



POSITIVE PARENTING
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THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI

Several years ago in my parenting group, one woman offered the way she and her family keep Christmas gift giving sane. They focus on giving three gifts: a gift for the Christ child, a gift for the family, and a gift for the soul.

This month's column is filled with family activities that may change forever how you celebrate Advent and Christmas. Worth a try? Read on.

A GIFT FOR THE CHRIST CHILD

When the Magi, the three wise men, came to visit the Christ child, they came bearing three gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh, gifts that celebrated both the royalty and divinity of Jesus and his suffering and death on our behalf. What are the gifts we could give the Christ child this Christmas season?

Favorite Christmas stories offer some ideas. In *The Littlest Angel*, the youngest of the angels goes back to earth to retrieve his favorite toys and offer them to baby Jesus. In *The Clown of God*, the aged clown, returned home to die, has nothing to offer Jesus but his gift for juggling. Both gift givers have given the Christ child exactly what he wants – a gift of themselves. In O'Henry's short story, *The Gift of the Magi*, a poor young couple sells their most prized possessions to purchase a gift for the other, only to discover that the greatest gift they gave was their selfless love. In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks to this kind of gift:

...I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

What might you and your family do this season for “one of the least of these who are members of my family”? Might you serve a meal at a soup kitchen, visit a nursing home, buy a toy for a child in need, bring a meal to someone who is ill or shut in, invite a neighbor over for dinner, sit with a single person in worship, sing Christmas carols in your neighborhood, write a letter to someone with whom you've lost touch, sit with a person who has lost a loved one this year? Look around at the need ... and fill one need with the love and light of Christ. Talk to your children about why you do this – because God first gave us the greatest gift of all, the gift of Jesus Christ.

A GIFT FOR YOUR FAMILY

Most of us long for more time. This season, plan a gift of time for your family. It can be as simple as family devotions by the light of an Advent wreath, a picnic dinner on the family room floor, a favorite holiday movie with popcorn, a game night, or a walk under a starlit sky, with cocoa to warm hands afterward. Whatever warms the hearts of your family, whatever gives you the gift of time to share, whatever reminds you how much you love one another is this gift.

A GIFT FOR YOUR SOUL

Consider an Advent retreat, daily devotions with a fragrant candle lit, simplifying your gift giving, spending time with a nutritious friend, listening to Christmas carols, attending a Christmas pageant, choosing to leave your fresh tree untrimmed, just soaking in the woodland fragrance. Do something this season that feeds your soul, helps you rest in God's presence, and come away refreshed. This may be choosing NOT to do something that is stressful and that distracts you from the joy of this season.

May the Prince of Peace bring that gift to your life this Advent seasons. I wish you and yours all the blessings of this holy time.