



Santa Claus:

“The patron saint of children; dispenser of gifts on Christmas Eve; also, the spirit of Christmas.”

giver of the great satisfaction of giving by being a poor receiver. And especially is this true at Christmas, when hearts are full of the spirit of sharing.

AND, FINALLY, we learned about Santa Claus from our children—the real Santa Claus, that is. Like millions of other families with young children, we went through the Santa Claus phase with our youngsters. We took them to see him at the department stores, and we tried to answer their questions about why there were so many counterparts of Santa Claus on every street corner. The questions grew more pointed and the incredulity more pronounced.

Then one Christmas Eve—as must happen to all parents—we had to eliminate Santa Claus or immortalize him. We had just finished decorating the tree—a job St. Nick always did on Christmas Eve in our home—and arranging the presents beneath. We were starting upstairs for bed when we saw David, then seven years old, standing forlornly on the stairway, watching us. His brow was furrowed with disappointment and disillusionment.

“You’ve been fooling me about Santa Claus,” he said accusingly, “There really isn’t any Santa Claus. You’re the ones who decorate the tree and buy the presents and put them under the tree after we go to bed.”

We invited him to come downstairs and talk with us. He came reluctantly. We didn’t ask him what aroused his suspicions or try to gloss over an obvious fact. Instead, I asked him: “When we want to find the meaning of a word, where do we go to look it up?”

“The dictionary,” he answered suspiciously.

“All right,” I said, “let’s see what the dictionary has to say about Santa Claus.”

We read the definition aloud together: “The patron saint of children; dispenser of gifts on Christmas Eve. Also, the spirit of Christmas.”

“Now,” I said, “what would you say the spirit of Christmas is? Would it be the spirit of giving, of sharing, of joy, of peace and happiness?”

David thought it over a few minutes.

“Yes,” he admitted, “I suppose it would be all of them.”

“Do you feel we have a fair measure of those things in our home?”

“Sure—most of the time, anyway. And always at Christmas.”

“Well, then,” I told him, “we have Santa Claus, too—because that’s what Santa Claus means to us; the spirit of Christmas. The fat man in the red suit

and the long beard is just a symbol of that spirit. But it’s the spirit itself that’s important, and as long as we express that spirit at Christmastime, then we most certainly do believe in Santa Claus. At least I do, and your mother does. If you want to quit believing in him, I can’t stop you. But if that’s what you decide, please don’t destroy Santa Claus for your sisters—or for anyone else.”

He went back upstairs then, pondering this new intelligence. And it seemed to me that the next morning was the most joyous Christmas we’d ever known—because all of us had a new sense and awareness of Santa Claus. We’ve believed in Santa Claus in our home ever since. The girls have never questioned this, perhaps because whenever the subject of Santa Claus came up we always referred to him as the “spirit of Christmas”—and they always accepted him that way.

I’m sure that somewhere along the line they’ve been told by some omniscient friend that there really isn’t any Santa Claus, but they’ve never made an issue of it at home. They seem glad to accept our definition of Santa Claus, and we’ve been courting him regularly for 15 years.

I think that all of us in our family have a feeling—and not a sacrilegious one at all—that if Jesus were to express Himself on the subject of Santa Claus, He would approve heartily of the old gentleman. Not, of course, in the commercial sense, which has been so badly exploited, but in the original meaning of St. Nick, who stands solidly for many of the same things that Jesus taught: unselfishness, good cheer, good health, strength, congeniality, joy, happiness, and an overwhelming love for His fellow man. Thus, we feel we do no discredit to the spiritual significance of Jesus’ birthday—and even enhance it—by continuing to welcome Santa Claus into our home.

These, then, are the Christmas lessons our children have taught us: we’ve learned that there are many gifts we can give which don’t have to be bought in a store; that it’s every bit as important to be a good receiver as a good giver; and that Santa Claus—as the glorious spirit of Christmas—is a very real and a very present force.

We haven’t stopped learning or growing. Rather, we’re looking forward to all the Christmases to come and the additional enlightenment they can bring. Meanwhile, we’ll be hoping, along with peaceful people all over the world, that the spirit of Christmas will eventually open the hearts of all men to receive a real and lasting “peace on earth, good will toward men.”

ing the hearts of people—and why they couldn’t seem to carry it beyond the family into relations with all men.

Since that Christmas morning, we’ve all made a special effort to become good receivers. Giving isn’t a one-way street; it requires both a giver and a receiver. We often consider it gracious to decline a gift that we know cost too much or came at too great a sacrifice. Yet sometimes—not always—this is a decidedly selfish attitude to take.

We should think carefully before we deprive the