



CHRISTMAS IS DECEMBER 25

By Susan Vogt

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I may make some enemies with this essay, but I'm really tired of it. What's "it"? – The Christmas season. Actually I'm not really tired of the *true* Christmas. What I'm tired of is the celebrating of Christmas during Advent. The hurrying of all holidays, but especially Christmas seems to be getting worse.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not really a no fun, "bah humbug" person. I love opening presents and decorating and having parties. It's just that doing it from Halloween on (or earlier in some stores) robs us of the beauty of Advent. There's a special spot in my heart for this holy time of waiting and preparing. Even nature seems to cooperate in its strange way by providing us a time of relative dark and cold so that we can welcome the light of Christ on December 25 with all the more excitement.

For example, I like the gradual movement from dark to light experienced through the candles on the Advent wreath, the untrimmed tree waiting for its glory, the slow movement of the three kings towards the manger, the cozy house, no longer with doors open because of the cold, the soft, almost mournful music of Advent, and mostly, keeping the house looking simple.

But, you may ask with horror, "How can she shop for presents being so focused on waiting?" Believe it or not I do live in the real world and in fact have children and relatives who enjoy getting gifts – I do shop! This is the *preparing* part of Advent. Just as Mary waited during her pregnancy to give birth, she must have done much preparing to get herself ready to bring Jesus to the world. We know she went out of her way to visit Elizabeth and comfort her. I assume, being pregnant, she also did the kinds of things all pregnant women do, preparing the nest, so to speak, for the long awaited child.

So I do prepare, but try to do it in quiet, almost secret ways, to preserve the sparkle of the main event. I especially like our family's sometimes clandestine efforts to make or buy gifts without the receiver suspecting it. What I find jolting are the early decorations in stores and the partying when the spirit of Advent is still saying "wait and prepare."

I do yearn for a simpler style of preparing for Christmas and even though I obviously am not going to single handedly change our society, I can let stores know that I'd prefer if they waited at *least* till Thanksgiving to start pushing Christmas. I can also make some impact on my own family by at keeping Advent at home and waiting till Christmas to do the celebrating. It's a shame to rob the **real** Christmas season (December 25 to January 6) of its power by serving it before its time.