



GETTING A “JUMP” ON THE HOLIDAYS

By Lois Breneman, © 2003, Revised 2004, Heart to Heart Newsletter,
jhbreneman@juno.com



Most of us are not finished with our Christmas shopping, and don't get stressed about that! I'm not finished either, but that's okay! There are lots of other things we can do ahead of time to help get a “jump” on the holidays.

Discuss with the family what they'd especially like to do for the holidays. Be sure to delegate some of the work to each family member, putting them in charge of specific projects. Plan your Thanksgiving and Christmas meals early. Look through recipes, write out your holiday menus now, make a grocery list and shop early for all except the perishable items. Buy a couple turkey breasts now while on sale for 88 cents a pound! Purchase basic ingredients such as unbleached flour, shortening, cooking oil, baking powder, baking soda, salt and chocolate chips when on sale, but don't wait until the last minute. I remember one year how I needed unbleached flour for baking cookies and the shelf was bare! Buy it now! This will cut way down on your time, saving trips to the grocery store during your busiest time of the year. Spices such as ginger, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg that are necessary for Thanksgiving and Christmas baking can be purchased in bulk at a health foods store to save as much as ten times the price in grocery stores. Use your savings to buy gifts.

Find a few holly or bayberry candles to get your family in the holiday spirit. Play your Christmas music while you bake cookies, cakes and pies now and freeze them for the holidays. All this will help get you and your family into the spirit and spur you on to finish the shopping and pull out the decorations too. I usually enjoy decorating the day after Thanksgiving, if at all possible, so we can enjoy everything longer. Don't overdo the baking, though baking now for parties will save you time in the long run. A birthday cake for Jesus will freeze well, if baked ahead, but frost it after it is thawed. Let's not forget that it is Jesus' birthday that we are celebrating!

Choose Christmas cards now – or use what you had already bought on sale last year. Type out all the names and addresses of those to whom you plan to send a Christmas card. Keep this list in a file to copy, paste and print. These names and addresses can be printed on mailing labels. Or they can simply be printed on white paper, cut out and glued onto envelopes with a glue stick. This can be done now. Sign the cards now, as well. Stickers, stamps and return address labels can be added now. Let the children help. There are so many rubber stamps available to dress up an envelope and that can also be done ahead of time!

If you plan to send a newsy Christmas letter to friends and family whom you don't see very often, work on a rough draft now. Get in-put from each family member on what to include. Then fine tune it and print it out! Make copies on colored paper. Use a rubber stamp with a Christmas theme. Fold the letter and tuck into the cards. Done! Now your cards will be ready to mail when the time comes. If you are waiting for a picture to include, fine, but the rest will be done, and your planning ahead will relieve a lot of pressure.

You may want to find a new Christmas ornament to make together as a family project. Search for ideas now. Holiday magazines, the library, craft books and Michael's are good places to find ideas. I've been giving each of my children a special Christmas ornament each year. They took their ornaments when they left home, but we still enjoy giving them a new one each year.

Continued on Page 2

GETTING A "JUMP" ON THE HOLIDAYS (Cont.)

Find an Angel Tree in the mall and shop early for the child you choose to bring some Christmas joy. Find out if there is also a needy family who needs a meal or other help. Remember the single moms.

As far as your gift list, write down all the names of those to whom you plan to give a gift. Check to see what gifts you already have on hand and continue from there. If you have time to make a gift that isn't too complicated, make it in multiples – assembly line style. Handmade gifts that are done well are always welcome, and you can save so much. Christian books, CD's and tapes are a great gift idea too. Some cities have a temporary Christian bookstore in their area, with merchandise discounted as much as 80%. I know one had returned to our area two consecutive years. The prices are amazing! You can buy good Christian CD's for just \$2 and audios for \$1!

A few other small ways to plan ahead (every little bit helps!):

- * Make a list of goals for your family during this holiday season, along with how you can reach those goals. Keep things in perspective.
- * If it's cold where you live, you may want to put out your snowmen and sled decorations early, even before Thanksgiving!
- * Plan which dishes to use for the special meals.
- * Cream cheese balls freeze well. That's something you can do now for later, even as gifts!
- * If you don't have an Advent Calendar to use with your children, make plans now.
- * Be sure your bathrooms have extra toilet paper and hand towels available.
- * Decide now which dishes you'd like to use for the special meals and make a note of it.
- * I like to use an 8 1/2 x 11" piece of colored paper, folded in half, to write down my specific plans. Being a special color, I'm not as likely to lose it! ;-)

These are just a few tips to help in planning ahead. I'm sure you can think of lots more! You can make this Thanksgiving and Christmas season a time of real thanksgiving and peaceful joy, rather than hurried, frazzled, stressful drudgery! Simplify by cutting out some things you think you just have to do! Remember -- "Jesus is the Reason for the Season!"

This article was included in the Heart to Heart Newsletter whose purpose is to bring godly and practical encouragement to women through creative ideas for the Christian family – regarding homemaking, marriage, children and much more. You may receive this bimonthly newsletter by sending your name, city, state, country and the name of the person who referred you to Lois Breneman at jhbreneman@juno.com.

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