

## 2012 Advent Reflections



Anchorage Pastors Write on the Theme

### **Advent as an Antidote for Acquisitiveness or Consumerism**

Collected from Church Visits Blog

December 2012

[www.adn.com/churchvisits](http://www.adn.com/churchvisits)

## **Pastoral Advent Reflections**

I became alarmed at the earliness and ferocity of the Christmas selling season this year. First, Halloween seemed to be a rallying point for kicking off the Christmas selling season. Then came a multitude of pre-Black Friday, Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Cyber Monday selling bashes where retailers were busting their buttons to get everyone buying in celebration of the birth of Jesus.

After Thanksgiving this year, when Advent began, I wondered why so many churches were strangely silent about all the spirit of acquisition and consumerism during Advent. I asked a goodly number of pastors and church leaders in Anchorage to write brief Advent Reflections on the topic of “Advent as an Antidote to Acquisitiveness or Consumerism”. Many pastors quickly committed to write such reflections. As they poured in, I began blogging them one per day in the fourteen days ahead of Christmas Eve, when Advent ends.

I’m so impressed with the quality of the thoughts, and the depth of feeling these pastors poured into their short pieces. I’m most appreciative of their efforts and rapid response to my individual requests. Unfortunately, I did not receive the courtesy of a response from the pastors of many of Anchorage’s major churches, or the Alaska heads of many key Protestant denominations headquartered in Anchorage.

Advent is traditionally a refutation of the values of the world, a time and place churches should unashamedly proclaim the values embodied in Advent themes of: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Advent, and Christmas are times of year when churches welcome one of the church year’s greatest influxes of people. What church leader or pastor would not want to share an Advent thought with the public? What could be their concern?

Nonetheless, I consider the thoughts of the 14 responding pastors, chaplains, and rectors to be of such significant value, that I’ve collected them into this PDF summary for your reading pleasure.

Enjoy!

Chris Thompson  
Church Visits Blogger  
Anchorage Daily News  
[www.adn.com/churchvisits](http://www.adn.com/churchvisits)

December 31, 2012



**Pastor Rick Benjamin**  
**Former Pastor Abbott Loop Community Church**  
**Currently Director Organizational and Spiritual**  
**Wellness – Hope Community Resources**

*Enjoy Christmas! Celebrate being with friends and family, eat all the great food, and have fun opening all your presents. But don't forget the reason for Christmas - God's gift of Jesus. And don't forget to give - to friends and family - but also to people around us in need. Remember that sometimes the most meaningful gifts don't cost a lot of money, like a photograph, and hand-made item or a hand-written note. Find a way to show love, to help overcome the deplorable commercialization of Christmas, and have a more meaningful personal Christmas experience as well.*

*God bless and Merry Christmas.*

*Posted December 10, 2012*



**Rick Cavens, Chaplain**  
**176 Air Wing, Alaska Air National Guard**

*The holy preacher textbook reply to what Advent is all about is "waiting." Waiting for the "Son of the Most High" to be reborn into our hearts once again. But it is more than that. It is about family. As you read the Gospel of Luke's story about Jesus' birth, it is a series of small clips about family; Elizabeth and Zechariah will finally have a baby, John the Baptist, after a life time of hoping and waiting; Joseph and Mary are engaged and now young Mary is pregnant?- (and the neighbors don't quite "get" how the Holy Spirit can make Mary pregnant); for comfort and care in a village far away from Nazareth a pregnant Mary visits her pregnant aunt Elizabeth and two outcast women can rejoice; the story peaks when Joseph and Mary travel to a city that does not welcome them until angels invite the shepherds to visit a manger where baby Jesus is holding court in his new makeshift living-room; for emphasis that Jesus is God's Son and about relationships, the story about baby Jesus ends with two old lonely people who seek God in places of faith, the Temple, here Simeon sees "salvation" in baby Jesus and Anna tells the holy young couple that their new baby, Jesus, will bring "redemption."*

