

FAMILIES FIRST

NEWSLETTER

Assisting Parents with the Spiritual Formation of Their Children

CHRISTMAS IS FOR KIDS

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Parental Caution

New movie release, **The Golden Compass** offers concerns that parents should research before allowing your children to view it. It is written by devote atheist, Philip Pullman. While rated PG13, there is concern of much violence toward children and a fear of adults is created. Check out www.parentpreviews.com.

Christmas is for kids and parents alike, but sometimes the stressfulness of the season takes away from the pleasure. I look forward to this special time every year, but soon become overwhelmed with trying to get all the shopping done, the presents wrapped, the cookies baked, and then find time to celebrate and spend time with family and friends.

When we begin our families, I think we have in our minds that we will be the perfect parents and make every Christmas the best ever. We have grand ideas about what the perfect Christmas season will include and we do all that we have to do to make the holidays special. We need to remember that the most important thing we can do to make the most of our holiday is to slow down and savor this special time. A recent article in the December issue of *Parents* magazine gave some great tips on how to slow down and enjoy the holidays.

The most important tip is to not try to do everything this holiday season. I can relate to this as my to-do list is often overflowing with everything that needs to be done before the holiday gatherings begin. Just looking at the list can send my stress level sky high. Children, especially infants, can sense this stress and adopt it themselves. Remember that your child will probably not know that all the Christmas cookies didn't get baked or that every decoration didn't get put out this year. Along this same line, when children are young, there is no need to overwhelm them with a ton of gifts. When they are little, they don't grasp the concept of gifts yet and will not remember whether they get one gift or ten.

It's also important to try to stay on your young child's schedule as much as possible. Schedule shopping outings and parties around their nap

schedules, meals, or cranky times. Often with young children it is easier to schedule gatherings after the children go to bed.

You should also expect for your young children to experience stranger anxiety. Often the holidays are filled with visiting friends and family that aren't seen on a regular basis. Remember that it can be overwhelming to meet so many new people. Ask relatives to take their time getting to know your child before attempting to pick them up. Be sure to ask people who are going to be touching your child to wash their hands and ask them to keep their distance if they are feeling under the weather.

The most important thing to remember during the craziness of the Christmas season is to not lose sight of the true reason for the season. The one thing we should make time for is to celebrate the birth of Jesus. While we are all busy, there is often time that we don't think about, like while we are waiting in the long checkout lines or while we are doing holiday baking, that we could use to talk with our children. Talk to them about Mary and Joseph, the donkey ride to Bethlehem, or the angels' that heralded the news of the birth of the Savior; teach them Christmas carols celebrating these things, such as *Joy to the World* and *Away in a Manager*; read them stories about Jesus' birth. By relaxing and toning down the stressfulness of the holidays, both you and your children will be better able to truly enjoy the wonderful season.



Shelly Kopcak

Parenting Over Christmas



So often over the Christmas season you will hear that Christ was born in a stable.

You will see nativities showing the same thing. Many people will explain that it was really a cave, where animals were kept. Those who are most learned may even talk about a division between the livestock and a sleeping compartment for the shepherds. Most of this is conjecture because in the scriptures there was no mention of a stable anywhere in Luke. Looking at when Jesus was born might give us a better picture of where, and add a valuable lesson for the Christmas season.

The scriptures say that Zachariah, who was a priest “of the division of Abijah,” was at the temple for the “appointed order of his division.” There are some differing opinions how this falls in the year but the historian Josephus, who was a priest himself, tells us that each of the twenty four divisions served for one week. Of course each division would come up again during the second half of the year. There are three festival weeks that every priest would need to serve at the temple each year, which are Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. ($24 \times 2 + 3 = 51$ weeks in the Jewish calendar) Zachariah’s week to serve (the 8th) falls immediately before Pentecost, so he would have remained another week to serve with all the other priests. Adding nine months for John’s birth, and six

months for the difference between Jesus’ and John’s ages, places Jesus birth in late September. March is the other possibility but September is confirmed by the census (you would tax people after they have just finished harvesting) and by the overcrowded inns (people would be traveling for the major festival of tabernacles while there is no corresponding festival in March.) Also, sheep normally would be in the corrals after mid October, so the possibility of an early winter birth is pretty remote.

All this information on when Jesus was born has an impact on where Jesus was born. More than likely Jesus was born in a temporary structure made especially for the feast of Tabernacles. This temporary structure that was built for the express purpose of reminding the Jewish nation how God had provided for them in the wilderness after they came out of Egypt. The entire nation was to build crude huts in their front lawns and live in them for seven days. The idea was to remove themselves from reliance on things, and remember God’s provision. Looking at our own consumerism and the presents under the Christmas tree we would do well to look to God’s design and “go without” this holiday season. How can we teach our children about reliance on God when we rely on things to produce a “Merry Christmas?”

Joe Rea



CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

My last year in college I lived in a sorority house with 8 girls, one girl in particular, Melanie, I wasn't close to at the beginning of the year, but that changed as the year went on. At Christmas she surprised me. She said that she and her boyfriend weren't giving each other presents, but instead had adopted 2 kids off of a Christmas tree and were going to go shopping together and would buy the kids presents instead of each other. She said, "after all, wouldn't God want us to give to others who really need it? I don't really need anything." It would surprise me when she said these things. She didn't go to church very often, but as I learned, she did have a close relationship with God.

When I look back on Christmas as a child, I remember two things, Christmas Eve service and Christmas morning with my family. I remember how beautiful the Christmas Eve service was, how I loved the music, and when everyone had a candle. I remember racing my brothers home from church to see if we could walk all the way back to our house without letting our lights go out. I remember Christmas morning, reading the Christmas story with our family, and the excitement of cookies with breakfast (only once a year) and all of the presents.

Just recently I remembered this conversation, and as I look back on my childhood, I want my kids to have the same sort of memories as I do. Of

Christmas Eve service, of cookies for breakfast, of talking about the true meaning of Christmas, and of course presents. But, I want them to remember giving away for Christmas too. We haven't started the tradition yet, but just like my friend Melanie (who still does this now with her now husband), I want us to remember that there are others who would really appreciate a gift for Christmas, who might not get anything else.

I challenge you in the midst of the Christmas craziness to celebrate the presence of the Christ child. Take time to read the Christmas story with your kids, to make an advent wreath, to help them see past the commercialism of the season, and remember Christ. Then, find something you can do as a family to celebrate Christ and share with others. Maybe you already packed Operation Christmas Child boxes, or maybe you could help serve dinner to the homeless, maybe you could adopt a child, or bring mittens for the mitten tree. Talk about something that excites your family and do it together. Because just like my brothers and I raced out of the church to see if we could make it home without our lights going out, we are called to go out into the world and let our light shine for the Christ child.

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