



DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY THIS YEAR

By Marilyn Sharpe

It began before Halloween – Christmas trees appeared in the stores, red and green decked all of the commercial halls, displays and catalogs began their siren song of “buy me, buy me”. Anxiety washed over most adults and we girded ourselves for the Christmas marathon. We know we will spend too much, sleep too little, eat food that isn’t good for us, entertain people we aren’t crazy about, try to please everyone, without much success. As Christians, we know this is a holy season, not a commercialized, consumerist nightmare, and yet... Could it be different?

What would happen if you chose to do Christmas differently this year? But isn’t it too late to change? Won’t people protest? Won’t people be disappointed? And where would we begin?

Have a goal. Years ago, when Christmas had gotten utterly out of control and did not bring me much joy, I decided that on the 26th of December, I wanted three things:

- To have experienced the gift of Jesus’ coming
- To have been delighted and felt joy
- To have my family still happy to be related to me

That has been my North Star, the goal that guides my planning and experience and assessment. Has it always happened this way? Heavens, no!

Prioritize. Begin today by asking your family this question: What is the one thing that you need to see, hear, read, sing, eat, do or experience this Advent season to make it feel as though Christmas has really come for you? Then, let that be the focus of your Advent and Christmas season. This is a wonderful way to simplify.

Delegate. One person can’t do it all. Decide who will do what, and include everyone.

Collaborate. Have a family wrap-a-thon or make cookie baking a group activity. Put on carols. Enjoy one another, as well as accomplish what you have chosen to do.

Delete. Without apology, decide what you will not do this year. What are those things that drain the life and delight out of you. Decide not to do them. It makes space for those things that give you life and delight.

Do it differently. If you host Christmas Eve dinner, instead of slaving over a hot stove, consider serving a purchased lasagna, potluck, or make something ahead and freeze it.

Tell others what you are doing and why. Invite them to join you in a simpler, more joyous Christmas season.

SAVOR!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES:

1. Have the family conversation about what is really important to experience this season; then, focus on that.
2. Create a family Christmas calendar, with all of the planned activities AND quiet time to enjoy one another and to savor the spiritual.
3. What is the gift that you will give the Christ child this year? Plan a service project that you will do together.
4. Have an evening of storytelling. Parents, grandparents and beloved adults, tell the children what it was like for you as a child at Christmastime.
5. Remember those who are not with you this season. Light a candle in their honor.