*Advent is about families and extended families caring and loving one another as Jesus comes into our lives. Like the reason for a day of Sabbath, Advent reminds us to slow down and love God and love those around us, our neighbors.*

*Posted December 11, 2012*



**Pastor Martin Dasler**  
[Amazing Grace Lutheran Church](#)

*Observing Advent as a separate season has preserved many people in the church from getting overwhelmed in the materialistic gift buying and selling of the pre-Christmas season. The season of Advent enjoys a natural rhythm of anticipation that every child with a birthday knows quite well. Certain events as well as time must come to pass before the celebration takes place. Capitalizing on this the church has told Bible stories filled with interesting characters, (John, Mary, and Elizabeth ), sprinkled with the rich imagination of prophets ( Isaiah, Malachi and Zephaniah). One Sunday they are called a “Brood of Vipers” and the next week people are bursting into songs of joyful anticipation like Mary and John’s father Zachariah. All have their part in the great pre-Christmas drama.*

*In many congregations the color of Advent is blue, the color of hope, not only reflecting Mary’s color, but the witness of Isaiah who reminded us that “the people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light”. I also like the way Advent serves as a counterpoint to a culture which wants everything “on demand” and seems incapable of denying itself anything. For many in the church this has become a favorite time of the year. It is the blessed anticipation of longing and waiting at the door until “the fullness of time” has come. Out in the shopping world good deals are now referred to as “door busters”. The church would prefer that we wait in peace, quiet, and contemplation trusting that the door will open at the right time. The philosopher, mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal wrote "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."*

*I would add “...and wait”.*

*Posted December 12, 2012*



**Reverend Jim Basinger, Rector**  
[All Saints' Episcopal Church](#)

*Advent means 'coming' – the coming of Jesus Christ in his incarnation and also in his triumphal return at the end of the age. And so, I wondered why on two Sundays out of four in Advent, we read about the ministry of John the Baptist? What does he have to do with the coming of the Lord? Just this: he came to prepare the way for the Lord. And how did he do it? By 'proclaiming a baptism for the forgiveness of sins.' The good news of Christmas concerns the coming of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, but John the Baptist reminds us that just as we prepare our homes for the celebration of Christmas, so too, in order to enjoy the new life of forgiveness of sins that Jesus brought, we need prepare our hearts by turning away from our idols – whatever they may be – and turning to God who in Christ offers us new and vital life.*

*Posted December 13, 2012*



**Senior Pastor Steve Holsinger**  
[Faith Christian Community](#)

*I love the Advent season because the whole world- whether they are intentional followers of Jesus or not- are involved! At this time of year people give generously to help those who are less fortunate. Every day another expression of the adventure of Advent surfaces.:*

*A box of gifts appears on the front porch of a family resolved to have a lean Christmas and everything seems brighter. Carolers visit a nursing home and at least for that day, it feels like home. A student gives a Christmas gift to a school teacher who is just trying to hang on till Christmas break and all of the sudden she has a smile again and some spring in her step. Christmas carols are being played in the shopping malls at Red Square in Moscow, in a tower in Dubai and on the streets of Shanghai.*

*Two thousand years after His birth (Advent) Jesus is still being remembered, honored and celebrated all over planet earth. Everyone who gives or receives a gift is reminded of the gift God gave us so long ago- not just a baby in a manger- a Savior, Christ the Lord. Every year at Christmas we see someone experience Advent in their own heart as they accept God's gift and enthrone Jesus as Lord in their heart. I am reminded of the rebellious young man, almost dragged into a Christmas Eve service, who stepped to the front at the end and said in an astonished voice, "I just realized I really believe this stuff!" Advent strikes again! I pray that this Advent season will be an adventure for you, your family and your church.*

*Posted December 14, 2012*



**Pastor Carlo Rapanut**  
[United Methodist Church of Chugiak](#)

*Advent provides an alternative to the commercialism that has come to define the holidays. It calls us to a time of waiting. It is a time of preparation, calling us to focus on what we truly celebrate during Christmas – the birth of Christ.*

