

Living Faith @



Dear Fellow Faith Shapers,

More than a few years ago, our family moved from Iowa to South Carolina so my husband could attend classes at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia. The move caused changes in careers, culture, and even language. We all enjoyed our time there and when we moved back to Iowa we left a piece of our hearts there.

One of the things that we have come to appreciate and cherish from our time there was a sense of tradition. The southern and eastern states of our country are steeped in history and tradition. As a people, tradition grounds us, forms us, shapes us, and helps us understand where we have come.

Families have traditions that ground us and form who we are. One Christmas we were not able to make it home for the holidays. We decided that we would prepare Christmas dinner and invite our friends from the seminary and adopt them as our Christmas family. Everyone brought something. Most people brought something that reminded them of their homes. We all sat down to the table filled with food to enjoy a Christmas meal together. At some point during the passing of the bowls, one of our children began looking for the fruit salad and boldly proclaimed it would not be Christmas until we have fruit salad. As we worked through the crisis we discovered or remembered that a fruit salad had been served at every family gathering. There was always tons left over because.....and frankly.....while it was not a bad dish, it just was not something that I thought was important. My mom made it and we had it because it was easy to make and it used FFA apples and oranges that we ALWAYS had that time of year (add a banana, a can of fruit cocktail, thicken the juice from the cocktail, and Voila' you have an instant salad). Truly, no one really noticed it was there. Until it wasn't. In the Church, our entire church year is also full of tradition. The colors that are displayed in the paraments, even that we have paraments (if you don't know what they are, look it up), the liturgy, the prayers, and even the music, I know that there are songs that I have to sing on certain festival days....such as "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" on Reformation Sunday, "For All the Saints" on All Saints Sunday, "Borning Cry" at Funerals and Baptisms, and "Silent Night" with the darkened sanctuary and drippy candles on Christmas Eve. And if for some reason we don't sing them in worship, I sing them when we get home.

We can get too stuck in tradition too. If you find yourself saying "we have never done it that way before" or it is the topic that everyone is talking about at the morning coffee groups, and not in a good way.....it might be time to ask a new question. "Why have we never did that before?" It might be time to change things up a bit and make some new traditions. What is the "fruit salad" in your congregations and families? Take some time this holiday season to talk about what makes those things important and special. And remember that what is important is the time you spend in praise and worshiping God together as a community of faith and as a family.

Blessings on the Journey During this Blessed Holiday Season,

Elayne Stoen Werges, Diaconal Minister @ Cross Roads Lutheran Parish, Nora Springs, Osage, and Mitchell, Iowa

Traditions!

WIKAPEDIA says: "A tradition is a belief or behavior passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past"



Advent and Christmas

Ever wonder where our traditions come from? There was a time when a tradition was a new thing!

Advent Wreaths: In Scandinavia during Winter, lighted candles were placed around a wheel, and prayers were offered to the god of light to turn "the wheel of the earth" back toward the sun to lengthen the days and restore warmth.

By the Middle Ages, the Christians adapted this tradition and used Advent wreaths as part of their spiritual preparation for Christmas. After all, Christ is "the Light that came into the world" to dispel the darkness of sin and to radiate the truth and love of God (cf. John 3:19-21).

Christmas Trees & Lights:

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it. In the 16th century devout Christians brought trees into their homes and decorated them. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles. It is a widely held belief that Martin Luther first added lighted candles to a tree. While walking toward his home one winter evening, he was composing a sermon, he was awed by the brilliance of stars twinkling amidst evergreens. To recapture the scene for his family, he erected a tree in the main room and wired lighted candles onto the branches.



This information has been prepared for you by the

Northwestern Iowa Synod-Home Life Network

for use by families and local congregations. For more ideas about how you can pass on faith in your homes go to: http://www.neiasynod.org/synod_resources/YouthFamilyResources.asp

If you have a comment or suggestion for future newsletters or are interested in joining the Home-Life Network please contact the synod office. Find us on Facebook!



