

# Creative Family Christmas Portrait Ideas



**Great Ideas for Family Holiday  
Pictures That Family & Friends will  
Treasure and Remember!**

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## It's time for a change!

Some professional family Christmas portraits are so ... boring. Reserved. Run of the mill. Everyone in your photo is dressed just like all of the other professional Christmas photos and they all look like they'd rather be doing anything else except sitting still for a family Christmas photo.

Does that sound familiar? You can still have a great professional portrait done for the holidays, but think outside of the box. Don't settle for the same old idea that's been done a hundred Christmas seasons past for thousands of other families.

With a little creative thought and planning, you can have some wonderfully creative and memorable Christmas photos and greetings this year. AND you can have them taken professionally, OR even by a friend with a good digital camera! Here are some ideas for some of the most memorable and treasured family Christmas photos ever:

## You CAN Call the Shots!

Did you know that many professional photographers are more than happy to incorporate *your* ideas into the portrait? After all, you're part of the finished project and they want you to be happy. If you don't see the holiday themed background you want, **ask for it.**



At the studio, for Christmas effects, have the photographer let a gentle 'snow' fall. Photographers have special effects they can add to the photographs.

Ask the photographer to photograph some of the **shots in sepia** (as shown to the left) and some in black and white.

Ask if you can view the photographer's selection of backdrops before the appointment. If you don't like the choice of backdrops the photographer has, find one you do like (did you know you can shop for Christmas as well as other photo backdrops online?) and ask him or her to use that one.

Remember that to young children, the unknown can be frightening. Bring younger children to the studio before the scheduled appointment to familiarize the child with the surroundings.

Make sure you get what you want. Photographers are professionals who know how to take stunning portraits of your family but they might not know exactly what you're looking for.

But you can be completely satisfied with your family Christmas portrait simply by telling the photographer your concept of the portrait. If you find that the photographer isn't willing to work to put your ideas in, then go to one who *is* willing.

## How to Dress for Christmas Pictures

Traditionally, knowing how to dress for Christmas pictures done in a studio or by a professional meant everyone dressed formally and wore red. You don't have to dress that way! You can have everyone in your portrait wear blue jeans and white sweaters if that suits your family's style better.

Here are a few ways you can dress for your holiday portrait:

- Have everyone in the family dress like Santa's helpers – or maybe dad could be Santa, Mom could be Mrs. Claus and the kids could be the elves.
- This is a fun family Christmas portrait idea: **Have everyone take a pair of pajamas to the shoot** – Then make the portrait one of all of you on Christmas morning unwrapping gifts!
- You can also have the family dress in blended colors, like a candy cane theme. Have one person in a red Christmas vest, other boys or men in red ties, mom and daughters in red pants or skirts with white shirts.
- You can have everyone dress as Christmas carolers and ask the photographer to use a backdrop depicting a street complete with a gaslight. To figure out how you'd like everyone to dress for a caroling portrait, study images of carolers done in the early 1900s.



- Have the photographer use a completely black backdrop. Have every family dress from head to toe in white clothing and hold candles. At the last minute, before the picture is taken, light the candles. Of course, if you have children that are too small to handle this idea safely, then obviously, don't try it.
- You can also have the photographer use a stark white backdrop. No frills. Then bring in the family dressed in eye-popping colors. Reds, greens, silver, and gold. Tie each color in together. The contrast between the vivid colors and the white background make the portrait both sharp and festive.
- How about everyone donning Christmas aprons over their clothes with Santa hats and being photographed in a kitchen baking scene?

You can have fun with this using Gingerbread Men, frosting and candy décor as props – along with a lot of smiles.



### **What If I Want to Take My Own Family Christmas Portrait?**

If the idea of heading out to a professional photographer's studio doesn't thrill you, you can still get a great family portrait done right in your own home. You don't have to be an expert and you don't have to have expensive camera equipment to take the photos, either.

You can take the photo with your digital camera. Digital cameras of today have time delay and two shot settings. That means that if someone blinks in the first photo, you can get them with their eyes open in the second one by using this feature.

Remember that if mistakes do happen, such as red eye or something in the picture you don't want in there, they can be edited right out thanks to all of the photography software available for computers.

Backdrops won't be a problem, since you can either make them from sheets or fabric rolls. Using fabric rolls in a Christmas print can give you a great backdrop. You can also purchase different Christmas backdrops (cloths made of muslin) from an online store.

