



December 2015

parenting CHRISTIAN kids



**St. Michael
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Focus on the Reason for the Season

POWERSOURCE

ASK GOD:

1. To help your family make Jesus your top priority during the Christmas season—and beyond.
2. To remind you and your kids to be satisfied with what they have.
3. To help you seek and value spiritual gifts, not material gifts.

Although our society tries to remove Jesus from the Christmas holiday, he's the sole reason for its existence. Despite what retailers want you to believe, Christmas would still happen without overloaded shopping carts and maxed-out credit cards.

As followers of Jesus, our efforts to honor the true meaning of Christmas do battle with our consumer culture. The temptation to overindulge our children isn't limited to December, though. All year long, kids of all ages are bombarded by ads for "must-have" items that promise fun, excitement, and even popularity.

Parents often give in, either because they can or because they don't want their children to be deprived. The result? Kids can become selfish and

self-centered, and families' priorities can shift from heavenly things to earthly things. Here are some tips for taming the materialism monster this Christmas so you can concentrate on the good news of Jesus' birth:

- **Emphasize nonmaterial values.** Spend time as a family doing activities besides shopping. Set a good example in this area, too.
- **Help children explore their values.** Instead of just saying "no" to every request, discover what's important to kids—and why.
- **Recognize various forms of overindulgence.** Don't indulge kids emotionally by expecting too much or too little of them. Set limits, as well as age-appropriate chores.

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TEACHABLE MOMENTS

The Greatest Gift

Beforehand, wrap small gifts that are appropriate for any age. Sit in a circle, and give every family member a gift. Say: **I'll read the Christmas story. As I read, pass your gift to the person on your right every time I say "God," Lord," or "Jesus." When I'm done, I'll say "amen," and you'll keep the gift that's in your hands at that time.**

Read aloud Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 1:26-38; and Luke 2:1-20. End with "amen." Have family members hold their gifts. Ask: **What did you have to do to receive the gift you have? What did we have to do to receive the gift of Jesus? What stood out to you the most about the Bible readings?**

Say: **Jesus is the best gift of all! Because Jesus came to earth as a baby, grew up, and then died for us, we have the gift of life in heaven.**

Open your gifts and close in prayer.

Keep Christ in Christmas

Have you ever experienced the Christmastime tug-of-war? As a parent, you want to shower your children with good gifts and revel in their expressions of joy. Yet you want to say "enough is enough" with material possessions and remind kids why we celebrate the holiday in the first place. To maintain balance, experts recommend keeping things simple when children are young. Be selective with gifts, ensuring each will stand the test of time. Don't feel guilty when gift-opening isn't a three-hour extravaganza. Instead, create memories and traditions that kids will cherish for years to come. And find ways to make Christmas special for other people, too. Try these ideas with your family this holiday season:

It's a Boy! As a family, create a birth announcement for Jesus—complete with a baby footprint, if you have access to an infant. Make copies of the announcement, use them as your Christmas cards, or give some away with small gifts.

I Heart Jesus Make a big felt stocking with the name "Jesus" in glittery gold or silver. Then have each family member make a felt or paper heart, put his or her name on it, and give the "heart" to Jesus. After all, that's what he wants most at Christmas!

Shine On Cut out posterboard stars, and have family members write their names on several stars using glow-in-the-dark paint. Tape the stars on the ceiling above your Christmas tree. Turn off the lights, and talk about the star that pointed people to Jesus when he was born. Tell kids they, too, can be "stars" who help other people find Jesus and tell them about his love and forgiveness.

Share the News With younger children, have them retell the Christmas account to you. Write each sentence on a different piece of paper, keeping it in children's words. Then have kids illustrate each page. Put the pages in order,

have kids create a cover, and staple it together. Every Christmas Eve, read the book together.

Share the News, Part 2 With older kids, let them each choose a role from the Christmas account and then write and present a Christmas drama from that viewpoint. Record the plays, and watch them together on Christmas Eve.

