

FAMILY
TRADITIONS

*Christmas
Edition*

ANDY
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BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

Wherever you are and whatever temperature you are experiencing, if you're reading this, it most likely means one thing. . .

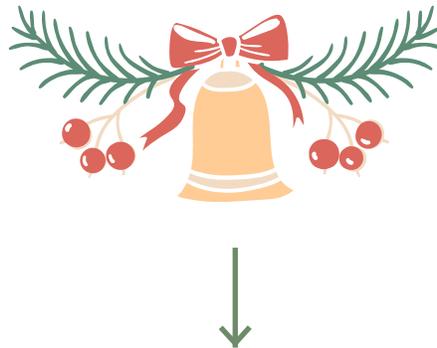
CHRISTMASTIME
is HERE!

Christmas is quite simply my favorite time of the year. And it has always been so!

I could make an endless list of the reasons why I love Christmas, but if I had to boil it down to one thing, it would be the traditions.

Recently, I saw a list of questions designed to make me examine my holiday traditions and I was not surprised to note that I am entirely happy with the ones my family has.

Most of them came from my Mom and Dad, I suppose. And for people who have been gone from this earth more than thirty years now, their presence is certainly still felt during Christmas.



We have a live tree every year.

My parents liked the smell. So do I.



We play the traditional carols in our house. Bing Crosby’s “White Christmas,” “Winter Wonderland” with Johnny Mathis, and “The Christmas Song” was what Mom and Dad listened to and it rubbed off on me, I guess. I even perk up when I hear Burl Ives’ version of “Holly, Jolly Christmas!” Remember? It was the song the snowman sang on the original television version of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. Speaking of Rudolph, the Temptations have the best version of that song!



This year again, right after an early dinner on Christmas Eve, we will load up in the car and drive around to look at decorations.

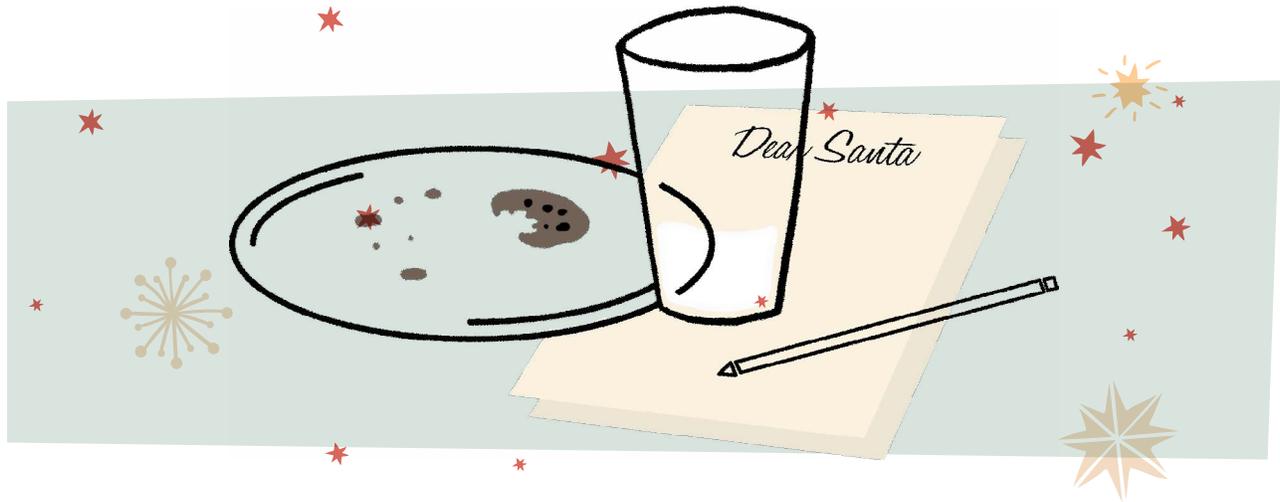


Before bedtime, we'll read the Christmas story from Luke in the Bible and celebrate the baby Jesus' birthday—complete with a cake, the candles and song.



Our boys love it. Just like their daddy did when he was their age.

They will write a note to Santa just like I did and take forever getting to sleep. . . like I still do.



We'll stretch Christmas morning out as long as we can. All the presents are opened on Christmas morning. This, by the way, was a huge "discussion" twenty-seven years ago when Polly and I were just married because, for some reason, her family opened their presents on Christmas Eve. Which is entirely incorrect.

That, I believe, is in the Bible, as well.



For breakfast, we will have cheese and eggs, as we always do. Yuck. Several decades' worth of cheese and eggs and I still hate them.

It is, however, a tradition. I can barely get 'em down, but my father always said it was what Jesus ate on Christmas morning so I would feel odd not insisting that my boys eat the same thing.

Of course, they don't like them either, but it makes me feel good knowing that this is merely another tradition Austin and Adam will pass on to their kids. Did my Dad like cheese and eggs? I wonder. . .



. . .that's a Christmas word to me.

Remember the song? "I Wonder As I Wander"?

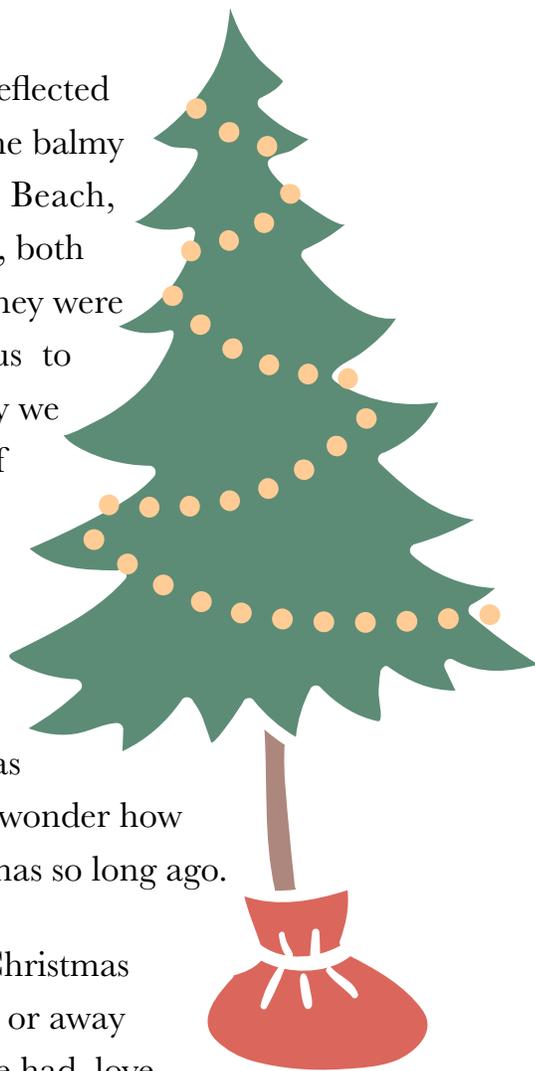
I suppose I have spent nearly half a lifetime of wondering and wandering and yet the wonder—the awe—of Christmas is still here.



Last night I noticed the tiny, white lights of our tree reflected in my wife's eyes as she smiled at me and, despite the balmy temperature here in our small community of Orange Beach, Alabama, it really felt like Christmas. Austin and Adam, both teenagers now, were asleep on the couch between us. They were little boys years ago when Hurricane Ivan forced us to evacuate and still, we occasionally talk about how happy we are to be back in our house. Today, I watch reports of storms devastating one place or another and wonder how many people are displaced.

This is the only house Polly and I have ever owned. . . the only one our boys have ever known. After the hurricane, we were out of our house for two years. It was unsettling being away. . . especially during Christmas. I wonder how unsettled Mary and Joseph felt on that cold first Christmas so long ago.

And yet, despite the disconcerting nature of spending Christmas away from home—whether away in temporary housing or away in a manger—history proves there is still happiness to be had, love to be given, and traditions to be created. In fact, if you've ever given or received a Christmas gift, you've taken part in perhaps the most famous tradition to come out of that seemingly imperfect first Christmas in Bethlehem.