*More than just a countdown to Christmas; the progressive lighting of candles on an Advent wreath give us themes meant to light our way through the season. We are called to HOPE. And it's not just hoping for gifts under the tree. Advent calls us to dig deep within and name what it is our hearts are truly hoping for. I am writing this as I pray for a colleague in ministry who was severely injured in a car accident recently. I name his healing and recovery as one thing my heart truly hopes for this Christmas. We are also called to find PEACE, which is an antithesis to the hustle and bustle of the season. I am also writing this amidst the news of the shooting in an elementary school in Newport, Connecticut. As my mind grapples for answers, my heart looks to God for peace – for all who were directly affected, and for all of us who were impacted by the tragic news. Advent calls us to LOVE, not just to give but to love, realizing that the gift of Christmas is not a shiny new car or the latest phone model, but the love of God wrapped in our own flesh. And we are called to JOY. Advent prepares us, not just for the momentary happiness that comes from material gifts, but to rejoice in celebrating God's wondrous gift – Jesus, Immanuel, God with us.*

*The season of Advent not only calls people to say no to the consumerism of the holidays, it also offers a different way of celebrating. Think of the Advent themes as adverbs. Instead of busily, stressfully, expensively and commercially, Advent prepares us to celebrate Christmas hopefully, peacefully, lovingly and joyfully.*

*Posted December 15, 2012*



Senior Pastor Bob Mather  
[Baxter Road Bible Church](#)

*Traditionally, Advent refers to the four Sundays before December 25th where we celebrate the birth of the Son of God while understanding and thinking about the need to prepare for His second coming. If we truly gave much thought about the second coming then buying stuff and the American traditional Christmas consumerism would lose importance.*

*We take a little different tack, for us, at Baxter Road Bible Church; we emphasize remembering whose birthday we are celebrating. It is Jesus' birthday not ours and our emphasis is on buying Him a gift which helps us realign our priorities. But what gift can we give Him? In Matthew 25 Jesus tells us plainly what He values and tells us "what we do for the least of these, we do for Him." So, as people give their tithes and offerings, we give it all away to help the poor and needy and in that way we try to make Jesus' priority our priority.*

*Posted December 16, 2012*



Pastor Brent Williams  
[True North Church](#)

*If we learn anything from our culture during the Christmas season, it is that marketers are brilliant and know how to remind you that your life is not fulfilled and they have what you need to be satisfied. Right? Have you seen the car commercials? There's a big red bow on the new SUV with a husband who is dressed for success. His perfect wife runs out and jumps into his arms while the kids sit nicely on the edge of the lawn doing algebra homework. The advertisements are conditioning us to believe that there is actually something that will fulfill the deepest longings of our life. Interestingly enough, they are correct. At times, all of us experience discontentment. We all want more. No one as a child dreams of spending his or her days in a cubicle, with no daylight for six months in four degree Anchorage weather. No, he or she probably wanted to be a cowboy or princess.*

*The consumer culture is also partially right when it comes to the satisfying nature of stuff. It feels good to acquire new stuff or finally receive that long wished-for item. Remember when you purchased that new car? You didn't roll down the windows because you didn't want the new car smell to leave. You said, "I'm finally going to keep this one clean," and 80,000 miles later, the new car is no longer satisfying and the newer model looks so sweet. Yes, there is satisfaction when we get what we want, but the problem is that temporary things eventually give way to wanting more. Eventually, we all get bored. This lie works because there is a hole of eternity in the heart of every man. The lie works because we do believe that there is more to be had and we are hungry for it.*

*Ecclesiastes 3 says that God has put eternity into the hearts of men and women. At the core is the longing to be fulfilled, a desperate need for purpose and meaning. The beauty of Advent is that God solves the problem. God steps into our framework. He enters our world as a humble baby - born in a manger to two unlikely parents. God reminds us that he has not left us wanting more but instead fills our life with that which never leaves us desiring or needing more. Jesus becomes the answer to the hole of eternity in the heart of humanity. Advent is the promise of God that he will fulfill the deepest longing of every human heart - the true antidote to consumerism. How unthinkable are the ways of God? God's answer to the world's problem is a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. The answer cannot be purchased by money, good works, or behavioral change. It is a gift from God received by faith to those whom God loves.*

