



CELEBRATING
Christ
IN THE HOLIDAYS

*A resource lovingly compiled and shared by the women of
Redeemer Church in Fort Worth, Texas*

Holy Days

The word *holiday* originates from the old English *haligdæg*, meaning “holy day.” While not all holidays have a “holy” significance, many do. It is the desire of the women of Redeemer Church in Fort Worth, Texas, to share ideas and resources that facilitate the intentional inclusion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in holiday celebrations that have a Christian significance. Celebrating Christ in the holidays has historical roots discernible in the Old Testament and continues throughout the New Testament and into modern times. The women of Redeemer Church have compiled this collection of Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday celebration ideas that we believe are readily accessible in order to encourage our sisters in Christ as they strive to honor our Savior and share His Gospel message with family, friends, neighbors, and strangers in each holiday celebration.

Come, let's celebrate Christ!



Thanksgiving

History/Description

An annual one-day holiday set aside for giving thanks at the conclusion of the harvest season. The United States celebrates Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of November. The Plymouth settlers (Pilgrims) set apart a holiday immediately after their first harvest in 1621, when they held an autumn celebration of food, feasting, and praising God. The Native American chiefs Massasoit, Squanto and Samoset joined in the celebration with ninety of their men in the three-day event. President Abraham Lincoln first declared Thanksgiving a Federal holiday as a “prayerful day of Thanksgiving” on the last Thursday in November.

Books/Resources

- *Let's Celebrate God's Blessing on Thanksgiving: Happy Day Holiday Book* by Lise Caldwell
- *Squanto and the Miracle of Thanksgiving* by Eric Metaxas
- *Thanksgiving, What Makes It Special?* by Harold Myra
- *Thanksgiving: A Harvest Celebration* by Julie Stiegemeier
- *The First Thanksgiving Feast* by Joan Anderson
- *The Pumpkin Patch Parable, The Parable Series #1* by Liz Curtis Higgs
- *The Story of Thanksgiving* by Nancy J. Skarmeas, board book ages 3-5
- *What is Thanksgiving?* by Michelle Medlock Adams, board book ages 3-6

Websites

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanksgiving>
- <http://www.doorposts.com/samples/thanks-05.pdf>
- <http://www.christianitytoday.com/cpt/9g6/9g6054.html>

Related Scriptures

- Psalm 69:30; Psalm 100:4; 1Tim. 4:4; Col. 2:6-7; Psalm 7:17; Psalm 106:1; 1Thess. 5:16-18

Use a concordance, topical Bible or study Bible to find other passages related to thankfulness, praise, or gratitude. Read a different verse or passage each day or week in November; or read the same passage daily for the month, memorizing, meditating, and applying it to your life.

You can also read passages about the various qualities of God. Offer prayer of thanksgiving for these qualities and observe how God manifests Himself in your life through these qualities.

Celebration Ideas

1. Plan a Pilgrim scavenger hunt. Give each participant a basket and a list of items with which the Pilgrims might have been familiar. Then hide these objects throughout the house or the yard for your kids to find: dried corn, small pumpkins, pinecones, a toy boat, or small Native American figures.
2. Draw and cut out a large paper tree (may use brown paper bag) with lots of loose leaves in autumn colors. Mount the tree in a prominent place and put the leaves nearby in a box with glue and markers. (Painter's tape is a good way to attach objects to walls, even wallpapered walls, without damage.) Ask your family to write things they are thankful for on the leaves, filling the tree by the end of the month.

Have your kids consider the following question: "If I could keep only the gifts I've thanked God for today, what would I have?" Ask younger children, "What do you want to thank God for today?" Encourage your family to add to the tree daily. Alternatively, use a tree branch planted in a flowerpot as a base for displaying the leaf shapes that express gratitude to our Lord.

3. Corrie ten Boom's book *The Hiding Place* teaches a deep lesson in thankfulness. Share Corrie's story with your kids, pointing out her struggle to be "thankful in all things." She even thanked God for fleas in her barracks. She later learned that the fleas kept the guards away and allowed Corrie and others to study the Bible undisturbed.
4. Make a Blessing Basket – Place a pretty fall basket containing a pencil and pad of paper in an easy-to-reach location. Throughout the month, encourage family members to jot down ways God has blessed them. Younger children can draw or cut out pictures from magazines. Read these together and give God thanks each day or set aside some time on Thanksgiving Day.
5. As a hospitality tradition, invite a few guests for Thanksgiving dinner who have no family and no where to go on Thanksgiving - widows, single adults, college students far from home, etc.
6. Make scripture place cards next to each person's place setting at the table. Write a scripture on each card about thankfulness to help turn hearts and minds to Christ rather than only the food during the dinner.
7. Mayflower Dinner <http://www.doorposts.com/samples/thanks-05.pdf> - has complete details of how to go about having a Mayflower Dinner. The basic idea is to recreate what it might have been like for the pilgrims voyaging on the Mayflower, and talk about their faith in God through it all. It is an opportunity to study the history of the Pilgrims and their desire and quest for religious freedom. You begin preparing for this celebration 2-3 weeks before Thanksgiving. You can read some of the suggested stories found on the website as you near the time for your Mayflower dinner. You then prepare a Mayflower dinner. For more details on all of the preparations, go to the website listed above.

Advent

Description

Beginning on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, Advent celebrates both the birth of the Messiah and the return of the Messiah.

Books/Resources

These resources may assist your celebration with daily Advent readings and/or an Advent wreath:

- *Good News of Great Joy* by John Piper - 25 short devotional readings beginning December 1 and going through Christmas Day. Available as a download or paperback book. <http://www.desiringgod.org/books/good-news-of-great-joy>
- *The Dawning of Indestructible Joy* by John Piper - 25 brief devotional readings from John Piper begin on December 1 and carry us to Christmas Day. Available as a download or paperback book. <http://www.desiringgod.org/books/the-dawning-of-indestructible-joy>
- *Christ in Christmas: a Family Advent Celebration* by James Dobson, Charles Swindoll, James Montgomery Boice, R.C. Sproul. This devotional book has daily readings which included scripture, stories, songs, and family activities adaptable for all ages.
- *The Handel's Messiah Family Advent Reader* with companion music CD by Donna W Paynes and Fran Lenzo. The daily reading feature Scripture texts used to create Handel's *Messiah* along with fascinating and interest-grabbing stories behind some of the symbols of Christmas. The Christmas Eve reading titled, "Why the King Stood Up" focuses on the "Hallelujah Chorus."
- *Jotham's Journey* by Arnold Ytreeide is a storybook with daily reading for advent. This adventure story features 10-year-old Jotham who encounters thieves, robbers, and kidnappers as he travels across Israel in search of his family. He also encounters shepherds, an innkeeper, and wise men as he finds his way to Bethlehem and the newborn Savior as well as his family. Some parts are a bit scary, so recommended for children ages 8-10 and up.

Other books:

- *Stories Behind the Best-Loved Songs of Christmas* by Ace Collins
- *Stories of Christmas Carols* by Ernest K. Emurian
- *Treasuring God in Our Traditions* by Noel Piper

Websites

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advent>
- <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/by-topic/the-birth-of-christ>
- <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-advent>

Related Scriptures

There are many suggested readings. The following websites have different selections:

- <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/holidays/making-meaningful-christmas-memories/making-meaningful-christmas-memories>
- <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/?articleid=32879&columnid=3881>

As a family, memorize Luke 2: 1-20 and Matthew 2: 1-15. On Dec 1, begin memorizing 1-2 verses each day according to the capabilities of family members. Don't fret if not all verses are learned. Repeating this effort annually will allow for the Scriptures to become well-learned as children grow in their ability to memorize.

Use a study Bible to find Scripture references for Old Testament prophecies about Christ and the New Testament fulfillment of those prophecies. The Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible is an excellent resource for this reading. Read a different prophecy and its fulfillment each day.

Celebration Ideas

1. To symbolize the simultaneous waiting for Christ and preparing for His coming, space out decorating for Christmas throughout all of Advent. Hang a wreath one day, set up the tree a few days later, add lights a few days later. It will help to build the anticipation for Christmas morning. Use symbolism in decorating – lights, colors, shapes, etc.
2. Similarly, space out family activities and crafts throughout the month of December to keep the family's focus on the coming of Christ's birthday rather than as a coming commercial holiday, and to further build the excitement.
3. Go Christmas Caroling (tell the Good News)
4. Take a drive and look at Christmas lights (Jesus is the light of the world)
5. Make Christmas Cookies (Jesus is the bread of life)
6. Visit a nursing home (share God's love)
7. Sponsor an Angel on the Angel Tree or something similar (Love your neighbor, Good Samaritan)
8. Do a 'traveling nativity' beginning with Advent and ending on Christmas morning or January 6th – A traveling nativity reenacts the Christmas story throughout the entire season of Advent. Initially, the separate pieces are placed in various locations through the house, with the Angels and Baby Jesus reserved for Christmas morning. Set up the shepherds and their sheep somewhere near the manger, arrange the wise

men the farthest away, with Joseph and Mary somewhere in between. Each week you'll move them closer and closer towards their final destination.

