



the Parent LINK

Children's Ministry Edition



December 2011

Family Ministries
www.gatheraround.org



POWERSOURCE

ASK GOD:

1. To bless your Christmas preparations and to ready your hearts for his arrival.
2. To help your family stay focused on Jesus during the holidays.
3. To replace stress and busyness with calm and peace, so you can treasure family time.

Try New Christmas Faith-Boosters

The most wonderful time of the year is a wonderful time to share Jesus—and why he came to earth—with your children. Instead of getting caught up in the holiday rush, focus on what Christmas truly means. Use the Advent season (the weeks of preparation before Christmas) to engage in old and new traditions, make simple crafts, have discussions, and worship Jesus, our newborn King.

Faith-boosters needn't be elaborate or time-consuming. Instead, use materials you already have to reinforce the good news that the angels shared on the first Christmas Eve: Jesus, our Savior, is born!

After you've shared this message with your children, look for simple ways to spread Christmas joy as a family. From caroling and delivering cookies to sending cards and inviting neighbors to programs or concerts, the possibilities are endless for letting your light shine as you celebrate Jesus, the Light of the world.

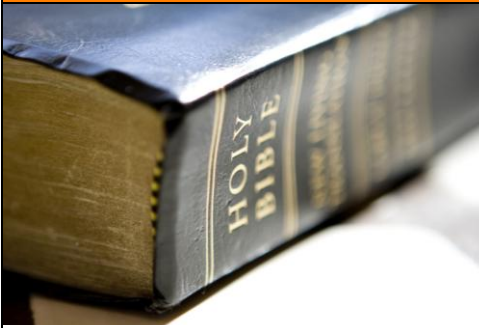
INSIGHTS

- In a poll conducted in the U.K., 24% of children ages 7 to 11 said Christmas was about giving, rather than receiving, presents.

(Daily Mail)

- When asked about the true meaning of Christmas, 70% of children said it's about celebrating the birth of Christ, 39% said it's about being thankful, 37% said it's about spending time with family, and 13% said it's about receiving gifts.

(KidzEyes.com)



So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. (John 1:14)

At Christmas, we celebrate the good news that God became flesh, in the form of Jesus, to die for our sins.

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

1. Wrap Race—You'll need some empty boxes and gift-wrapping supplies. Form teams and have them race to wrap an imaginary gift for the whole world (such as peace) in the shortest time possible. Afterward, discuss what gifts you'd like to give and why.

2. Chapter Chain—Encourage family members to spend more time exploring God's word. From Thanksgiving until Christmas, give out a red or green construction paper link for every chapter of the Bible someone reads (or listens to). On Christmas Eve, hang the chain as a special birthday gift to Jesus.



3. O Christmas Tree—Tie a red ribbon around the head of a concrete nail, and tie the ends of the ribbon into a knot to form a loop. Hang the ornament on your Christmas tree. Talk about how baby Jesus wasn't only born for us but was born to die for us—on a tree.

While engaging in Christmas festivities, start a conversation by asking these questions:

1. What are your favorite Christmas traditions, and why? How do our traditions help us remember the real meaning of Christmas?
2. What are some ways we can add service and outreach to our Christmas celebrations?
3. How would you explain Christmas to someone who didn't know anything about Jesus?

FAMILY EXPERIENCE

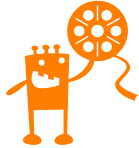
Add a meaningful new twist to your Christmas celebrations by trying these ideas:

• **Unwrap the Story**—Start a new tradition as you unpack your family's crèche, or nativity scene. Let each person pull out one or two wrapped figures without peeking to see what's inside. Take turns unwrapping figures. When someone adds a figure to the scene, have him or her say a prayer of thanks for the role that figure played in Jesus' birth. For example, the person holding the stable might say, "Thank you that there was at least a stable nearby where Jesus could be born." The person with a shepherd might say, "Thank you that the shepherds went and told lots of people about Jesus' birth."



After the scene is complete, discuss the role we all can play in preparing for Jesus' birth and in telling people why Jesus came to earth.

• **Parable Ornaments**—Make a different ornament each week that reflects a parable from the Bible. For week one, pour salt into clear ball ornaments (Matthew 5:13). For week two, pour mustard seeds into clear ball ornaments (Matthew 17:20). For week three, tie Goldfish crackers in netting (Matthew 13:47). For week four, pour sunflower seeds into clear ball ornaments (Matthew 13:37). Print the verses and tie them to the ornaments. Then hang the ornaments on a small Christmas tree as a powerful reminder of Jesus' life and teachings.



MEDIA MADNESS



MOVIES

Movie: *The Adventures of Tintin*

Genre: Animated adventure

Rating: PG (for adventure-action violence, some drunkenness and brief smoking)

Cast: Jamie Bell, Daniel Craig

Synopsis: In this motion-capture film based on comic books, a boy and a captain go on a treasure hunt to find a sunken ship.

Our Take: With Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson at the helm, *Tintin* is being hailed as a “must-see” family movie this Christmas.



MUSIC

Artist: Aaron Shust

Album: *This Is What We Believe*

Artist Info: Shust, a church worship leader, won several Dove Awards for his 2005 folk-driven album *Anything Worth Saying*.

Summary: The singer-songwriter’s fourth album contains several heartfelt worship anthems, including “My Hope Is in You.” The moving video is available on YouTube.

Our Take: Shust’s powerful tunes and lyrics will help listeners of all ages celebrate God’s power and love.



CULTURE & TRENDS

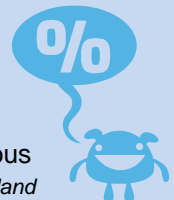
- Last year, 36% of kids ages 10 or 11 owned a cell phone. That number has more than doubled since 2005. Boys are more likely than girls to perform “data-intensive” activities with their phones, such as browsing the Web and downloading games. *(Mediamark, NY Times)*

- Before heading to the ER with their sick children, more parents are now logging in. One in eight parents now checks the Internet for medical information before plunking down an emergency-room copay. *(Reuters)*

QUICK STATS

- Only 4% of adults ages 25 to 34 in the U.K. believe that the most important part of Christmas is the religious meaning. *(Church of England Newspaper)*

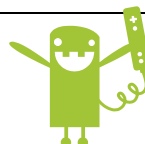
- According to a new study, preschoolers who have trouble resisting temptation and delaying gratification are more likely than their more-patient peers to become adults who lack self-control. *(HealthDay)*



GAMES & SITES

Title	Content	Rating & Platform
<i>Skylander: Spyro's Adventure</i>	This action-adventure game is pricey because it comes with collectible action figures and a sock puppet. Contains cartoon violence.	E10+; Xbox 360, Playstation 3, Nintendo 3DS, Wii,
<i>Centipede Infestation</i>	In this reboot of the classic arcade game, players must kill as many creepy, crawly critters as they can in numerous rounds of play.	E10+; Nintendo 3DS, Wii
<i>FactMonster.com</i>	This free website from Information Please provides a wide range of resources for students, including a “Homework Center” reference desk.	Geared toward elementary and middle-school students

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, listen to, and wear.





December



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24 Christmas Eve
25 Christmas Day	26	27	28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve