

November 2011
E-newsletter

ADVENT - A CHANCE TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS

In the midst of economically fragile times, we are drenched with ultra-commercial-hype. The message is spend, spend, spend. Right now. Or, you might miss out. Blood pressure is up. Bank accounts are down. This season of light begins in a cloud of anxiety.

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."

But, there is an alternative, an Advent alternative. Advent means "coming." Jesus, the light of the world, is coming into the world, into our world. 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. God's ultimate gift is coming. Couldn't we be givers of good gifts, too?

HOW COULD YOU DO IT DIFFERENTLY, IF YOU KNEW THAT JESUS WAS COMING TO YOUR HOME THIS ADVENT SEASON? SOME IDEAS TO CONSIDER:

GIVE A GIFT OF A FAMILY STORY BIBLE - No one gets points taken off for a Bible that tells God's story with rich, grace-filled, engaging language and beautiful pictures. I'll suggest two that I love: *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones and Jago (my grandkids love, love, love this one) and Desmond Tutu's new *Children of God Storybook Bible*. Help families make reading the Bible a new family tradition.

SIMPLIFY AND DOWNSCALE – The list of those with whom we exchange gifts can take on a life of its own. Talk now about sharing time, rather than giving a tangible gift. (Bonus: nothing to eat, wear, dust ... or to exchange!)

HOMEMADE – Do you have a special recipe for cookies, appetizer, cocoa mix, bread, or snack? Or, how about a collection of favorite recipes? If you knit, paint, or do needlework, share your gift. Every parent and grandparent loves some refrigerator art by their favorite young artist!

FRAMED PICTURE – A picture of you and the recipient is always appreciated.

HONOR WITH A PHILANTHROPIC GIFT – Give a gift to a charity or cause that reflects the interests, values, or passions of the receiver.

COUPONS FOR TIME TOGETHER AND/OR SERVICES – Think about the gift of a leisurely day together or deliver a meal, do a load of laundry, run errands, babysit, or give a back rub.

TICKETS FOR A SHARED EVENT – Is there a movie, concert, play, or art exhibit you'd both enjoy? Give tickets or a promise of that shared experience.

MEMBERSHIP – By giving a membership to the zoo, arboretum, or museum (science, art or children's), you give the gift of time and experience together.

SOMETHING YOU ALREADY OWN – Pass on something a friend has admired or would enjoy or a legacy your child or grandchild would inherit.

GIVE LESSONS OR CAMP – Here is something that kids love and don't expect. Think about an interest, sport, or skill in which they have expressed an interest. Camp will make memories for a lifetime.

DO SERVICE TOGETHER – Shovel snow for a shut in neighbor, visit a friend or relative in a nursing home, serve a meal at a soup kitchen, or plan a mission trip together. This captures the meaning of the season.

BAKE OR SHOP OR WRAP TOGETHER – We all do these things over the Christmas season. Turn a chore into a memorable time by doing it together.

JESUS IS COMING TO YOUR HOME THIS ADVENT. WELCOME HIS PRESENCE AND SAVOR THIS TIME.

For more on an alternative Advent season, see the promotional video for Advent Conspiracy at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOG6WVTE8A>