



# Bulletin

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Merry Christmas!

## THE PERFECT GIFT

BY KAY WILLS WYMA

WHEN WE WERE KIDS, MY SISTER AND I KNEW THAT THE CHRISTMAS season had arrived when the Sears catalog arrived. We'd flip pages and clip items to arrange on our gift lists. Come Christmas Eve, we fully expected to find the goods beneath the tree, hidden in bright boxes.

Children throughout the generations have delighted in the excitement of Christmas gifts. And then there is the truth that Christmas is about the Gift that cost the Giver everything—the gift of a Savior.

It seems that Christmas moves us toward competing behaviors. On one side, we praise God for the birth of our Savior. On the other side we . . . scramble. And shop. And delight in all the loot. Around our house, the moods on Christmas Day are often directly dependent on the perfection of the gifts received. Those gifts are talked about with friends for weeks on end. How many conversations begin with, “What did you get for Christmas?”

I want my kids to experience more of the truth behind Christmas so our family can be freed from the culture's tradition of making it about ourselves and the things we accumulate. I want them to genuinely celebrate and worship—and yet still enjoy the gifts they receive in remembrance of God's perfect Gift.

**I have a relationship with God. How do I pass that on to my children?**

**ANSWER:**

How do young children learn about relationships? By watching and talking and interacting with you. Explain that just as the closeness between you and your children grows as you spend time talking, so closeness to God grows with prayer—which is simply talking to Him.

Let children know that God hears them and wants to help them, just as you hear and want to help. But God is much bigger than you are, and He knows best how to take care of them. They can talk to Him about anything; God loves to hear from them, just as you do. And since being close to God is so important, talking with Him needs to go on the list of things we do every day.

- Before your children have learned to talk, let them hear you pray as often as you can. In addition to mealtimes and bedtimes, try praying at “odd” times—perhaps when you're carrying them from the car to their room as they're falling asleep, or when you have encountered a beautiful sunset during a walk. As you establish the habit, they'll be more likely to pick it up.
- As much as possible, let praying be easy and enjoyable—even fun. To fit attention spans at younger ages, try keeping prayers short and to the point.
- Be yourself. Prayer doesn't have to be formal or use certain words. Favor words and language that are part of their normal, everyday speech—and yours. Requiring formal, unfamiliar language implies that God is “foreign”

and unknowable, and that your children must put on an act to be in His presence.

- For younger children, it's likely that you'll say the prayers and your children will listen. Let them know that these are *their* prayers.
- Pray about anything and everything, especially things that already interest your children.
- From time to time, remind children why you're praying—and to whom. Remind them that God is really there, listening, and that they don't have to work hard to get their prayers through to Him. He's ready and willing to answer.

(Adapted from the *Parents' Guide to the Spiritual Growth of Children*, general editors John Trent, Rick Osborne and Kurt Bruner)



Tough  
Questions  
from Kids

Why did an  
angel come  
to Mary?

## TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM KIDS

**ANSWER:**

The angel told Mary that God wanted her to know that she would be the mother of Jesus, God's Son. When Mary heard the news, she was frightened, but she also wanted to obey God. And she felt very honored to be Jesus' mother.



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## OUR LOVE JOURNAL

I'd been married only one year when I opened an empty journal and wrote my husband, Jeff, a love letter. I told him I was starting a new tradition: Each Christmas I committed to expressing my love, describing my favorite memories and recording Jeff's loving actions in the pages of this journal.

Three decades later, my husband's book of love is almost full. Each year, I've added to the journal and placed it under the tree. This longstanding tradition helps me pause during the season's chaos and thank God for my husband and for a marriage that has thrived—with God's help—despite the challenges and sorrows of life.

—Julie Holmquist

## A CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

One of my family's most memorable Christmases occurred when our first son was just over a year old. My wife, Jean, had learned she was pregnant again but wanted to wait until Christmas morning to tell me. When the day finally arrived, I opened a present that contained the blue-and-white hospital cap that Trent had worn when he was born.

"Are we having another baby?" I asked, but the tears of joy in Jean's eyes already told me the answer. We hugged and screamed with delight.

As we celebrated the new addition to our family, I was reminded that God's ultimate Gift to mankind—and indeed, the reason we celebrate Christmas at all—came in the form of a baby. Christ "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). Christmas is more than a celebration of Christ's birth; it's a reminder of His life, death and resurrection on our behalf.

—Jim Daly



Focus on the Family's free 2018 Advent calendar, "Knowing Him by Name," includes meaningful devotions and activities that will help you draw a little closer to Jesus each day as you learn more about His names. Learn more at [FocusOnTheFamily.com/advent](http://FocusOnTheFamily.com/advent).

## CHRISTMASTIME EXPENSES



It's no surprise that money is a stress during the holidays. There are just so many extra things to spend money on. In recent years, my efforts to make Christmas special for my family had resulted in me overspending and overpromising. And as I talked with other parents, I discovered that, for many of us, our Christmastime expenses had gotten to be too much.

No matter your family's financial situation, a few smart decisions can help reduce money stress this time of year, helping to give you and your family the capacity to focus on why we celebrate and Who we worship.

**Make a family budget.** This seems so obvious, but few of us actually set a final spending limit for the season. No wonder the pursuit of unrealistic expectations sends the budget spiraling out of control. Decide with your spouse what total spending you'll be comfortable with. Then work backward, assigning specific amounts to every area. Gifts, travel costs and big-meal budgets—try to put a dollar amount on every category, even if you allow a little wiggle room. In January, you'll thank yourselves for this limit.

**Avoid comparisons.** Our actual Christmas spending should reflect our family's actual budget. There will be families who can spend more and those who can spend less. We must avoid the temptation to compare what others are spending. Whether that means a social media hiatus, not talking with your neighbors about shopping or making a list of all the material things you are grateful for this year, you want to focus on what you do have, not on what you don't.

**Limit gifts.** It is almost impossible to capture the wonder of the Christ child if we're overextended. Yet, as parents, we are often tempted to give our kids whatever is on their wish list. Set limits on the number of gifts and spending per child. The younger your kids, the easier this will be. If older kids are going to feel a change from years past, take the opportunity to have conversations about realistic spending, needs vs. wants and God's provision for your family.

Throughout your talks, help your kids remember that the season is about God's great Gift to us, how the baby Jesus launched God's plan to save the world. No gift we offer can compare to that.

—Alexandra Kuykendall