nativity collecting and the play acting we eventually began to use one particular nativity set as a family focus. This particular one had the "removable" baby Jesus. The baby would be wrapped as a gift which the youngest child was allowed to open and place in the manger as Harry read or told the Christmas story—with a few other Fatherly words of wisdom. (Wish I could say that the children sat quietly and listened with devotion—they didn't. They were restless and anxious to get to the gifts!)

Nativity Scenes (Cont.)

Some added thoughts (*Valerie Logwinuk*)

Here are some other ideas that can be used with Nativity sets: Put a Bible, opened to the birth narrative in Luke or Matthew, next to the Nativity scene. Let the children put the camels and wise men on the other side of the room from the manger scene, as well as the shepherds and sheep. Let children slowly move the wise men and camels toward the manger as they journey there (While it is likely that the wise men came up to two years after the birth of Christ, you can just move them in before Christmas Day.) The shepherds and sheep can be moved to the manger Christmas Day. Have the youngest child place the baby Jesus in the manger (if you have a removable baby) on Christmas morning.

We have such fun memories of the children playing with our wooden manger scene. The top of Joseph's staff has been bitten off and Mary has teeth marks on her head. One of my children still puts the animals in the manger to keep warm, and puts Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus out in the cold. While I opt for the artful arrangement of the animals, shepherds and wise men, I constantly find all the figures lined up like soldiers to show their respect to the baby Jesus. It makes me laugh every time I see it. I often found various Playmobile figures interspersed in the manger (Vikings, knights, Star War characters.) Once we couldn't find the baby Jesus for days and we were ready to put out an APB on him. I was surprised one day, when getting ice and water from the refrigerator, to have baby Jesus drop into my glass along with ice cubes. He had been stuffed up the ice maker!

Performing a Family Christmas Skit (*contributed by Neda Mays*)

We perform a Christmas skit (usually based on Luke 2) or fine arts performance of some kind that the younger ones put on for the older ones, usually on Christmas Eve. When the kids were all younger, my sister took on the role of director, but as the kids got older, they began taking on all creative aspects of these performances (lots of fun). In one of our locations, we've actually taken these "performances" to a local nursing home and shared it with the residents.

Visiting "Main Street Bethlehem" in Burnet (*contributed by Melissa Kummerer*)

Main Street Bethlehem in Burnet. (First Baptist/Burnet--it runs the first two weekends of December). Bethlehem come to life, complete with Roman soldiers collecting taxes, merchants, etc.....and no room at the Inn. Go early and take your time wandering through. Talk to the candle makers and blacksmiths and rope makers. The "townspeople" are all church members who take on the character of Bethlehemites...they'll talk to you in character, etc. Truly brings the story to life for young children. My kids still love it!

<http://www.fbcburnet.org/mainstreetbethlehem.htm>

Watch a Nativity Movie (*contributed by Valerie Logwinuk*)

Several years ago, my husband bought The Nativity Story (New Line Cinema – available through Amazon) for our family to watch together. Last year, just my pre-teen daughter and I watched it together and it turned out to be a wonderful opportunity to talk about Mary's faith when faced with pregnancy and not being married. It was a great chance to talk about the practical aspects of the birth of Christ, Mary's faithfulness and the real human drama of the story.

Read Luke's Birth Narrative on Christmas Morning *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)*

This is a good way of centering yourselves and setting the foundation for Christmas Day. After we've opened our stockings from St. Nicholas, we get a cup of coffee/cocoa and read aloud the birth narrative from the gospel of Luke (Chapter 2, verses 1-20.) As the children get older, they can take turns reading portions of the scripture or it can be done by Dad. As Joanne Moore suggested, little children can act it out with a Nativity scene. Friends of ours had their children work on memorizing the verses all during December and they recited it Christmas morning.

Listening to Handel's Messiah in the Car *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)*

Years ago I asked for a recording of Handel's Messiah. I listen to it when I am alone in the car (my kids are not real big fans!) in the weeks preceding Christmas. Not only is the music majestic, but the words are from scripture. I find it immensely uplifting and devotional.