I say this to make a point—things don't have to be perfect for you to experience the wonder of Christmas this year.

Maybe you're in the midst of an "imperfect" season of your life as the holidays are arriving.

Maybe you're even going through the worst time of your life. (Curiously, it's rarely pointed out that every person who has ever lived has had a "worst time" of their life.)

Or perhaps you're in a place where things are better than they've ever been.

Regardless of whether things are looking up or down for your life right now, remember this. . .

You have the power to make this holiday season one to remember.

You have something to give, even if it seems like you don't have many *things* to give—your time, your attention, a kind word to someone who needs it. Often, these are the best gifts of all.

If you don't have any traditions, you can start your own. I've listed several so far, but there's one last Christmas tradition I'd recommend be somewhere near the top of your list. . .

Growing up, Mom and Dad always insisted that I write letters not just to Santa Claus, but to people for whom I was grateful. I was to write a letter revealing something of myself to them, expressing my love for them and my hopes for *their* future.

The purpose of this letter was to make certain that these friends knew how important they were to me, to my family, and to the world.



This year, my letter is to you:

Dear Reader,

There is nothing quite like Christmas traditions. In the short time we've had together so far, this is a truth on which I'm sure we both agree.

I hope the traditions I've described have given you ideas for new ones to try this year. Or maybe you saw a few that are already long-standing traditions in your own family. In that case, I hope you're looking forward to them with excitement and wonder.

But before that magical day in late December arrives, I want to leave you with one last thought:

DON'T WAIT.

Don't wait for Christmas to arrive before you experience the next special moment with your family.

Use the gift that is "today" to create a new holiday tradition for your family.

Sure, look forward to your Christmas traditions. Keep them. Cherish them.

But remember that in looking forward to the traditions we've already established, we often forget about the special opportunities available during each passing second of today.

You have the power right now to create a moment just as meaningful, just as lasting, just as unforgettable. . . for yourself and the ones you love.

The best part? These moments often involve the simplest of ingredients.

They don't have to cost much money.

They don't have to take much time.

All they require is your intentional action to make them happen.

On the pages that follow, I've listed eleven ideas you can borrow and a list of questions designed to help you create ideas that will be uniquely special for you and your family. You can print these pages out and write in your answers by hand, or click and type them in on most computers.

Christmas may be close, but you and your family don't have to wait for it to arrive to begin experiencing the moments you'll never forget.

Merry Christmas!

Andy Andrews

FAMILY TRADITION IDEAS



1

Go for an unexpected drive after the kids are already in their pajamas. (Remember how fun it was getting to ride somewhere *in your pajamas?*)



2

Cook dinner together. Everyone is in charge of making one dish!



3

Gather in the living room and read something aloud to your family. Bonus points if it's cold outside and you've got a fire going!

4

Spend one whole day with each of your kids or your spouse. Do all the things they want to do. (Within reason, of course. You are allowed to veto skydiving.)

5

“Camp out” in the yard or even inside the house. S'mores are encouraged, but not required.



6

If you have kids who are young enough to have never pumped gas, but also old enough to handle doing it with a little bit of guidance, let them put gas in the car! This may not sound like something very “memorable,” but a lot of times duties that are arbitrary to us are extraordinary to young minds. Side note: you will probably still end up paying for the gas. Ha!

7

Make a special dessert...and then eat it *before* dinner.



8

Every once in a while—teachers, please don't get too mad at me. . . I promise this doesn't happen that often—stay up extra late with your kids to do something special on a school night. Watch your favorite childhood movie with them, take them to a ball game, stay up for a meteor shower, etc.

9

The converse of #8, and one teachers may find a little friendlier, get up extra early and do something special *before* school! The boys and I recently went fishing before school and they had a blast. Convincing them to get up at 5 AM was well worth the effort!

10

Bake something and walk it over with your whole family to a neighbor you've never met.



11

Do that one thing you've been meaning to do with your family. You know what it is. It's what you're thinking of right now. Seize this moment, and do it.

