

Our Christmas Experiment

When our children were still at home, we wanted them to enjoy all the sights and sounds of Christmas, including the excitement of Santa. But our focus needed to shift—more to Christ and giving and less to Santa and getting. We also wanted to lessen financial pressures and create a less hectic

holiday schedule. So we decided to try an experiment—and it has lasted throughout the years.

• **Emphasize Christ rather than Santa.** To focus on the spiritual aspect of the season, we displayed several nativity scenes and pictures of the Savior. On Christmas Eve we celebrated His birth by singing carols and reading scriptures. Before opening presents on Christmas morning, we knelt together to thank our Father in Heaven for the greatest gift of all—our Savior and His Atonement.

• **Reduce financial pressures.** We set up a special savings fund for our Christmas expenses and stuck to it. We

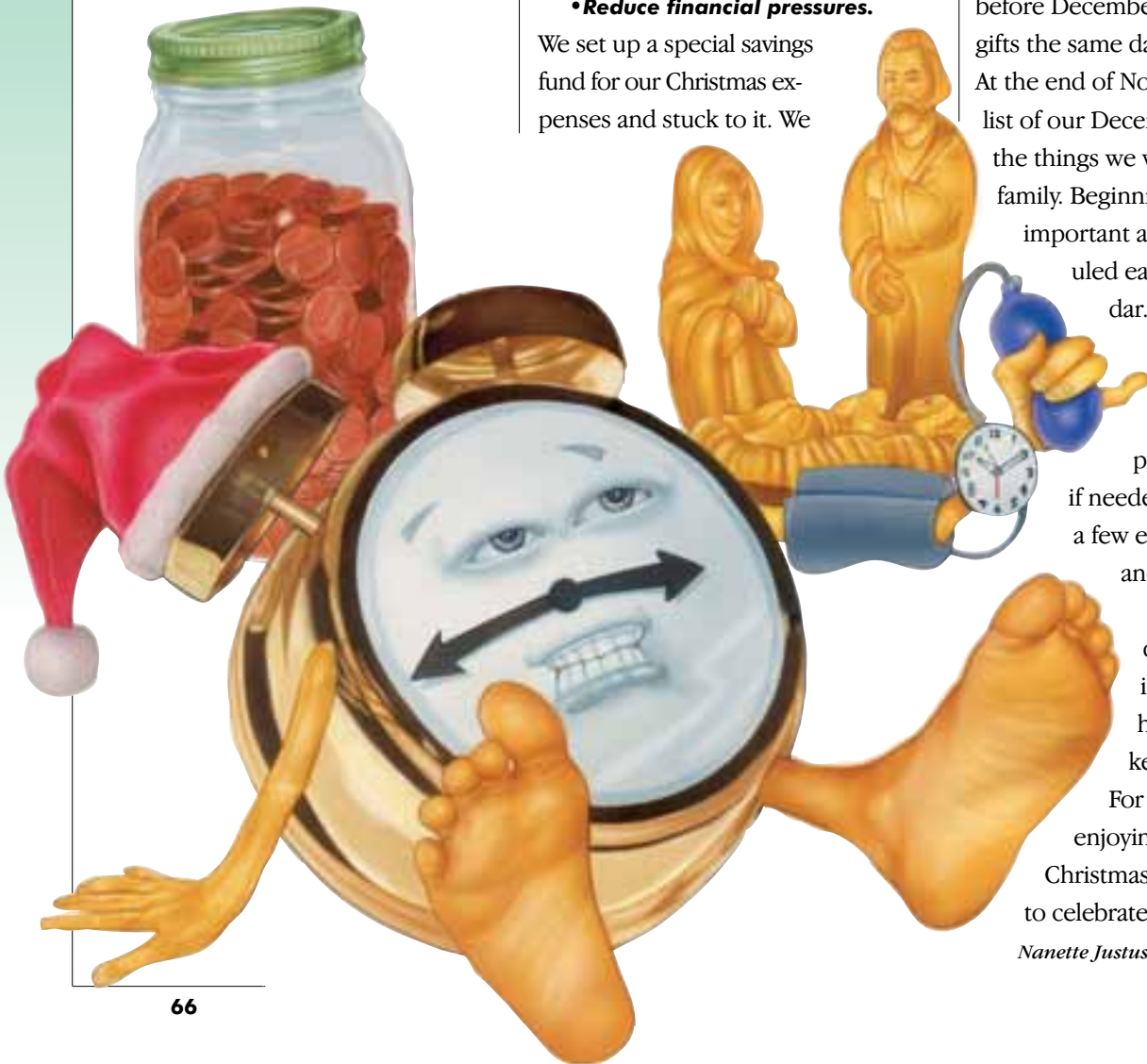
made a budget based on past Christmas spending and what we could afford to set aside each month. When it came time to shop, we kept a list of our purchases so we wouldn't accidentally overspend.

