

DR. CHRISTOPHER'S *Herbal Legacy Newsletter*

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How To: Stop Look and Listen For Christmas

By Sue Monk Kidd

It was the day of the Christmas party at the children's home but my heart wasn't in it. In fact, throughout the holidays I'd found myself going through the motions of Christmas – buying gifts, trimming the tree, even listening to the Christmas Story – without much awareness. Once again the holiday had become clouded with shopping, cooking and a host of wearing details.

"Christmas just isn't what it used to be." I muttered, remembering the wonder-filled Christmases of my childhood.

"Christmas doesn't change," said my husband. "We do."

I shrugged away his comment, thinking of the party. I was to bring a gift for six-year-old Angela, a new child at the home. I'd bought her a nice sensible sweater. Now I wished I'd chosen something else – a doll or a teddy bear. That's when I noticed the little manger made of Popsicle sticks lying in a box of our decorations. On impulse I tucked it in the box with the sweater.

Later that day, Angela shook the gift in eager anticipation. Finally she tore off the wrapping and gazed at the manger.

"It's to remind you that God came to earth as a baby," I explained.

Her eyes widened. She leaped to her feet, paper and ribbon scattering. "God was the baby?"

"Why, yes," I said, realizing this must be the first time she'd heard the Christmas message.

Then Angela did what I suppose all of us should do at such stupendous news. She threw her arms in the air and whirled about, joy dancing all over her, and all of a sudden it was as if I had never heard the story before either.

That year I learned that to make Christmas wonderful we must be full of wonder ourselves. My husband was right. Christmas doesn't change, only people's ability to capture its mystery and marvel. So if you find it difficult to keep the wonder of Christmas kindled amid the fuss and familiarity of the holidays, maybe you'd like to try these helps. They worked for me.

1. **STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN.** When you discover yourself becoming dulled to the joys of the season, STOP. Slow down the pace and grow still, making time to look and listen. Take a winter walk or curl up before the fireplace. Helen Keller once observed, “The seeing see little.” So peel familiarity from the glow of a candle and the red of a poinsettia. Listen anew to laughter and bells, and the whisper of love deep in the Bethlehem story.
2. **FIND WAYS TO ANTICIPATE CHRIST’S COMING.** Our family keeps an Advent calendar during December. Sometimes we hang handmade symbols of Christmas onto a tree, counting down the days. One of my favorites is carrying out our “24 ways to celebrate Advent.” Each day we open an envelope on the tree and find a suggestion such as: “Write someone and express your gratitude, forgive an old hurt, tell someone you love them, name your blessings.”
3. **FREE YOUR CHILDLIKE SPIRIT.** Jesus held childlikeness as a quality to be cultivated (Mark 10:15). Children dream up simple delights that most of us never experience. There was the year I came upon a little boy singing “Jingle Bells” to a plastic Jesus that was for sale in a department store. And why not? For often Christmas comes in moments such as these, when we enter with spontaneity, with unabashed adoration for the Baby.
4. **BE WILLING TO BE SURPRISED.** Recognize that God comes in the least likely ways. A Holy Child born in a village barn, a strangely lit star, angel song in a night sky. Watch for Him to come in equally surprising ways to you. When we live as if God is going to surprise us any time, any place, any way, He usually does.
5. **SHARE THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS WITH SOMEONE ELSE.** Nothing multiplies the sense of wonder in your life like giving it away. The more you share, the brighter Christmas grows. Even if all you have to give is a rickety Popsicle stick manger.

Not long after that Christmas, Angela left the children’s home for a foster family. But hardly a year passes that I don’t remember how she woke me to God’s tidings of great joy. And sometimes, too, I smile at the appropriateness of her name.

