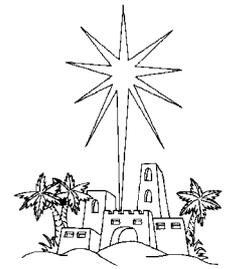


## Practical ways to help get in touch with the real meaning of Christmas:



In recent times many have noted that with the increase in materialism we have focussed our enjoyment of Christmas in rather self centred and secular ways. Huge sums of money are spent on gifts, parties and alcohol at the expense of the real reason for Christmas ....celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. The passing of the age of the Celtic tiger has left families and the county much the poorer with many struggling to make ends meet. Now perhaps is the time to re evaluate our priorities. Below are practical suggestions for parish, family and personal actions and ways to rediscover why this is such a special time in our year.

1. If you are sending Christmas cards or greetings, try to choose cards with a religious theme or message. After Christmas recycle your own collection of cards.
2. Families need to live within their means. Don't be pressured to spend what you can't afford. Do not get into debt. Remember what and whose birthday we are celebrating. The stable at Bethlehem offers a stark contrast to the window displays and the television adverts we see on a daily basis. Support Trocaire and other charities.
3. Place your crib in a prominent position in your home. Place more importance on this than on lights and decorations. Bless your crib and also your Christmas tree.
4. During Advent try as a family to put some gifts aside to give to those who are in need of our help ie Parish hamper project, SVP etc. Charities have great gift ideas.
5. Young children could be encouraged to make and colour a birthday card for Jesus and to bring this to Mass on Christmas eve/day and place this at the parish crib. Priests might invite young children to get involved in this and perhaps sing "silent night" or "happy birthday Jesus" when the children gather around the crib.
6. Families might download and use the Advent pack for Primary Children from the website [www.prayerandspirituality.com](http://www.prayerandspirituality.com) Parents could display children's work on the kitchen fridge throughout Advent and Christmas.
7. Take a single piece of straw from the parish crib and place it on the family table to remind all of the reason for this special Christmas dinner. Begin the meal with a thanksgiving prayer/Grace. All should help prepare for and help clear up after the family meal. This includes the washing up !
8. Recycle all materials used for wrapping presents and cards and envelopes.
9. Visit neighbours and friends who live alone, invite people to share your Christmas family dinner. Remember those who have little or who find it hard to celebrate or who may be lonely or grieving.
10. Do not overindulge on food or alcohol. Never drink and drive.

May the peace , love and joy of Jesus be in your hearts and families this Christmas!