

Family time at Christmas



Alongside all the present giving and festivities, Christmas can often be about being intentional in spending time with family. This can sometimes be challenging as well as enjoyable, and being prepared with some family activities can help focus children's excitement and create lasting memories. Looking back, children often remember special times together more readily than the presents they received.

In the church calendar, the season of Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day and ends on Christmas Eve. The word 'advent' means 'coming', and it's a time when we can reflect and prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Here are some ideas to help you count down to Christmas. Maybe you could do one each weekend to celebrate special family time together.

1. Take a flask of hot chocolate to an outside space and hunt for holly

This is a great way to burn off excess energy and excitement and get your little ones outside in the fresh air. Evergreen trees are a symbol of hope and last all year round. As you remember Jesus' birth, you can think about how Jesus is our hope and he promises to be with us always. You can collect holly or fir branches and decorate picture frames, mantelpieces or windowsills at home to remind you. Perhaps you could snuggle up together with hot chocolate and tell the Christmas story. What a precious memory!

2. Christmas Zoom concert

Arrange a date when you can get together online with friends, family or older isolated members of your community who may be feeling lonely. Each household could contribute something related to Christmas. You can make this as simple or complicated as you want. Maybe you could sing along to a Christmas song with a homemade shaker, read a short Christmas story, share Christmas crafts you have made, or wear Christmas jumpers or nativity costumes. The choice is yours, but the hours of fun this creates will be endless. Younger children can dip in and out when they want to, gone is the stress of 'containing' them.

3. Christmas light hunt

As soon as it gets dark, drive or walk to see the lights on houses and buildings in your area. Look out for anything that reminds you of Jesus – stars, angels, crosses. Maybe you could take some snacks or hot drinks to enjoy. And as you drive or walk, you could pray for the families, schools and hospitals that you pass – asking God to show everyone the peace, love and joy that Jesus brings.

4. Christmas story video

If you have the time and patience, create your own; it doesn't have to be elaborate. It could be as simple as reading a page from the nativity story while your children act it out. They could march to 'Bethlehem' inside or outside – stomping the ground as they go. Children love to watch videos of themselves and what a great way for them to connect with the story. Maybe you could include older friends or family. Have a film premier – get some popcorn and invite your friends or neighbours.

5. Make your own nativity scene

Cut off one of the long sides of a large cardboard box and you have a ready-made 'nativity scene' background. Make characters together using cardboard,

Play-Doh or other craft materials. Be as basic or elaborate as you want – let your children guide you. Some children may enjoy drawing and colouring, while others will prefer to use their small world figures or soft toys to role-play the story. Whatever you choose, you will be creating fun memories for your children, and if you repeat the activities year after year they will become lasting traditions. For further ideas of simple family traditions to start at Christmas (or anytime of the year), check out Rob and Dianne Parson's book, *'We always ... making memories that last a lifetime'*. Rob and Dianne share real life stories and ideas, and show the joy, value and power of creating family traditions. There's even space to write your own traditions and scrapbook pages for recording your memories.