II. TRADITIONS THAT BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND PROMOTE JOY AND FUN

This section includes a wide variety of traditions that build relationships and a family identity. Many of them emphasize showing love and caring about others. That is a wonderful emphasis of Christmas since God gave us his greatest gift, his son Jesus Christ. Some of these traditions are just plain old fun. They help a family to create special memories and activities that promote a unique family identity.

- Being With Family During Christmas (Page 9)
- Prayer Chain (Page 10)
- Secret Santas/Kris Kringle (Page 10)
- St Nicholas Day, December 6th (Page 10)
- Decorating the Christmas Tree/Ornaments (Pages 10, 11)
- Getting the Christmas Tree as a Family (Page 11)
- Caroling (in the neighborhood, at a dialysis center, etc.) (Page 11)
- Gingerbread House (Page 12)
- Gift Giving (Page 13)
- Involving Grandparents and House Guests (Page 14)
- Baking Treats (Page 14)
- Just for Fun (Pages 14 – 15)
 - Making Garland (popcorn/cranberries, buttons/beads) (Page 14)
 - Christmas Tree Sleepover (Page 14)
 - Swimming at Barton Springs Christmas Morning (Page 14)
 - Driving around to See Neighborhood Decorations/Lights (Page 15)
 - Listening to Carols/Christmas audio books during carpool (Page 15)
 - Reindeer Food, Snacks for St. Nicholas (Page 15)
 - Twinkling Lights in Each Child's Room (Page 15)
 - Advent Calendars (Page 15)
 - Special Christmas household items (Page 15)
 - Watching Classic Christmas Movies (Page 15)

Being With Family During Christmas *(contributed by Neda Mays)*

A major goal that John and I have shared over the years is being able to share Christmas with extended family members. Family has always been very important to me personally over the years from my own childhood on into adulthood as a mom, and continues to this day. I've been very blessed to enjoy a loving and close extended family, on both sides. So, John and I have always made it a priority to travel with our girls to meet up with extended family for Christmas. Many families like to avoid traveling for Christmas, but we have embraced it and always enjoy time shared with others.

Prayer Chain *(contributed by Brooke Shannon)*

We did a prayer chain for the 25 days leading up to Christmas. At the end of November, we colored and decorated links of construction paper, wrote names of family, organizations, church members etc. on each of the links and then linked the whole chain together. Each day we would take off a link, representing one day closer to Christmas, and would pray for whatever name/request was on the link. The kids liked it a lot.

Secret Santa/ Kris Kringle *(contributed by Mary Jane Grooms)*

Everyone gets a chance to be a Secret Santa or Kris Kringle. Everyone's names go in a hat. Each person draws out a name and has to do a good deed secretly each day for the person they got. At the end of the week, we went around the table and tried to guess who our Kris Kringle was. Being very secret was the key and studying your subject and doing things that really were a gift to them was the focus. It had to be a deed and no money could be spent. This was great training in mercy, showing love, not being rewarded or noticed. We started at Advent and went the 4 weeks until Christmas, so there were four rounds of secretly ministering to another member of the family.

St. Nicholas Day, December 6th *(contributed by Melissa Kummerer)*

We celebrate St. Nicholas Day (Dec. 6). This is how we dealt with the Santa question: read the stories, read the history, understand that St. Nicholas was a real man, a Christian, who sought to love and serve the Lord by caring for the poor. We emphasize that Santa is a pretend character based on this real man. We read the story, we hang up our stockings on Dec. 5 and open them on Dec. 6. Every year we get a new Christmas book and we all get new jammies. Our new Christmas book and new jammies are part of our stocking gifts, so we've got them through most of the Christmas season.

Decorating the Christmas Tree/Ornaments *(contributed by Joanne Moore)*

When we just had three children, I used to cross stitch an ornament for each of them every Christmas. As our family grew, it got more difficult to find the time to cross stitch, so I began purchasing a Christmas ornament for each child on which I wrote the date and their names. The night we decorated the Christmas tree, the ornaments came out and each child got to place their own ornaments on the tree. Obviously we've always had a hodgepodge kind of tree! (As the kids have married, the newly married couple receives his or her childhood ornaments on their first Christmas as a couple together. With the fourth wedding this past weekend our tree is going to be pretty bare this year!)