Before you get everyone together for the shot, take the time to see which time of day you get the best shots if you want to use natural lighting. Your camera doesn't always 'see' what you can. What's bright red to you can look paler in a picture depending on the light used.

## **How to Take a Christmas Portrait at Home**

If you're using a digital camera, you should be able to take great shots no matter what the lighting situation is. But sometimes, you'll need to take a few shots in order to figure out the right balance.

If it looks off to you, then you can set it to balance on the camera manually. Look for the settings on the camera that change the lighting in regards to indoor or outdoor, overcast or bright daylight, regular bulbs or fluorescent lights. Sometimes photos taken under fluorescent lights have a tendency to appear too washed out.

Decide what style of Christmas portrait you're aiming for - informal or formal and then have everyone dress accordingly. Better yet, take both kinds (just make sure you remind everyone to bring a change of clothes to the shoot).

For more formal Christmas portraits, everyone can wear black tie or silver dresses if you don't want to use reds or greens. If you have a large family or want to have a portrait that includes extended family, think up.

You climb up a few steps on the stairs and take the photo. If you don't have stairs, use a small stepladder. Resist the urge to take the 'family on the staircase' photo.

No one every really looks good hunched together on a set of stairs. Plus the people further up the steps can end up looking like floating heads if the lighting is too dark.

Create a scene where everyone's trimming the tree together. Let everyone pick an ornament to hang for the picture. That way they're all together in the shot, around the tree, but it's more natural looking than scooting into close quarters and standing in a still pose.

In order to get every family member in the shot and not have an MPT (missing photo taker) then you should use a tripod or other method for holding the camera.

Using the delay button will give the picture taker enough time to zip into the picture. Remember that it's okay to be relaxed during a photo. No need for stiff, forced smiles.

If you have older teens who would rather scrub the house and skip junk food than have their picture taken, you might want to forego any posed photos and instead take ones that are teen friendly. You might even try to take some funny family pictures.

## **Funny Christmas Portrait Ideas**

Look at this Family Christmas portrait:



Nice enough family, but that has to be one of the most BORING Christmas portraits in existence. And it's a shame because this is what's happening to many families across America.

Even the dog looks un-amused.

Don't let this happen to you.

If you have a wacky sense of humor and you'd like that to be part of the picture, you can easily make it happen. For example, you can dress like the characters from a favorite Christmas movie such as the Grinch or Frosty the Snowman.

You can do a North Pole theme Christmas portrait. You could have one person dressed as Santa, the rest as elves right down to the curved toe jingle shoes. You can pose various family members working in Santa's 'workshop' while Santa checks the naughty or nice list.

For added fun, zoom in on the list and make sure it has family members' names under the naughty heading. You can even turn this one into a personalized Christmas card. Put a copy of the photo on the outside and on the inside, the zoomed in photo of the list. Add funny words like, "You're getting coal. I checked the list twice!"

Another funny Christmas portrait idea is to have all the family members dressed in pajamas with PhotoShopped thought bubbles of what each is dreaming of getting for Christmas. The gift thought bubbles can be quite funny if you really exaggerate what the gift could be.



Hot cocoa is a staple of chilly Christmas nights. Have everyone grab a cup with whipped cream on it and accidentally get a face whipped cream moustache on them like the picture to the left!

For a real Christmas portrait full of laughter, create a family patterned after the characters in Whoville.

You can tease up hair like the Whos wore theirs or you can get Who hair when you buy a wig in that shape. You can add to the fun by designating one member to dress the part of the Grinch.

Who's in the stocking? You can buy or make oversized stockings. Have each family member get into a stocking. For a funnier portrait, get a super sized stocking that many members can fit into. Have them stand in front of the fireplace. For props, place giant suckers and toys among the family members.

## **How to Take a Christmas Tree Portrait**

Something to consider when taking a Christmas tree portrait is the color on the walls. If you're going to use a fully decorated and lighted tree in the photograph, don't shoot the picture from too far away if you have white walls.

White walls make are glaringly noticeable. You want the focus to be on the Christmas tree and the people in the picture, not on the walls.

One of the easiest and most traditional family Christmas portraits to take is the one where the family is all gathered in front of the Christmas tree. But you don't have to do it that way if you're looking for something a little different.

You can take a photograph of the entire family in front of the tree but with each of the kids inside a box decorated to look like a Christmas present. If you have teenagers, you can wrap the box they're sitting or kneeling in paper depicting their favorite things to do - music, sports, as well as their hobbies.

