

YOU'RE GOING TO ANYWAY

Reimagining your Christmas traditions without throwing them away completely

DEC 2018 | CHRISTY WHEELER

The call to Reimagine Christmas, to consider how Jesus would want us to celebrate his birthday, does not mean we don't 'do Christmas'. Instead, it is an invitation to redeem our Christmas traditions to be more just, more outward and others focused.

You're going to buy presents anyway

It's hard to escape the reality that Christmas involves presents. Presents aren't in themselves bad things. It's wonderful to give gifts. We have heard the scripture, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). We also can't escape the reality that we live in a culture that works very hard to convince us that we never have enough and so we always want more.

Nobody wants to be the Grinch that stole Christmas. So, if you're going to spend money anyway on presents for your loved ones, how about considering spending it in a way that will bless someone else in the process?

This Christmas visit some local craft markets and....

- Buy local
- Buy handmade gifts
- Buy from people you know
- Buy from the self-employed

The big stores don't do a little jig when they make a sale. Make someone jig this Christmas.

If you want to get even more creative and avoid creating unnecessary waste by giving things...

- Give memories (events tickets, experiences or memberships)
- Buy second-hand
- Make homemade gifts (baked treats, crafts)

And if you want to be generous without spending any money at all, consider the gift of your time. Share your skills, babysit for free, do an extra chore, give a loved one a massage. Time is a priceless gift and you'll be surprised by how much it is appreciated.

You're going to feast anyway

For most of us, our memories of Christmas include a special meal, most likely with a specific menu that you eat either on Christmas Eve or Christmas day. We see many places in scripture where God instructed his people to celebrate and eat special food. So we see that feasting isn't bad or wrong. In our context, however, I think we can do well to not overeat, to not prepare so much food that some is thrown away. We can celebrate and feast with boundaries.

So, if you're going to feast anyway, consider doing it in a way that isn't wasteful and perhaps includes someone or some others that wouldn't necessarily be experiencing a feast this Christmas. Consider these ideas when you consider your food and feasting this holiday:

- Invite someone new to your Christmas table and share your feast
- Bless a family who wouldn't normally have the means to feast with a generous and feast-worthy food hamper
- Cook enough, rather than too much
- Simplify your meal, while still making it delicious and special

If you want to go even further, consider

- What Jesus would be eating at this time as a middle eastern Jew...Kosher, Mediterranean food like roast lamb or fish, flat bread, hummus.
- Serving at a soup kitchen on Christmas day with your family
- Ask your Pastor if there is anyone in your church that will be alone on Christmas day and invite them to your table.

You're going to read the Bible anyway

Perhaps you've already chosen an advent reading plan in the lead up to Christmas. If not, I encourage you to find one in your Bible app or online or just spend the couple of weeks in the lead up to Christmas reading through the first 2 chapters of Matthew and Luke. Both accounts are different and when read together create a fuller more complete account of the birth of Jesus. I encourage you to do some light research into who God included in his birth. Who were the Shepherds? Who were the Magi? Are they the kind of people you would invite to your birthday?

Perhaps you've heard the Christmas Story so many times before that the miracles that occurred 2000 plus years ago have become so ordinary they don't stir a sense of awe and wonder in you anymore.

I recently read an article on sojourners.net by Conrad Hoover. He wrote it during Advent 40 years ago in 1978. His words impacted me so deeply I feel compelled to share some of it with you. Perhaps the

questions that Hoover asks below will stir afresh in you some of that awe and wonder that occurred long ago.

Advent speaks to us of mystery. How can our finite minds begin to comprehend the vastness of God's mercy in creation and history? No wonder the prophets and the psalmists continually call upon us to fall on our knees with awe-filled wonder before the mighty purposes and works of the Lord.

We are not called to understand and to control, but rather to be obedient in wonder and in love: The little child who shall conquer the world through suffering and death. The wonder of new life and possibility which springs out of death and failure. The amazing fact that God's great and final action for the salvation of humankind was planted with the seed of an ancient and fallible king, and dependent upon the total submission of a lowly peasant woman.

It seems to me that this is a theme to ponder, this theme of submission. For we have the willingness of the mighty God of the universe to submit himself to us in flesh, the willingness of Mary to give herself over entirely to God's will, and the call upon us to the obedience of faith in the face of the mystery of God's love for his creation.

Gabriel comes to Mary and he says, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you! Do not be afraid." These are God's words to Mary and to all of us who are the children of the new Eve: "Do not be afraid." God is faithful to his promise and he will take care of you. All of creation is in his hands and nothing is impossible for him. Even from one as barren as Elizabeth, can he bring forth a messenger of the good news. Even in ones as barren as we are, can the promise take root and bear fruit in the world.

But it does take a conscious act of submission on our part; submission to the working of grace in our own lives. Can we say with Mary, "O Lord, let it be to me according to your work?"

It is so hard for us to abandon ourselves, even to the promise of God. More and more I am aware that the crucial issue in my own life is trust. Do I really trust the promise and the loving purpose of the Lord in my own life? So often my fear-filled actions and responses belie what my lips want so much to say. And sin enters in unawares when I wrest control from the gentle probings and nudgings of the Spirit.

And then I fail not only myself, but also my sisters and my brothers. For precisely at that point of mistrust I cease to be transparent with the love of Jesus, given for the suffering and the wounded of the world.

As Christmas dawns with this new year of my life--of your life--dare we pray together the prayer of Charles de Foucauld? He entitled it "The Prayer of Abandonment."

Father,
I abandon myself into your hands;
Do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you;
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures--
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul;
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart.
For I love you Lord,
and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands.
without reserve,
and with boundless confidence.
For you are my Father.
Amen!

Conrad Hoover: Sign Bearers of the Kingdom
<https://sojo.net/magazine/december-1978/sign-bearers-kingdom>



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