

<P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">I know that we have printed our own Christmas traditions before, but I thought it might be helpful to print these again as a reminder of things that you could do with your own family this marvelous time of year.</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ As soon as Thanksgiving is over, we now have Jon◆s permission to listen to Christmas music and start our holiday decorations and activities, so we embrace this month wholeheartedly. The day after Thanksgiving, we begin listening to all our Christmas CDs all day, day after day until the end of February. I could personally listen to this music all year long, but for Jon◆s sake, I only press it for three months. </P>◆◆◆◆◆ After turning on some Christmas music, we begin our month with our Advent calendar and decorating our blank calendar for Christmas. We usually place verses or a scene of Christ◆s birth on the top of the calendar and then decorate the days◆ blocks and border around the weeks with mittens, candy canes, gingerbread cookies, snowmen, ornaments, sleds, wrapped gifts, Christmas candies, mice in little Christmas outfits, cookie sheets of cookies, fir trees and more. As you know from previous newsletters, we love decorating each month in our blank calendar and then hanging it up to enjoy for the entire month. <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ We paint our wooden and ceramic ornaments, snowmen, and sleds to be placed around the house. We also make other crafts like snowmen out of popsicle sticks, candy canes out of red and white pipe cleaners, little star ornaments out of glittered red and gold pipe cleaners, adorable little people out of pine cones, wooden balls, and pipe cleaners, little Christmas houses for our pine cone people and whatever new craft Sonia and I think up for the new season. These projects go on all day while the kettle◆s steam penetrates our kitchen and we sip on tea and munch on homemade cookies. </P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ While we are at it, we make cute cards and cute gift tags for each other.</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ We take my mother and father to select our Christmas trees together at our favorite Mannino◆s Market. Then we go out to dinner before we arrive home to put up our trees.</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ While listening to Christmas music, we decorate our trees (two large ones, one in our living room and one in Sonia◆s and Josiah◆s bedroom) and two in Jon◆s and my bedroom (one on our dresser and one in front of our window, and sometimes, one in the kitchen) and place our other decorations around the house. Afterwards, we give the children their new ornaments and let them place them on our tree in the living room or on their own trees in their rooms. </P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ Every year we give each of our

children a new Christmas book and place the entire collection by our sofa to be read by me throughout the season. This way they will have a collection of Christmas books to read to their children when they have families of their own. </P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ We plan our annual trip with friends to downtown◆s Old Courthouse for one of their Christmas concerts, Famous Barr (now Macy◆s) to enjoy the first floor◆s lovely decorations and for some Christmas shopping, Metropolitan Building to have our picture taken in front of their 40-foot beautifully decorated tree, a walk to Adam◆s Mark (while we sing Christmas carols) to see their gingerbread house display, dinner at one of the downtown restaurants, and then a drive through Anheuser Busch◆s Christmas-lit drive.</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ We bake Christmas cookies with friends while we listen to Christmas music and enjoy all our Christmas decorations.</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ While munching on Christmas cookies and carefully sipping on our milk, we drive around different neighborhoods to view their outdoor Christmas light decorations.</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ One afternoon, we all go to Adam◆s Mark for their Christmas High Tea. Although pricey, this is a special Christmas treat for us. </P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ Assembling our gingerbread house is always a treat as I take pictures of the kids putting their own signature touches on it.</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ During the season we will frequently turn out all the lights except those on our Christmas tree and holiday garlands and sit in our living room to enjoy cookies and hot chocolate by the tree.</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ Every year we select a special Christmas concert to attend either at the symphony, at a church, at the Fox◆</P> <P class="MsoBodyText style=MARGIN: 0in 0in 0pt; TEXT-ALIGN: justify; tab-stops: .25in">◆◆◆◆◆ One Wednesday night in December, we take the children to St. Charles to do some Christmas shopping while also enjoying the strolling Victorian carolers, St. Nicholases from around the world, a fife and drum corps, roasted chestnuts from the Victorian chestnut man, and hot cider available in many of the shops. We have even taken a carriage ride this time of year because the shops look so lovely dressed up in their Christmas attire. For a complete listing of the special Christmas nights and other special events, go to www.stcharleschristmas.com and click on ◆Plan Your Visit◆ (our thanks to Joye for giving me this website for

you).

Sometime during the holidays we will bake and personalize our adorable gingerbread cookies.

All throughout the Christmas season, we watch our many Christmas movies while we sip on tea and munch on Christmas cookies, or sometimes we just have popcorn and soda.

We love to sing Christmas carols and hymns and read about the birth of Christ around our Christmas tree.

If there is snow, we will call friends and spend the long night giggling as we get sprayed with snow sailing down the hill by their house. Afterwards, we enjoy hot chocolate and cookies or pie.

Josiah and I will make Christmas treats for the birds and hang them on our trees while Jedidiah keeps the bird feeders filled for our feathered friends.

The week after Christmas, we decide which movies we will watch for New Year's Eve night (last year it was a Charlie Chan marathon till well into the wee hours of the morning), make out our shopping list for all the goodies we eat for our New Year's Eve midnight feast (crab legs, cheese ball, crab meat appetizer, pickled okra, olives and pickles, lunch meat, cheese, bread, sausage, cheese and crackers, creamed herring, baked artichoke cheese appetizer, miniature sausage and cheese pizzas, dill dip with rye bread, crab rangoon dip and wontons, mango chutney log, sparkling grape juice, baklava, and cookies ♦ this sometimes varies slightly but usually it is the same menu each year because it is tradition) and decide which games we will play in addition to our annual Clue game, which we play before the movie marathon and feast begins.

Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow, and enjoy this wonderful season with your family!