These ideas are just the beginning. There's no limit to what you can think of if you take the time to intentionally create a special moment.

So I want to leave you with a tool designed to speed up those ideas. Take five minutes to go through the following exercises. I know you'll walk away with something special for your family.

What are your favorite childhood experiences or memories?

List them below.

**What's one thing you wish your parents had done
with you that never happened?**



**What is the most fun and memorable moment you had with your family
over the past year? Describe where you were, what you were doing, and
how it felt.**



Who do you know right now who is going through a tough time? List three things your family could do to lift their spirits.



If this were the last week you had to spend with your family, what would you want to do? What experiences would you want to create with them? What would you want them to know?



Now, using your answers to the questions above, describe the one moment you will make happen with your family before the week is over:



Where To Go From Here. . .

Now that you've written down at least one idea for creating a special Christmastime moment for your family, I want you to commit to making it happen as soon as possible.

Most likely, there will not be a perfect time for doing what you've come up with. After all, it's usually the weeks leading up to the holidays when we are at our busiest.

It's easy to *intend* to make this moment happen, but intention will only get you so far.

To truly seize the opportunity, you'll need to take action.

You'll need to bring an attitude of excitement and enthusiasm, so others will follow your lead.

Most of all, you'll need to set a date.



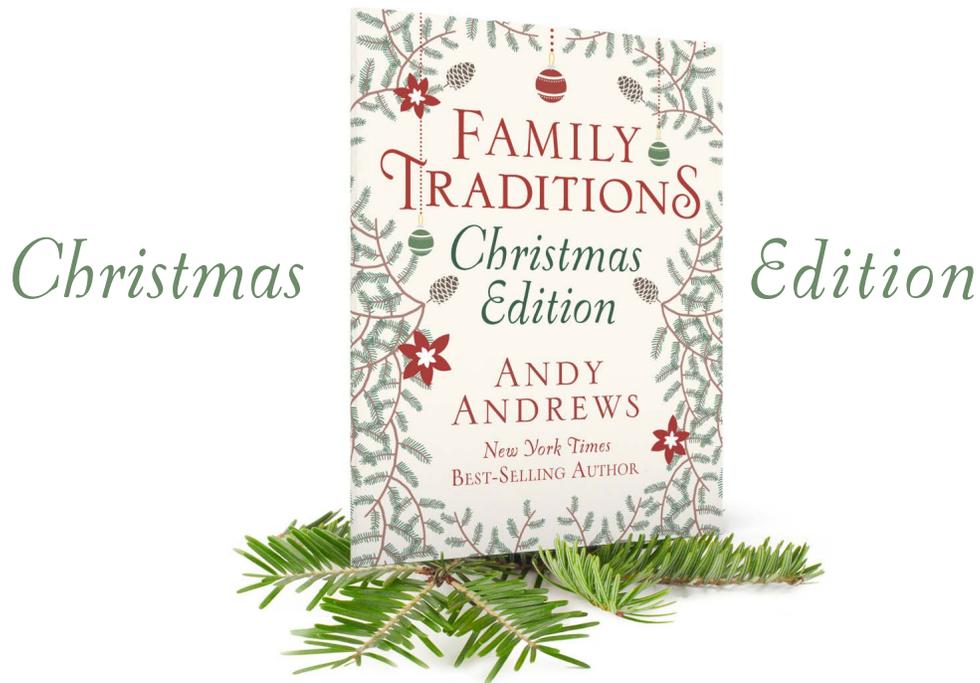
In the space below, write down the day you will make this moment happen for your family.

DAY: _____ MONTH: _____ YEAR: _____

If you've made it this far, you've done the hard part. Now, look forward to that date with excitement. Your new tradition is just around the corner.



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ABOUT *The* AUTHOR



Hailed by a *New York Times* reporter as, “someone who has quietly become one of the most influential people in America,” Andy Andrews is the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *How Do You Kill 11 Million People?*, *The Noticer*, and *The Traveler’s Gift*, and is also an in-demand speaker for the world’s largest organizations. Zig Ziglar said, “Andy Andrews is the best speaker I have ever seen.”

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