Marilyn Sharpe Ministries, LLC

Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
December 2009

ADVENT ALTERNATIVES, SIMPLY CHRISTMAS

> [Jesus said] But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.
>
> John 17: 13

Advent means "coming." Jesus is coming into the world, into our world, so that His joy may be complete in us. Advent is the church season that begins our new church year with the four Sundays before Christmas. It is intended to be our season to slow down, to wait for Jesus, and to be filled with wonder. But our culture has turned it into marathon shopping, baking, entertaining, doing that pulls our focus off the coming of the Messiah and onto the coming of the UPS truck, off receiving God's best gift and onto the dozens of gifts yet to purchase, wrap, ship, and deliver. It may look festive, but it is frenzy. This isn't what the angel announced to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth: "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." Good News, astonishing Good News, but are we so busy that we don't even hear it? What can we do differently this year?

Are there really alternatives or the possibility of living simply during the Christmas season? How might I pull that off? What about the expectations of my family and friends? What is the price I would pay? What's in it for me? Let's unpack those questions, one at a time.

Are there really alternatives or the possibility of living simply during the Christmas season? Yes, of course, there are!
You make choices every day to do things in the same old way. How is that working for you, when you fall into bed exhausted, when you feel like the Grinch Who Stole Christmas and wish it was December 26th, when you dread your credit card bills in January, when you grit your teeth at the thought of going out to one more gala party, when the children and other beloveds in your life take back seat to those you don't even like that well? Most of us find our way to simpler alternatives that reflect our deepest beliefs and values, because we've gotten it so out of balance, because we've made ourselves and others miserable, because this holy season has not been Good News for us. I remember, with alarming clarity, wrapping gifts and packing shipping boxes at 4:00am, baking cookies that felt like a miserable forced march, spending too much money, eating too much food, and, worst of all, entertaining people who had invited me because I had invited them because they had invited me… And who paid the biggest price? My family and me. Years ago, I knew that if I wanted my family to still like being related to me on December 26th, something had to change. Some things.

How might I pull that off? All that being said, trust me, I am a work in progress; and that is what it takes – perpetual mindfulness. Sort all of your family's traditions into "love it" and "leave it" piles. "Love its" are the things you all enjoy and do together. "Leave its" are the things that suck the life out of you. Decide to focus on the "love its" … and leave the rest.
What about the expectations of my family and friends? Let them know right now that you would like to simplify the season, with more emphasis on presence than presents. Invite them to join you.

What is the price I would pay? Know that some will be disappointed and try to push you back into the way it's always been done. Resist, kindly and faithfully.

What's in it for me? Time. Money. Delight. Jesus, in the center of your lives. A family that is healthy and happy, present with one another. New, life-giving traditions.
Great joy that has come to you this season. Savor every minute … and do it again next year.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

- ☐ Sit down with the ideal. Do Advent devotions each evening by the candlelight of an Advent wreath. Just be still and know that God is with you.
- ☐ Discuss the things you really dread about the Christmas season. Clean house on your traditions, doing the ones that give you life and discarding the others.
- ☐ Do things in a new way: potlucks, instead of formal dinner parties; donate service or money to favorite charities, instead of gifts for some of your friends or family.
- ☐ Exchange experiences, instead of things: a day of sledding and cocoa, instead of toys; a trip to the museum, instead of clothes or

Copyright (c) 2012 Marilyn Sharpe Ministries LLC | MarilynSharpeMinistries@comcast.net | (612) 202-8152
Use with permission only.