



Congregational Connections

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CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS: OLD AND NEW

Let me begin with a minor confession: I love Christmas. I know that's not a big deal, I'm certainly not alone in loving Christmas. Even in my teen years when church was particularly "uncool" I still looked forward to Christmas Eve worship; lighting the little individual candles and singing the traditional carols. Tolland, CT Christmas services were not complete until the choir's outstanding baritone sang "Sweet Little Jesus Boy", and the lead soprano sang, "O Holy Night" and we would all stand on the front stairs of church after the whole congregation processed outside singing "Silent Night, Holy Night" and wait for a closing blessing. And, in my mind's eye at least, the snow was always gently falling down around us as my brother and I made our way to the family car seeing who could keep their candle burning longest.

Our minister would frequently tell a story on Christmas Eve instead of a sermon. We used to tease my Mom, because she would get all teary-eyed at the heart-warming ending. The stories always seemed to be about some vulnerable creature on a cold wintry night, like a little bunny, or one of the stable animals from Bethlehem, being lost and alone, before being saved by the care, compassion, and sacrifice of another. Of course, I would never admit it, but I'd get teary eyed too. My Mom got sick in 1989 and received a liver transplant in the late fall of that year. She was very weak as December days began to pass, but she was determined to get home so she could attend the Christmas Eve worship service back home—and she did. Being at church on Christmas Eve was crucial to her, and really to all of us.

I still look forward to the Christmas Eve services, as well as the "build-up" during the weeks of Advent as we move closer week by week. My family now has its own traditions. Now they tease me about praying too long, telling stories about vulnerable creatures, like a little bunny, out on a cold, wintry night instead of a sermon and getting teary-eyed. We have also had a variety of silly misfortunes over the years trying to find dinner for Henry after the last service has been finished

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