

Christmas Shocking

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This isn't what I expected. We drove all day on Christmas with screaming kids in a small car to celebrate with my husband's uncle for the first time. We finally arrived and "wow!" do they do things different. At our house, when opening presents, we take turns and watch each person open the gift. When it came time to open gifts today, everyone ripped into the presents, pieces of gift-wrap practically falling from the ceiling like confetti. I could hardly see my husband across the room. And do not get me wrong, I enjoy a nice blessing before eating the meal, but did it have to be for fifteen minutes? When we finally got to eat, I was surprised to find, instead of the usual turkey, there was meatloaf on my plate.

Each of us have expectations as to how Christmas should look, feel, and taste. However, not everyone has the same expectations as you do. Culture shock* is described as "a state of bewilderment and distress experienced by an individual who is suddenly exposed to a new, strange, or foreign social and cultural environment." Overall, it is a drastic change. Let's take a look at what experts agree are the four stages of culture shock.

- *Stage One: Honeymoon Phase*
This is the stage where everything is new and exciting, and your overall outlook is positive. For instance, according to your personal taste, the Christmas decorating ideas of Aunt Beth are a bit odd, but you are willing to overlook it.
- *Stage Two: Disenchantment Phase*
During this stage you are going to notice your expectations are not being met. You may feel anxiety, dissatisfaction, anger, resentment, isolation, and bitterness. Aunt Beth's decorations were just a bit odd, but now you find them a distraction and every time you look at them, your blood pressure rises.
- *Stage Three: Adjustment Phase*
In the adjustment phase, you come to understand the new culture. Your feelings from the disenchantment phase will evolve into satisfaction, inclusion, contentment, and even humor. You have chatted with Aunt Beth for awhile and you begin to understand her point of view.
- *Stage Four: Effective Phase*
Finally, you have had a chance to observe and participate in the various aspects of the culture, discovering pros and cons, and choosing what aspects to include in your life. You appreciate and accept Aunt Beth and her sense of décor. The next year, you and Aunt Beth decorate together.

A detailed account of the birth of Jesus is found in Luke chapter 2. Mary and Joseph's birth story was not traditional. Imagine the surroundings, smells, and noises of animals, or laying your child in a feeding trough (manger) for a bed. Mary and Joseph may not have pictured the birth of the Son of God in this manner. Christmas this year may not happen as you picture it; in fact, you may experience Christmas culture shock. What will

your family remember at Christmas: anxiety or appreciation, anger or contentment, bitterness or acceptance?

*Definition for culture shock found at Dictionary.com and stages found at <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/cGuanipa/cultshok.htm>.

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