

Have yourself a drama-free Christmas

Ever since my mom and dad passed, family holidays have taken on a very weird flavor. My siblings and I, our spouses and kids, we all struggle with our family identity now that the keepers of our shared history and traditions are gone. We even sold our childhood home, so the saying “you can’t go home again” rings particularly true.

So, my wife and children and I decided on a “Drama-Free Christmas.” To pull it off, we made three, simple rules for ourselves:

1. Everyone is welcome ... not to come.

We flung open our doors to everyone. My siblings and in-laws, primarily, but the list quickly grew. With families so diverse and spread out, it occurred to us that there were quite a few friends and family members who didn’t have a place to land on Christmas Day. That place became our home. Your kids are celebrating with their spouses’ families? Come over. Your parents snowbird in Arizona, and you celebrated Christmas last July? Come over. Oh, and most importantly, if you can’t come, that’s OK, too. The spirit of Drama-Free Christmas means being OK with people where they are, even if that’s nowhere near you.

2. Well, almost everyone.

Drama-Free Christmas: it’s all right there in the name. We weren’t angling for a Christmas without a hitch. Far from it. We count on hitches. Celebrating the first of what will be many Christmases without my parents, we counted on tears. With lots of little ones running on sugar and little sleep, we expected tantrums. The goal was to create a manger – an imperfect place that welcomed kings and drummer boys alike.

That said, in some cases, creating a manger meant telling some of the more rambunctious magi who tend not to get along with one another that they were to leave their drama at the door (gold, frankincense and myrrh optional).

3. Traditions Were Made to Be Broken.

We have a saying in our house: “There’s no such thing as a first-annual anything.” Doing something once doesn’t make it a “tradition.” Traditions are organic. They happen because they mean something to those involved. Traditions that are done solely out of obligation aren’t traditions, they’re burdens. Life (and death) had permanently altered my family’s long-standing traditions, so it was time to make some new ones. Our Drama-Free Christmas does not do a sit-down dinner; food is ready when you are. Our Drama-Free Christmas doesn’t insist on gifts. And our Drama-Free Christmas even recognizes that some good and loving relatives may choose not to attend Mass with us, but we make sure they know they’re welcome.

Drama-Free Christmas greets our guests where they are, not where we wish they would be. Which is, of course, how Jesus greets us on Christmas day and every day.