

A Night to Remember – The Neighborhood Walk – by Marcy Lytle

Kids love to look at Christmas lights and hopefully you have a night planned to drive and look at them as a family! But for this family devo for December, get out and walk a neighborhood. It can be your own or one you know that is well decorated in every yard! Why? Because it's fun, and it can be part of the discussion when you return home to hot chocolate and cookies.

Preparation: Pick the neighborhood. Look for the following items (you can print out the list for kids to check off if you wish!): reindeer, Santa, manger scene, peppermint candies, gingerbread men, stars, something blue, bells, and cartoon characters, as well as music. Then head back home for cookies and milk, or peppermints and hot cider, as you talk about what you saw on your neighborhood walk.

Christmas is full of all sorts of images that people like to place on their lawns. And a manger scene is one of many. And while it's the focal point of the Christmas Story, there are good things to be noted about the other images as well!

Reindeer – what's the story of Rudolph? He's got a big red nose and other reindeer shun him, but who awards him the privilege of driving the sleigh? Good ole' Santa! Santa isn't real, but Jesus is, and that's just what he does for us. He values how we are made and honors us with his love and presence, and delights in giving us things to do for Him and for others.

Santa - St. Nicholas, or Santa, was a monk way back centuries ago that gave away his inherited wealth to help the poor and sick. That's still the idea today that treats will land in our stockings and under our trees. And where do good gifts ultimately come from? Not St. Nick but from our good, good Father.

Manger Scene – We see baby Jesus and his parents Mary and Joseph, and maybe the shepherds nearby. It's of utmost importance that we believe and know the love of Christ who willingly came to earth to obey his Father's will, to save mankind from sin, and offer us eternal life with him.

Peppermint candies – Supposedly in 1670, a choirmaster gave out sugar sticks to keep kids quiet during Christmas Eve mass. He asked the candy maker to add a crook to the top of the candy to represent the shepherds who visited Jesus. And they're white for purity and have red stripes for Jesus' blood, spilled for us all. Pretty cool!

Gingerbread men - The tradition of making gingerbread men specifically is said to have originated in the court of Queen Elizabeth I of England, who had gingerbread cookies made in the likeness of her favorite courtiers. Did you know we are made in the likeness of God – in his image?

Star – well we know where that came from – a star appeared in the sky and the shepherds followed it to Jesus. We see stars every night in the dark sky, to light up the darkness. Jesus is the light of the world, the Shining Star!

Bells – The Hebrew word for bell means beautiful. Churches ring bells to call people to worship. So when we see bells in yards and hanging from branches, we can remember to worship Jesus and sing beautiful songs to show our love.

Blue – This might not be a “traditional” color for Christmas but lots of people use it, and blue lights on a house are so warming and beautiful. God doesn’t love us because of our color or a traditional way we look like everyone else. He loves us because He made us. So enjoy blue or red or even pink if you want...for the holidays!

Those big blowups – They’re everywhere and they’re often Mickey or Minnie, or Goofy or the Grinch – and kids love them. They’re larger than life and they’re associated with a story...and the characters in that story. Enjoy them, marvel at them, and wonder at all the stories that are told at Christmas time. And give thanks for the one true story of the Christ Child in the manger...

Which was your favorite that you saw as we walked? Why?

Let’s pray:

Jesus, thank you for Christmas time and for all the lights and colors and images that represent your love for us all. We pray for all the homes we passed by tonight, for peace and joy and salvation. Thank you for being the Light of the World, and help us to represent your light to those around us. Amen.