Decorating the Christmas Tee/Ornaments (cont.)

(contributed by Neda Mays) We decorate the tree while favorite Christmas music plays in the background. The music selections have changed over the years as musical tastes have expanded.

(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk) After many years of children making ornaments in school, we decided to have a special tree (3 foot, artificial) in the upstairs hall (or it could be for the children's playroom) to hang all the children's home-made ornaments. The kids decorate it and it always brings back a lot of memories. Many of them include ornaments with pictures of the children through the years. They also hang on their tree ornaments people have given them.

Practical Tips:

- Hang wooden and non-breakable ornaments on the lower branches when you have young children who tend to grab at low hanging ornaments.
- Buy an inexpensive glue gun and keep it in the kitchen to handily repair all the broken ornaments (and manger pieces) that will invariably occur. Just pretend you work in Santa's Workshop and don't get stressed out. Lamb legs and angel wings can be repaired!!!!
- As children get older, let them help hang ornaments (start with non-breakable ones and give them tips on how to do it.) You'll appreciate the help.

Getting the Christmas Tree as a Family

(contributed by Neda Mays) We always go together as a family to get the Christmas tree. Keeping this tradition has become more challenging and has brought about change as my daughters began leaving for college. College schedules are not always family user friendly, so we've learned to become more flexible and be creative.

(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk) We go to Elgin to a live Christmas Tree farm each year, usually on Thanksgiving weekend, to select and cut a fresh Christmas tree. On the ride to Elgin, we listen to Christmas carols and, if it is cold enough, drink hot cocoa. Everyone walks around and helps to find our perfect family tree. We ride the hay wagon and the boys help cut the tree. Admittedly, as the kids get older, this is losing its appeal. Last year, Greg and I decided we might make it a date event just for the two of us since we seem to enjoy it the most nowadays and we need more opportunities to spend time alone. Let the traditions morph and make sure they still are a blessing and not a burden!

Caroling *(contributed by Joanne Moore)*

And of course over the years we've done our share of Angel Trees, Samaritan's Purse Shoe Boxes, caroling to shut ins and nursing homes. The last two times that some of us went caroling we went to a dialysis center. The nursing homes seem to get hit left and right during the holidays. I once heard an elderly lady say, "Oh, x#\$%. Here comes another group of carolers. I'll be so glad when Christmas is over and it's quiet around here again." [Don't you just love Joanne!!!!] Nobody thinks to go to the dialysis centers, and the patients really seem to appreciate it.

Gingerbread House

(contributed by Neda Mays) We make simple gingerbread houses (that use small milk cartons for a base and then graham crackers and other goodies to decorate.) Icing is used as the "glue" (you can use canned frosting.) It's fun to get different sizes of cartons to make a village.

(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk) This can take some time, so make sure you're up to it before you start. Some years, I just didn't have time and never attempted it. Also, decide how much your children can help and whether you want this to be their project or if this is going to be a fine arts creation of your own! I have a gingerbread house mold (one side Victorian, the other log cabin) that makes baking the pieces of a gingerbread house easy. Alternatively, you can use graham crackers, or cardboard covered with small shredded wheat. Frosting is the glue (recipes for gingerbread and royal icing are in Appendix B.)

We made themed gingerbread houses based on books we read aloud. Of course, all the scenes are in snow (icing all over the base, frosting icicles hanging from the house, and confectioner sugar sprinkled over for fresh fallen snow!) For example, we did the scene from The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe where Father Christmas gives gifts to the children once Aslan breaks the witch's spell and Christmas finally comes after the endless winter. Other years, we made a log cabin for Little House on the Prairie. When we were learning about the Middle Ages one year in history, we made a castle and depicted a scene of St. Boniface coming to the castle of Pipin The Short to disciple him (Pipin was the father of Charlemagne – just a fun fact.) St. Boniface is a wonderful character – the stories of his evangelism of the fierce Nordic/Germanic tribes spawned the tradition of the Yule Log and Buche Noel dessert.

We used little porcelain figures you can buy for mantle decorations, action figures (St Boniface was a Star Wars character with a home-made cape and fur boots!), plastic animals and candy to embellish. We took lots of artistic liberty in "interpreting" our book themes. It was fun. It was a lot of work. It lasts a long time and I used it as a decoration for many weeks.

