

# A Christ-Centered Christmas

By Jennifer Lund

*Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. Make Christ the center of your home, your activities, your decorations, and your celebrations.*

## Examples of ways to center Christmas on Christ:

### ***Decorations/Atmosphere***

- Display pictures of Christ and the Nativity around your home.
- Create a Christ-centered Christmas tree with ornaments representative of Christ. As you decorate the tree, discuss the meanings with your family. Read a scripture for each ornament.
- Add the various names of Christ to Christmas ornaments using glitter glue.
- Nativities - consider child-friendly sets for hands-on involvement (bean bags, Little People)
- Display a names of Christ garland - tutorial here:  
<http://thehomespunheart.blogspot.com/2008/12/names-of-jesus-garland-tutorial.html>

### ***Media***

- Christ-centered movies (*Luke 2*, *The Nativity Story* - an excellent Hollywood film)
- Display meaningful and uplifting Christmas books. Wrap them (if desired) and open one each day and read together (uses a lot of wrapping paper).
- Christmas music (CDs, printed). Choose to play songs about the Savior and His birth.
- Play Christmas music all month long - especially while working on projects and gifts.
- Sing Christmas hymns each night in December (during scripture study time). For young children focus on just one or two each week to help them learn the words.

### ***Spiritual Devotion***

- Hold daily devotionals during regular family scripture study time. Use the 24-days of Christmas program (with or without ornaments) to focus on Christ *or* choose special scriptures to read about Christ's birth and life mission each day.
- Watch the First Presidency Christmas devotional.
- Hold special spiritual programs "Christmas in the Americas: A Christmas Program," *Friend*, Dec. 2004, 18; "Sharing Time: Come unto Christ," *Friend*, Dec. 1989, 8; "Twelve Witnesses of Christ's Birth" Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Liahona*, Dec. 1992, 43.
- Memorize *The Living Christ* - free packet and memorization cards at <https://discoverthescriptures.com/blogs/news>
- Go for a nighttime winter walk and enjoy the beautiful stars. Talk about the special star that appeared at Christ's birth.
- Attend the temple (before it closes) to experience a truly "white" Christmas season.
- On Christmas Eve read Luke 2 and act out the Nativity with costumes. Sing Christmas carols.
- Make a Christmas advent candle, and read a Christ-related scripture each night as the candle burns.
- Bear your testimony out loud, either at testimony meeting or to a friend or family member.
- Since there are 24 chapters in the book of Luke, read one chapter each day until Christmas.
- Pass around the baby Jesus from your nativity - answer the question "what has Jesus done for me?"

### ***Service - Gifts to the Savior - "It was said of Jesus that He 'went about doing good.' As we do likewise, the Christmas spirit will be ours." - Thomas S. Monson***

- Family members perform acts of service, write them on a slip of paper and put them in a white Christmas stocking or a specially wrapped box with a slit in the top. These can be read on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.
- Improve yourself in some way that would be pleasing to the Savior. This can be written down as a pledge at the beginning of the month and placed in your own stocking or another special receptacle and read (by you) on Christmas Day.