*Posted December 17, 2012*



**Chaplain Rolfe Holmquist, Maj,  
USAF 673 ABW/HC JBER**

*Advent is upon us as we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christmas. We wait for the second coming of Jesus, as we also ponder on his first arrival on Earth. The church celebrates Advent with the lighting of Advent candles. Each candle represents a different theme, one of hope, peace, joy and love. These themes are drawn out of scripture from our church fathers around the 6th century.*

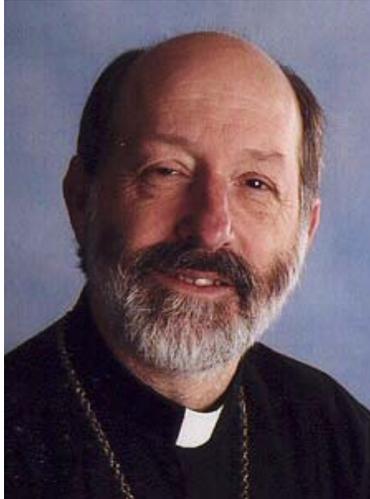
*There is also significance in the color of the candles. Historically, the primary sanctuary color of Advent is purple. This is the color of royalty to welcome the Advent of the King. In many churches, the third Sunday remains the Sunday of Joy marked by a rose-colored candle. Lastly, the Christ Candle is white to remind us that Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God, sent to wash away our sins.*

*I have always liked candles. I enjoy the way candles cast off a warm glow on a cold winter's night. I know about cold winters, I am stationed in Alaska. Today's high in Anchorage, Alaska was 27 degrees. I think about what it must have been like for the first settlers to endure a winter in wild Alaska. The early pioneers lit candles just to see inside their cabin, when the sun went down. It is amazing how something as small as the flicker of the flame on a candle, has the ability to light up a whole room.*

*I believe that is how it is with us Christians. Though the candle of our soul may be small, it should light up the whole room. This Advent season, we have a reason to be joyous. We are deeply loved by a God that gave the very first present on Christmas – himself. As we light the advent candles in church this month, think about what they represent -- hope, peace, joy and love. Does the world see these attributes of God displayed in us? Is our candle lit? With this understanding of the love of God, we should be lighting up the whole world!*

*Go ahead this Advent--- take your candle and go light your world!*

*Posted December 18, 2012*



Fr. Marc Dunaway

[Saint John Orthodox Cathedral](#)

Eagle River

*The rhythm of worship in the Orthodox Church is always one of preparation and fulfillment. Advent, then, for us is a the season of preparation for the Feast Day of Christ's Birth, Christmas. This preparation includes efforts in fasting and more attention to prayer and to acts of kindness and mercy. Notably it shies away from parties and festive celebrations. These are reserved for the the season of Christmas which begins on December 25 and continues through the days following. This is the time for celebrations and gifts and good food.*

*During Advent we also remember on December 6 the real Saint Nicholas, bishop of Myra in the 300's, and on December 13 Alaska's own local Saint Herman of Kodiak and Spruce Island, who was one of the first missionaries to come to Alaska in 1794 and who to this day is still venerated by the native people. To make Advent a season of spiritual preparation goes against the flow of secular commercialism, but it is the only thing that will lead to a real and lasting joy: the celebration that God loved us so much He sent His Son to be born among us, as one of us, that He might bear our burdens, free us from death, and bring us into His Kingdom. In the light of this joy we can truly celebrate family gatherings and and the holy days of Christmas.*

*Practical suggestions for Advent: cut back on celebrations before Christmas, decorate a tree the week before Christmas and not earlier, share gifts for a few days after Christmas, give generously to someone you know who needs your help, read a small portion of the Bible each day, and find a Church to hear the message of Christ's birth on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Then celebrate with us on Christmas Day as we say: CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!*

