

HORIZONS

FOR ADULTS

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Will You Ask the Right Question This Christmas?

By Sue Donaldson



December 1 arrives too quickly on the heels of Thanksgiving. It happens every year, yet it's always a surprise. (What? Red and green already? I haven't put away the orange! Actually, I'm still eating leftover sweet-potato casserole. . . . There's always leftover sweet-potato casserole. My family might be trying to tell me something.)

Red and green show up, unbidden, too soon; but there they are, and it's time to ask the right question—the main question—for every December 1: “Lord Jesus, what do You want for Your birthday?”

I need to remember what's most important about December as the days get crazier and busier the closer it gets to the 25th. I wasn't raised with an Advent church tradition. Now, as an adult, I love the weekly prayers and Scripture readings, because without them, the real meaning of Christmas can get lost in the wrappings and trappings.

KEEPING TRACK

Keeping Advent is keeping track of Jesus Christ's birthday celebration. And asking that question each year at the beginning of December helps me worship the King of Kings, Who came as a child one night so long ago.

I wanted to remember that I had posed that question, so to give punch to my prayer I asked my friend Debbi, “Deb, would you pray that God tells me what He wants for His Son's birthday? It's December 1. I want to know.” Patient Debbi with the powerful prayers said yes, she would pray. And she did.

One week about halfway through the month, with gallons of corn sausage chowder leftover from a Sunday supper, I invited eight girlfriends for a festive soup luncheon. We talked of our kids and their classes and teachers.

My firstborn was in kindergarten, and I had a lot to say about her teacher. “You know that Bonnie's teacher is so great, but when I volunteered to share the true meaning of Christmas with the class, she refused to let me. It's legal. I checked. But she said no. I just don't get it. I'm very upset!”

Deb was there, on my left. She could tell I was upset. Patient Debbi with the powerful prayers turned to me and said, “Sue, I know what you're supposed to give the baby Jesus for His birthday—”

“I already did!” I interrupted. “It's this luncheon!”

She pretended she didn't hear me. “This is what you're sup-

posed to do: you need to host a birthday party for Jesus and invite everyone in Bonnie's class. And I'll help." (If you're telling your friend what to do—even if you think your idea is God's answer to that friend's prayers—it's best to include those three little words: "And I'll help.")

ANSWER TO MY QUESTION

I invited the kids in Bonnie's class sans the boys. (I only have daughters—best for me to stick with girls only.) That afternoon, one of the moms I didn't know called me. "Hi, I'm Gina's mom. Tell me: will you be reading out of the Bible?" I couldn't tell if she was going to object. I prayed a quick prayer and replied, "We will be reading the Bible Christmas story from a children's book. Would you like to come too?" She did. And she came the following fourteen birthday parties for Jesus too. We became best friends.

Every year for fourteen years I hosted a birthday party—sometimes two, back-to-back, for two different age groups. I always had help. That first one I came down with laryngitis, and two friends donned aprons, served the cake, and read the Christmas story.

I'm craft impaired. I needed help. Debbi helped, as promised. Sometimes the crafts were glitter-themed. The glitter on stairs and cushions and carpets remained through New Year's. One year my husband had pulled out our front room walls for a remodel. I almost didn't give a party. It seemed too much. But our girls insisted, and they were right. That year's invitation read: "Wear sweatshirts—it's cold." The kids didn't care how the house looked and felt. It was tradition. A way to keep track of what was important.

And we always did a craft because they were girls and they loved it. I read the Christmas story when I didn't have laryngitis. We lit candles on our cake or cupcakes and sang with gusto. "Happy Birthday, dear Jesus, happy birthday to You!" It's especially poignant if the parents are waiting in the entryway and overhear the sweet noise to the One Who came to love and to save.

Hosting Jesus' birthday party was an Advent tradition to keep our minds on things above, to keep on asking the right question, "Lord, what do You want for Christmas? A quiet heart? A sweet spirit? A gracious tongue? Twenty kids in the living room with hot glue and glitter? Whatever You want, that's what I want to give. It's Your birthday, not mine. It's Your life, not mine. Happy Birthday, Jesus!"

Ask the question. It's not too late. (And ask for help if glitter is involved.)

Will you pause to ask the question this December? "Lord Jesus, what do You want from me for Your birthday?"

Listen closely. You may get more glitter than you can imagine. ■

Sue Moore Donaldson speaks and writes to introduce God's welcoming heart; it's all about the invitation to know the Ultimate Host and pass His invitation on to others. Sue blogs at www.welcomeheart.com/sue-donaldson. You can also listen and subscribe to her new podcast, Make It Count: Living a Legacy Life.

Recipe for a Birthday Party for Jesus

Ingredients

- Invitations, on paper or via text.
- Kids of any age—yours, others, or both.
- Other parents or teen-age helpers.
- A craft. (Keep it simple; ask a friend who likes doing crafts to help.)
- An age-appropriate, gospel-centered Christmas storybook.
- Cake or cupcakes.
- Candles and matches.
- Optional: Have each kid bring an unwrapped baby gift.*

Directions

1. Send out invitations. Welcome kids into your home. Sit them down and read the Christmas story.
2. Ask, "Why do we give gifts at Christmas?" (*Because God gave us His Son, Jesus.*)
3. Ask, "Why did Jesus come to earth?" (*Because we needed a Savior.*)
4. Lead them to the craft table. (Plastic or paper tablecloths are a good idea.)
5. Pass out glitter, felt, glue—whatever is needed. Make something simple. (One year we made snowmen made with torn-up napkins and lots of glue. Then with a black felt pen we wrote "Jesus loves me snow much!")
6. Clear the table and distribute a piece of cake with a candle to each child. Light the candles, sing "Happy Birthday to Jesus." Blow out the candles.

**After the party, donate the unwrapped baby gifts to a local crisis pregnancy center.*