When I googled "gingerbread house molds" many options came up:

http://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4ADFA_enUS427US429#hl=en&sugexp=kjrmc&cp=22&gs_id=2c&xhr=t&q=gingerbread+house+mold&pf=p&sclient=psy-ab&rlz=1T4ADFA_enUS427US429&site=webhp&source=hp&pbx=1&og=gingerbread+house+mold&aq=0&aqi=g3g-v1&aql=f&gs_sm=&gs_upl=&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.cf.osb&fp=940a13cacbe1996d&biw=1044&bih=621

Gift Giving

(contributed by Genevieve Johnson) For gifts, I enjoy attending the Holiday Collectables Boutique at Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church. Proceeds benefit the preschool. They attract quality vendors from all over who still have a great selection as it is early in the season. You can get a lot of shopping done in one place. They also sell pre-made, frozen, soups, pies and casseroles which are made by the preschool moms and are delicious. You can thaw and bake during the busy holiday season to give yourself a little breathing space. This year is Nov 4 & 5. Info at http://www.holidaycollectibles.org/Holiday_Collectibles/Event_Details.html

(contributed by Joanne Moore) Some Christmases we gave a "group" gift to the children like a swing set, ping pong table, or a go cart. A "message", usually in rhyming form, would give them clues as to where to look for the gift. The clues usually took them all over the house or even outside to find the hidden treasure. They had to figure out the clues together. The year they received a go cart, the kids had to follow a string which took them out the front door, to the back yard, around trees and clothes lines and half a block down the street to a neighbor's garage where the go cart was hidden. (I also reproduced an AL driver's license with state seal and id photo for the kids who were allowed to drive the go cart. The others received "rider's permits.")

Back when Sears published their annual Christmas catalog my kids would comb through it. One year I told them to go through the catalog and write down everything they would like to have for Christmas. They each wrote down notebook pages full of items. I then told them to take their list and pick out 10 items they would like; that wasn't too difficult. Then I told them to pick five from that list; then three; it began to become a struggle... I wish you could have seen their agony as they had to pick only one! With all our children now adults, we started a "Dirty Santa" time. I purchase enough \$25 gift certificates to restaurants, movies, Target, Starbucks, iTunes etc. for each participant to end up with one gift card when it's all over. However this is a Dirty Santa with a twist. The first person to open one of the gift cards has to give it to whoever they think would want it the most. The next person can take that gift card or open another card to give to someone else. Person #3 then can take from either person one or two to give away or open a new card etc. This goes on until all the gift cards are given out. It's been fun since no one really "loses". Everyone ends up with a decent card. (There are some other details to the rules, but I don't remember what they are!!)

(contributed by Brooke Shannon) For Michael's family (brother, sister, spouses, nieces and nephews), we pick out different donation items to give in their name instead of traditional gifts. The kids and I look through different "gift catalogs" that non-profits have (International Justice Mission has a great one), and pick items out together as gifts. This is nice because on Christmas day we read about the different organizations that donations were made to, and there is not as much focus on so many material things. [Note: Samaritan's Purse also has a wonderful catalog.]

(contributed by Neda Mays) We draw names for a cousin family gift exchange.

Involving Grandparents and House Guests *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)*

House guests will be happier if there are places to go and things to do. Don't make everyone stay in a room together – give people space and let them spend time with different groups of people. Involve Grandparents in your traditions and activities. Let them read stories to your children. Let your children practice their reading and read their Grandparents Christmas stories. Let Grandma bake cookies with the grandchildren. If you want to help build memories, let Grandpa put together some kit or make something with the children (eg. a pre-made bird house – painted however the children want to do it.) Play games at night, with young children participating by being a partner for an older person (moving pieces, picking up cards, anything to be a “helper.”) Go for a walk after dinner, play games, do a puzzle, laugh your heads off as you watch old home movies. (By the way, it is a marvelous gift to parents/grandparents to preserve family history by getting old movie film or video tapes put onto CDs). If people in your house play instruments, have a “recital.” Sing songs together. Read a story aloud. Have families bring old yearbooks, scrapbooks, wedding albums, and baby books to look at and share. Don't just watch tv!!!!

