

## Combining the secular and sacred during December

With Christmas preparations starting ever earlier each year, it's hard to find space for Advent and its sense of patient waiting, preparing ourselves for the birth of Christ. However, our involvement in Christmas events can provide an excellent opportunity to reflect on our kingdom culture and the gospel story.

Try this **Countdown to Christmas** 'to do list', to weave a Christian response into the festivities and rituals in the run up to 25 December.

**Instructions:** As you take part in and experience the activities in the red (secular) boxes, try to balance them with the paired purple prayer, reflection and action suggestions. Do it as a family or on your own. Tick the activities as you do them ✓.

### Giving and receiving

Christmas shopping	Make a charitable contribution or buy a 'Good Gift'.
Panic purchases	Pause to accept 'enough is enough'.
Wrapping presents	Pray for those who don't receive gifts.
Buying gifts for yourself	Instead of self-gifting try self-giving – offer to help someone out with their preparations.
Writing Christmas cards	Pray for the recipients of your cards.
Round robin letters	Write an email or letter for Amnesty International. ( <a href="https://www.amnesty.org.uk/get-involved">https://www.amnesty.org.uk/get-involved</a> )

### Signs and symbols

Town centre Christmas lights switch-on	Imagine the multiple lights represent churches all around the world. Pray for the church throughout the world.
Decorating the tree	Give thanks for the gift of creation.
Outdoor lights and decorations on houses	Light a candle in a dark room and pray for those who find this a difficult time of year.
Snowy scenes on cards and in adverts	Pray for the stewardship of the earth and the issue of climate change.
Holly	Read through or sing the words to 'The Holly and the Ivy'.

### Sights and sounds

School nativity/end of term play	Give the teacher a small present to thank them for their work producing the play. Pray for those who took part.
Christmas concerts	Invite someone to attend a carol service or Christmas service with you.
Visiting Santa/Father Christmas	Visit someone who is lonely or housebound.
Pantomime/Christmas shows	Reflect on the roles of the heroes and heroines of the Christmas story.
Christmas TV, Strictly/X Factor finals, Christmas specials of soap operas	What are the 'Christmas specials' in your life? Thank God for them.
Christmas pop songs	Spend a few moments reflecting on what your favourite carols convey about faith at Christmas time.
Christmas crackers	Reflect on the surprises we encounter in our walk with Jesus.

### Meeting and eating

Christmas cooking	Try to support small/local producers when buying your festive foods.
Food shopping	Contribute to your local food bank.
Family/friends coming to stay or going to stay with family/friends	Entertain someone outside your regular circle of family and friends.
Busy houses	Find just a few minutes to be un-busy.
Cleaning the house – getting it ready	Ponder on whether you are ready to greet Jesus.
Christmas parties	Offer hospitality at church after a service.
Mulled wine	Consciously spread warmth and good cheer.
Party outfits	Think about how can we look our best on the inside as well as the outside.