

Living the beautiful gospel story

by Daniel Miles

This past Christmas was the first Christmas that my daughter knew Santa wasn't real. She actually found out back in the fall once she realized that I was the one who snuck quarters under her pillow for her teeth.

When I confessed to being the Tooth Fairy, a chain reaction of concrete logic took her to Santa Claus. This was far more traumatic a loss for her, and we cried together at the loss of a little magic. And then a week later, seemingly out of nowhere, she brought up the next step in the logic chain: "Daddy, are you God too?"

Of course I laughed and said, "Sweetie, how could I be God? What kinds of things do I do while pretending to be God?" She asked what I meant, and I clarified: "As Santa and the Tooth Fairy, I did certain things, like bring you money and give you presents under the tree. But what things did I do that would make you think I was God?"

She shrugged and said just that she was wondering if God is real. I assured her that I do think God is very real and that I understood how it might be hard to believe sometimes, particularly when some of the magic seems to leave the world.

This conversation prompted me to consider closely my question to her. When she was born, I wanted her to believe in Santa because of the beauty and magic of the story. And so I acted as if Santa was real. If I want her to believe in God, then what should I do? How do I live so that she believes God is real? What stories do I act out so that she can experience the richness of grace and love?

Part of why I love Christmas is because it helps me reconnect with the experience of joy and mystery. Whether through Santa or bright lights or the squeals of my child as she opens up the Baby Alive doll she's asked for, I find the jaded cynicism I live with most days giving way to a celebratory hopefulness of the promise of newness and growth. Now that my child no longer has the mystical story of Santa, how will I live so that she can hold on to a hope and joy that is enduring and life-changing?

We are the actors in the story of God, and if the world is to believe that grace is a real thing, then we must live the story every day. Kindness, compassion, justice, care – these are but a few of the ways that we can live so that people know the story of God's people. As we head into this New Year, may we all recommit ourselves to living the beautiful gospel story so that people will see and know God's presence.