Celebrating Traditions



Telling the Story with the Manger and Animals

Idea: Use your Nativity set (aka manger scene) to teach and retell the Story of Jesus' birth and the faith of those that were there.

What you will Need: a non-breakable Nativity set (you can make them out of inexpensive items such as blocks of wood or paper towel rolls. See Pinterest or search online for patterns and ideas), wrapping paper, ribbons, bows, cards for clues, pen

What to Do:

- Without the kids knowing, get out your Nativity set. Count how many components you have to decide how many days you will be doing this activity. Suggestions are listed below. Place each piece in a small box. Then wrap the box in pretty paper and a bow. On each box put a card with a clue about the identity of what or who is in the box. Be sure to wrap the stable or barn. If the set has a baby Jesus that is detachable, wrap the baby and the manger separately. Arrange that the stable comes first, even if it comes later in the story. Emphasize that in Advent we are waiting for Jesus to come again.
- Look up each of the Birth narratives found in the Gospels.
 - Matthew 1-2** Explains Jesus's family tree, the birth in Bethlehem, and the visit from the Wise Men.
 - Mark 1:1-3** Recalls the prophecy from Isaiah to prepare for the coming of the Messiah
 - Luke 1:26-2:38** The foretelling of the birth of a Messiah, John the Baptist's birth, the birth of Jesus, the shepherds and the angels, and presenting Jesus at the temple.
 - John** really does not tell about the birth of Jesus. The writer of the Gospel of John begins with John the Baptist and preparing for Jesus's ministry.
- Each day carve out a special time that you will be preparing for the arrival of Jesus and ask everyone to commit to gathering together.
- Each day hide one of the boxes and tell the kids that we are waiting for a special gift....the gift that God sent and will send again, Jesus.
- Give the kids a clue about where the gift of the day is hidden. Decide who will get to open the gift when it is found, encourage them to take turns so all will have a chance. Another can choose where to place the found object. With the exception of the stable. That is placed where it is placed every year.
- When the object is found and the paper is ripped off to reveal the identity, read the appropriate verse and have a placing ceremony. For example the angel can be placed high up. Pieces can move each day (also gives more jobs to kids to do). Remind them of the Journey they were all on.
- On Christmas Eve, gather the family together. Read the story (Luke 1:31-32) or watch your favorite Christmas DVD. Luther, Wartburg, and St Olaf choirs and orchestras are televised and good to turn on after. Have each of the kids place a piece in the stable and have them tell that part of the story in their own words. Open the very last gift, and place the baby in the manger. Have someone proclaim that "The Light has come into the World". Talk about Jesus as a gift and that we give in response to God's love. Merry Christmas!

Day 1-The stable or barn, Read Isaiah 9:6-7

Day 2-Angel Read Luke 1:26

Day 3-Mary Read Luke 1:27-32, 46-54

Day 4-Donkey Read Luke 2:1-4

Day 5-Sheep Luke 1:8

Day 6-More Angels Luke 1:9-15

Day 7-Shepherds Luke 1:8 and 1:16-18

Day 8-Joseph Luke 1:27, Matthew 1:18-25

Day 9-The manger Luke 2:10b-12

Day 10-The cattle Luke 2:7

Day 11-Wisemen Matthew 2:1-15 (it would be more accurate to wait to place the Wise men on the day of Epiphany-January 6)

Day 12-Camels and other animals-Sing Away in the Manger

Christmas Eve or Day- The Baby Jesus



Table Talk....



Conversation Starters to use when you gather for a meal, as you are driving in the car, or as you are preparing for bed.

- ✓ What were your roses and thorns today/this week.
- ✓ Ask what your child saw, smelled, and heard during a family gathering.
- ✓ Sing a favorite Christmas hymn or song.
- ✓ Talk about a favorite memory from a Christmas gone by