

Christmas isn't just for children

Dec 22 , 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

People sometimes like to say that Christmas is for children, and in many ways that is true.

We look at that little baby in a Christmas manger, and think perhaps of children everywhere, regardless of their race or religion. We want them to be warm and comfortable, to be fed well and loved well.

We see pictures of little tykes sitting on the laps of Santa Clauses from New York to Taipei, and we smile. Christmas is for children, yes?

We witness the frantic efforts of Moms and Dads fighting a clock that ticks inexorably down till a fateful moment on Christmas Eve. These good folks are rushing to stuff stockings for “the kids,” to bake still another batch of cookies, or to send cards or gifts to distant places for children now all grown up. It’s for the children, they say, no matter what their age, that’s what Christmas is all about.

Just this week I sent a note to my God daughter in Minnesota. I promised to bring my Christmas gift for her in person next summer. Once upon a time, in a simpler life, that little girl always got her present from me on time. I made sure of that. She’s married now and a mother of two. I’m sure her heart isn’t on herself. Brenna will understand and sense my guilt. She’ll be thinking this Christmas of her little ones, the children in her life, even as I think of the children in mine.

Two news stories that appeared in local English papers on the same day this week focused on children in particularly relevant ways. One story was about Christmas, actually. The other was not. Instead, it hinted that in some ways every day should be Christmas for our children.

The first story comes with a sad twist. It seems a high school teacher in New Mexico arranged for a party, and told the students if they wanted to dress up for it, they could come as a Santa, an elf, or a reindeer. One the male students in the class showed up as Santa Claus, only to find the teacher disgruntled. This person asked him, “Don’t you know Santa Claus is white? Why are you wearing that?”

The school district has acknowledged that the teacher is now under suspension, pending an investigation. Can you imagine anyone claiming to be an educator saying such a thing? Since when is Santa any particular color?

And, excuse me, but it’s Christmas, so I beg permission to indulge in a slight digression. Call it a gift to myself, if you will. I’d like to ask: If we’re looking at Santa Claus and race, what about Jesus?

When will the Christians of Taiwan (remember, we Catholics too are Christians) be able to accept an undeniable historical fact? The cute little fellow in the crib set may look like he just stepped out of the Italian Renaissance, but it would have been impossible for Jesus to have been born looking like a boy version of Snow White, with curly blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes. When will we be able to welcome an Asian Mary, an Asian Joseph, an Asian Christ child? Christmas is for the children, isn’t it? Well, is Christmas for our children, too?

The China Post reported the other story, and it’s decidedly more upbeat than the downer above from New Mexico.

The National Immigration Agency (NIA) announced here at home this week that it was promoting two short films about children who are born into families with parents of different nationalities. The films tell their stories through the vantage points of the children themselves, and stress the values of racial tolerance, open-heartedness, and respect for people who are different than we are. When I read of the press conference, Christmas came to mind instantly.

Christmas should be every day for these, our youngest citizens in Taiwan. The gifts we owe these little ones, however, have nothing to do with ribbons and wrapping paper. Come to think of it, being treated with respect is not a gift at all. It’s a right that every person deserves.

Well, maybe Christmas is for children, but not only for children. Christmas is for all of us, young and old. Christmas is about celebrating a beautiful and important truth.

According to a very old and sacred story, the birth of a little baby long ago made everyone under heaven one big human family. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points :

1. The question of a race or skin color (apologies for such a direct term) attached to Santa Claus is an interesting Q. Have you ever seen a Taiwanese / Chinese Santa Claus? Can you imagine an Afro-American Santa or a Japanese or Korean Santa? Why or why not?
2. This column obviously focuses on Christmas as a holiday, and raises at the same time the Q of how Christmas is not only for children, but for people of all ages. What images of Christmas did you perhaps have as a child? Have Christmas images changed for you now that you are a college student around 20 years old at Fu da?
3. This column asks readers to contemplate artistic drawings and carvings of Jesus and his mother and foster father (Mary and Joseph) as Asian and not European. Have you ever thought of Jesus with a Taiwanese / Chinese face? What about Mary and Joseph?

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