- For each act of service, family members add a piece of straw to a manger to make a nice bed for the baby Jesus.
- Hang Christmas stockings early in the season and encourage family members to place notes of appreciation, love, and of noticing the good deeds of another. If someone performs an act of service for another, they can write the service on a slip of paper and put that in their stocking as well. Read them on Christmas morning as you go through your stockings.
- Circulate a baby Jesus (a piece from an old Nativity set or a crafted one) or a “service star.” Leave it in the location of a service performed for a family member (on a sister’s bed that you made). That person then performs another act of secret service and leaves the baby Jesus there.
- Encourage your family members to listen for spiritual promptings of who needs to be served, in what ways, and when. Take a walk around your neighborhood to search for needs. Call your Relief Society President, Compassionate Service leader, or Bishop and ask if they know of service that could be done. The service could include a visit to a family or the elderly or widowed simply to lift their spirits. Your family could sing some Christmas songs, share a treat or pictures drawn by the children.
- Simple White Envelopes [www.whiteenvelopeproject.org](http://www.whiteenvelopeproject.org) (a woman’s husband hated the commercial aspect of Christmas, so as a gift to him, she made donations to people – wrestling gear to a poor, inner-city church, sent a group of mentally handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, sent a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned down the week before Christmas, etc. The envelope became the highlight of Christmas; the last thing opened on Christmas morning; anticipated and enjoyed by the whole family. After her husband passed away, she continued the tradition and was surprised to find three more white envelopes on the tree that year from each of her children.)
- Forgive and make amends with someone.
- Schedule a night to help another person or family.
- Call someone you normally wouldn't to wish him or her a Merry Christmas.
- Change in Your Pocket: One woman enlisted the help of her children doing small jobs around the house, paying them for the jobs completed with the understanding that the money they earned was to be used for a special purpose. When she ran errands with her children, they were to place their earned change in their pockets. Then when they came upon a bell ringer for the Salvation Army they got to place the change they had earned in the metal bucket.
- Do “The 12 Days of Christmas.” Pick a few families each year. Each night leave something (candy, ornaments, piece of a Nativity set, etc.) on their doorstep with a note or poem. Try not to get caught for the first 11 days. End the 12 days on Christmas Eve and deliver a plate of homemade cinnamon rolls in person, revealing who you are. Sing a few Christmas carols as you drop it off, or dress like the nativity story and sing “Silent Night.” End the evening sipping hot chocolate together.

### *Treats*

- Use Nativity cookie cutters
- Make a gingerbread Nativity
- Make a Nativity out of candy, marshmallows, graham crackers, and coconut (picture from [aokcorral.com](http://aokcorral.com)).
- Make bread to deliver to shut-ins or neighbors with the bread of life scripture attached.
- Make star-shaped sugar cookies. Attach a tag with a scripture that tells about the signs at Christ’s birth. Share them with someone.



### *Activities for Children and Families*

- Help children write a story about how they imagine being at the manger on the first Christmas.
- Color or paint a Nativity scene or a picture of the shepherds and hang it in your home.
- Help children clean out toys and donate good used toys to charity.
- Attend a live Nativity together.
- Collect small items (or make them) that are symbolic of Christ and Christmas. Teach children the meaning, then let them draw one from a bag and tell how it reminds them of Christ.
- Visit the lights on Temple Square. Go early enough that you can enjoy the visitors centers.
- Have a Shepherd’s or Bethlehem Dinner – eat a simple meal of fish, pita bread, cheese, fruit, olives (food that might have been eaten at the time of Christ; improvise a little for children – have a yummy

stew). Eat your meal on the floor with candlelight. Read about the birth of Christ in Luke 2 and give a gift of self to the Savior. Keep your gift in a personal box (don't have to share with others).

- Drive around town looking at Christmas lights. Discuss how Christ is the light of the world.

### **Gifts**

- Simplify gift giving. Set the expectation for 1-3 gifts per person (from parents or Santa). Anything else is an unexpected surprise/bonus.
- Teach children about the three gifts from the wise men and their symbolism: Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Give three special gifts to each child: something to amuse, something to use, and something to cherish. Or something they need, something they want, and something spiritually uplifting.
- Include a candy cane in the gifts. Accompany this with a tag or the book "The Legend of the Candy Cane" to teach its symbolism (white = virgin birth/sinless nature of Jesus; hard candy = solid rock, foundation of the Church, firmness of God's promises; J = Jesus; staff = "Good Shepherd"; red stripes = suffering Christ endured in our behalf)
- In lieu of monetary gifts, ask that family members memorize a scripture or hymn for you, which can be recited on Christmas Day. They could also develop a talent or perform an act of service for someone "in your honor."
- Give the gift of time to loved ones. Plan special outings with that person, mark it on your calendar and make it happen.
- Remind your family that our gifts will contribute to the spirit of Christmas only when they pass these three tests: 1-Is the gift given in the spirit of love? 2-Is it a reasonable choice and not too expensive or time consuming for the giver? 3-Will it be ready before Christmas so that it will not take last minute preparation that should be spent on more important activities? ("Come Let Us Adore Him," FHE Resource book, 1997, 156.)
- Make it a tradition to give the gift of family history stories to your children. Give each a binder titled "Stories from Our Family Trees" or "The \_\_\_ Family Legacy," etc. Include brief, interesting stories on a level that children can enjoy and understand, audio recordings and videos, family cookbooks, sentimental items from home, etc.
- Write your spouse a love letter each Christmas.
- Give a Christ-centered ornament to your children each year rather than a random one. Include a scripture reference.
- Make "give lists" instead of or in addition to a list of gifts you'd like to receive.
- Trim the gift list.
- Set and stick to a holiday budget.