If you're using a live Christmas tree, before you put any decorations on the tree, have each family member dress warmly in sweaters, mittens, boots and scarves (turn the furnace down in your home so no one gets overheated) and sit in front of the bare tree.

Put snow fluff and Styrofoam balls representing snowballs. Have each family member sitting or kneeling in the 'snow.' You can do this with an artificial tree, too.

Instead of the family gathered in front of the tree, you can have a photo of the family gathered around the tree in profile. Each one is looking at the tree and their faces are bathed in the lights from the tree. Silhouettes also make great Christmas portraits. You can also get a picture of everyone in the photo reaching toward the tree to hang a special ornament.

If you're a couple without children, both of you dress in white with pale blue scarves. Stand together, slightly angled toward one another in front of a white Christmas tree decorated with blue ribbons and blue Christmas balls. Use the zoom feature so that the Christmas tree doesn't have a lot of it in the background. This makes a lovely portrait.

## **Taking a Family Christmas Picture That Includes the Dog**

Animals are surprisingly easy to photograph and most dogs will sit still for inclusion into a family Christmas picture. You can take a more traditional photo of the family seated in front of the tree with the family pet sitting or lying in the middle.

Or you can create a unique family picture with Fido. Though pets are easy to photograph, like children, they have short attention spans, so the second you get them ready for the shoot, don't dally. Take the picture.

Have every family member dress in Santa hats including the dog. In front of each member, give them a sign that reads either 'naughty' or 'nice.' If you have or can find a red sleigh or sled, here's an idea that's different:



Put the harness on the dog (this works will if you have more than one dog too) add reindeer antlers. Have the family members sit in the sleigh or pile onto the sled. If you have a small dog, you can dress him up in a mini Santa suit and have him 'drive' the sleigh.

You can also create a family wreath complete with bow-wows of holly. Spread evergreen boughs on the floor (place a sheet on the floor first to catch loose needles). Everyone sit holding a dog (bigger dogs can lie in front of the family members) and each dog is dressed in bright red with holly bow hairpieces.

## How to Get a Great Outdoor Christmas Picture

Don't make the mistake of thinking that a Christmas photo has to be taken inside the house.

Or even in your front yard. To find a spectacular photo opportunity, you don't have to look any further than what the world around you has already provided.

You can find some wonderful settings and great backdrops to make a special picture this year.

If you live in an area where it doesn't snow - maybe your state is more famous for its beaches than for creating a winter wonderland, you can head to the beach.

Think you can't create a Christmas look at the beach? Think again. Head to the beach and use the damp sand to build



Christmas decorations. Giant balls and ribbons, Christmas boxes, a jolly Santa or two and a snowman or two.

You can bring props from home to give the sand decorations added pizzazz. Bring oversized bows for the sand Christmas boxes. Take along a Santa hat, beard and boots for your sand Santa. For the snowman, bring along a few scarves, a black hat, coal and a carrot. Not only will you have fun, but you'll have a unique picture as well.

If you would prefer not to leave your yard to make an outdoor Christmas picture, then use your own if you have it or rent a gazebo. Before it's time for the picture, decorate the gazebo in hundreds of tiny white Christmas lights. Hang Christmas wreaths and bows. Have family members dress in red or green or silver and black and sit on white wrought iron benches.

If you live out in the country or on a farm, then you can have a country Christmas photo done where everyone gathers together in a wagon decked out in Christmas lights and bells. Taking good family Christmas photos can be a way to forever capture those special moments. Remember these final tips when you're taking Christmas photos.

- 1.) Take more than one shot of each kind you want in case someone blinks or moves. Add some funny photos to the mix. Even if someone is doing something goofy in the shot. It's often the pictures that aren't posed that turn out to be the ones that are the funniest.
- 2.) Practice before you take the shots - especially if you're using a new camera - but don't expect perfection. Sitting still is boring. Subjects get restless.
- 3.) If you're taking pictures of a large family gathering for your Christmas portrait, don't have them all in the exact same pose. In the top row, have family members standing back to back, the second row kneels and the front row should sit.
- 4.) Get in the shot. Don't always be the one behind the camera. You're an important part of the family too.
- 5.) Turn the camera sideways for a shot from a different angle.
- 6.) Try taking your Christmas photos in black and white.

7.) If you're trying to get dogs in a picture and they keep looking away, their attention is easier to get if you keep a squeeze toy in your pocket and squeeze it gently.

With a little patience and a little practice, you'll have a Christmas family portrait that you'll love for years to come!

**Happy Holidays!**

**The Erskine Family**  
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