• **Simplify gift giving.** Santa had a short list because he gave just one present to each family member. We pooled the rest of our Christmas funds and focused on finding meaningful presents for each other.

• **Reduce time pressures.** We tried to complete our shopping before December 1 and wrapped gifts the same day we bought them. At the end of November, we made a list of our December obligations and the things we wanted to do as a family. Beginning with the most important activities, we scheduled each event on a calendar. But we tried to be flexible, realizing that some things could be postponed or canceled if needed. We also reserved a few evenings to stay home and relax.

Sometimes we accidentally slipped back into our old holiday habits, but we didn't keep them for long. For us, relaxing and enjoying a Christ-centered Christmas is the way we want to celebrate the season.

Nanette Justus, Idabo





Food Storage Fun

There's one Monday night activity that has become a family holiday tradition. When our children still lived at home, we would go to the grocery store each December as a family and shop for food storage. We gave each person (or sometimes we organized into teams) a set amount of money to purchase food storage items.

The first year each

person was asked to purchase things that began with their initials. For instance, Eric Marcus could buy items such as elbow macaroni, mustard, or egg noodles. One year we decided to purchase ingredients for our favorite meals. Some years our teams consisted of family members paired off, boys against girls, or parents against children.

We then compared our shopping receipts

to see who had spent the closest amount to the allotted budget without going over. Or sometimes we rewarded the one who had the most items or the one who was the fastest shopper. Then together we put all our items away at home.

This tradition was such fun that we've continued it with our children's families. Though we still offer rewards to the thriftiest shopper, our biggest reward is

knowing that at least once a year we are contributing to our food storage needs—and having fun together.

Shirley Oakes, Illinois



Scripture Countdown

A few years ago at Christmas-time, I decided to focus less on the holiday's commercial side and more on the Savior. Since there are 24 chapters in the book of Luke, I decided to read one each evening until Christmas. I thoroughly enjoyed reviewing the events of the Savior's birth and life. The many miracles He performed, the things He taught, and the events surrounding His death and Resurrection became more profound to me. That Christmas I was able to focus on Christ and the true meaning of the holiday season.

Stephanie Nixon, Florida

A Photo, a Sketch, and a Story

If compiling your life history seems too daunting, consider writing short experiences instead. Then share them with relatives. A few years ago my husband and I received such a gift from our daughter. She gave us a three-ring binder with a slip-in front cover that reads, "Stories from Our Family Trees." Inside are five wonderful stories, each page preserved in a sheet protector. The stories relate

interesting events about our living relatives and our ancestors and are written in language simple enough for our grandchildren to read. We recognized three of the stories from our family history books, but two were new to us. Each Christmas thereafter we received a few more stories to add to our book. This quickly became our favorite, most anticipated gift.

I decided to join in the fun by helping my busy daughter research the stories. We supplement each one with a photo, appropriate picture, or simple sketch. We hope that the easy, short format will be more interesting

and less intimidating to read than a lengthy family history book. Now in my 80s, I have a growing posterity, so we send a set of stories to each of my grown children. They are encouraged to photocopy additional sets for their children, and so on.

We encourage our family to share these wonderful experiences in Church talks and lessons, at family home evening, or at bedtime. What a great blessing it is to share meaningful, true accounts from our family tree, accounts that often focus on gospel principles and courageous lives.

Fay Rich, Utah