

## Only \_\_\_\_\_ Days Until Christmas

We all are fascinated by countdowns. I remember being glued to the TV set when they started the countdown. Ten, nine, eight, ... We knew when they reached one, there would be a pause, and then the words, "ignition; liftoff." We looked forward to the Saturn 5 rocket blasting off into space carrying the space shuttle and other payloads.



There is an even more joyous countdown. Well before the NASA countdowns young children started the countdown to Christmas. For them, it was part of the anticipation of the gift receiving season. Parents, however, had a different perspective. For many adults the countdown was toward the deadline to complete all the shopping and Christmas preparations. The adult world often is consumed with shopping, baking, sending Christmas cards, putting up the decorations and then either hosting or traveling to be with as many family members as possible at the end of the countdown.

What are you counting down on the days before Christmas? The newspaper focuses on the number of shopping days left until Christmas. The church Advent calendar, however, counts down the number of days until the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. So, which countdown gets your attention?

In today's commercialized, fast-paced world we can get caught up in what we have to do to be ready for Christmas day. The to-do list is long and takes us out of our normal daily routine. Stressing on how many days we have left to get everything done makes Christmas preparation feel overwhelming. It is one of the reasons why Christmas is the most stressful time of the year. But, focusing on the anticipation of the Christ child sets our mind on the reason for the season.

I know what kind of countdown Jesus would want us to have. Remember His words: *And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3).* This may seem like an unusual verse to quote during Advent, but the kids have it right. Jesus would want us to celebrate the joy of Christmas, like a child, and not succumb to the drudgery that consumes adults, and crowds out their joy. In either case we still need to get everything done, but with enthusiasm for the Lord, it is a labor of love.

This Advent season, fix your mind on the reason for the season. Prepare to celebrate His birth. When you do that you will more lovingly handle the to-do list. We do this because we love what Jesus did for us and we want to share that with our family. As you light the second Advent candle – that of love, let the countdown be all about the anticipation of celebrating a loving Christmas with your family. Jesus will lift up your heart in love.

Let the countdown begin.

**Question:** Is the countdown to your Christmas one of eager, faithful anticipation or fear of not accomplishing everything on your to do list?

**Scriptures:** *I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope (Psalm 130:5).*

*"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).*

**Prayer:** Dear Lord. The countdowns all end on the same day. We pray the countdown will focus on the anticipated birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus is a gift from you because of your love for us all. Let us look forward to Christmas with the eager anticipation of a child. Amen.