Silent-Night Sleepover Curl up in sleeping bags beneath your tree on Christmas Eve. Just before you go to sleep, talk about what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph to sleep in a barn with newborn baby Jesus. When you awake in the morning, you'll have a sense of how uncomfortable that first Christmas night must have been. Before you open gifts, talk about the arrival of Jesus, the first and best Christmas gift.

"Pay" It Forward Use this idea with money your children receive for Christmas, and continue it year-round: Have kids use 10% of their money to help someone else, whether they donate it or use it to buy a small gift. Together, keep a journal detailing how children use that 10% to bless other people. Jot down new ideas in the journal whenever you think of them.

"The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."

—John 1:9

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MEDIA MADNESS



MOVIE

Title: *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*

Genre: Action, Adventure, Fantasy

Rating: PG-13

Cast: Harrison Ford, John Boyega, Daisy Ridley, Adam Driver

Synopsis: The plot for this movie, set 30 years after *The Return of the Jedi*, is rumored to revolve around Han Solo and Princess Leia's kids. Many actors from the original films are back—along with new, diverse faces.

Our Take: It remains to be seen whether the year's biggest movie will be the year's *best* movie. Now that Disney owns the franchise, expect it to be family friendly. Director J.J. Abrams' commitment to "real-life" special effects—rather than digital ones—offers hope that he'll stay true to the original films.



MUSIC

Title: *Purpose*

Author: Justin Bieber

Synopsis: The 21-year-old singer's fourth album—and much-anticipated "comeback"—has generated lots of buzz. Bieber is collaborating with bigger names, and the first single, "What Do You Mean?" debuted at #1—a first for him.

Our Take: Beware. Bieber seemed to gain fame and fortune before knowing his true identity and "purpose," and his poor choices have been well-documented. Bieber's fans, known as Beliebers, remain faithful, though parents are watching to see if he's changed. In the past, the singer has been vocal about his Christian faith, and he's reportedly been consulting with religious advisers.



CULTURE & TRENDS

STEAM-Inspired Toys Many parents are introducing kids to science, technology, engineering, arts, and math through play. Toys that spur curiosity and creativity include Project Mc2 dolls, which come with science-experiment kits. The dolls also star in their own Netflix show. (*fortune.com*)

Safe or Sorry? With school shootings on the rise, lockdown and active-shooter drills are the new fire drill. But some experts say those scare students unnecessarily and take resources from other crime-prevention areas, such as sexual abuse. (*huffingtonpost.com*)

Games, Sites & Apps

Fish, Fish, Squish!

In this board game by Winning Moves, the goal is to be the last person with an "unsquished" dough fish. Gameplay also involves matching cards, so kids work on their memory. The game, which takes about 20 minutes, is for ages 5 and up.

American Folklore

At AmericanFolklore.net, parents and children can learn about folktales, myths, and fairy tales from throughout the United States—and from various cultures. The site also features riddles and tongue twisters. Just beware that one section of the site features ghost stories.

David Wiesner's Spot

The Caldecott-winning picture-book creator merges art and tech in this visual adventure. Kids explore tiny worlds through an iPad's pinch-and-zoom features. With its character and depth, this app promises "worlds" of fun for users (ages 4 and up, \$4.99).

QUICK STATS

Older Adoptees Almost 20% of kids who are adopted these days are preteens. Yet each year about 23,000 kids "age out" of the foster-care system; in other words, they turn 18 before being placed in a permanent home. (*psychcentral.com*)

Low-Tech Joys Don't rush out to splurge on e-readers for your kids this holiday season. Two-thirds of 6- to 8-year-olds still prefer paper books over ebooks—and the same number say they'll always prefer traditional tomes. (*scholastic.com*)

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This page is designed to help educate parents and isn't meant to endorse any movie, music, or product. Our prayer is that you'll make informed decisions about what your children watch, read, listen to, and play.