



December 2009



Keep Christ in Christmas By Starting Some New Traditions

Traditions are important for families because they provide opportunities to keep your unique legacy going. From the simple to the silly to the sentimental, traditions can create meaningful memories. Perhaps you buy a new ornament for each of your children every year. This Christmas, don't hesitate to try out some new traditions. See what does and doesn't work for your family. You just may create a new tradition that'll keep going for generations!

Make Affirmation Ornaments—Have each family member cut out a large ornament shape from construction paper and write his or her name on the front. On the back, have other family members write (or draw) something special about the person whose name is on the front. Then decorate the ornaments, attach yarn hangers, and put them on your Christmas tree.

Get Crafty—Have a family craft night so family members can make simple homemade gifts for one another. These can include coupon books for help with chores or for special outings.

Share the News—As a family, dress up and put on a Christmas play for neighborhood children. Serve juice and homemade cookies.

Adopt a Child in Need—Anonymously assist a young person in your community through small gifts, money, and encouraging cards. If possible, do these acts of service all year long.



"I Believe..."

According to a recent Associated Press poll, 86% of people believed in Santa as children. More than 60% of parents with young children said Santa is an important part of their Christmas celebrations.

Other findings:

- 47% of people said Santa detracts from the holiday's religious importance, while 36% said Santa enhances the religious nature of Christmas.
- 81% of people said they believe in angels, including more than half of people who say they aren't religious.

PowerSource



Ask God:

1. To help your family keep your Christmas celebrations focused on Jesus.
2. To give your family members positive attitudes about trying new traditions.
3. To help you create strong bonds and lasting memories.

Parenting Insights

The editors of *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children* (Focus on the Family) share these tips for incorporating new traditions.

1. **Make them fun!** When your celebrations are filled with laughter, the real message behind them will be reinforced more positively in your family.
2. **Use Christmas symbols.** Many symbols have Christian origins. For example, St. Nicholas was a shy, generous man who secretly did good deeds for the poor. Decorating with festive Christmas lights also has Christian roots.
3. **Don't ban all secular traditions.** Take a balanced approach to your Christmas celebrations, for your children's sake. Then they'll be more open to receive the true reason for the season.

OpenTheBook

**"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."
Luke 2:14**

On the first Christmas, the angels announced Jesus' birth. As we celebrate Christmas, our worship and traditions also focus on our newborn Savior, the King of Kings.

Teachable Moments

1. **Make waiting fun.** Patience is a difficult life skill to learn, especially during December. Harness children's wonder and anticipation by letting them explore their creativity. Keep red and green-colored paper, as well as other craft supplies, readily available. Have kids make gift tags, wreaths, cards, and more.
2. **Deck the (stable) halls.** Instead of a gingerbread house, decorate a gingerbread stable with assorted candies. Prop animal crackers inside graham-cracker walls, and use toasted coconut as hay.
3. **Read all about it.** Many families read aloud the Christmas story before opening gifts. Go beyond Jesus' birth to Luke 2:25-38, where Jesus is presented in the temple. Talk about faithful Simeon and Anna, whose prayers were answered. Then discuss ways you've seen God in action during the past week.



"So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are **ON THE ROAD, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up." Deuteronomy 11:18-19, NLT**

What do traditions—and Christmas—mean to your children? Discover their opinions and insights by asking these questions:

1. What are your favorite things to do around Christmastime, and why? Which do you plan to continue with your own children?
2. How do our traditions help make Christmas more special? How might some traditions interfere with our celebrations?
3. What traditions would you like our family to start or stop, and why? What traditions can kids in our family be in charge of?
4. How would you explain "Christmas" to someone who was unfamiliar with it?