### ***Stress - Simplify your Christmas by embracing the spiritual side of the season.***

- Politely decline requests that will take you away from family.
- Avoid "mad rush" shopping times.
- Look for ways to be Christ-like while shopping (be kind, let someone with a crying child go in front of you, smile, speak kindly, etc.)
- Shop online.
- Say thank you as often as possible.
- Delegate some holiday preparations to children or other family members.
- Let go of some items on your "to-do" list and even traditional activities which bring too much stress to your life or take too much of your time. Simplify a traditional activity.
- Set apart time to ponder about Christ and how you can act more Christ-like.
- Find quiet time to pray.
- Write down great memories as they happen.
- Learn to roll gracefully with the unexpected.

## Christmas Eve

- Turn your Christmas lights on the morning of Christmas Eve until Christmas night as a reminder of a day, a night, and a day when there was no darkness.
- Set out luminaries along the street of your house. Have the children fill the bags with sand. Help them light the candles inside.
- When setting your Christmas dinner table, set a literal place (chair, plate, glass, silverware) for Christ as an honored member of your family. Place a golden paper crown on the place setting for Christ. Have the father of the family to ask everyone how they would act if Jesus were sitting at our table.



- Eat a meal of Chicken á la King (Chicken for the King). Gently push down store-bought bread into muffin tins and bake until toasted (so it will keep its shape). Serve the toast “crowns” with the creamy chicken on top. (Pictures and recipe from [www.thesisterscafe.com](http://www.thesisterscafe.com).)



Chicken á La King (The Sisters Café) - Serves 8-10 adults.

½ c butter

½ c red bell pepper, diced

½ c green pepper, diced (these red and green peppers are so festive!)

½ c onions, diced

½ c flour

2 small cans mushrooms and juice (optional)

3 c chicken broth

1 c cream

5 c cooked chicken, shredded (Rotisserie is great)

Salt and pepper

¼ c milk

Shred chicken, and dice peppers and onions. Heat butter over medium-low heat. Sauté peppers and onions just until soft. Then add flour. Mix well to make a roux. Let it bubble. Add mushrooms and broth; bring to a boil to thicken. Stir in cream and chicken. Add salt and pepper to taste. *Don't boil after adding cream.* Add milk to thin if needed.



- Buy “Christmas Crackers” for each member of the family (a British tradition). Partners help to pull the package apart until it makes the cracking sound. Each person wears the crown inside, reads their joke, and enjoys the toy and treat.
- Father reads the Christmas story in Luke 2. Family acts out the Christmas story. Film it each year. Sing Christmas Carols.
- Visit the graves of loved ones on Christmas Eve and place a luminary on each grave. Seeing the lights flicker in the dark on the eve of the Savior’s birth can be a special experience. Remind your families that Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness. Because of His coming to earth, His atonement and resurrection, we can be together with our loved ones again.
- Christmas Eve, parents write special letters to each child expressing their love, etc. Place them in the area where the children will be waiting. Have them read the letters on Christmas morning.
- Sharing the Love & Sibling Gift Exchange (idea from [www.oneshetwoshe.com](http://www.oneshetwoshe.com)): Start with the oldest child; everyone in the family takes turns saying nice things about them. When everyone has had their turn, they give that sibling the gift from them. Then it goes right on down the line: kind words and presents. Not only are they saying kind and loving things to each other but they also get excited about the small (\$1-10 dollar) gifts that they are given. The gifts don't get overlooked in the excitement and seem insignificant like they might on Christmas morning. This can be a special family moment.



