

***** 5 WAYS TO KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS *****

1) GIFT-GIVING: Since we want to remember that Christmas is about the birth of Our Lord, and not about luxuries, it is a good idea to keep presents to a minimum and not allow them to be extravagant. For parents, a nice idea is to give the children three presents, representing the three gifts given to the Christ Child by the magi: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Relatives may also be asked to buy only one gift per child. This way, the children will not be too overwhelmed. There will also be less clutter in the home!

2) DECORATING: To keep the emphasis on Christ, it is important to keep decorations to a religious, not a secular, nature. Since Christmas is a profound holyday, when we celebrate the Incarnation of God Himself, everything we do should be in keeping with this deep and awesome truth. This extends to the cards we send and even the wrapping paper we use.

3) THE CHRISTMAS TREE: The holy and reverent atmosphere we wish to create will also extend to the Christmas tree. Choosing ornaments relating to the religious celebration of Christmas can be easily done. Balls and ornaments featuring the nativity scene or the Madonna and Child can be found quite readily. Musical themes, candles and of course, angels, would all be good choices. This is not to suggest that pictures of loved ones, sentimental items or that ornament your child made at school, should be excluded. It's the spirit of the tree that matters.

4) THE TRUTH ABOUT A CERTAIN CHARACTER: A character based on a holy man, Saint Nicholas, has become a challenger to Christ on this most holy of days. Children's minds are consumed by this idea and the materialism associated with it, instead of the real and far more incredible gift of God's Son. Telling our children the truth includes the following benefits:

- the emphasis will be on the real Person of Christ rather than a fictional character
- children will know that their presents come from their loving parents
- the intellectual development of children will not be impeded by being encouraged to believe a story that goes against reason
- the trust that children have in their parents will not be undermined when they come to realize the truth-the disappointment and hurt that is often felt at that time will not be experienced

5) SEASON OF ADVENT: Advent is a time of preparation, similar to Lent. We can encourage penance, as we do in Lent, or we could also focus on works of charity, which can be a wonderful activity for the whole family. This is also a great time to learn Christmas hymns (*that you don't know all the words to*) and to read and meditate upon the Incarnation. Also, down-scaling Christmas preparations can be a good idea if they've been too stressful in the past. It is wise to be mindful of the simplicity of the first Christmas. If the stable in Bethlehem is our starting point and our mindset, we cannot go wrong!