



The myth of Father Christmas?



‘What should I tell my children about Father Christmas?’ ‘Would pretending that Father Christmas was real damage them – or cause them to doubt the truth of the Christmas story?’ These were questions I asked myself when my children were born and we approached our first Christmas. My desire was to create fun and meaningful family traditions which would build good foundations in their lives, alongside teaching them the truth of the gospel with the hope that they would one day decide to follow the Lord for themselves. My dilemma was would going along with the myth of Father Christmas – and the tooth fairy and numerous other fairy tales and pantomimes – hinder or help these desires, which I believe were good and right.

I love Christmas preparations! I enjoy the lights and decorations, buying and wrapping presents and especially Christmas services, Carols by Candlelight and Christingle services being the highlights of the season. As in many families, there were tensions around the Christmas season, who and where to spend Christmas Day and how to blend the expectations of different generations, but that didn’t mar my excitement when we reached 1st December and I could put the tree up!

I wanted my children to enjoy Christmas and look back with fond memories when they had their own families so my decision was to do both. They visited Father Christmas at various garden centres and school parties, both with ourselves and their grandparents, and hung stockings on the fireplace on Christmas Eve – he wasn’t allowed in their bedrooms as they didn’t like the idea of that! We also read them the biblical Christmas story, had nativity decorations in our home and made church services and events an important part of our Christmas celebrations.

As the children got older I resolved not to lie to them. I never told them that Father Christmas was real, I simply enjoyed him with them as with other fairy tales, and, when they got to the age of asking questions about how he got down the chimney or was in so many places at once, I simply reflected the questions back to them and asked what they thought. However, when we talked about the biblical story I would talk about my own beliefs and experiences of God.

As their understanding grew and the realisation that he was a fairy tale we played a game of pretend – they knew Father Christmas wasn’t real and they knew I knew they knew but we kept the fantasy going for a while, partly for the younger sibling and partly to make sure they still got their stocking on Christmas morning! We have had many a chuckle about this in later years and one day my eldest daughter told me of an incident which had made her wonder if he could be real after all. We spent one Christmas at my in-laws’ house, a lovely big house with a real fire. On Christmas Eve her granddad had left out the sherry and mince pie for Father Christmas and a carrot for Rudolph as usual. After the girls had gone to bed he ate the goodies then moved the grate from in front of the fire, took off his shoe and left sooty footprints all over the white fur rug in front of the fire. The following morning the girls were enchanted by this and, as they couldn’t believe their grandma would let anyone do that to her rug, concluded that Father Christmas had indeed come down their chimney in the night!

My children are both adults now. My youngest daughter is involved in the children’s work at her church, teaching the next generation of children the truth of the Christmas story, and my eldest daughter has children on her own. I’ve bought my grandchildren age appropriate Christian storybooks for Christmas each year and enjoy reading and explaining the Christmas story to them. I also enjoy



taking them to see Father Christmas. My belief and experience is that Father Christmas is an important part of our children's tradition and heritage, provided he is kept in his right place and we teach them the truth and the meaning of the birth of Jesus.

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