*Posted December 19, 2012*



**Sr. Pastor Mark Goodman**  
[Rabbit Creek Community Church](#)

*He spoke in extremes. "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). No wiggle room there! The Lord Jesus chose the Aramaic word "mammon" in reference to riches because the word's root is associated with the act of trusting. His message is clear. Each person who would follow in the Jesus Way cannot simultaneously trust in God, the Provider, and riches, the stuff on earth. You and I, however, live in the world of Black Friday, zero % interest loans, endless credit card offers, and the American Dream. Considering that stores opened before the Thanksgiving turkey meal was digested, most of us find it difficult to count our blessings without doing the math to figure how soon we can buy and therefore count higher. It is time to trust in Who rather than What.*

*I delight in knowing that I will join with my church family on the 24th to sing praises to God for His gift of Jesus. I look forward to ripping wrapping paper and reaching into my gingerbread man-adorned stocking. I smile in anticipation of watching my daughter and sons bolt down the stairs on the 25th. I pray that my wife likes what I picked out. Eagerness for Christmas, however, should not overshadow Advent. The season of Advent helps us to avoid the trap of Mammon. It helps us focus on what really matters, to trust the only One worth serving.*

*December 2nd marked the first Sunday of a four-week observance of Advent (a coming). Christian believers look forward to that day that the Apostle Paul referred to as "the blessed hope – the glorious appearing" (Titus 2:13). On that day the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ will appear. While Christmas reminds us of Jesus' first arrival, Advent declares the promise of His return, His second arrival. Christmas without Advent is a reflection on an historical event alone. Advent, while allowing time to look back, draws our attention forward so that we can look forward to God coming to set all things right. No matter how much we buy, even if everything in your shopping bag is 40% off, we will tire of the gifts sooner than we think. How many shoes do you really need? How many rifles does it really take to bag next year's game? Do you really just have to have the newest iPhone? If you must, go ahead and buy it. But don't count on any purchase to bring you happiness. I am no Grinch. I will buy and open as you do. Yet, I sure hope that I will remember to count my blessings before I do and not pout if the number, as it increases, does not include that certain "must have." Join me, won't you?*

*Posted December 20, 2012*



**Pastor John Dodson**  
**Interim Pastor**  
**St John UMC (2009-2010)**

*Advent is a time for preparation and expectancy. It is a good time to take stock, to reflect and consider “what are the best things in life?” Most people if pressed would not say that the latest fashion item or a plastic wrapped doll or a spaceman were among the best things in life. Advent is about what is the best thing in life! Life is made up of small good things that result in a great life. Like kindness, friendship, family bonds, love between persons and respect for each other. If we took these as meaningful experiences in our lives, we might want to fashion our gift giving after those values.*

*Give the gift of yourself this Christmas. Think of ways you can give a gift that has deeper meaning. A fishing trip for your grandson, a treat to a ballet for your granddaughter, a picnic for the family in the spring time to a favorite place, an offer to give some babysitting time to a young couple and perhaps you can begin to create some events that are unique to you. Why follow the depressive route of gifts soon discarded and the discouragement that often comes with over spending and feeling like you want to do something different? Now is your chance! Do something different this Christmas!*

*Posted December 21, 2012*



**Pastor Steven Vicaro**

[Hillside O'Malley SDA Church](#)

*Gift giving is a challenge. The perfect gift is one that is wanted, needed, and unexpected. Satisfying all three of these criteria is uncommon, but sure to bring excitement to both the giver and receiver. When God gave His Son to Humanity, few people were excited about the Gift. Jesus was wanted by some, needed by all, but most were not expecting Him. This is not to say that those who called themselves followers of the Creator were not “expecting” a Messiah. Indeed, they were waiting for Him, though not exactly.*

*God's people were expecting one who would redeem them from poverty, save them from their enemies, deliver them from the Roman authority that was over them, and give them their heart's desire, along with many other expectations.*

