

Did your Christmas get out of hand last year ... again?

The 12 Months of Christmas

Lynn Lusby Pratt

The song claims there are 12 days of Christmas. But one ladies' Sunday school class proved it. They calculated that the hours spent on preparing for Christmas indeed total at least 12 full work days.

Where did we find those 12 extra days last December? We didn't. There's no such thing as an extra day. We crammed the 12 days of time in and around our regular jobs, ministries, home duties, school schedules ... No wonder people are depressed and cranky every January!

We love everything about the 12 days of Christmas: the gifts, the baking, the goodwill visits, the church choir and drama programs. But many of the things we do are not related to Jesus' birth. I'd like to keep doing everything we do at Christmas. But not all in December, please.

Our family is trying to have Christmas all year round by rescheduling the 12 days into the 12 months of Christmas. Now that the chaos of last Christmas is over, how about settling down to take a look at this sample calendar:

January

Keep the Christmas cards you have received. One quiet January evening, in front of a fire, go through the cards and pray for the senders.

Send out a family newsletter. Tell your friends that you prayed for them. Use this mailing as the time to send a family picture or the kids' school pictures. Everyone hears from you; it's simply a January newsletter instead of a Christmas card.

February

It's been documented that the average American gains weight during the Christmas holidays. Yet we continue to bake enormous quantities of lard-laden goodies for the numerous overeating events we schedule.

So quit. In December, skip the baking.

Then in February, bake cookies for the college students from your church. Cookies can be mailed with a "you are loved" card in connection with Valentine's Day. No time to bake? Send Valentine's candy or a healthy snack box of pretzels and other munchies. This is a great way to help your church's college students over the winter blahs.

March

Take your family to visit a nursing home resident. At Christmastime, church groups literally stand in line to perform their programs. But who visits these people during the dead of winter on those last bleak days before spring?

April

Bosses are overextended during the month of December too. When my realtor friend suggested to her boss that he eliminate the Christmas office party in favor of an Income Tax Day office party, the look on his face was one of relief and gratitude.

May

Instead of exchanging Christmas gifts with family and friends, send a gift box of spring clothes (or "vacation money") to a missionary family now.

Let's face it: Most of us have everything we need—and more. But if you will scan the newsletters of the missionaries your church supports, you will find missionaries who are in urgent need of necessities.

As a former missionary myself, I can assure you that a surprise box in the middle of the year brings enough happiness to emotionally carry a missionary for a long time!

June

One June I took a meal to a needy family instead of participating in the canned food drive at the end of the year. Have you ever wondered what these people eat all year before Thanksgiving and Christmas arrive? Your family can be the instrument for brightening up a long dry spell. Or see whether a local benevolence ministry might use some summertime help.

June is also a good month to celebrate any December birthdays in your family. Children born in December tend to feel cheated because their birthdays are swallowed up in all the Christmas hoopla. You can devote more attention to their special day with a June Happy Birthday-and-a-Half party.

July

If you want to continue buying Christmas gifts for the younger nieces and nephews in your family, buy their gifts while you're on vacation this month. You may opt to present the gifts now. But even if you save them till Christmas, your "Christmas shopping" is finished.

When these souvenir gifts are opened, your own children will relive their vacation fun.

August

Does every December find your family racing to assorted rehearsals at church, preparing for numerous Christmas programs?

To avoid the pressure of being drafted by desperate leaders, take a dinner hour this month to decide on the family's involvement in the upcoming Christmas season at church. Remember, every member of your family doesn't have to be in every program every year.

Inform the leaders now. Perhaps you could even suggest interesting drama and music ideas for other times of the year. How about a Halloween cantata for a change—celebrating the healing of the Gadarene demoniac? OK, maybe not.

September

Local thrift stores and charity organizations start early collecting good used toys and clothes for Christmas distribution. Now is the time to help your children gather up a load. Even when my children were very young, they liked the idea of sharing—and clearing shelf space in anticipation of any new things they might receive.

October

Have you noticed? We tend to visit our relatives only at their funerals when they're dead and at Christmas when they're exhausted and feel half dead!

Many school children have a fall break in October. Designate a weekend to visit relatives whom you usually visit during Christmas. Or invite the relatives to your home on a weekend that coincides with an event they'd enjoy, such as your child's soccer game or band concert.

November

Think of the Christmas gifts you usually give that could be considered thank-you gifts: gifts to your boss, teachers, and so on. Give these appreciation gifts at Thanksgiving. It's fun! People aren't used to receiving Thanksgiving gifts.

“I’m not sure about all this,” some of you may say. “You don’t understand my situation. Uncle Gotrocks will be very upset if we don’t join in the gift exchange. And Dr. Arpeggio at the church will have a spasm if I don’t sing in the choir. And—”

What kind of people *are* these friends of yours anyway?

OK, I had some of the same objections. Then I learned that I am not responsible for what other people think; I have to do what’s right and best for my family. I could not ignore the fact that we weren’t celebrating Christ’s birth in the best way. How could Christ possibly be glorified by our Christmas gluttony or by going into debt to buy frivolities, or by ignoring the needy for most of the year, or by scheduling ourselves into oblivion—then snapping at our children and coworkers?

Discuss the above suggestions with your immediate family. Rearrange the ideas to suit your own situation; then mark your calendar on the first of each month as a reminder. Next December may be the first truly Merry Christmas you’ve had in a long time.

* * *

As for my family, things have been better since we took control of the Christmas season, because ... well, just take a look at the December calendar:

DECEMBER

O come, let us adore him!

Merry Christmas!

“The 12 Months of Christmas” © Lynn Lusby Pratt, 1997. Revised 2021. First published in *The Lookout*, December 21, 1997; then in *Seek* magazine, January 2, 2005. Permission is given to copy. Read more at LynnLusbyPratt.com.