Baking Treats *(contributed by Neda Mays)*

We bake favorite treats together (new tradition in our home is the college student coming home after exams and making a wonderful homemade wassail that we enjoy as we decorate.)

Just for Fun **(these may spark your imagination to create some activities that are simply fun and reflect your family's personality)**

Making Garlands *(contributed by Neda Mays)* We string popcorn and cranberries to make a fun garland (use cross stitch needles that don't have a sharp point to protect younger fingers.) To make a more sophisticated garland when they are older, recycle old buttons, bits of costume jewelry, and corks and string those together. It helps to string the cork if someone takes the time to use a thin nail and pushes or hammers it through the cork first. This makes it easier to string later.

Christmas Tree Sleepover *(contributed by Melissa Frye)* I believe Melissa Frye shared this idea when we had a similar Christmas tradition-sharing event at Redeemer Presbyterian many years ago. Let your children sleep in sleeping bags in the room where the Christmas tree is on the first night it is decorated. Of course, leave the lights on until the children are asleep! [Valerie Logwinuk notes – My kids loved this and it later became a Friday night sleepover in our living room every week.]

Swimming at Barton Springs Christmas Morning *(contributed by Virginia Rogan)* The entire family goes to Barton Springs on Christmas morning and braves the cold water together!

Driving Around to See Neighborhood Decorations/Lights *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)* We never have time before Christmas, but the day after Christmas, we take a drive at night to see the decorations and lights in many neighborhoods. We take hot cocoa and play Christmas songs to set the mood. This is something my family did when I was a child in Coronado, California and everybody put “illuminarios” (candles embedded in sand inside paper bags) all over their lawns and even on their roofs!! It is fun to take a tradition from your family and continue it, perhaps with your own twist on it.

Listening To Christmas Songs/Books during carpool *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)* When we were in carpools, I would start playing Christmas music starting the week after Thanksgiving. The children would sing and it made carpool time much more fun. Another idea is to find a Christmas story audio book at the library and listen to that in “installments” during carpool. Kids really love audio books with good voices/reading.

Sprinkling Reindeer Food / Putting Food out for St. Nicholas *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)* We have stockings for St. Nicholas (We emphasize the Christian bishop who is the basis for the Santa Claus figure. We tell our children that this real life Christian was the source for the make believe character Santa Claus. We have a good time with the fable.) Our children used to sprinkle reindeer food (glitter and oatmeal -- now who thought up that combination??) on the front lawn Christmas Eve. Our children would put out milk and cookies for St. Nicholas on Christmas Eve.

Twinkling Lights in Each Child’s Room *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)* My husband would put a string of LED Christmas lights in the kids’ rooms (around their windows or mirror or around a doorway.) The kids thought that was such fun. We turned them off at night once they were asleep.

Advent Calendars *(contributed by Patti Edling)* My kids really enjoyed the advent calendars with chocolate for each day, even in their teens. We used to get advent calendars with different educational subjects such as celebrations around the world for each day.

Special Christmas Tissue Boxes, Plastic Bags, Saran Wrap, Paper Towels etc. *(contributed by Valerie Logwinuk)* One of my indulgences during the Christmas season is to buy special decorative Christmas household items. Each child gets a decorative tissue box for their room and we put them in bathrooms, the kitchen etc (we use lots of tissue due to cedar allergies!) I love having special Christmas baggies and colored Saran (green, red) to wrap lunches in and Christmas goodies. It is fun to make little things special.

Watching Classic Christmas Movies *(contributed by Joanne Moore)* Every Christmas Eve, when Harry was growing up, his family always watched the movie *Miracle on 34th Street* together. We carried on that tradition, as well. However there was a revolt last year when instead of *Miracle*, the kids and spouses demanded to watch *Elf* instead.

III. RECOMMENDED CHRISTMAS BOOKS

(recommended by Melissa Kummerer) We have a special basket full of Christmas books. We get them out for the first week of Advent, and leave them through Epiphany. This is the only time we read these books. It is a collection we've made over the years: so it includes simple board books, all the way up to complex stories. My girls still love to read them when there is time! Favorite books:

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey, Wojciechowski

The Trees of the Dancing Gods, P. Polacco (this one is about Hanukkah, but a beautiful story and honoring to God!)

