

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

SANTA OR THE SACRED: WHICH?

Every once in a while, a sensitive, thoughtful parent will ask me what I think about telling children that there is a Santa Claus who, in a single night, climbs into his sleigh and flies through the air to visit every child in the world. Their concern is that, at some point, their children will grow up and discover that their parents lied to them. Will they ever be able to trust their parents again? Why shouldn't parents just give gifts to their children without telling them an outright lie? *Those are the questions that some well-meaning individuals who want to be good parents have asked me.*

I can appreciate any concern the caring parents have about being honest and, especially, their anxiety over feeling that they are forced to choose between Santa and the Sacred, between Truth (with a capital 'T') and what they describe as "perpetuating nothing more than a myth."

Nothing more than a myth? Really? What if those dear parents, as well as all of us, need to think more deeply about this issue? Of course, Santa Clause *is* a myth, but *rightly understood*, Santa is a great deal *more* than a myth. So what is the more?

First, if you haven't had an opportunity to study one of the Romance languages derived from Latin (e.g., French, Spanish, Italian, etc.) here's something that you might not know: Santa actually means "holy" or "holy one." The problem for most of us is that we have lost the *original* meaning of "Santa." Long ago, Santa Claus (or Saint Nicholas) was created by thoughtful people to represent the *embodiment* of the holy-not to be a secular being completely *foreign* to that which is sacred. Initially, Santa, "the holy one", was envisioned as an ordinary human being whose very nature was godly and whose actions were intended to be an *expression* of God's love working in and through him.

Santa was a very down-to-earth person who allowed himself to become what God has called *all* of us to be: bearers of God's Spirit, expressed lovingly, caringly to all others.

Santa, similar to God, is able to be present everywhere! He has the ability to be in every home throughout the entire world-all on the same night; and his only purpose is to benefit others'.

Santa, similar to God's presence in Jesus, is non-authoritarian and non-dogmatic. Santa doesn't order people around with a my-way-or-the-highway attitude, although he knows what they are doing all the time and, for their own welfare, wants people to be good.

Santa is inclusive, all-embracing: He doesn't require belief in any supposedly "right" doctrines, acceptance of a particular political perspective, involvement in some "correct" world religion, demand an acceptable gender orientation, preferred race, or anything else we humans use as an excuse to distance ourselves from other people we're supposed to love as we love ourselves.

And Santa, the holy one, is, above all, the embodiment of generosity. He exists to give, to make others happy, and, day by day, he and his helpers spend every year attempting to make those lofty goals a possibility.

Finally, Santa, as did Jesus, exhibits a passion for the enjoyment of life. His tummy indicates that he loves good food and drink. Perhaps some might characterize him as "a winebibber and a glutton," just as they did Jesus. Santa, "the holy one," obviously loves a good party, just as did Jesus who is reported to have furnished a copious quantity of extremely qualitative wine for a large crowd. Santa definitely is cheerful and has a great sense of humor. Indeed, his most familiar expression is "Ho, ho, ho!" In that way, also, he is like Jesus who, in the Gnostic gospels, is reported to have relished laughing with his students.

I could give you additional examples, but it is clear that Santa Claus was created to represent, for adults as well as for children, the very qualities that the New Testament attributes to God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. That is why he is holy.

So *rightly understood*, Santa, "the *holy one*," is a deep expression of the *true meaning* of Christmas. If Santa is so understood, we adults will *not* want to abandon our belief in Santa or the purpose for which Santa *originally* was created to exemplify the profound values that Jesus himself taught and lived. Instead, on every Christmas we will explain carefully to our children and grandchildren the deeply *spiritual* significance of Santa, "the holy one." He, following the example of Jesus, allowed the God of Christmas to guide the way in which he lived, not for just one month but throughout the entire year. In doing so, he becomes a sterling role model for each of us.

So we do not *have to* choose between Santa and the sacred. Rightly understood, Santa *embodies* the sacred! Santa and the sacred are fused together into one personality—a goal to which we *all* are called.

Again, Santa Claus as a *historical* figure, *is* a myth; but the example of Santa as "the *holy one*" will live forever as he points both adults and children to the very *essence* of Christmas. After all, myths, as is the case with the wonderful parables of Jesus, are never *historically* true. But, a *spiritually grounded* myth is a story created to highlight a reality that *always* will be true.

Santa *or* the sacred? Thank God we don't have to choose! Instead, perhaps *we* can aspire to become a Santa (a holy one), too. Then, that which appears to be only a myth *will* become a

reality! In this very special season, I send each of you my love and best **wishes** for a profoundly meaningful Christmas.

Your pastor and friend,

John

CHRISTMAS AT CCM

Since our last newsletter was published early in November, *there has been a very important change in our December schedule.*

As you may know, Christmas Day, December 25th, falls on a *Sunday* this year; so we were planning to have a festive worship service on that morning. However, it came to our attention that a number of our members and friends who wanted to be present for the annual Christmas worship gathering will be out of town for family gatherings on December 25th.

As a result of the aforementioned helpful information, we discussed the issue at our Enlightenment Session in November and decided to have our Christmas service on the Sunday *before* Christmas December 18th. That not only will make it possible for persons to participate who would not have been able to do so on December 25th, it also will enable the Seven Oaks staff at our meeting place to be with *their* families on Christmas Day, instead of having to leave them to open the building and set up for our gathering.

So please note the change: Our Annual Christmas Worship and Candle Lighting Ceremony will take place on Sunday, December 18th *instead* of December 25th. That will be our *only* gathering in December and our last worship opportunity in 2016! So please join us for this very special occasion.

John's seasonal message will be entitled, "THE *HIDDEN* MEANING OF CHRISTMAS." Because the most *profound* meaning of the biblical Christmas accounts tends to be missed, even by the majority of faithful, every Sunday church attendee, the Christmas sermon this year promises to be of *particular* value. Why? That which often is hidden will be made joyfully evident!

As usual, the service will begin at 10:00 a.m.; and since we traditionally do not have our after the service discussion time on a Christmas Sunday, we will adjourn a little earlier than usual (around 11:30 a.m. or earlier); However, anyone who wishes to join a group of us to go to lunch after worship is welcome to do so!

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Years ago a member of CCM, now living in North Carolina, had a birthday that fell on December 25. She said that nobody ever paid any attention to her birthday "because everyone was so busy celebrating Christmas. Two of our present members are more fortunate because *their* birthday occurs early enough in the month not to be obscured by other festive events! So we wish for Dr. Norman Masters (12/11) and the Reverend Dale Sessions (12/14) a truly meaningful birthday and a "new" year filled with abundant love. ·

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO EACH OF YOU!