Family Experience: Star-Studded Fun

Brighten up the dark winter nights by trying these joy-filled, Christ-based experiences with your family and friends:

- **Follow the Star**—Hang a trail of stars throughout your house, and at each star, place a nativity-scene figure. Hang the last, largest star over a cake with three candles, and place baby Jesus by it. Then follow the stars. Stop at each one and talk about the role of that person (or animal). At the final star, light the three candles. Say, "These candles represent the star of Bethlehem that shone brightly over baby Jesus; Jesus, the light of the world, who was born into a dark night; and how God wants us to be a light for others and point them to Jesus. Sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus and share the cake.
- **Star Square**—This game, which is ideal for play with extended families, is a reminder of the wise men who followed the Christmas star to find Jesus. With masking tape, divide an 8x8-foot space into four squares. Tape a construction-paper star in one quadrant. Put one person in each square, and have everyone else stand in a circle around the quadrants. The "star" square starts play by tapping the ball into another square. Players tap the ball into another square whenever it enters theirs. Play continues until someone misses, and then that person steps out and a new player rotates in from the circle. Players rotate clockwise toward the star. Whenever a player steps into the star, he or she should share one thing about Jesus or Christmas.





What's Playing at the Movies

Movie: *The Princess and the Frog* (Dec. 11)

Genre: Animated fairy tale, comedy

Rating: G

Cast: Anika Noni Rose, Angela Bassett, Terrence Howard, Oprah Winfrey

Synopsis: Tiana, Disney's first African-American princess, lives in New Orleans during the Jazz Age. She meets Naveen, a prince who's been transformed into a frog by an evil magician. Naveen mistakes Tiana for a princess, and when they kiss, Tiana becomes a frog, too. They go on adventures to restore their humanity. (Caution: They seek direction from a voodoo priestess.)

Discussion Questions: What kind of true or untrue assumptions do people often make about you? What can you tell (and not tell) just by looking at someone? Read 1 Samuel 16:7. What do you think God sees when he looks inside your heart?



What Music Is Releasing

Artist: Sara Groves

Album: *Fireflies and Songs*

Artist Info: Groves is a prolific writer of Christian folksongs that contain personal lyrics about faith and relationships. Her tours have benefited several Christian ministries.

Summary: Groves says *Fireflies and Songs* is a candid, confessional album. In the nostalgic "This House," Groves assures her 2-year-old daughter (and her listeners) that "the Lord withholds no good thing."

Discussion Questions: During your life, what are some of the biggest blessings that God has provided for you? How have some of those blessings been disguised at first? Read Psalm 84:11. How might God be using you to be a blessing for other people?



What Games Are Out

Title	Content	Rating & Platform
<i>Cook or Be Cooked</i>	Would-be cooks learn basic kitchen skills and then advance to "real-life" food prep.	E; Wii
<i>LEGO Rock Band</i>	This music-simulation game is more kid-friendly than other popular titles. As the band "travels," some LEGO characters engage in comic mischief.	E10+; Nintendo DS, Xbox 360, Wii, PS3
<i>Adventures to Go!</i>	Young Finn joins a magical training camp for adventurers in this role-playing game. It contains mild fantasy violence and mild suggestive themes.	E10+; PSP

RATINGS: EC=Early Childhood, E=Everyone (ages 6+), E10+ (ages 10+), T=Teen (ages 13+)



Culture & Trends

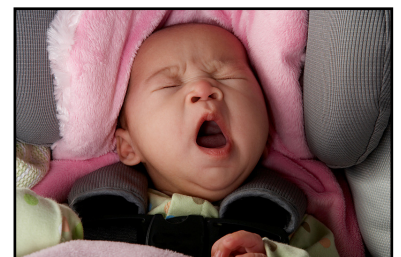
What's happening right now that may affect your children and family:

- More restaurants are trying to lure families with "kids eat free" meals. "Free is magic," says professor Barry Schwartz. "It will seduce people into eating out who shouldn't."
- Preschoolers can have chronic depression, new research shows. Symptoms include persistent sadness (even when playing), trouble sleeping, irritability, and frequent tantrums.

Quick Stats

- In this flailing economy, many pregnant women are rethinking adoption. At a Chicago agency, 30% more women are inquiring about placing a child for adoption than a year ago.

(USA Today)



- The U.S. now has between 1.5 million and 2 million home-schooled students. That's a 75% increase since 1999.