Christmas Tapestry, P. Polacco

How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Dr. Seuss

An Early American Christmas, Tomie dePaola

The Legend of the Poinsettias, Tomie dePaola

The Night of Las Posadas, Tomie dePaola

(recommended by Sabra Boone) Sabra reads these two books during the holidays each year.

Treasuring God in our own Traditions - Noel Piper

Family Celebrations - Ann Hibbard

(recommended by Patti Edling)

Patti recommended the book The Candle in the Window by Margaret Hill McCarter as a read aloud for older children (early teen). It is a Lamplighter Rare Collector's Series book which is available on Amazon.com.

(recommended by Neda Mays)

I Spy Christmas (a book of picture riddles) by Wick and Marzollo

On Christmas Eve (a 3-D pop up book) by Penny Ives and David Hawcock

The First Christmas (pop up book) by Tomi DePaola

Letters from Father Christmas (this is quite a delight) by J.R.R. Tolkien

Story Book Set and Advent Calendar by Carolyn Croll

(recommended by Amy Palmer)

The Jesse Tree: Stories and Symbols of Advent by Raymond and Georgene Anderson

Jesse Tree Devotions: Family Activity for Advent by Marilyn S. Breckenridge

(recommended by Valerie Logwinuk)

The Last Straw, Fredrick H. Thury (my favorite read aloud story for young children)

The First Christmas Tree, Henry Van Dyke (my favorite read aloud story for older children, especially boys – a story that is enticing to young men – the bold adventures of St. Boniface bringing the gospel to the savage Norsemen.) We read this on several nights preceding Christmas and finish it on Christmas night as we eat the Buche Noel (Yule Log cake which commemorates St. Boniface's vanquishing of the Nordic Oak god with the tree that brings life – Christ's sacrificial death on the cross.)

Christmas Spirit, The Joyous Stories, Carols, Feasts, and Traditions of the Season, George Grant and Gregory Wilbur

Stories behind the Great Traditions of Christmas, Ace Collins

The First Christmas, Enid Blyton (a beautifully written story based on the birth narrative)

A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire, Charles Dickens

Reflections on the Christmas Story, Janette Oke

Christ in Christmas, A Family Advent Celebration, Dobson/Swindoll/Boice/Sproul

Christmas Carols for a Kid's Heart (Focus on the Family), Bobbie Wolgemuth, Joni Eareckson Tada (includes a CD, related devotion and scriptures for the carols/hymns, background about the composers and hymn writers)

A Family Christmas (various stories), Dr. James Dobson (paintings by G. Harvey)

Christmas Joy, Susan Branch (my favorite book for decorating and fun activities – wonderful illustrations and a hand-printed look.) I sit up late by myself every year during the holidays and reread it; it appeals to my whimsy!

APPENDIX A

ADVENT CHAIN

1. A quarter! That equals 25 cents. But 25 also stands for the number of days till Christmas, when God gave us His best present. Jesus told about one woman's gift and the way she gave it. Read Mark 12:41-44
2. Grape gum. Grapes make jelly, juice, raisins, and wine. But Jesus didn't need grapes to perform His first miracle. Read John 2:1-10.
3. Here is a smile (smiley sticker)! A smile usually shows happiness. Jesus gave us many instructions to keep us happy. Read Matthew 5:1-12.
4. A net. What does a net have to do with Jesus? Wait till you read the story today! Jesus even knew about fishing! Read Luke 5:4-7 and Mark 1:16-18.
5. A birthday candle! As you know, we are getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birthday. However, Jesus talked about something else that related to this candle....light. Read Mathew 5:14-16.
6. A Bell! You could make some noise with this but it would not have bothered a certain man, until he met Jesus. Read Mark 7:31-37
7. Fish (goldfish)! These would not go very far if you were really hungry, but Jesus could make much out of little. Surely He knew how to multiply. Read Matthew 14: 13-21.
8. These cotton balls would be helpful in a thunderstorm wouldn't they? We could use them for ear plugs to muffle the loud noises that thunder makes, but we know Someone who doesn't need cotton. Jesus can control the weather! Read Matthew 8:23-27.
9. A piece of a map. People needing to use the other parts of this map are in trouble! Don't you get lost today. Read John 14:1-6.

