

Celebrating Christmas at Church

A study in the late 1990s showed that three out of four Americans attend church some time during Christmas, and almost 30 percent attend church more frequently during the holidays.¹ Even if studies like this one did not exist, most of us know somebody who seldom attends church – but who will be certain to do so this Christmas. The holidays always bring guests to our churches.

That is not to say, though, that our churches are ready for the guests. We say that we are prepared, but our preparation is often limited to shifting our place in the pew so that guests have a seat. That kind of preparation seldom results in changed lives and church growth.

Here are some suggestions to be prepared for the guests who attend your church this Christmas.

1. *Do all things with excellence.* Of course, we should always do all things with excellence simply because we do them for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Excellence at Christmas is especially important because we may have only this one opportunity to speak to visiting non-believers. This is not the time of year to plan music by the soloist who always begins by saying, "Please pray for me—I didn't have much time to get ready." Now is a time of year when we *must* find time to give God our best.

2. *Get ready for the opportunity to impact the lives of guests.* Prepare for the opportunity rather than react when the opportunity presents itself. For example, enlist parking lot greeters who will welcome all who come to your church before they get to the front door. Even if your church is in a cold climate, get the greeters ready – and watch as guests are surprised to be welcomed by those who brave the cold. Position greeters at every entrance to the church

building. Welcome guests with a small gift bag that includes homemade cookies (that taste good!) and church information. Prepare for a time and place for the senior pastor to meet guests after the service.

3. *Secure information from guests.* Follow up is imperative, but it is impossible if the church does not secure contact information. Rather than embarrass guests, consider requesting basic information from *all* attenders during the Christmas season. Consider using pew pads or producing a special form that attenders will pass through the congregation during each service. If all attenders are completing the forms, guests will be more likely to do so as well. It is even possible that the church might get an opportunity to correct outdated information on its own members! Again, prepare for the guests by having in place a clear plan to follow-up.

4. *Do not miss the opportunity to teach the theology of Christmas.* The Christmas story is much more than the story of a baby born in a manger. It is the story of a God who took on flesh, ultimately providing salvation through His own efforts rather than mere human effort. Jesus was uniquely full deity and full humanity, yet inheriting no sin from the first human being, Adam. The virgin birth is a non-negotiable truth of the Christian story that demands more than a cursory review during the Christmas season. Teach the doctrine in such a way that unchurched guests are not overwhelmed with Christian lingo – but do teach it. Perhaps a guest will learn that Christmas really does matter eternally.

5. *Do not ignore Easter at Christmas.* The virgin birth is critical, but its importance is incomplete without the rest of the story. Bethlehem needs Calvary, and both need the resurrection of Easter morning. The baby in Bethlehem was the crucified Redeemer who defeated the enemy through His cross and resurrection. If a guest attends our church only on Christmas, surely he deserves to hear the entire story of salvation – and be challenged to follow

the Bethlehem baby through faith and repentance.

6. *Follow up with guests by providing an “After Christmas” card.* Christmas cards come often prior to December 25, but seldom do we receive many cards after the holiday. Be unique by designing an “After Christmas” card that reminds recipients of the importance of Christmas throughout the remainder of the year. Thank them for attending your church, and invite them to visit again. Encourage them to begin a new year with a renewed commitment to attend God’s church.

7. *Begin preparing for the Christmas season now by enlisting a prayer team to pray through the holidays.* This prayer team might meet weekly, praying specifically for:

- the church to prepare for guests and to treat them with respect while securing contact information from them
- God to give great power to those who preach and teach the Word
- God’s Spirit to challenge and convict non-believing guests
- lives to be changed in such a way that Christmas takes on eternal significance for them.

Christmas is a time for giving, most often marked by our willingness to give sacrificially to others. Many of us save all year to prepare to give to others. Only by properly understanding God’s gift to us, though, can we fully celebrate this season. We who appreciate the Gift of Christmas should look forward to offering this Gift to those who visit our churches this season.

¹ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m4021/is_1998_Dec/ai_53959111