

## God's Greatest Gifts

By Angela Bucholz

My oldest son had a birthday recently and when he was opening his gifts he said "Oh, this is unexpected...but I love it." This off the cuff comment gave me great pause, and I immediately likened it to some of God's greatest gifts to us: marriage and family.

I will be so bold as to say that all of God's greatest gifts to humanity are completely unexpected in nature—the Incarnation being the highest among them. How utterly unexpected that the supreme God of the universe would humble Himself to be born as a tiny defenseless baby, into relative poverty (in a stable no less), and then enter into an almost entirely hidden life until He would begin His public ministry where He would: suffer, die a horrific death, and rise again from the dead to save us from our sin, is at the very least completely surprising.

God reveals so many lessons for us in the fabric of Jesus' family life; gems of love for us to uncover, and unpack, in our own minds and hearts. Ways in which Mary and Joseph are amazing models for "the community of love" that marriage and family life are designed by God to be. There are many lessons indeed, but as Christmas draws near and I reflect on the Nativity at Bethlehem, three main things come to mind; practices that we can implement today within our own marriages and families.

1. Mary and Joseph fully TRUSTED God, and were faithful to God's precepts. Even when it seemed impossible, or frightening, they made an act of the will and CHOSE TRUST. We can also choose to trust regardless of circumstance in our everyday lives.
2. When Mary and Joseph received Jesus on the day of His birth, they immediately presented Him to other people and invited others to share in their lives; even into the "messiness." I'm reminded of the shepherds and wise men visiting the stable shortly after Jesus' birth. We can also present Christ to the world, and invite other people to share in our lives on a daily basis in small ways, that make a huge impact.
3. Mary and Joseph placed Jesus at the center of their lives. Their lives revolved around Him, and they were in constant conversation with Him. We too can center our lives upon Jesus; calling out to Him and communicating with Him throughout the day.

Mary and Joseph received Jesus into their lives on that first Christmas. They received him lovingly, gratefully, humbly, excitedly, totally trusting and surrendering to Him...and in doing so they participated in divine life and love. This is how we can try to prepare our hearts to receive Jesus this Christmas as well, because just like that holy night thousands of years ago, Jesus continues today to come into our nothingness (our poverty) and if we invite Him, and allow Him to, He will bring us His everything and our salvation. He will give us utterly unexpected blessings, for our good and His glory, especially within our vocations as wife and mother.

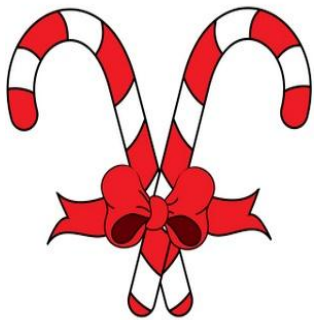
## Get to Know Angela



*Role in MOPS:* Discussion Group Leader

*Kids:* Asher 6, and Abram 3.5

About: I am from Rapid City, SD and have lived in Bookings 5.5 years. My husband, Aaron, is a Hardware Design Engineer at Daktronics



### The Candy Cane

The candy cane is a long-time Christmas tradition.

Everywhere we look we see them and the candy cane can teach us a few things about the true meaning of Christmas.

The candy cane looks like a shepherd's crook and should remind us that Jesus is our shepherd and he will keep us from wandering away and getting lost or hurt. Upside down it's shaped like a "J" to symbolize His name. The white is for His life, holy without blame. And the strip of red is for His blood so pure and freely given that we might spend eternity with our Lord in Heaven!

To many people, the candy cane is a meaningless decoration seen at Christmas time or just a piece of candy to be eaten and enjoyed. Every time you see a candy cane this season, may you be reminded of the true meaning of Christmas.

## Raising a Reader and Writer

1. **Talk sing, and play with your child:** Kids rapidly pick up concepts and words they hear used.
2. **Make time to read together each day:** Children love having a regular reading time with a parent. Choose a time when you can be relaxed and not rushed—bedtime, naptime, or whatever works for you.
3. **Choose books with care:** look for books that relate to what's happening in the child's life at the time.
4. **Surround your child with reading material:** Besides those wonderful library books, children like having some books of their own that they can return to again and again.
5. **Slow down and have fun:** It's not just *what* you read but *how* you read. Read with expression, putting yourself into the story. Occasionally ask a question or make a remark that will prompt the child to think, express himself, or relate the story to his own experience.
6. **Read it again and again:** There's a lot for a child to take in, and children need and want to go through a book more times than grownups can imagine.
7. **Foster your child's awareness of print and how we use it:** Point out letters and words and encourage your child to find them.
8. **Provide a variety of writing tools and materials:** paper, crayons, pencils, markers, greeting cards, etc.
9. **Don't push or pressure children about what or when to read:** Pushing certain books or slighting what your children like is a mistake. Remember, they *are* reading
10. **Show children that you value their efforts:** Your reactions are more important to the child than anyone else's. Be the Great Appreciator, not the Great Corrector.

## Upcoming Events

**January 9: Open Gym Resumes**

**January 16: "Deep Sea Treasures"**  
Budgeting with tools from Crown Financial

**January 25 "Staying Hydrated"**  
MOPS and POPS night (more info to be announced in January)