*Yet the Father arranged that His Son would be born in an animal shelter, raised by peasants, self-employed as a skilled laborer, without any formal education, and with no military training. Jesus was certainly not what His proclaimed people were expecting. So when Christ came the first time, they missed out on the joy. But He was so much better than what they were expecting: love, forgiveness, righteousness, purity. Only shepherds and foreign travelers, along with a few others who were true in heart, knew when he arrived. God's perfect gift was only appreciated by a few.*

*As we celebrate Christ's first advent and await His second, let us not miss out on the blessing that God has already given to us. Simplicity rather than extravagance, the spiritual rather than the material, giving rather than getting: these are some of the lessons that God gave us through His Son.*

*Posted December 22, 2012*



**Rector Michael Burke**

[St Mary's Episcopal Church](#)

*On Second Advent Sunday, I spoke about the “irony, humor, and tragedy” of the fact that “Christmas” (meaning the commercial season stretching from Halloween to December 25th) has eclipsed not only Advent, but the celebration of Christmas as well.*

*We live in a culture that does not know what to do with Advent, as it seems to “be in the way of” this secular or commercial celebration of “Christmas.”*

*While Advent was originally practiced as a relatively austere time of “much space” for introspection and the preparation of one’s own heart for the coming of Christ, the busy-ness of the season has crowded that out.*

*So I wonder... Has the celebration of “Christmas” become the single biggest obstacle to the celebration of ... .. Christmas?*

*Attached\* is some of what I shared with our congregation regarding how one family responded to this situation, and the different approach they took.*

*I have since had a couple families report back to me, that this is what they are choosing to do for this Advent / Christmas.*

*\* See Appendix.*

*Posted December 23, 2012*

# APPENDIX

## The Grateful Christmas Project

Courtesy of St. Mary's Episcopal Church

## The Grateful Christmas Project: 7 Ways to have more Grateful Kids this Christmas

'I'm thinking it's almost a dozen years now, nothing under the Christmas tree here.

Strange, the way children teach men.

The whole crazy, unexpected thing, it started at bedtime one year, I do remember that. Smoothing back hair, kissing foreheads.

I had gifts to wrap.

So, I pulled up the blankets. Prayers. And then, when I'm at the door, one hand on the doorframe, resting in the light of the hallway, I turn to close the door a bit on the dark.

And the oldest boy, he stops me with just one question:

“What does Jesus get for His birthday?”

The words hung... strung me up.

I say the words into the black. Um... A cake? Our love?

I can hear him turn again in the bed, roll over on the pillow. Restless...

“But Mom.... if we get wrapped presents for our birthdays. If people give up other things to give something to us for our birthday — then why don't we do that for Jesus' birthday?”

I stand at the door looking into all that light cast down the hallway. One round moon hangs large outside the window, an ornament dangling off stars, decorating the night.

I stand in the dark, the light right there, and I grope for the answer that could change the world...

And the boy says:

Why don't we give up things so we can give to Jesus for His birthday?"

Is it always this way, that a little child will lead them?

He was five that year, I think...

I just know that now he's seventeen and we all stepped out into some light that year and we've done all the Christmases since this way — giving away.

It's not at all wrong to do it differently, but just for us... all the Christmas gifts — are gifts for the Christ Child.

I shamefully confess I thought it would somehow make me sad.

I am a very slow learner. Only love under the tree can unwrap abundant joy.

And the Birthday Child tells us what He wants: Give to the least of these and you give to Me.

So this is how we do it: If any extended family doesn't feel it's Christmas without gifts, we honor and exchange gifts. And we make lots of love packages of baking for the neighbors and the excitement is about reaching out with His love. And we draw names in our own family and give only one handmade gift the week after Christmas, to each other on New Year's Day, a way to celebrate the blessing of a New Year.

But our Christmas here, the main thing? It happens after breakfast, each day for the last two weeks of Advent, selecting one gift for He who is Christmas.

We pick out gifts from His gift catalogues and give to Him and the excitement is palpable — the [Compassion Catalog](#), [Samaritan’s Purse Catalog](#), [Partner’s International Catalog](#), [World Vision Catalog](#), [Gospel for Asia Catalog](#), and [Mennonite Central Committee Catalog](#).



They flip pages, deciding on what to give Him today:

“Anyone think we should get a pair of rabbits today?”

“I was thinking mosquito nets. Two. I wouldn’t want to die of malaria.”

“If we buy a seed packet for a family, our gift is tripled.”

“Did you read the story on page 25 about what a difference it makes for an orphan family to have seeds? The little girl said, ‘Life is much better with food.’”

“Why are you crying, Mama?”

“Oh, just thinking— how life really is much better with food...”





I'm sitting at the table with the kids all bent over The King's Catalogues when I finally get what the kids already know:

I'd rather only fill a child's tummy than fill my house with anymore things.

Maybe that's the choice our Christmas needs to make: feed our own wishes or feed the real hunger of Christ?

Nothing can be claimed, taken, received, had; everything we have is gift to us from heaven. All that we have has no other source but the hand of God (Jn 3:27).

And the thing is: "Christian hands never clasp and He doesn't give us gifts for our gain because a gift can never stop being a gift— it is always meant to be given." (~[One Thousand Gifts](#))

When we pass our gifts on — the gifts from Him remaining a gift and being given again — we are the ones given even more of the source of all gifts — more of God Himself.

**Filled.** When we give to Christ in the hungry, He satisfies our own hunger pangs.

A decade of this, our little family turning the Christmas tree upside down and letting gifts all fall into the hands of the poor.

Sure, some thought it too strange, all this with no bows under the tree and really, I understood.

But we couldn't stop seeing just this, Him hanging on a tree. It's just the way He's just spoken to us, that's all, and there are a thousand ways to do Christmas well.

And then the unexpected happened — my Dad, he stood in our kitchen. Stood with his hand on the counter, his farm coveralls still on, him just driving by, and he said it quiet, "I think this year — we shouldn't do gifts as a family."

He looked up at me. My eyebrows arched.

He did understand?

"I was thinking that this year — maybe we should just all go together — and see if we can help drill a well in Africa."

And that one boy who was once five but is now pretty much grown up, who asked a question on a night long ago that answered so much — he turns to me and he smiles.

His smile lighting the room and all the world.

# The Grateful Christmas Project



## 7 Ways to grow grateful hearts this Christmas :

### 1. A "Gifts We Already Have List"

**Hang a long paper on a wall or on the fridge or back of door. Fill *that* list up before Christmas** — with all the countless ways God blesses you all as a family. Count 1000 (or a bit more or less) of the gifts you already have this Christmas!

### 2. Thanks Mob the neighborhood

**Set out a basket of Thank you postcards and leave a pen and stamps in the basket.** Add a stash of chocolate bars. See if you can empty the thank-you card basket, accompanied by chocolate bars, by Christmas — a thank-you card and chocolate bar for the postman, the garbage collector, folks at the hair salon, the crossing guard, the church janitor.

### 3. Love-in for a Shut-In

**Adopt a shut-in this Advent.** One person who is homebound or elderly or in a nursing home — and have the kids think of one thing they can do for that shut-in face to face over Advent. Sing Christmas carols with them one evening? Bring them a very small tree in a pot and every week of Advent pop in with one more meaningful ornament for the tree? Bring them a meal? Find a way for the kids to be face-to-face with blessing someone.

#### 4. Thrift Gifts

**Before every trip to the mall — check out one thrift store.** Before any online order — check out Value Village, or eBay. Help kids to thrill in the hunt for thirsted gems — and see it as a way to make gifts keep on giving! Think Thrift Gift!

#### 5. Lower expectations to heighten Joy

“Expectations kill relationships — and joy.” ([One Thousand Gifts](#)) Consider ways of sharing with the kids that Christmas is going to be smaller and holier this year. Set low spending limits for all gift-giving and make the creativity with little part of the Christmas fun. Live by the small rule: Only buy for Christmas Day what can be paid for by New Year’s Day. Lower the expectations to heighten the joy!

