

40 Simple Ways to Keep Christmas Meaningful

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40 Simple Ways to Keep Christmas Meaningful

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It's the same every year. As soon as I flip the calendar page to December, it's much like opening the starting gate at the Kentucky Derby. I'm off for the Christmas race—shopping, baking, wrapping, mailing. I have to track and attend recitals, school plays, church concerts, and work parties. By the time it's all over, I'm left with an exhausted spirit, frayed nerves, and a worn-out body. Is the mad dash to the Christmas finish line really worth it?

Many can identify with that holiday lament from a woman who lives in a major midwestern city. On one hand, Christmas is supposed to be a time of joy, peace, and goodwill. But on the other hand, the planning and preparation can be intimidating and overwhelming. For too many people, Christmas becomes a burden and not a blessing. Yet *it doesn't have to be that way*. Here are forty ways to keep Christmas simple *and* meaningful.

Ground Yourself

- 1. Remind yourself of the reason for all the commotion.** Luke's Gospel reports: "For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord" (Luke 2:11). The birth of Christ must be the central focus and foundation for all activities in December.
- 2. Plan ahead.** A little early planning can go a long way to reducing holiday stress. Print free downloadable Christmas planner pages at www.organizedchristmas.com/printable/christmas-countdown. Then gather your family, plan what you're going to do, and divide the tasks.

Approaches to Gift-Giving

3. Avoid debt. A major source of frustration is the accumulation of debt brought on by Christmas gift giving. Resist the temptation to use credit cards unless you can pay the entire bill on each due date. Instead of going into debt, keep gift giving small and simple. It is, after all, the *thought* that counts. For ideas the whole family can use, go to <http://familyfun.go.com/arts-and-crafts/season/> and www.betterbudgeting.com/articles/money/63giftsunder10dollars.htm.

4. Read about the original Santa Claus. Saint Nicholas was famous for helping the poor and reaching out to children. Visit www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Dec2002/Feature1.asp to read about

this remarkable man who became Santa Claus. Let his kindness and compassion set the tone for your holiday celebration.

- 5. Give the gift of time.** Instead of giving elderly friends and family a gift they don't need or have room for, help them do their own Christmas shopping by giving them a ride to the store or helping them order gifts online.