



Thoughtful Moments

The Magi's Gifts

Children can get so caught up in receiving gifts for Christmas that they miss the significance of the holiday. To keep the focus on Christ, consider limiting the number of gifts to three in honor of the gifts of the Magi. Consider giving children one gift that is their heart's desire, a piece of clothing that is not just sensible, and one gift that will help them grow (a book or sports accessory, for example).

Family meals

Families can help children become better socialized and more secure in as few as 60 minutes a week. Experts agree that gathering as a family even for just one meal a week can build a stronger family.



"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).



Celebrate an unusual Christmas with joyful traditions

This will be an unusual Christmas holiday for many families. At an unsettling time, it is important to renew or create family Christmas traditions to give children a sense of stability. Consider these ideas to keep the joy in your family celebration this year:

Give Jesus the first gift. At Thanksgiving, wrap a gift box for Jesus. Cut a slot in the top. During Advent have every member of the family write down how they showed love each day and drop these offerings in the box. Unwrap this gift first on Christmas morning and read the notes out loud.

Make "Adorements." Craft ornaments that illustrate names for Jesus, "Bread of Life," "Light of the

World," "King of Kings," etc. Hang them on the tree.

Mark a milestone. Give each child a new ornament marking an event in his or her spiritual life from the year. Celebrate the receipt of a Sacrament, learning a new prayer, or acquiring a virtue.

Celebrate cultures. Learn how to say "Merry Christmas" in different languages. Serve up new foods at dinner, such as potato latkes or pasteles.

Light out of the darkness. Some cultures around the world place candles and paper lanterns in their windows to symbolize Christ bringing light out of the darkness. Place a candle or lantern in your window on Christmas Eve.



Why Do Catholics Do That?

This month we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. We are able to share in God's divine life through Jesus's life, death and Resurrection.

Who do Catholics believe was born on Christmas?



In his gospel, St. John explained that the birth of Jesus fulfilled a promise God made. *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14).*

Lessons from the Magi

On the January 6 feast of the Epiphany, we celebrate the visit of the magi, or wise men, to the newborn Savior. There are two lessons families can learn from this visit:

Look for a sign. Through study and investigation, the magi figured out that something big was going to happen and waited for a sign to tell them which direction to take. God often gives us signs to point us to the right path. Help youngsters weigh options and pray for direction



when facing big decisions.

Travel in faith. Once the magi started their journey, they asked for help when they got stumped and believed it would come.

"Behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage'" (Matthew 2:1-2).

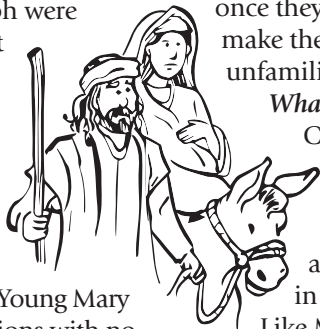
Teach your child to follow his "star" and rely on God for help. The key is to be like the magi and have faith that something marvelous will happen.

Scripture LESSON

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23, God chooses each of us in a special way.

We often think of Jesus' birth as an idyllic scene. The reality was quite different. Mary and Joseph were forced to travel in the last stages of her pregnancy from Nazareth to Bethlehem. On foot or donkey, it was a dirty and exhausting journey. Once there, they had no option for decent housing and had to stay with animals. Young Mary gave birth in crude conditions with no friend or family to help.

After a short time, they fled to Egypt with their newborn to escape threats from the government, and stayed there



for several years. There were no friendly faces to greet the family once they arrived and they had to make their own way in an unfamiliar land.

What can a parent do?

Catholics have a special charge to protect those who are vulnerable: children, elderly, the poor and those fleeing violence in their home countries.

Like Mary's and Joseph's, God has a special place for each of us in his plan of salvation. Prayerfully ask God what he wants you to do for him and his kingdom.

Feasts & Celebrations

Dec. 6 – St. Nicholas (350). St. Nicholas had a generous heart and gave away most of his fortune. He is credited with saving three girls from being sold into slavery to pay their father's debt. His anonymous acts of generosity helped him become the patron of children.

Dec. 9 – St. Juan Diego (1548). A simple, humble Native American who became a faithful Christian, St. Juan Diego was visited by the Blessed Virgin at Tepeyac Hill in Mexico. She asked him to have the bishop of Mexico

build a chapel for her, and had him carry roses to the bishop as a sign. When the roses fell from his tilma (cape) before the bishop, it retained the Blessed Mother's image.

Dec. 12th - Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531). The Blessed Mother appeared as a young Native American maiden to St. Juan Diego, also Native American. By choosing to appear in that image, she was identifying with the poor and down-trodden of the land to give them hope.



Parent TALK

Our family Christmas last year was awkward. For no real reason, my youngest brother drifted from the Church, saying he doesn't feel

"connected" to God.



Now that he coaches his daughter's soccer team on Sundays, Mass is out of the question. So Christmas for his

family is no longer about Christ.

When our family met at my parents' house for Christmas dinner, David's kids were grumpy. In contrast to the rest of the happy cousins, David's three had long faces and moped. "Santa didn't come through for them," David apologized. He said each child only got a few items off long Christmas lists and were disappointed. In my opinion, without Christ as the focus, Christmas will always disappoint.

This year, I have invited David and his family to Christmas Eve socially-distanced caroling at our parish followed by the Vigil Mass. That will give his family's Christmas the best start.

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