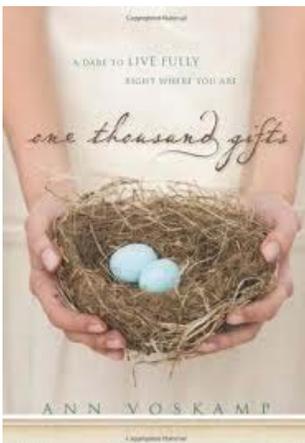
#### 6. Giving Lists not Getting Lists

**Spend quiet time with each of the kids thinking and planning on what they can give** and how they can be the gift, give a blessing — so that they can live out the truth of: It is more blessed to give than to receive. What can they make? Bake? Create? How could they surprise? Bless? Who is on their Giving list? **Let’s focus on our Giving Lists — and not so much on any getting lists.**

#### 7. King Gifts

Hear Jesus whispering it: **“When You give to the least of these — you give to Me.”** Consider how to make this Christmas radical — and get out the King’s Catalogues and get excited about giving bringing gifts to our King! Gather the family around with all the catalogues and make it a family birthday party for Jesus — will you bring the King a goat, clean water, a chicken, a Bible for a new Believer, a warm coat?

**“Christian hands never clasp and God doesn’t give us gifts for our gain because a gift can never stop being a gift— it is always meant to be given.”**



This material adapted from the resource book, “One Thousand Gifts: Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are” See: [http://www.amazon.com/One-Thousand-Gifts-Fully-Right/dp/0310321913?ie=UTF8&tag=holyexper-20&link\\_code=btl&camp=213689&creative=392969](http://www.amazon.com/One-Thousand-Gifts-Fully-Right/dp/0310321913?ie=UTF8&tag=holyexper-20&link_code=btl&camp=213689&creative=392969)

Available from your local bookstore or online at Amazon.com.

*With thanks to John and Katrina Zimmerman!*

# Gifts To Heal a Hurting World:

## Where to find online gift catalogs:

(These links will be “live” in our St. Mary’s weekly e-newsletter this week.)

Malawi Children’s Village: <http://malawichildrensivillage.org/>

Heifer project International: Compassion International: <http://www.compassion.com/default.htm>

Gifts for Life, including Nets For Life : <http://www.er-d.org/GiftsForLife/>

World Vision: [http://donate.worldvision.org/OA\\_HTML/xxwv2ibeCCtpSctDspRte.jsp?section=10389](http://donate.worldvision.org/OA_HTML/xxwv2ibeCCtpSctDspRte.jsp?section=10389)

Harvest of Hope: <http://www.harvestofhope.org/>

Heifer Project International: [https://secure1.heifer.org/gift-catalog?msource=KIK11120063&gclid=CJu68Y7si7QCFYp\\_QgodclsAiw](https://secure1.heifer.org/gift-catalog?msource=KIK11120063&gclid=CJu68Y7si7QCFYp_QgodclsAiw)

International Justice Mission: <http://www.ijm.org/>

Tundra Women’s Coalition: <http://tundrapeace.org/>

Abused Women’s Aid in Crisis: <https://www.awaic.org/Donations.html>

Blood Water Mission: <http://www.bloodwatermission.com/>

Kids In Need of Desks (K.I.N.D.) <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40558738/>

Dancing With The Spirit Ministries: <http://www.dancingwiththespirit.org/index.html>

Activism: Visit <http://www.one.org/us/>. They are not asking for your money. They are asking for your voice.

## Extreme poverty can seem like an abstract idea.

Some terrible thing that happens to people you’ve never met — halfway around the world. But for

**1 billion** people

**it’s their daily existence.**

Millions of people die from completely preventable disease.

Parents are forced to choose which child eats today.

Poverty in any form is a terrible thing. Extreme poverty is an **unacceptable** thing.