10. It's soap! Do you like to wash your face and hands? How about behind your ears? Washing turned out to be happy time for a man who met Jesus. Read John 9: 1-7.

11. Hearts! Wordlessly they speak of love, don't they? Jesus spoke some commands about love. Read Matthew 22: 37-40.

12. We use the cross as a symbol for Jesus. Do you know why? Read Philippians 2: 1-11.

13. Ordinary salt! Jesus compared salt to our behavior and to us. He also gave us some advice. Read Matthew 5:13 and Colossians 4:6. Notice that He doesn't recommend pepper!

14. Don't try to eat this! It's sand! It reminds us that Jesus knew something about building buildings and lives. Read Matthew 7:24-29.

15. Flowers are pretty aren't they? Jesus used flowers to teach us a reassuring lesson. Read: Matthew 6: 28-34.

16. Raisins! Many children are given raisins instead of candy because they are a healthy and delicious fruit snack. Jesus told us how we can produce good fruit. Read John 15:1-5.

17. Jesus told a story about the seeds a man planted. Find out how His word is really like a seed. Read Matthew 13:3-8 and 13-23.

18. Christmas is just a week away! Let's sing an appropriate song...and remember, sing it loudly! Read Psalm 100. (Maybe cut out words to a song or have symbol of music)

19. A stone! Can you change this stone into bread? Do you think Jesus could? He was asked to do just that! To see how Jesus handled it... Read Matthew 4:1-4.

20. A star! A star was used to lead certain people to Jesus when he was born. Are you letting Him lead you? Read Matthew 2:1-2 and 7:10.

21. The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds, yet it grows into one of the largest plants! See what Jesus said. Read Matthew 17:20.

22. We've learned that the cross stands for Jesus, but do you know what the dove stands for? Read Matthew 3:13:17.

23. The threads that make up this fabric came from the wool of a sheep. Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd, but do you know who His sheep are? Read John 10: 7-18.

24. A marble! Do you know what is sometimes called the Big Blue Marble? It's the world God made for us! What does God continue doing to the world? Who is in the world? Read John 3:16

25. A baby! Jesus was God's gift to us to pay for our sins that we might be able, by faith, to enjoy heaven with Him. Invite Him into your life today to be your Savior and Lord. Read John 1: 12 and 1 John 5:11-12.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

APPENDIX B

GINGERBREAD HOUSE RECIPES

Gingerbread recipe:

½ cup shortening (eg. Crisco)
½ cup granulated sugar (white)
½ cup dark molasses
2 tbs cold water
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp ground ginger
1 tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp salt

Cream together shortening, sugar, molasses and water. Sift together flour, spices and salt. Add dry ingredients to shortening mixture and mix well. Dough will be stiff. Chill at least one hour. Grease or spray mold with vegetable spray. Press dough into the mold. [Note, you can make pattern pieces out of cardboard and cut pieces of dough and place them on a cookie sheet.] Bake in pre-heated 350 degree oven for 25 minutes. Let gingerbread cool in mold 10 minutes. Carefully remove each piece of gingerbread to cooling rack, flat side down. Repeat to make other side, front, roof and chimney. Allow gingerbread to stiffen for a day before assembling. Use royal icing to assemble.

Royal Icing:

3 egg whites
¼ tsp cream of tartar
1 lb. box of 10X confectioner sugar (sifted)

This is a sweet icing to use as glue to assemble the gingerbread house and to make “snow” for the base and for decorating roofs, etc.

Combine all ingredients in a mixing bowl and mix on high speed for 7 to 10 minutes. Beat until very stiff – you can’t overbeat. Store at room temperature (covered tightly with saran.) Once the royal icing is exposed to air, it will harden quickly. Put into a piping bag to apply “threads of glue” to gingerbread house pieces. Spread with a knife to make snow. Apply candy decorations while it is still wet.