



Preparing for Christmas, Personally and Professionally

By Mary Younger

For unto us, a child is born, to us, a son is given, and he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 NIV

Ninety-five days till Christmas, the newscaster said. Inwardly I groaned. Unlike Hobby Lobby, which starts Christmas after the Fourth of July, it's hard for me to get motivated when Halloween (sorry, the Autumn Festival) has yet to arrive. Working in a large church has rearranged my priorities for holidays. **START EARLY, OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES.**

Suppose you are on a church staff with several ministries under your supervision, or perhaps just one with many workers like Sunday School, Community Groups, and Music ministry. In that case, Christmas becomes a time for recognition and appreciation of leaders and volunteers. Brunch, lunch, or dinners pop up in every ministry, and invitations arrive for them all. Event organizers may approach you with no regard for your schedule, "Oh, by the way, would you say a few words, bring the message, give the evangelistic call?"

Here are some helpful hints to prepare for those requests and get a head start on a fast-approaching season.

START EARLY. Reread the gospel story of Christ's birth in your quiet time. Ask the Lord for new insight. Take the thoughts given by the Holy Spirit to renew your love of the old story and enlarge upon them. Add interesting facts gleaned from research or a meaningful poem, and search for a devotional reading that adds depth. Another tack is to research the background on familiar Christmas music. I once spoke for twenty minutes on the story behind the song "Rudolf the Red Nose Reindeer" intermixed with the birth of our Savior as he brought compassion, love, and hope to desperate people.

Create a thirty/forty-minute message for a speaking engagement, a fifteen-minute devotion for the appreciation luncheon for leaders (they love brevity), and a seven-minute statement sufficient for that unexpected request that a harried leader makes as you walk in the door of the restaurant.

Because we draw from our personal encounter with the Lord, whatever the setting, the listeners will connect with the words the Holy Spirit has given us to say. Our walk with the Lord reflects in the audience.

START EARLY recruiting the church decoration team. Look for women who have a natural ability to decorate well; include some guys for moving ladders and trees. If possible, give them a budget. Coordinate a theme with the senior pastor and the music department. Create a schedule for setup and tear-down.

Always coordinate decorating with the Sunday School department and music director, so the twenty-foot fake tree on the stage doesn't interfere with thirty-five pre-schoolers singing Jingle Bells the third weekend in Dec.

Make sure the new janitor knows where the Christmas decorations are stored. Purchase new ones if necessary. Sometimes the 1970 garland needs to disappear.

Remember, fire regulations: no open flame candles. I once had decorations fall off a wall and narrowly miss a bank of lit candles. Thank you, Lord, for your protection.

START EARLY and, if at all possible, give your leaders a break at Christmas. Bring ministries to an end two weeks before Christmas and do not resume until two weeks after New Year. They will be so grateful.

START EARLY, and make reservations for the staff party. In addition, find a way to acknowledge the women who work alongside you. Give them extra days off after Christmas with pay. They work hard to make ministries run smoothly, usually for minimum wage. They deserve a Christmas gift of time at home. A little box of something never hurts and a luncheon speaks volumes.

START PLANNING EARLY because you have a home life, and family Christmas is just as important as the church's celebration of Christ's birth. Our children may not remember presents received at Christmas, but they will remember a Mom/Dad who was exhausted from working at the church. That's a memory we want to avoid, so START EARLY.

My prayer for you:

Father, thank you for sending the Wonderful One, who would grow up and eventually die for our sin and give us eternal life. As we move into a busy season, give us discipline to start early, long before the Christmas spirit motivates us. We need creativity and generosity of spirit. Help us grant mercy and understanding when life's demands hurray others. But, most of all, refresh our hearts and help us see the old, old story in a new light. Then our praise and our words will give life to others. In your Wonderful name, dear Jesus, Amen.

Mary Younger

Mary has spent 40 plus years in Women's Ministry, first as an attendee learning about God and the Bible, then serving coffee and setting up chairs. As she grew spiritually, the Lord called her into leadership. Mary served 18 years as a volunteer before joining the staff of RiverLakes Community Church in Bakersfield, CA. She served for 18 years as Director of Women's Ministries and Service Ministries.

Mary loves to help women turn biblical knowledge into practical application for their everyday life. She has a heart for leaders and loves to mentor them. Mary is married to Doug. In retirement, they enjoy traveling across the United States and Canada. They have three children, nine grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. She loves to read, sew and teach. You may contact Mary at myounger.1050@yahoo.com