

# Parent pages



Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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## Conquering the Christmas Gimmies

**“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshiped him . . .” Matt. 2:11a**

**E**very Christmas sermon, Christmas hymn, and children’s Christmas service reminds us that Jesus is the focus of Christmas. God, in His perfect agape love, came down to earth as a baby to save us from the sinful world we live in and help create. Our response to this immeasurable gift is to worship Him.

**“ . . . Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.” Matt 2: 11b**

This, however, is the half of the verse that our society has latched onto in order to create the Christmas sales season. We have twisted this simple act of worship into something that serves our own desires and furthers the local economy.

Christmas has become about gift-giving and spending more money than we have. We have wrapped the Baby Jesus

up in ribbons and bows and tucked Him under the tree behind the doll that talks, the gift cards, and the mp3 players.

Our challenge is to live in the world *but not be a part of the world*. It is definitely a challenge to keep our children sheltered from the world on this matter. The “gimmies” are everywhere— on television, radio, computer, in the words of friends, and in the examples of us as parents. We live in a materialistic society that thrives when money

is spent. We are daily encouraged to believe that we need things to be happy. Why should our children be exempt from these same pressures and influences?

Yet, we cannot surrender to the world. We are children of God and His Spirit lives in us, feeding our faith and showing us the way to the Baby Jesus and His

saving love. As we begin the season of Advent, let your prayer, your worship, and the Word of God help you to keep the Baby Jesus as the true gift of Christmas.

Worship is the key to modeling for our



children the true reason for Christmas. December is a very busy time, and dealing with busyness is often a matter of priorities. The world is telling you to shop, and bake, and shop, and decorate the house, and shop, and pack up gifts for mailing—and did I mention shop? God whispers in your heart to come to Him and worship. Plan on family attendance of advent services and be faithful to your family devotion schedule. God’s Word will feed you and fill your heart, keeping the influences of the world at bay.

Environment is a key influence on a child’s development. Evaluate your Christmas decorations. Are they about

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Santa and gifts or do your decorations promote a heart of worship? Perhaps your Santa decorations can be the subject of a family devotion. You can use them to explain to your children that Santa is the world's invention, but Baby Jesus is God. This message will be brought into focus when you light the candles on your family Advent wreath.

Remember this when you are watching TV or shopping with your children, and use these opportunities to remind them about the faith side of the holiday. Remember that advertisers are working overtime to reach your family with their take on the season. You, however, work with the power of the Spirit.

Set pre-determined limits for gift giving as a way to counteract the gimmies. Before our children were old enough to count and compare gifts, my husband and I decided that each member of our family would receive one gift from each other. That kept our gift giving down to three gifts each.

Changing a gift-giving policy when children are used to piles of gifts is a challenge. Again, this is a great topic for family devotions. The Spirit will help your family to see that getting gifts is not what Christmas is about. Bring your children into the gift-giving process so they can derive enjoyment from choosing a special present for Dad or Sister.

Purchase extra gifts for people in your community who do not have the means for gift-giving at this time of the year. God will help you replace the "gimmies" with a heart of gratitude that enjoys giving.

Many children who demonstrate a raging case of the "gimmies" have difficulty hearing and accepting the word "no." Many of these children have equated asking for, and getting things, with asking for, and getting love. This is an issue that

is bigger than Christmas; it is a faith issue and needs to be addressed. As adults, we know that God loves us even when He says "no" to our requests. Children need to recognize this also.

If your children balk or pout about fewer gifts or throw a fit when you deny them something they do not need, they need to hear "no" and to be assured that you love them even when you are not giving in to their demands. This is not an easy lesson to teach and sometimes results in embarrassing reactions in very public places.

We remember that God loves us even when our children are screaming or pouting. Christmas reminds us that God sent His Son to live among us, making His love the only gift we really need.

But what about the Santa issue? Some traditions have St. Nicholas related to religion, but the Santa we see at the mall has very little to do with the Baby in the manger. My husband and I did not teach our children about Santa, but, curiously enough, they both chose to believe in him anyway.

The Santa story is a fun part of Christmas tradition for many families. Participating in this tradition is a decision that each family makes for itself. Be careful to keep Santa in his place. If you use Santa

as law (he's watching you so you better be good) you have brought Santa into the religious equation where he does not belong.

When children are old enough to shed their "belief" in Santa, he can be an illustration of the presence of faith. Remind your children that at Christmas you hear two stories: one about a baby in a manger and one about a man in a red suit. When we are young we believe both stories, but as we grow older we begin to doubt the truth in a fat man traveling down a chimney. Both stories have details that are hard to believe, but we do believe the story with God in a manger and a sky full of angels because that God has put faith in our hearts.

That is a gift that Santa can't give. It is a gift that only comes to us from God through His word and sacraments.



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## Questions for discussion

1. List your family traditions and determine which ones promote worship and which promote a secular view of Christmas.
2. Explore some possibilities for change in your traditions. Do some need to be dropped or can they be adjusted to have a new focus?
3. What new traditions could you develop that keep your hearts focused on Baby Jesus?

## Resources:

- *Celebrate Jesus! at Christmas*, Kimberly Ingalls Reese, CPH ([www.cph.org](http://www.cph.org)).

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