

Benevolent Fictional Patrons of Important Christian Holidays

This article was written as part of the blog, Happily Even After, by Josh and Stacey Noem on USCCB's For Your Marriage website.

Someone at work recently asked me if the Easter bunny still visits our house (our youngest is in third grade). I replied, "Our kids are pretty smart. They know when they have a good thing going, so they don't ask unnecessary questions."

In other words, we have an unspoken "don't ask, don't tell" policy. While we don't go over the top to encourage the fiction (such as the elf on a shelf nonsense), we also give due diligence to preserve it by hiding gifts and baskets.

Not insignificantly, this policy gets us off the hook of ever having to overtly acknowledge to our kids that part of their childhood has been a lie. The Easter bunny and Santa simply are one of those things that they will have to figure out and make their own decisions about. They will face many similar situations—it is part of growing up.

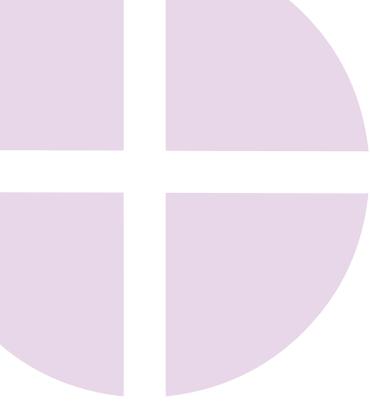
We do our utmost to ensure that the most important realities of the Christian holidays are not overshadowed by these characters—our kids are crystal clear about what these feasts mean for our faith and religious practice. The Easter bunny and Santa are obvious side-shows to our observance of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, so I guess it honestly hasn't been important to us to make a decision about whether and how to tell them the truth.



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We invest a lot of time and energy into Advent and Lent, so when Christmas and Easter come around, we are prepared to celebrate them properly and whole-heartedly. Those preparation seasons include more intensive moments of family prayer (10-15 minutes of quiet prayer individually each night before our normal night prayers), and intentional acts of service, almsgiving, and fasting. In comparison, visits by the Easter bunny and Santa Claus end up feeling like a game we play together—at least at this point of the kids' lives.

The pretense is starting to wear thin. I was caught writing clues for the scavenger hunt created by the Easter bunny to lead each child to their basket. The kids simply noted that they saw me writing clues and left it at that. I was



contemplating this fading aspect of their childhoods and came to an important conclusion.

Some say that visits by Santa and the Easter bunny and tooth fairy are a way to make a childhood feel “magical”—that anything is possible, and that the world can be surprisingly good—but this hasn’t been a motivator for us to participate in these cultural traditions. In our opinion, childhood is magical enough on its own. Once you watch a kid learn to read, or see siblings caring for each other, or observe the imaginary games they play in the quiet of their room, you know that childhood doesn’t need any artificial enhancement.

We take part in these cultural rituals because they are a way to make plain the hidden ways that we provide for our kids and celebrate that ability. Stacey and I carry full professional workloads in order to provide a safe and welcoming home. Our jobs provide us with food in the fridge and gas in the tank and tuition money and soccer cleats and dog food and winter coats. There is no way for our kids to fully understand and appreciate what we do for our family—it is just part of the air they breathe.

So, we have these benevolent fictional characters who make magical appearances on occasion. They bring good things—surprises and gifts—that inspire wonder in our kids. As parents, we get to see on their faces the joy and gratitude that we all feel—all of us—for our ability to provide for the things we need.

And in the face of the great gifts we’ve been given by God through Jesus—mysteries into which our children are very well initiated—the Easter bunny and Santa Claus are a way for us all to play together and rejoice.