

How This Woman Lost the Elf and Woke Up to the Wonder

I'm one of those. I never taught my boys to believe in Santa. Gasp!

In part, I never wanted disappointment to cloud the holiday the way it clouded my sensitive soul when I learned the truth at a young age. But I also longed for the wonder of our Savior's birth to overshadow all other aspects of the celebration.

I don't judge those who differ. Abnormal challenges skewed my perspective. After my first husband died from a brain stem tumor, a neuromuscular illness left me disabled by my late 30s—a neuromuscular illness I share with my youngest son.

However, as I watched the father of my young children suffer, the Jesus story became more than a tradition. It became my life force. My hope. My joy. My anchor in the storm. So when Christmas rolled around, Santa had little appeal. I wanted my boys to marvel in the mind-blowing truth of God come to Earth. The divine in human flesh—for the One who gave all watches over us all year long. He sees us when we're sleeping and walks with us when we're awake. But instead of judging our worth, He offers forgiveness, new beginnings and joy in our sorrow—which is why we exchange gifts on Christmas morning. Divine love gives generously to all without finding fault. How can we not do the same?

We now live in the era of The Elf on the Shelf. Although I appreciate the fun and sense of magic it evokes, I can't help but wonder how much it distracts from the truth of what we celebrate. Or think of it this way: Do we as faith-filled believers speak of our Saviors' birth with the same level of excitement that we use when teaching little ones about Santa?

Recent church attendance statistics suggest not. Many pews sit empty as young adults abandon their faith. A faith that grew stale and unrealistic just like their belief in Santa.

Yet, angels sang. A virgin gave birth. Wise men followed a star to witness the Savior of the world come to earth. It's crazy and exciting all at the same time. But in a world engulfed in the darkness of sin, continued belief requires soul building exercise like our bodies at the gym.

Why celebrate Christmas? To bask in the wonder of the light that still shines in the darkness and the hope that brings healing to our world. Because if we're not careful, we'll miss out. We'll wonder at the wrong things and stay so busy we forget to nourish our souls.

So, leave the elf on the shelf and forget Santa for a day, and allow your imagination to travel to a lonely hillside where dirty shepherds sat under a dark sky, tending their sheep, unaware—until the heavenly host broke through the sky and declared, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). And then share that priceless wonder with your children. {eo}

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