On Christmas morning Baby Jesus and the angels will be added to the scene, with the wise men arriving last. You can continue moving them closer to the nativity until they arrive on January 6th (Day of Epiphany) twelve days after Christmas during which time you can continue celebrating with a "12 Days of Christmas" theme. Another option is to add the wise men to the nativity scene Christmas night and do a bible study with it to close out Christmas Day.

9. In an effort to minimize the emphasis on receiving gifts, ask each family member to compose a short note of appreciation or blessing for all other family members. These notes will be placed in stockings and read aloud by the recipient on Christmas Day, perhaps at Christmas breakfast or before opening gifts, or as a sweet close to the end of Christmas Day. They could also be read as a Christmas Eve activity. If you will have houseguests such as grandparents or other relatives, prepare notes for them also. Sometimes houseguests like to participate in preparing notes, too, so plan ahead if you think that would be of interest in your family.

It is wise to spread the composing of notes over several days of advent, depending on the size of your family. Younger children may need assistance with ideas and writing and may even dictate a note for an older child or parent to write for them. To help stimulate ideas, prompt a child with questions such as "What do you really enjoy doing with your brother?" "What do you want to thank Daddy for?" "What does Mommy do that makes your glad?" etc.

Write notes on special Christmas stationary available at a variety of stores. It can be enjoyable to have 3 or 4 different papers to choose from so that the artistic interests of family members can be enjoyed. These notes can be a source of joy and blessing for many years, so store them in a safe file. You might want to have each family member read aloud his "blessing notes" again on his birthday.

10. Advent craft ideas

- Make ornaments for the Christmas tree
- Make and mail homemade, Advent-minded Christmas cards
- Make a "Sugar Plum Christmas Tree" using colors, shapes, and candy that symbolically represent Christ – idea taken from <http://www.amazing-christmas-ideas.com>
 - Examples of symbolic colors and shapes:
 - Clear/Lights: Jesus is the Light of the World
 - Red: Jesus is our Sacrifice
 - Yellow: Jesus is our Joy
 - Green: Jesus is Life
 - Blue: Jesus is the Living Water
 - Purple: Jesus is our King

- Pink: Jesus is Love
- Gold/Silver: Jesus is our Treasure
- Star: Jesus is our Guide
- Bell: Jesus is the Good News
- Evergreen Tree: Jesus is Everlasting
- Wreath (circle without end): Jesus is, was, and forever will be
- Other websites with craft ideas:
 - <http://www.first-school.ws/activities/bible/advent1.htm>
 - <http://www.dltk-holidays.com/Xmas/advent.html>
 - <http://www.kiddyhouse.com/Christmas/xmascrafts.html>

11. Purchase an Advent calendar, or make one together. The following example should provide some inspiration:

December

- 1 Advent Begins! Put up the Christmas tree with the lights and clear ornaments. Jesus is the light and we are called to reflect that light. Set up Advent Candle Wreath – Week 1 Reading; Set up “Traveling Nativity.”
- 2 Hang purple ornaments (Jesus is our King) and wood nativity ornaments (Jesus is our Savior) on the tree.
- 3 Hang wreath and garland.
- 4 Add the silver ornaments (Jesus is precious) and gold ornaments (Jesus is our treasure) to the tree.
- 5 Decorate with candles and angels. ([Paper Plate Angel Craft](#))
- 6 Hang blue ornaments (Jesus is the living water) and green ornaments (Jesus is everlasting life) to the tree.
- 7 Listen to Christmas music
- 8 Make a Christmas table runner for the dining table. (Sew something nice or have children help create something fun and crafty.) Also, Week 2 Advent reading.
- 9 Put up the outside decorations. (Light up candy canes and lights.)
- 10 Put red ornaments (Jesus is our sacrifice) and pink ornaments (Jesus is love) on the Christmas tree.
- 11 Mail Christmas cards and hang the Christmas stockings (If you don’t have a fireplace or mantel, hang them on your wall as decorations until Christmas Eve.)
- 12 Make [Spiral Star Craft](#) for ornaments or decorations.
- 13 Make paper snowflakes.
- 14 Make sheep ornaments. Jesus is our shepherd and we are his sheep.
- 15 Read a Christmas story. Listen to Christmas Carols. Also, Week 3 Advent reading.
- 16 Homemade Play dough Ornament Party. Have friends over to make ornaments out of homemade dough that you can bake in the oven and paint.
- 17 Letters to Jesus – instead of writing letters to Santa asking for gifts, write letters to Jesus to express whatever their little hearts want to say. “Happy,

