

## 10 Tips for a Simpler More Meaningful Christmas

1. Plan ahead. Instead of going on auto-pilot the day after Thanksgiving, hold a family meeting to decide what the group really wants to do and who's going to do what.
2. If you need a symbol for giving (in addition to Jesus and the Three Wise Ones), learn about St. Nicholas. Santa Claus has been completely taken over by commerce.
3. Avoid debt. Refuse to be pressured by advertising to overspend.
4. Avoid stress. Give to yourself. Don't assume that things have to be the same way they've always been.
5. Draw names rather than everyone giving something to everyone else in your giving circle. Set a ceiling for each recipient. Give children ONE thing they really want, rather than so many gifts. If need be, pool funds.
6. Give appropriate gifts. Get to know the recipient. Give what they want to receive, not what you want to buy.
7. Give alternative gifts. Give 25% of what you spent last year to the needy... individuals or groups locally, nationally or internationally.  
Buy crafts and clothing from developing countries at alternative gift markets, not from commercial importers, so that the artisans receive a fair price for their work.  
Give of yourself, not just "stuff" - a coupon book for future services (such as baby-sitting or an "enchanted evening"); something baked, sewn, handmade, composed, etc.; or a family service project, such as working together at a soup kitchen.
8. Celebrate Advent for four weeks before Christmas.
9. Put the gifts under the tree shortly before opening them. Then take turns opening them around the tree, not all at once, so that each gift can be admired and each giver thanked.
10. Make changes slowly but persistently. Don't try to change everything and everybody all at once. The resistance will make you feel defeated and lonely.