

Christmas Rituals for Couples

From: www.smartmarriages.com/intentionalmarriage.html

The following Christmas rituals were gleaned from a list available at Smart Marriages' web page. Bill Doherty's banquet presentation during the 2000 Smart Marriages® conference talked about the rituals in his own marriage, such as a nightly hot tub soak and conversation under the Minnesota stars. He then invited audience members to share their own favorite marital rituals. The results were moving, inspiring – and sometimes hilarious. Smart Marriages® has asked for couples to share additional rituals and added them to this list, the following are specific to Christmas.

My husband Dan and I make a point to go out one evening and look at Christmas lights and decorations around our neighborhood. Since we have moved to Chicago...we have now added a trip "into the city"--do dinner, walk along Michigan Avenue hand in hand-- taking in the holiday energy. We also get "all dressed up" for some holiday event (me in glitter, he in a "tux" or great looking suit) and get our photo taken to add to our collection.

In addition to gift exchanges, we also give each other a "Christmas" card...(put under the tree) and write our special words of love and wishes. This means more to me than his store bought gift.

Every Christmas season, my husband of ten years and I choose an evening to make a fire in our fireplace, put on some Christmas carols, lie on the couch together and look at the lights on our Christmas tree. It makes us feel warm, cozy and connected.

Our holiday tradition is that the Christmas tree does not come down until we've made love beneath it (which has been more of a challenge as the kids have gotten older).

More than 25 years ago, I inaugurated an annual Christmas day "treasure hunt" for my spouse [The first time, I had gotten a small bonus and wanted to surprise my wife on Christmas morning]. I placed the first clue in her Christmas stocking, which led her to a second clue hidden somewhere in the house, and then to another, until she found the "treasure" at the end. The \$ amount has not always been very large but the "hunt" is priceless. Since that time, we now have to do it for all three of our children as well [mind you, the youngest turns 21 on December 31 this year!] As children,

they protested being "left out." We have bought a Christmas ornament together every Christmas for the last 9 years, starting a year or two before we were married. We just buy one each year, and we spend a good amount of time looking for just the right one that reflects something about our year that year. The first was bought at a street fair in Salzburg, a beautifully carved violin with a red ribbon. It reminds us of our time there together that Christmas. Our most recent is a wooden cactus, bought here in Tempe Arizona. In between we've had ornaments that reflect the place we got engaged, the year we got our dog, the year we lived in North Carolina, and so on. We always put the date on the back with permanent marker. It's fun every year to unwrap the ornaments one by one and remember our years together.

Each year we both take a day (or a half-day) off of work to go Christmas shopping together. Sure, we could go on the weekends, but the act of actually taking time off work just to spend time with each other is really powerful! It's a tradition that we look forward to. We have a nice lunch out together while we're shopping. Sometimes, we don't even buy a single thing, but we do a lot of looking.

We have a tradition of baking bread together to give as gifts to friends, neighbors, colleagues. We put on holiday music and bake away! When we have kids, I'm sure they'll be involved in this tradition.

In our 33 years of passionate and joyful marriage we have never bought each other a Christmas gift. (We have ten children so we do enough gift buying) Each year we do something, often adventurous and generous for someone in need as our gift to each other. The memory is the real gift. Our favorite thing to do is "ring and run." We will find out about a family in need, Dad suddenly out of work or whatever, and stuff enough cash for us to feel it as a sacrifice, into a Christmas card that says "and the word was made flesh and dwelt among us". We tape the card to their front door when we know they are at home, ring and run. The first time we ever did this Ron let me hide in the bushes so I could hear the squeals of delight. We laughed ourselves silly, panting and puffing in the "get away car" wondering if one of these years we will give ourselves a heart attack for Christmas.

My husband and I do something kind of silly - but we rely on it for a few laughs every Christmas - and our kids love it! When we wrap our presents to place under the tree, we "make up" the gift-giver, using the name as a clue to what's in the box. For instance, this year I bought tickets to an opera, wrapped the tickets in a box, and put on the tag: To Dan From Beverly Sills. Other memorable tags have been: a pair of clogs from "Dutch," a pair of pajamas from Hugh Hefner, perfume from Pepe LaPew, a book from Mr. Barnes.... you get the picture. So, it's a guessing game, as well as a big laugh when the gift is finally opened.

