

The Mitford Years Book VIII: *Shepherds Abiding*

1. Father Tim is inspired to finish restoring the crèche by imagining Cynthia's face when she sees the time and love he put into her gift. What are some memorable and unique Christmas gifts you've given? You've received? When you give someone a gift, how important is his or her reaction?
2. Karon reflects on the season of Advent. What is this season all about, and what do you do to mark this time of preparation? Does your family have Advent and Christmas traditions?
3. Father Tim wrestles with memories of his father. What do you think of his decision to focus on the good time he spent with his dad? Is there anyone in your life you deal with this way or have chosen to remember this way?
4. With the possibility of entrepreneurship and a budding romance with Scott Murphy, Hope Winchester's life is suddenly turned gloriously upside down. Does it seem that major life events come in clusters? Can you think of a time in your life when everything was joyfully, to quote Father Tim, "berserk"?
5. Father Tim tells Esther Bolick that not taking a cake to Ol' Man Mueller out of spite would be much worse than feeling like a hypocrite for giving him a cake even though she didn't want to. Do you agree? Would you continue giving gifts to someone with whom you no longer had a good relationship? Does Ol' Man Mueller's reaction upon receiving the cake change your mind or reinforce your opinion?
6. Father Tim takes on a new challenge and discovers an artistic talent he never knew he had. Have you ever made or been given a handmade gift? Aside from the time it takes to make, can it be harder to give a handmade gift? Do you enjoy new challenges? What's Father Tim's attitude toward them?
7. Who do you think put the stable in the back room? Why do you think it was that character? What might his or her reasons have been? Have you ever given a gift anonymously? Do you think it's possible to be joyful about giving a wonderful gift, if no one knows the giver?