

# **Sustainability and Justice at Christmas**

## **Catherine Fish**

*This work is adapted from Green Christian's "Reclaim Christmas" Blog, which was co-written by Catherine. Read the original article [here](#).*

Christmas causes so much spending and debt in our nation, and people don't notice the meaning of Advent, because they are by now caught up in the stress of the commercial side of Christmas. Meanwhile there is not enough to spend at Christmas in some parts of the world, due to extreme poverty.

Let's use Advent to re-organise how we prepare for Christmas, to bring more fun, less stress and more global justice, while treading lightly on the earth.

## **Praying and preparing**

- Stillness during this time will help you make choices without rushing later – choices that work for you, and do not cost the earth.
- Write a letter to family or friends explaining why you really want to keep Christmas simple, and write this early, so they do not mistake it for ingratitude or bah-humbug.
- There is a useful Grove booklet, "[Reviving Advent, Reclaiming Christmas](#)" by Ruth Grayson, a Sheffield-based Christian.

## **Enjoying and preparing**

- Local community events ... showing up and making links with others at this time of year is great. At fayres, decide before going how much to spend. Decide not to be drawn into buying loads unnecessarily, but offering an affordable donation if you don't want lots of purchases.
- Celebrate Stir-up Sunday – "stir up oh Lord the wills of your people" (Common Prayer book) – preparing by thinking and talking about your hopes for the coming season, while making puddings, if that is your thing.

## **Connecting and making**

- Some community organisations do Christmas craft workshops – enjoy a couple of hours making a wreath or decorating glass jars.
- If making a wreath, try to take dried fruits, fruit rinds and perhaps don't include ribbon with plastic, and be willing to mention to others why this is.
- Handmade decorations and cards, brown paper with ink stamps of holly leaves or candles, homemade crackers (with unshelled nuts rather than novelty plastic toys) help to focus on giving and enjoying.
- Take part in the posada – a Latin American tradition which can be adapted to your circumstances. You need knitted Nativity characters – and may not have time to knit those for this year! Each day, the Nativity characters “stay” with someone in the community, and then are passed on to their next port of call. This symbolic journeying and a small ceremony at each of their stopping points can be used to help us recall all who travel or are far from home ... particularly refugees, displaced and homeless people.

## **Bringing the outside in**

- By looking for decorations from nature – lasting greenery, and pine and fir cones, you enjoy the outside and then bring it in. Decking the halls with holly and ivy is a pre-Christian tradition, now with some adopted Christian symbols, and provides a continued connection with nature during the dark months.
- In Sheffield, there is a Community Orchard by the Millennium Gallery. There is a lot of mistletoe growing on the heritage fruit trees there, and if anyone would like some “free Mistletoe” you'd be doing them a favour by slowing the spread of this beautiful, but ultimately parasitic, plant.

## **Using candles**

- This and other Advent traditions come from Scandinavia, when candles were lit midwinter to welcome back the sun. Then it evolved into lighting bigger coloured candles for Christmas, particularly on Christmas eve to welcome Mary and Joseph as there was no room at the inn for them.

## **Making small changes**

- Reverse Advent Calendar – many local food banks run this scheme when you put something aside each day to give to food bank users.
- Challenge yourself to do small gesture of kindness each day during Advent, such as visiting and carol singing in a local care home, popping in to see a neighbour, buying a coffee for the person behind you in the queue, and telling them why – to spread kindness and goodwill.

## **Going deeper**

- Enjoy an Advent Carol Service – often more reflective than Christmas ones.
- Read your advent reading and reflections.
- Find and sign up for an online Advent calendar with reflections, such as [this one from CAFOD](#).
- Church leaders – find resources from global aid agencies like Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tear Fund for preparing Christmas services, and include climate and environmental justice themes.
- Consider a half day, or day Advent retreat, in person or online.
- Reflect on the meaning of a Christmas carol, perhaps one each day leading up to Christmas.
- Perhaps re-write a carol to include care for the planet, and all creation, and climate justice.

## Heading to Christmas

- Keep things simple, put up a Nativity scene, but only with the stable, and Mary, Joseph and the donkey could move a little closer to that each day.
- If there are children in the house, put Jesus in the stable after their bedtime on Christmas Eve. The magi could still be further away.
- Use a simple card Advent calendar – with the Christmas story and not with chocolates.

## Decorating

- Gather more of those pine and fir cones.
- Use coloured strips of unwanted paper for paper chains.
- Have a competition to make a camp angel for the top of the Christmas tree from recycled bits and pieces.
- Save decorations from one year to the next.
- If you want to buy more decorations, consider buying from Fair trade shops like Oxfam, Tearcraft, [We Are Fair Trade](#)
- Christmas tree – consider buying a recycled tree, or a tree with roots, that can be planted. [The Soil Association website](#) has up to date information on sustainable Christmas trees and re-plantable trees.

## Reducing

- Reduce the number of extra gifts by doing Secret Santa in families, or with friends
- Handmade gifts – that don't take all year to make – there is still time to make: seed bomb, bug hotels, pot of plants or indoor garden, homemade hamper, homemade mince pies.

## **Connecting**

- The shepherds came in a group, not as individuals.
- Spend time with family and friends (presence and connection not presents and consumerism).
- Board games socials, making use of church halls to invite more to those.
- Share your meals by plating up or inviting others round.
- Connections – global family – think about Christmas around the world, and perhaps have something in your home, cooking or conversations to reflect some of those.

## **Joining in with saving the earth**

- Rent a Christmas tree, or use locally sourced greenery.
- If you have fairy lights, use ones with LED bulbs.
- Buying – source plastic free toiletries. Agree on the spending limit.
- Alternative gifts – consider the donations to charities that arrange alternative gifts, for example a tree being planted, support for basics in a community impacted by Climate change, endangered species support.

## **Spending time alone**

- It's really okay to not do any of these things.
- If you are alone for much of Christmas, or do not feel festive, perhaps connect with those things you've not had time for during the year – books, music, crafts.
- Find a local "Blue Christmas" or "Quiet Christmas" service to join, or connect to one online if that would help.
- Light some candles and if there are people you miss, light one for them and connect with the memories.