

FOCUS – Happy Easter to your neighbor

by Amanda Reardon, Captain –



I started writing this column about six years ago. One of my first pieces was about Easter; I remember reflecting that no matter how hard the marketplace tried, it couldn't secularize Easter. Christmas, on the other hand, had been successfully wrung of its true meaning. Santa Claus replaced Christ. "Peace on Earth, goodwill to men" was retained as a slogan, not a Scripture verse.

But things have changed over the past few years. It seems as though enough plush bunnies have been manufactured and "Happy Spring" has been declared so frequently, that even Easter has been sucked dry of any significance.

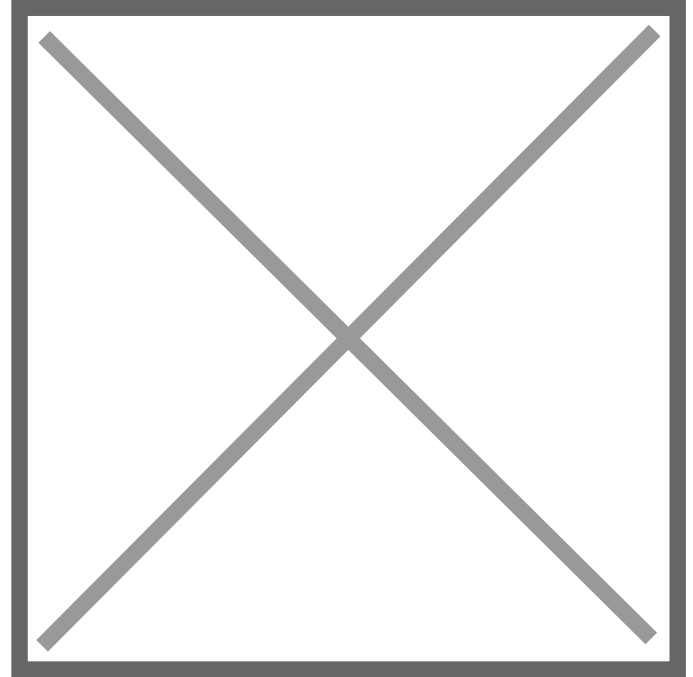
Now, I know that many readers wish to remind me at this point that Easter was originally a pagan celebration. Our resurrection celebration was linked with the date of the pagan holiday (and, of course, Passover). Though some may find it offensive, we adapted the name of "Easter"; it became synonymous with "Resurrection Day." Not a bad idea, really, because the holy celebration swallowed up the pagan festival, which was eventually forgotten.

But I guess it could be said that Easter is returning to its pagan roots. More and more, it is a celebration of spring and the new life that season brings. Not the new life Christ brings through his provision of salvation.

And not an acknowledgment that new physical life originates from the Creator God. We are expected to open our curtains, look out at the melting snow and celebrate the emergence of a tulip, as though that tulip were responsible for itself.

Well, I'm not having it. I'm sick of it. I won't let the devil claim Christ's most glorious day. At least, not in my neighborhood.

This year, for the fifth year in a row, the Reardon family will place an Easter basket on the doorstep of each home in our immediate neighborhood. In each basket there will be candy and trinkets, but also a beautiful card that tells the Easter story, and a small magnet that celebrates the resurrection of our



Lord and Savior. This little tradition of ours has opened doors for sharing the Gospel, even with neighbors we didn't previously know.

Some neighbors have been reminded of the Savior they had long neglected, and eventually returned to their churches. We invested a little time, money and creativity, and the yield was great.

Well, that's one idea for reclaiming Easter. I'm cooking up more ideas while there is still time. And I want to encourage you to do the same. Something must be done. Satan is working overtime to obscure the truth of what happened on Resurrection Day—the most important day in all of human history! It was only a few years ago that Easter floundered as a secular holiday, but today there are children who have no idea it has any religious meaning at all. (Were we all sleeping while Satan was working?)

I Peter 1:3,4 says: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade." What joy! Satan wishes to rob you of your elation over the resurrection of Jesus, and replace it with a bunny and chocolates. Don't misunderstand me—there will be chocolate and stuffed bunnies at my house on Easter! But they aren't the focus. Easter Sunday is the happiest day of the year.

We pin our faith on that day. What can we do to make sure that it is Christ who is celebrated on that day? Is it enough that those of us who will be in church will acknowledge him? I don't think so. I believe it is our duty as Christians to see him lifted high on his great day, even within our secular society.

It's disheartening to see how Christians have silenced themselves. We have been inundated by talk of tolerance and separation of church and state until we believe we are without right to speak about Christ publicly. We have become convinced that we can't approach unsaved people and tell them about Christ because we may offend them. We certainly do not want to be ungracious or pushy, turning others away from the message. But let us not be hypnotized by the lies of the enemy. Let us not become spiritual paralytics, feeling that we have been divested of any power or right to share the good news of Christ. Let us remember that we have the truth, and no one who loves his neighbor would refuse to disclose the truth that would save him.

It should be our practice to share our faith whenever and however we can. But at Easter we can share it with a particular sense of joy. At Easter, the good news seems even better, because the emphasis is on victory. And hope.

And your neighbors don't need toy bunnies. They need hope.