

## **Ultimate Christmas Countdown Checklist**

Getting organized is the best way to ensure you'll have more holiday cheer, less holiday stress. This timeline will help you keep track of the big tasks.

### **Three to Six Months Before (Before Mid-October)**

Make a family plan.

Buy travel tickets.

### **Two Months Before (Mid-October)**

Put activities on a calendar.

Start baking things you can freeze.

Update your Christmas card list.

Shop for cards and wrapping paper.

Make plans for overnight guests.

### **Six Weeks Before (Beginning of November)**

Make a master gift list.

Make a budget.

Start Christmas shopping in earnest.

### **One Month Before**

Do any online shopping.

Wrap gifts as you buy them.

Take stock of your decorations.

Take stock of dishes and glasses.

Start addressing Christmas cards.

### **Three Weeks Before (First Week of December)**

Send cards.

Buy a real tree.

Decorate!

Finalize menus.

Order a turkey

### **Two Weeks Before (Second Week of December)**

Make sure you've sent posted presents

Shop for non-perishable items.

### **One Week Before**

Deep clean your house.

Buy batteries for children's toys.

### **Three Days Before**

Shop for fresh ingredients.

Set the table.

### **Two Days Before**

Start cooking.

Buy fresh flowers.

### **The Day Before**

Recharge the batteries on your camera or video recorder.

Finish last-minute wrapping.

Finish cooking and make a timeline for the next day.

Sit back and relax.

*Enjoy your family and friends and relish the traditions you share.*

So, there we are with all the Christmas celebrations – ready?! But what are we really *preparing* for?

This morning we are thinking about John the Baptist as we saw last week through the Old Testament there are predictions about when the Messiah will come. John the Baptist continues this and says to prepare for the coming of Jesus.

In the mess comes the messenger telling of the messiah.

This may seem like the end of the year to most of us, but for Christians, as we open up our Advent calendars, this marks the beginning of a new year. It's where everything starts as we prepare for Jesus coming, so perhaps this could be a new start for all of us?

So, what would are you going to put on your list for getting ready for Jesus?

Do all your Christmas preparations help you to find God or just stress you out?

*How* do we to prepare our hearts to find God?

Let's take John's message today.

What do John the Baptist and Winnie the Pooh have in common? Their middle name

Why did John the Baptist take his shoes off before going into the water? He wanted to save soles!

John is all about saving souls. He wants people to repent (to turn around to God)

When Jesus did come, His message was subtly different. He still talks about repentance, but also good news.

John the Baptist taught that if we will fall down on our knees before God and ask forgiveness and be baptized in the Jordan River as a sign of washing our sins away, God will forgive us. Jesus announced the good news that if we do turn around and face Him, He himself had come to make us a way to God and show us how to live.

We are told in both cases to "repent." This is not a deeply fashionable statement but is part of the preparation. Advent is a time of self-examination.

A soap manufacturer and a pastor were walking together down a street in a large city. The soap manufacturer casually said, "The Gospel you preach hasn't done much good has it? Just observe. There is still a lot of wickedness in the world, and a lot of wicked people, too!" The pastor made no reply until they passed a dirty little child making mud pies in the gutter. Seizing the opportunity, the pastor said, "I see that soap hasn't done much good in the world either; for there is much dirt, and many dirty people around."

The soap man said, "Oh, well, soap is only useful when it is applied."

And the pastor said, "Exactly, so it is with the Gospel."

If we're not prepared to apply the gospel of repentance in preparation for Jesus, it might as well not be there.

Now, I'm not saying we are all dreadful sinners, but let's face it there are many things which turn us away from Jesus, rather than towards Him at this time of year. Christmas can give us lots of joy, and I hope it does, but it's also the time of year where people get into compromising situations at work parties, panic about money, argue with their relatives, and get to the point where they are close to killing their own children – or at least 'accidentally breaking' the irritating noisy toy they are playing with non-stop!  
It's a time where the 'not so nice' parts of our characters can be magnified.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus taught that if we want to find God, the first thing we must do is to turn away from our sins

Are there things you and I need to say sorry for and change? For example, asking God's forgiveness for ways we've acted with, or viewed certain people, and ask him to help us take stock of relationships which could be fixed and made so much better, rather than made worse over Christmas.

Advent is a great time to just pause for a minute in all the rushing about, because even with the best of intentions, even with all the New Year's resolutions you probably made, we drift back into those old, familiar, sinful patterns, and we begin to dislike ourselves.

When the gospel is applied it is like soap, cleaning us up, helping us act in wonderful ways. Helping us reach out to others and bring genuine Christmas cheer! Rather than the mulled wine fuelled joy which is soon gone the next morning!

Instead of deep cleaning our houses, which I'm guessing you weren't going to do anyway?! we can have a tidy up of our Spiritual lives, to apply the soap of the gospel. To say sorry for all the things we're not happy about as we reflect on our lives and turn to Jesus.

We could make our own list to prepare the way for this Christmas:

Put up Christmas lights, knowing that Jesus is light coming into our dark world.

Buy presents, knowing that God's love, made known in Jesus, is what you can really share.

Prepare food, knowing that Jesus gives us all we need to live life to the full.

Recharge your Spiritual batteries, peace, love and joy are what Christmas is about.

Receive gifts, knowing that blessings and love come from God.