I don't know if this qualifies but my mother and I got a good laugh. I visited her recently and we were talking about Christmas's past and she said that when we were small (the '50's and 60's) and when she and my father were alive, every Christmas eve when they were sure that we were finally asleep they would listen to Christmas carols while they got organized and then watch the replay of the Midnight Mass from the Vatican while they assembled toys, etc. I laughed because 50 years later, my husband and I do the same thing.

When visiting parents or relatives for several days and staying with them, we agree to "check in" twice a day to debrief and stay connected.

One holiday ritual I enjoyed as a couple for new year's eve was filling out a questionnaire that recounted (among other things) best and worst moments of the past year (for each individual and for us as a couple), favorite movies and books seen/read, noteworthy world events and trends, something important each partner learned that year, and hopes, dreams and resolutions for the future/coming year AS A COUPLE. Filling out the questionnaire together was fun and sparked interesting discussion, as did reading past years' surveys which I collected in a notebook. Over time, it can become a wonderful record of your journey together.

New Year's Day is our annual stay-at-home, order food and make out our list of wishes, dreams, and goals for the year. We also revisit the list on our anniversary.

A Christmas ritual we began when we were commuting between cities during the holiday time, was to plan several special events for times we were together...being very intentional--could be

symphony; lighting of the River Walk; attending a play; when in Phoenix doing a Desert Walk at night, etc...but we try to do 3-4 different events that are special to the season, the area of the country we are living in at the time and involve just the two of us.

A "new tradition" we began implementing several years ago is something we call the 10 days of Christmas. (Why 10 days and not 12...don't know...just happened that way). Beginning on the 14th of December we give each other a small token gift, each day. Actually my husband seems to get into this more than I do. It's not about expense but a deliberate way of treasuring each other...a favorite candy bar; candlelight & massage; a favorite poem copied and given with an explanation why; book; CD...the sky's the limit. We both enjoy doing this and it has lessened our expectations of the actual DAY of Christmas.

We both love to bake, so two days before Christmas my husband and I spend a day together in the kitchen baking a variety of goodies for our family and friends, pack them in decorative containers and deliver them to their homes on Christmas Eve. Everyone looks forward to receiving the goodies and if we miss someone or deliver too late, we sometimes get a phone call to ask if the goodies are coming.

Each Christmas, my wife and I select a memory to share with one another from our own childhoods at Christmas time. Sometimes the memories are pleasant, sometimes sad, or maybe just plain silly. Often, they are memories that neither of us have previously shared with one another.

One evening when my husband and I were dating, he called to invite me for a drive around town to look at all the Christmas lights. Unfortunately, it was late and I was already in my pajamas so I declined. Being the "persistent courter", my husband said, "That's okay, I'll put my pajamas on too and we can tour the town together in our PJ's!" So, he came and off we went admiring all the Christmas lights in town in our plaid flannels and fuzzy slippers! We giggled at the thought of getting pulled over by the police! We had so much fun that we did it the next year and hence a tradition started! That was 9 years ago! This year we are taking our two children for the first time and calling it the "Pajama Parade." It's kinda a crazy thing, but it has been fun for us and there is something very cozy and intimate about driving around in your PJ's ohhing and

ahhing at Christmas lights!

Since we are empty nesters and our children live 1000 miles away our rituals is truly a couple ritual. My husband Larry and I go to Midnight Mass on Christmas eve because either one or both of us will sing in the choir; we wake up Christmas morning; fix a Mimosa then open our gifts from each other. After opening gifts, we fix breakfast, put a fire in the fireplace and depending upon whether we have to visit family later in the day, just lay back and relax. We may watch "White Christmas" and/or "It's A Wonderful Life" or whatever Christmas story is on the TV. Most of the time we don't have to visit family until later in the day and sometimes not at all. Some Christmases we never got out of our PJs! It's a

great day to "cuddle", "reflect", and be close to God and each other.

Following candlelight service at church, my husband and I come home and fight. The tradition started years ago amidst slap-happy holiday fatigue. I make my turkey stuffing with French bread, and one year Bob and I challenged each other to a 'sword' fight with the loaves (still wrapped, of course). Our four kids are grown, but whoever is home for Christmas still expects our rousing fight, which ends when one of us cries uncle or one of the swords breaks. Then we snuggle up and settle down to Bob's reading of the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke."