

sharper focus “The belief of a child”

By Erin Wikle, Soldier

As I drove toward the grocery store with big plans to stock up on all things Thanksgiving, I noticed the Christmas lights adorning the lampposts and hanging from the electrical lines. During the past three years, these special lights have always made their appearance early in the season, but never quite this early. Nonetheless, I wasn't too surprised. It seems most people have given way to the Christmas season being rushed in while the last few pieces of Halloween candy linger in the pantry. And Thanksgiving? What Thanksgiving?

Seeing the red and green-lit stockings, candy canes, and angels, my nearly 6-year-old Eva asked in a very flat voice, “Why in the world do kids think that Santa brings toys to them? He's not even real.”

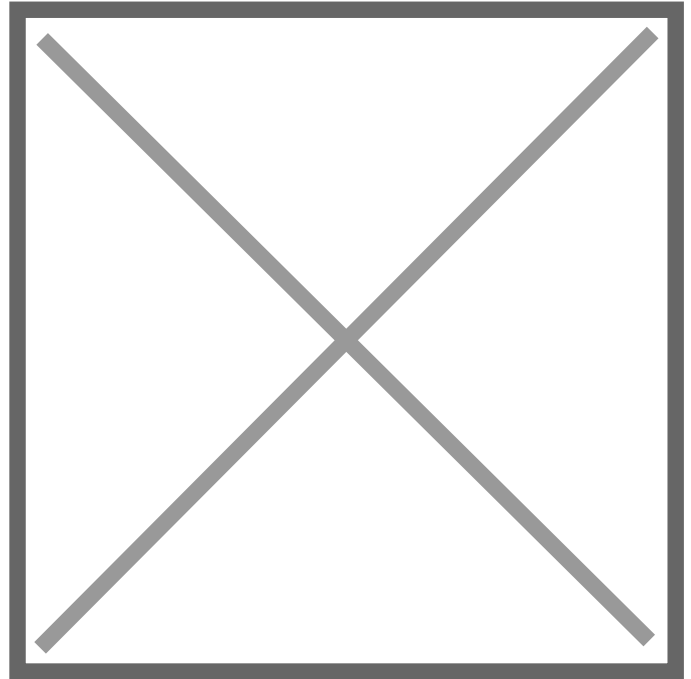
I'm not going to lie, I died a little inside. I wanted to scold her and say, “For crying out loud, can you just be a child for once and live in the magic of the moment?” I quickly recalled being 12 years old and still wanting to “believe” even though deep inside I knew Santa was no more real than was my passion for piano lessons.

I regained composure and addressed her “I'm 6 going on 16” question. I assured her that while she may not believe in Santa, a lot of kids her age did, and it wouldn't be fair to say otherwise to any of her friends.

I wanted Eva to have a magical Christmas experience! I didn't want her to be stripped of her right to believe in someone whimsical. Do we teach our children about Jesus and why his birth was both a necessity and a miracle? Absolutely! But can't we serve up a little side of Santa with our Savior?

In the middle of my moral dilemma, my internal monologue came to a screeching halt.

Things are so different now. The childhood I was recalling, and even projecting on my daughter, was so much simpler. Life was not as it is now; it was much different. Here I was warning little Eva that it wouldn't be fair for her to tell other children Santa wasn't real if they believed he was; that it wouldn't be okay to strip them of their innocence and wonder.



What was I talking about? Life as it is now for so many children means what is “fair” is not an option. I’m talking about children whose spirits have long been broken by the verbal abuse of an unloving mother or father. Children who battle confusion about relationships because their family is “non-traditional.” Children who are entering puberty at a much earlier age and are experiencing a whole world of emotional and physical responses that weren’t meant to occur for years to come. Children who are not just exposed to common addictive substances, but to disturbing images and themes (e.g. vampire series, reality TV), social media, sexting, etc. For so many children, their innocence was stripped long before my daughter had the idea to campaign against Santa Claus.

This shook me. So this is what I decided.

I would far rather expose, preach, live, speak, and be an expression of truth to my daughter than urge her to hold closely to any whimsical notions that, while intrinsically harm no one, don’t offer her life everlasting. And don’t get me wrong; even as I type these words, I realize how much I wish it could be some other way. If our young people are going to have their childlike innocence robbed and “adulthood” thrust upon them, our response must be to cultivate within them a certain understanding of who God is and to believe that their bright minds hold the capacity to grow a “mature” faith.

The reality is this: Jesus is real. And Eva doesn’t need to find comfort and temporary solace in a false identity; she needs to understand and recognize her identity in Christ. This is fair. This is just. Showing her, even at this early age, who Christ is and whom she can be in Christ means equipping her to combat the fallenness of a world that is worse off now than it was when I was 6 years old.

We’ve no time to waste leaving the responsibility of growing our children’s genuine love of the Lord to their Sunday school teacher. We must take seriously the battle that is being waged for the souls of our sweet little ones and protect them from the enemy’s advances by raising them in homes of praise and worship, purity, and obedience to the Lord. Count the cost and join me in committing to be Truth and Light to our youngest disciples.

For a musical chaser to this article, check out “Keep Your Heart Young,” by Brandi Carlile.