



A Family Christmas

by Richard Bott and Shannon Tennant

How the Idea Began

When Richard was growing up, part of his congregation's tradition was to gather on Christmas Day—either in the morning for formal worship or later in the day for a shared meal and fun time with the congregational family. Coming into ordered ministry, Richard invited the congregations he served to include these traditions with their own. While the gatherings have not always been large, the people enjoyed the congregational Christmas celebrations.

In 2005, Christmas Day fell on a Sunday. As our congregations debated gathering for Christmas morning worship, we wondered whether families would find a Christmas family worship resource helpful. Being new parents ourselves, we thought about the ideas we wanted to share with our daughter and played with different ways of doing that. What came out of our discussions was “A Family Christmas: Help for Families Worshipping Together.”

At St. Marys United Church and Kirkton-Woodham United Church, copies were distributed to the Sunday school and were available at the back of the church. A good number of parents with children picked up the resource, but even more interesting was the number of grandparents who took it home. Some of them made comments such as “This is wonderful! The grandkids are coming over, and I’ve

been wanting to do grace with them but didn’t have any idea what would make sense,” and “I never would have thought about a prayer before we opened our gifts.”

The feedback has been tremendous, both from families in our congregations and from other congregations who shared the resource. We’ve started to think about family resource packages for other parts of the church year.

A Family Christmas: Help for Families Worshipping Together

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Sometimes, with all of the hustle and bustle of Christmas, it can be difficult for families to slow down and be together. Often, it can be *extremely* difficult for families to build in time to join in worship.

This year, our congregations would like to offer you and your family some ways of worshipping together on our celebration day!

Candle-Lighting for Christmas

At Sunday worship during Advent, our church family lights Advent candles. If you can pull together five candles (it really doesn’t matter what shape or colour), your family might use a litany like this one at home.

This is a morning of celebration!
 This is a morning of fun!
 This is a morning to be together!
 So, this morning, we celebrate Jesus and his family.

(Light one candle.)

Today is about Hope!

(Each person is invited to share something he or she is hopeful about.)

(Light second candle.)

Today is about Peace!

(Each person is invited to share the name of someone or some place that needs God's peace.)

(Light third candle.)

Today is about Joy!

(Each person is invited to name a special moment of joy she or he had over the past few days.)

(Light fourth candle.)

Today is about Love!



(Each person is invited to tell the others in the family that they are loved; for example, “Richard, you are loved by me and by God! Happy Christmas!”)

(Light final candle.)

This is a morning of celebration!

This is a morning of fun!

This is a morning to be together!

So, this morning, we celebrate Christ—alive in our hearts!

Merry Christmas!

(Remember: Never leave a burning candle unattended!)

Prayer before Opening Gifts

One: God, you have given us so many gifts—
 life and love and family!
 We thank you for these gifts,
 and today, we thank you especially for the
 gift of Jesus
 —for his life and teachings
 —for the way he taught us to love.
 Help us to remember that the gifts we give
 each other
 are reminders of your great gifts to us.
 We ask these things in Jesus' name,
 who taught his disciples to pray, saying,

All: Our Father, who art in heaven...

Telling the Story

Some families have a nativity scene or crèche in their homes. Perhaps the figures could be used to illustrate the Christmas story.

Luke 2:1–20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of

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Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all

they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

At Table

Before you start, invite everyone to name something for which they are thankful, or invite everyone to brainstorm ideas about what the family is thankful for this day. The symbols below show the actions that can accompany the grace (optional).

One: We bow our heads,



All: We bow our heads,

One: We sing with joy,



All: We sing with joy,

One: We welcome here,



All: We welcome here,

One: The baby boy!



All: The baby boy!



One: Thank you, God, for all of the gifts in our lives!

Help us to use those gifts wisely and well.

And help us to share the gifts you have given, with all of your world.

In Christ's name, we pray.

All: Amen!

An Act of Remembering

In some traditions, on Christmas Eve families light a candle and set it in a window, remembering Mary and Joseph as they travelled to Bethlehem, lighting their way and letting them know this home is a safe place to stay.

Other families set an extra place at the table to remind themselves of those who are not with them—not only people they know, but people they don't know who need their love and care.

Some families try to find out if there is someone who will be alone for Christmas, and they invite that person into their family's celebrations.

What can your family do to remember Christ's coming?

Singing Christmas Carols

Psalm 100 invites us to "make a joyful noise to the Lord." Christmas seems to be one of those seasons in which many people know the music. Consider gathering the family to sing a verse from some well-known Christmas carols.

Go, Tell It on the Mountain (VU #43)

Refrain

Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

Verse

While shepherds kept their watching
O'er silent flocks by night,
Behold, throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light.

(Sing the refrain again.)

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing (VU #48)

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Il est né (He Is Born) (VU #50)

Refrain

Il est né, le divin Enfant,
Jouez hautbois, résonnez musettes;
Il est né, le divin Enfant;
Chantons tous son avènement.

Verse

Depuis plus de quatre mille ans
Nous le promettaient les prophètes:
Depuis plus de quatre mille ans
Nous attendions cet heureux temps!

(Sing the refrain again.)

Joy to the World (VU #59)

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Silent Night, Holy Night (VU #67)

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace. **E**

When this resource was put together, Richard Bott was ministry personnel at St. Marys United Church in St. Marys, Ontario, and Shannon Tennant was ministry personnel at Kirkton-Woodham Pastoral Charge in Kirkton and Woodham, Ontario. They now live in Maple Ridge, BC, where they serve a variety of congregations in a variety of ways.