

# Gifts for the Christ Child

by Catherine Fournier

There are many variations of this custom, all of which are intended to promote love, tenderness, charity and generosity in the family and teach the family to strive to imitate the loving qualities of Our Blessed Mother and her Son, Our Redeemer. All use the general idea of performing secret 'good deeds' for another family member, and marking each with an anonymous physical sign.

In our family, we draw names out of a hat as part of our Saint Nicholas Day celebrations. Saint Nicholas was famous for his secret acts of charity and love. The name we draw is our 'secret friend' for the rest of Advent. For the next 19 days, we find our beds made, cookies slipped into our pockets, small gifts on our pillow (if we are lucky enough to have an older sibling or parent as our secret friend) our laundry done and folded, and many other small helpful tasks done for us. When we perform a good deed for our secret friend, we put a small piece of yarn into the manger already placed in our Christmas creche. Each secret act makes a softer bed for the Christ Child.

On Christmas Day, our secret friends are revealed to us by a small gift under the tree from them. Surprise, and joy all around!



In Family Advent Customs, Helen McLoughlin writes that in her family;

"On the first Sunday of Advent each child in our family receives an empty manger. An oatmeal box covered with bright paper will do as well. At bedtime the children draw straws for each kind deed performed in honor of Baby Jesus as His birthday surprise. The straws are placed in the child's manger or box daily. It is amazing how much love a child can put into Advent when he is preparing for His Redeemer's coming in grace."

"On Christmas each child finds an Infant in his manger, placed on a small table or on a chair beside his bed. Usually it is a tiny doll, beautifully dressed; but one of our children receives a Hummel Infant year after year. This custom, which in no way interferes with the larger

manger in the living room, fills the child with a longing in Advent, and gives him an image of his Redeemer as his first happy glance mornings and his last impression at night during the entire Christmas season."

"As our youngsters grew older, they added the Hungarian custom of planting a grain of blessed wheat for each Advent sacrifice. They use small flower pots, especially decorated with Christmas symbols. By Christmas the tender green shoots of wheat are growing, each a reminder of some special, and of course secret, offering of love for "Little Jesus" on His birthday. The wheat is placed at the crib and usually lasts until Epiphany."

Other families use the idea of filling the Baby Jesus' manger with a piece of yarn or hay for each act of charity to the poor, or for each act of penance performed during the Advent Season. A skipped dessert, a gift wrapped parcel under a mall 'Angel Tree', are sweeter for knowing that each prepares the way for the King of Kings.

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