

## Of Kids and Christmas

by Rachel Jankovic

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Monday's Meal is a service of The Oaks Classical and Christian Academy.

Each meal is selected specifically to feed and nourish parents for the long distance run. If you found it helpful, consider passing it along.

"...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds..." Hebrews 10:24

One of the serious responsibilities of Parenthood is pulling off Christmas. If you have a little posse of kids you already know what I'm talking about. Weeks and weeks of mad dashing and shopping and wrapping and brainstorming and decorating and planning and pouring eggnog and peeling baggy oranges and unsticking candy canes from tabletops and carpets and the bottom of hot chocolate mugs. Frantically realizing that you failed to mail packages in time, or that you forgot to order in time for free shipping, or that you still haven't done the gingerbread house kit with the kids, and that you've even managed to fall four days behind on the Advent calendar.

Then there are all the things that you are trying to do differently than last year--the things learned from unfortunate experience. Correcting gift imbalances. Learning what kind of stocking stuffers actually survive past Christmas afternoon. And, of course, you are stressing yourself out with what seems like completely unnecessary work. Who wanted to sew everyone new pajamas in the first place? Who thought we should be knitting the Christmas stockings? Why is it after midnight and I am still up making caramels? What is the point of messing around with a real tree, with lights, with sick amounts of bacon? On top of this, basic parenting through the Christmas season can be a real Minefield, too. Sometimes the kids start being greedy, sometimes things that you wanted to be special aren't even noticed. Sometimes no one wants to sing Christmas carols around the dinner table.

Christmas comes to the real families of this real world. Often, it doesn't look like a catalog shot, but more like a blooper reel. Turkeys burn. Gravy clots into lumps. Presents that you thought came with batteries didn't. You end up resenting someone's gift in the garbage bag. Kids might get grabby around the Christmas tree. People might not like the gift you thought they would like, and they can even be too tired to pretend. Headaches know no seasonal bounds. Life happens. This is why we have all heard people talk about Christmas like we all just need to get a grip. Where is our spirituality gone that we are worrying about a holiday five weeks in advance? Real Christians would celebrate quietly around the fire with some spiritual reflections, grab some small handmade token, or just a loving smile. There would have been no stressing that Christmas, only calm. There would be a sensibly portioned meal with no excess of pie or fudge or stray cookie platters. There would be some restraint. What are we really teaching our children about holy days? And why are we apparently so willing to float down the raging stream of our consumerist culture?

I certainly support the variety of traditions that people use to celebrate Christmas, but there is one very important part of Christmas that is all too often overlooked, and it applies to everyone. Brace yourselves...

Christmas is the ultimate celebration of the *material* because Christmas is the time when God became man. Word to flesh. Unfettered spirit to the hazards and joys and stresses of physical life. Think about it. Some people want to filter the material out of Christmas and more it into some pure ethereal spirit religious day. And some people want to filter all the spiritual out of it and make it simply a holiday celebrating the purchasing power of plastic.

But the power of Christmas is when spiritual and material meet and it always has been. That is the joy of the season, that is the good news, that is the laughter in the paradox in the earth shaking magic of Christmas. The infinite word became a physical baby.

It wasn't like that first Christmas was a time of quiet reflection. Mary and Joseph were on a huge last-minute trip. And she's big pregnant on a donkey? Think of it. It sounds like the worst travel experience of all time. No room. No bed. No privacy. Baby coming. Not just any baby either—one Mary knew was the Messiah. Angels. Shepherds dropping in? You think she felt dressed for that? I doubt she had time to throw a cheese platter together. She was in a barn, forced to place the king of kings— her Lord—in the trough. And I doubt her livestock roommates were quite as cute as they look in the storybooks. The truth is, that's what it's like when the spiritual becomes material. When God became man. It's not easy, because it turns the world upside down, a true cataclysmic joy.

Our celebrations aren't supposed to be smooth, effortless bits of quiet either. They should be as big and as glorious and as spiritual and as physical as we can make them. Clearly, the attitude with which everything is done is important. If the house is full of physical holiday cheer, but Mom is yelling about the snow boots by the door, the blending has not been complete. If Christmas dinner turns out beautifully, but no one wants to be together, something has gone wrong. But the remarkable thing is that doing it all wrong, having bad attitudes, and resenting the work will not affect the power of Christmas at all. The neighbors throwing money at their children and resenting each other will not slow down anything. That first Christmas was enough for all time, and no amount of fussing from us about all the busy work will slow it down. We can give each other stink-eyes all day long, and the world will just go on being transformed. The only thing that we can actually damage by losing sight of the point of Christmas is our children.

Because what we do on Christmas is an acting out statement of faith. To our children, we are Christmas. We are their memories. We are the story. We are acting with the shepherds in the field with their problems and squabbles and regular lives, and also the heavenly host that came to them singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." We can't stop being the shepherd's on this side of glory, and God doesn't want us to. He wants us to be the shepherd's the whole way through that story. Listening, fearing, following, worshipping. We are bringing our children alongside us as we come in and out of our worldly field, smelling like sheep, and fall at the feet of an infant king in a trough, beside livestock and an exhausted teenage mother. This is what Christmas is all about. So stay up past twelve making fudge, and do it laughing. Revel in the candy cane carnage and sap and shopping and crunchy pine needles in the carpet. Show your children that we serve the word made flesh.