

December 2008

Saturday 6th

St Nicolas

Sunday 7th

Advent 2

Prepare for the Lord

Mk 1:1-8

Monday 8th

Immaculate Conception of Mary

Sunday 14th

Advent 3

Get Ready

Jn 1:6-8,19-28

Sunday 14th

Advent 4

Nothing is Impossible to God

Lk 1:26-38

Thursday 24th

Christmas Day

Friday 25th

St Stephen, first martyr

Sunday 28th

Holy Family

Salvation Seen!

Lk 2:22-40

Advent Family Activity

Gingerbread Nativity!

Create a Gingerbread House with a difference. See [CathFamily Activities for instructions](#).

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The Perfect Christmas?

The Holy Family may be the perfect family, but it's doubtful Mary and Joseph experienced their first Christmas as all going to plan!

If there is one thing that everybody associates with Christmas, it's family. Images abound of grand family gatherings, delighted children, relatives young and old enjoying sumptuous feasts. Yet increasingly, Christmas Day is fraught with pressure and tension. Be it annoying cousins, over-watered uncles, interfering mothers, critical in-laws or misbehaving relatives - every family has its stress relationships. And it seems that they frequently surface on the very day when joy and peace are expected to reign. So what makes this day such a magnet for mishap?

Every person brings expectations and cherished values to Christmas. These expectations are rooted in each person's childhood memories and are energised by the high stress environment of the pre-Christmas period. All families are blends of different traditions. It can seem sacrilegious to let a cherished family tradition be replaced by someone else's cherished tradition, or worse, a new innovation! Primed by the pressure-cooker of frenetic consumerism, expectations can easily turn into disappointment and hurt when things don't go to plan. It's never personal, but it's hard to remember that in the pressure of the moment.

So what are some tips for making the day more joyful and less stressful?

- **Avoid the consumer rat race.** Really, really try to do this. The rampant materialism promoted by commercial interests is like a cancer in the soul. It makes gift-giving competitive and distracts us all from the real meaning of the day. Put a price limit on gifts, do a Kris Kringle, give gifts of 'time and service' rather than 'things', make a donation to charity, keep shopping to a minimum.
- **Share the spirit.** Extend the invitation to others outside your immediate family. Singles, overseas visitors, orphaned grandparents, divorcees, religious, estranged cousins... there is no shortage of people for whom Christmas can be a lonely time.
- **Spread the load.** Encourage everyone to contribute to the celebration to avoid burnout in the host and help all to feel invested and equal partners in making the day special. Successful delegation needs to be coordinated and tasks varied so that everyone can find a way to participate. They can cook a dish, bring the party crackers, make a special punch, do the table decorations, plan the music selection, prepare the grace, come early to clean up the yard or set the table... there's no reason everyone can't contribute something.
- **Be Flexible.** Get out of the rut of Christmas being 'the way we always do it' or worse, 'your way last year, my way this year'. Resilient families successfully balance tradition and flexibility and are open to new experiences. Don't make change your enemy - experiment with new traditions especially if they are initiated by a new family member or one of the younger generation.
- **Use Advent well.** Advent is a time of joyful anticipation. Just as Mary awaited the birth of her baby, we too do well to use these weeks to attune our mind and heart to the presence of God in our world. Stop, take a deep breath, be aware of the presence of God, give thanks for your blessings, reach out in kindness to others.