- Birthday, Jesus! I'm so glad you came and died and rose again so that I could know God.."
- 18 Hang candy canes on the tree. Jesus is our shepherd.
 - 19 Read a Christmas story.
 - 20 Read another Christmas story.
 - 21 Give a surprise gift or baked item to a friend or neighbor.
 - 22 Read a Christmas story. Make Christmas Wassail. Week 4 Advent reading.
 - 23 Drive around and look at Christmas lights.
 - 24 Christmas Eve – See celebration ideas in Christmas Eve section
 - 25 Christmas Day!!Put Jesus in the manger, Christmas Day Advent reading, celebrate with family.
 - 26 Write thank you letters to God, for the blessings he provided, the good time we had with family, and most of all for sending Jesus.
 - 27 Write thank you notes for the gifts we received.
 - 28 Read a Christmas story.
 - 29 - break - (starting to wind down.)
 - 30 - break - (winding down..)
 - 31 New Year's Eve Bible Study

January

- 1 New Year's [Peace Dove Craft](#).
- 2 Take down some of the decorations.
- 3 As a family, write down some goals for personal growth (in Christlikeness) for the new year.
- 4 Take down some more decorations.
- 5 - break - Winding down a little more.)
- 6 Day of Epiphany: Finish the traveling nativity.
- 7 Take down the rest of the decorations and store them away for next year.

Christmas Eve

Description

Celebrations for Christmas Day often begin the evening before, on December 24th, which celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of God's promise for redemption.

Books/Resources

- *The Legend of the Candy Cane* by Lori Walburg
- *Santa Are You For Real* by Harold Myra
- *Saint Nicholas: The Real Story of the Christmas Legend* by Julie Stiegemeyer
- *Christmas Lizard* by Cory Edwards

Websites

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_Eve
- http://www.christmas-celebrations.com/christmas_eve.htm

Related Scriptures

Sin & Redemption - Romans 3:9-26; Romans 5; 2 Corinthians 5:18;
Colossians 1:20-22; Hebrews 9:11-28

Celebration Ideas

- Attend a Candlelight Christmas Eve Service
- Prepare a special evening meal, integrate the advent readings and/or advent wreath.
- Go Christmas caroling. Consider especially going to the homes of elderly or sick neighbors, acquaintances or friends.
- Make a Gingerbread House <http://thatsmyhome.com/sugarplum/christmas-gingerbread-house/>
- Make a "Happy Birthday Jesus" cake for Christmas Day
- Make Christmas Candy
 - <http://thatsmyhome.com/sugarplum/mfudge/>
 - <http://homeparents.about.com/od/candy/>

Christmas Day

Description

Celebrating the birth of Jesus, the fulfillment of God's promise for redemption.

Websites

- <http://christmas.howstuffworks.com/christmas.htm> – Outlines the origins of many Christmas traditions and elements.
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas>
- <http://www.allthingschristmas.com>

Related Scriptures

Humility & Service - Phil. 4:5-11; Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:1-10; 1 Peter 1-11; Colossians 3:12-15

Celebration Ideas

- Before opening gifts, make and enjoy a sit-down breakfast together. Consider establishing a tradition of serving the same foods each year for Christmas breakfast.
- Read Luke 2: 1-11 and Matthew 2: 1-15 aloud before opening gifts. If family members have memorized part or all of these verses (See Advent celebration), ask them to recite along with the reader.
- If you chose to write notes of blessing or appreciation to family members as suggested in the Advent section above, set aside a special time for the reading aloud of these notes by each recipient. This will likely become a favorite Christmas activity. Consider filing these precious notes in a special place, and perhaps reading them aloud to family members on their birthdays.
- If you have a big family and as a result your family ends up with a large quantity of gifts, consider dividing the gift opening throughout the day. Open some on Christmas Eve, some on Christmas morning, and some later Christmas Day. Or consider spacing them out over the next twelve days for the twelve days of Christmas.
- At the end of the day, thank God for all the gifts and blessings He has provided. Spend a moment in prayer. You could even finish with a Christmas hymn or two.
- Christmas Day craft Ideas
 - Celebration Banner from *Celebrate The Holidays With Scripture* by Dorla Schlitt
 - Make a paper plate angel or one of the other crafts from <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/christmas>