



# Make Christmas Rich Without Blowing The Family Budget Or Your Mind



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Food And Family  
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EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Making Christmas special for family and friends too often ends up with overextended budgets and frazzled nerves, which quickly deletes warm memories and leaves little time to celebrate the original meaning of Christmas.

"Christmas is Jesus' birthday," said Arlene Kreider, who believes that the real meaning of the holiday gets lost in the bustle of "things" began with good intentions.

Take the custom of exchanging presents — originally began as a reminder that God gave his Son to the world. Unfortunately the concept of gift giving puts a financial burden upon many families because there is no end to the list of presents "required" for friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances.

Several years ago, Arlene and her husband Wilmer, who were dairy farming in Quarryville, examined the gift-giving concept. True, gift giving created happy memories in children, and sometimes in adults. But the Kreiders recognized that gift giving often promotes selfishness and detracts from the real meaning. In addition it is often a hassle to find a gift for those who really don't need anything.

"On birthdays, people don't give gifts to everyone except the person whose birthday it is — quite the contrary — they give to the birthday person. In this case, that person is Jesus," Arlene said.

The Kreiders started the tradition of baking a birthday cake for Jesus and singing "Happy Birthday," to establish the understanding within their own three children that Christmas is really Jesus' birthday. The Kreider children are now grown, but the family continues the birthday cake tradition with the grandchildren that have expanded their family.

"Instead of giving elaborate Christmas gifts to each other, we give larger gifts for each person on his or her birthday, and keep Christmas more simple," Arlene said.

Gift giving at Christmas is a time to give to those in need. Despite America being the land of plenty, there are many needy families who through illness or unfortunate circumstances need financial help not only at Christmas but throughout the year.

Arlene dislikes our culture's materialistic message that expen-



Christmas celebrations for the Kreider family includes a birthday cake and singing "Happy Birthday" to the person — Jesus — for whom Christmas originated. Here are Grandma Arlene Kreider with her grandchildren, from left, Jalen, Emma, Katie, and Mark.

sive gifts are a sign of love and caring.

It's much easier to focus on the things money can buy rather than the things that matter: relationships with family and friends, satisfaction, peace, and joy.

If gift giving really is important to you, consider some of these ideas to lighten the financial load: Have each member in your extended family or guest bring one gift. Play "now you have it, now you don't."

You've heard the saying that one man's junk is another man's treasure — incorporate that idea into your gift giving. Have each guest bring something from their home that they no longer use or want but is in fairly good condition. Another words: exchange "used" gifts. If this sounds tacky, it's only because you've never participated in one of these exchanges.

It is absolutely delightful to unwrap a gift and find that vase you always admired at your friend's home. Or, to find a copy of the Guinness Book of Records and spend hours laughing over the silly, stupid, and amazing things that the human race achieves.

This is also a way for the older generation to do the necessary

downsizing that age often requires. It is rewarding for a great grandmother to see her a young granddaughter appreciate receiving a family heirloom.

"Our culture bombards us with idealized images of the holidays," said Karen Bracey, extension agent for Wyoming County.

When we can't attain the "ideal" image of the perfectly decorated house, a massive amount of gifts for family and friends, and scrumptious holiday dinners and parties, we often feel disappointed, upset or depressed. This contributes to holiday stress.

Bracey recommends developing realistic expectations. Stick to a budget. Have realistic expectations about the sheer amount of things you will have time to do.

Decide what is most important to you and your family. Do you need to have six different varieties of cookies to serve to guests?

If you enjoy baking and have the time, your answer might be "yes." If baking isn't your forte, forgo the traditional baking and concentrate on the things you enjoy. Today's market enables you to purchase homemade cookies and even factory-made ones that often taste just as good as those that require hours of slaving over in your own kitchen.

Perhaps you enjoy decorating your home with fresh greens and filling your yard with twinkling lights. These touches give you an emotional lift and certainly delights passerby and visitors. Do it if you enjoy it, have the time, and can afford it. If the process makes you irritable and exhausted, don't do it or at least reduce the amount of decorating you normally do.

Do you always send stacks of Christmas cards to everyone you have ever met? With the price of cards and postage, that can make a hefty dent in your budget not to mention the time required to address and sign all those cards. You may want to rethink whether or not this custom is as meaningful to the recipients as it once was. An alternative to holiday card sending is to save those you receive. In January, select a card each day, and respond to the message that you are thinking and praying for that person on that day. This method gives you more time to individualize your card and will probably be more meaningful to the recipient also.

Elaborate Christmas dinners are traditional, and one that families often cherish. But the time required to prepare a feast can be overwhelming to today's busy

housewife, especially if she works outside the home or is a relatively new cook.

Share the workload. Instead of grandma or the hostess preparing all the food, have each guest bring a dish. Most are happy to prepare one of their favorite recipes. This method enables the family to continue the tradition of the holiday feast without causing "kitchen distress."

Some families spend time around the piano singing Christmas carols. Many love this tradition. If your family isn't musically inclined, you can play Christmas music in the background.

Some traditional observances can be adapted to include all family members. Have children reenact the Christmas story while a family member reads it from the Bible. As children grow older, they may be assigned speaking parts. Incorporate the talents of children or adults by having them play a musical instrument or sing a solo.

A few people ignore the whole holiday bustle by refusing to give gifts or decorate and some refuse to participate in family gatherings because of family grudges. Christmas is a good time to put aside differences and show appreciation to each other.

Don't expect your children to behave perfectly during the holiday season — remember they don't at other times of the year either. Sibling rivalry is a childhood trait. It is unrealistic to expect it to disappear during the holidays.

As a parent, you can help reduce frustrations caused by normal childhood behavior. Don't hang antique ornaments on the tree — that only entices childhood curiosity. Keep holiday treats out of sight. No use in constantly tempting children and adults with overindulging in holiday goodies.

If the tree falls over, try to retain perspective. The story is sure to be retold and becomes more humorous with the retelling.

A balanced and rewarding approach in dealing with holiday stress is to be adaptable and flexible. Real families and real people are not perfect. Don't expect yours to be. Your family and your home might not qualify for the "ideal" media image, but they're yours. If you relax and concentrate on what is important, you might discover that celebrating a "rich" Christmas is possible without blowing the budget or your mind.



Having the children act out the Christmas story is a tradition passed down through several generations of the Martin, Kurtz, and Good families.

## Gifts That Last A Lifetime

The first gift I will give my children is the gift of *example*.

The second gift I will give my children is the gift of *hugs*.

The third gift I will give my children is the gift of *time*.

The fourth gift I will give my children is the gift of *praise*.

The fifth gift I will give my children is the gift of *guidance*.

The sixth gift I will give my children is the gift of *communication*.

The seventh gift I will give my children is the gift of *learning*.

The eighth gift I will give my children is the gift of *laughter and play*.

The ninth gift I will give my children is the gift of *responsibility*.

The tenth gift I will give my children is the gift of *permission for their feelings*.

The eleventh gift I will give my children is the gift of *permission for their mistakes*.

The twelfth gift I will give my children is the gift of *freedom*.

Suggestions from

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