- In Ireland, families place candles in the windows of their homes to show that they would have welcomed Mary and Joseph.
- In Finland, families visit cemeteries on Christmas Eve and place candles on the graves of loved ones.
- In India, people put small clay lamps on the roofs of their homes to show that Jesus is the Light of The World.

### Christmas Day

- Children wake up parents on Christmas morning by singing Christmas carols.
- Children hunt for the baby Jesus, which is hidden somewhere in the house. The first to find the baby wins a prize (or gets to open the first present, or share a prize with everyone – to avoid tears or anyone feeling bad). Put the baby Jesus in a manger or (gather around the spot he was found) and share scriptures and a carol or two in His honor. Have a family prayer.
- Before (or after) opening presents on Christmas morning, kneel as a family to thank Heavenly Father for the greatest gift of all – our Savior and His atonement.
- Children get to go through Christmas stockings while breakfast preparations are finished. If you have done the service activity with stockings, family members get to read these notes of love and accounts of service along with the goodies in their stockings.
- Decorate a streusel cake with candles to remember Christ’s birthday. Blow out the candles. After breakfast, clean up together quickly so you can get on to present opening.
- Open the present for Jesus (explained above in “Service-Gifts to the Savior”). Read your gift to the Savior (out loud or to yourself) and ask yourself if you were successful in giving this gift to the Savior.
- Include a nice set of thank-you cards in each child’s stocking. On the last day in December, the family writes the notes to extended family members and relatives.
- If grandparents or other family members are deceased, visit and decorate their graves with holly and other greens on Christmas Eve day as a way to visit them.
- *Source: www.oneshetwoshe.com:* Wrap four boxes and put them under the tree to be opened last. Each present represents a gift Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have given us.



#### **Gift #1 - The Savior's Birth**

"Heavenly Father gave us his Son."

Object - Nativity picture or baby Jesus from a Nativity set



#### **Gift #2 - Jesus' Teachings**

"Jesus taught us how to live righteously."

Object - Scriptures, heart, 10 commandments



#### **Gift #3 - Jesus' Suffering For Our Sins**

"Jesus made it possible for us to be saved from sin."

Object - Gethsemane picture, olive branch, cross



#### **Gift #4 - The Resurrection**

"Jesus made it possible for us to be resurrected."

Object - Resurrection picture, rock (for tomb), glove (compares to our body; hand to our spirit)

Ask the kids to name some of their favorite gifts they received. Talk about how these gifts from our Heavenly Father and from the Savior show their love for us. Tell them how Heavenly Father loves to see us enjoying life and especially enjoying it together. He is saddened when he sees us fight. Let's remember Jesus today and try to act like He would in sharing and being extra kind to each other!

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*From churchofjesuschrist.org:*

The gift of Christmas isn't wrapped up in presents or parties. The gift of Christmas is Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten of the Father, the Son of God. As you follow Him, you put people first. You may spend less time in lines and more time serving others. You may spend less money on - and more time with - the people you love. You may lose yourself and you may find everything else that matters.

Resources:

- <http://www.jonlund.com/Favorites.html> (Christmas section)
- <http://christcenteredtraditions.blogspot.com>
- <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/christmas?lang=eng> (Christmas videos, ideas and music)

*Talks and articles*

"Idea List: Make Your Christmas Christ Centered" by Peggy Sue Clark, *New Era*, Dec. 1998.

"Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful: An Advent Calendar" *New Era*, December 1998.

"Random Sampler" *Ensign*, December 2007.

"The Wondrous and True Story of Christmas," President Gordon B. Hinckley, *Ensign*, December 2000, p. 2-5.

"He Took My Lickin' For Me" - great testimony from President Hinckley on p. 5.