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Holiday Traditions

SANTA

Continued from Page 3B

around, Havice said children often place Santa above God and their parents because kids believe in him and his magic.

"Santa can actually solve the problems you have as a child," he said. "He can make your brother or sister well. He can bring them back, sometimes. He can make Rudolph fly. He can do all kinds of things," he said.

Many times because of the strong faith kids have in him, children ask him for more than just toys. Sometimes they ask for beyond what Santa can provide, Santa said as he waved to mall shoppers.

"Last year, I had a little girl that wanted Jesus to come back for Christmas," Santa said. "I told her that Santa couldn't predict when Jesus would come back, but that I thought it would be a good present to the world if Jesus did come back.

"I enjoyed talking to her about it, because she knew the true meaning of Christmas," he said. "She knew Christmas wasn't that commercialized."

Although some people may think the presence of Santa Claus detracts from the true meaning of Christmas, Santa's suit does have religious overtones, Havice said.

"The red stands for the blood of Christ, or the sacrifice. The white is for the purity of the soul, or the spirit. The green in the holly on his cap represents the

everlasting life," he said.

Santa sometimes talks about Jesus to the occasional child who claims he doesn't believe in him, he said.

"If they don't believe in me, I try to get them to believe in Jesus. If they don't want to talk about that, you just try to talk to them about character, good behavior, and giving instead of getting. I also tell them if they don't believe in Santa, they need to believe in themselves," he said.

But the people who may doubt him can't prove he's not Santa, he said.

"When kids leave here, they might see another Santa Claus. But how do you know I'm not the real Santa? They're all over, and you really don't know," the icon said with a twinkle in his eye.

When the holiday season rolls to a close, Santa will disappear quietly for another year, unlike his attention-getting arrival last month when he arrived on an elephant. The elephant ride was not only memorable for those who welcomed him, but also for Santa. The elephant stood up before Santa was completely on.

"He was rattling around like a pea on a boxcar," Havice said.

Until he leaves, Santa will be content to sit out the holiday season in his familiar chair, as he has done for years — and years.

"I'm not as young or as agile as I used to be. I'm 300 years old, you know."

—Julie Swensen

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