



DO WE STILL BELIEVE IN SANTA CLAUS?

By Jim Vogt

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I was riding in the car with my children recently when my six-year-old daughter leaned over to me and whispered some of her ideas about how we should arrange the gifts on Christmas morning. She explained her whispering by adding: “Dacian (her four year old brother) still believes in Santa Claus.” I was struck both by her pride in being able to discuss Christmas planning with the adults and by her concern that her brother’s fantasy not be shattered.

In reflecting on her comment, I started to wonder about Santa Claus. My wife and I – along with many other couples I’m sure – have always been somewhat unsure about how to deal with the issue of Santa Claus. In so many ways, Santa Claus has come to symbolize the materialistic, “what am I gonna get” approach to Christmas that pervades our cultural celebration of that day. Yet on the other hand, Santa is one of those fantasies that often is important in the child’s world as he or she grows up. We have ended up dealing with the issue mainly by not making much of a fuss over Santa Claus. If our children ended up believing in Santa, that’s okay. If not, we don’t see that harming their appreciation of Christmas. For example, we have never promoted Santa as the one who brings the Christmas gifts. Nor have we ever made a special trip to “visit Santa” at the stores. And while each of our children has believed in Santa, it’s not been the obstacle we feared in their appreciating the deeper meaning of Christmas.

But I feel a greater concern – do we adults still believe in Santa Claus? Are we still hanging on to the secular culture’s attitude toward Christmas that Santa has come to symbolize? I’d suggest that adult Christians who have really quit believing in Santa Claus would have put aside the following attitudes:

1. Christmas is for kids. While Christmas is perhaps the biggest day of the year for most children, in some ways it can trivialize the Christian celebration of the day to see it primarily as an event for them. Unless Christmas is a significant time for us adults, I doubt it can really mean much to our children, no matter how many toys or how much attention they receive.

2. Buying gifts and gift giving is the central focus of Christmas. Unless Christmas is a time for us to be with others, rather than buy something for them, all our gift giving is rather empty and meaningless. Christmas should be a time for renewing and deepening relationships.

3. Christmas is a time for giving food baskets to the poor. This isn’t a bad idea, but it’s not enough. Ideally, Christmas should be a time for reassessing our whole attitude toward the poor and how we might better express our concern for the poor throughout the *whole* year. Of course, there is value in sharing with the poor by giving food baskets. But if that’s the *only* thing we do for the poor during the year, or worse, if at other times we curse the poor for their laziness or lack of motivation, then the Christmas basket is best forgotten.

4. Christmas is a time of hectic preparation and families on-the-go. While to a certain extent the frenetic pace of our holiday celebration is inevitable, it ought to be balanced by adequate time for relaxation, reflection, and prayer. If all our time is filled with shopping, cooking, partying, etc., when have we left time for the presence of Jesus to seep ever more deeply into our being?