

# Eight is great, Christmas gifts, ping-pong in the dining room, a trumpet concert, and Ramen Around the Christmas Tree (7 Quick Takes)

~1~



We have a brand-new 8-year-old in the house! Daniel had the most wonderful birthday. We had a bowling party for him and some of his friends—old and new—over the weekend, and he enjoyed every minute.

He and I picked out cupcakes at the store to take to school on Monday. He opened his gifts from us that morning. Then, on his birthday evening, we went out to dinner at the restaurant of his choice—our favorite place with sushi and long-life noodles. He announced to the waitress it was his birthday, and she brought him some fried bananas and ice cream for dessert—and sang to him.

I'm big on celebrating birthdays, but Daniel challenges even me to appreciate the awesomeness of birthdays.

~2~

Daniel's godfather and his family sent a ping-pong set for his birthday. We love it, of course, and I was perfectly happy to convert the dining room table to a ping-pong table.

To be honest, though, I am including the photo just to prove that occasionally we have a clear horizontal surface in our house.

~3~

We are participating in the Adopt-a-Family program through our parish for the first time, and shopping for the family of seven we were matched with has been our shopping priority. Our deadline was earlier, for one thing, since the gifts have to be turned in today. But also selecting the right gifts for the family seemed really important. It has been fun, too, and really special to imagine them opening our presents.

After we had the more important gifts together, the boys and I stuffed a stocking for each of the family members. The whole experience has been a big undertaking, but I would definitely do it again. There is something wonderful about trying to make Christmas beautiful for people you don't even know.

~4~

But gifts from friends are also wonderful. The other day I happened to mention to a friend that I don't have a hot glue gun. I wasn't trying to drop hints—not the way I talk about how I wish I had crocks I could make French onion soup in or metal skewers for kebobs, cough, cough, cough—but just a few days later I came home to find a brand-new hot glue gun!

This is life-changing. I hardly know where to begin.

~5~

I have a favorite gift I'm giving to a few people on my list this year, but I can't tell you about it because the people who are receiving it to are some of my best blog readers. Ah, the agony. We will all just have to wait for Christmas. Or maybe I can slip a photo onto Instagram and hope no one sees it there. You can keep a secret, right?

~6~



Leo played the trumpet in a concert this week, and I was so proud of him. He dressed up in the suit he picked for his Uncle Eric's funeral, and he looked so good—and sounded great on the trumpet. All the children played really well.

I sat there in the audience thinking how at the boys' Christmas concert last year I would never have imagined we would be attending a different concert in a different school this year. But I know we are in the right place for our boys right now.

~7~

We're having a holiday lunch party at the office today, and my colleagues are bringing cookies and other side dishes. I signed up to bring a pasta salad—and I made chocolate chip cookies.



I had suggested that we could have everyone bring Christmas Carol-themed dishes, but I couldn't manage to get all my colleagues to share this vision. I thought it would be fun to call the party, "The Twelve Trays of Christmas" and bring dishes like "Soy to the World" (a stir-fry?), a potato dish called "Mashing Through the Snow," "Handel's

Jambalaya," "Do You Taste What I Taste," "Goat (Cheese) Tell It on the Mountain," "Good King Worcestershire Sauce," "God Rest Ye Berry Gentlemen," and "O Come All Ye Falafel."

One of my colleagues came up with a number of brilliant ones, including "I Saw Three Chips Come Sailing In" and "Strudel, Strudel, Strudel." We had decided that you could even serve "O Christmas Tea" and "Grandma Got Run Over by a Root

Beer.” I thought you could even have a carving area titled “O Holy Knife.” But somehow this idea didn’t take flight this time around.

Nonetheless, my pasta salad is named “Ramen Around the Christmas Tree.” I made it with snowflake noodles from Trader Joe’s, along with only red and green vegetables.

Meanwhile, I am determined to bring this feast of Christmas carol puns to life one day.

***There is no quick takes linkup this week, but I hope you have a wonderful weekend.***

***Here comes the third Sunday of Advent!***