

“Let’s join the Easter egg hunt!”

Who are the most cherished holiday figures for American children? Sociologist Cindy Dell Clark researched children’s perceptions about figures linked to childhood celebrations and milestones. She interviewed thousands of children.

Could you guess the top three? This may not be a surprise; the three with the most votes were: the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. We all have stories to tell about these three—and even stories that have been passed along through the generations. They are three important figures!

If we reflect a bit, we will have to admit that the messages children receive from each of the Big Three are different. They don’t teach the same things.

What about the tooth fairy? Well, you will receive a tangible, spendable reward in exchange for a grubby lost tooth, if only you believe in the tooth fairy and put the tooth under your pillow at bedtime. In her book, *Leaps of Faith, Flights of Fancy*, Professor Clark shares transcripts of interviews she conducted with children in her research. Here’s one about the tooth fairy:

Clark: How did the Tooth Fairy get started doing this, do you suppose?

Child: Probably God made her... One day Adam or Eve, either one, lost a tooth and didn't know what to do with it. So God spoke to them, and he told them put your tooth where you're sleeping and it'll go away and you'll get something for it.

Clark: How come God knew they'd need to do that?... How do you think he thought they'd feel?

Child: He figured, toothless! Then they might not be able to bite so well.

Clark: So God made the Tooth Fairy and said, "Put the tooth under your pillow," and that's that? What did the Tooth Fairy think about getting the job?

Child: Happy...because not too many people get to see God while they're living, and then the Tooth Fairy got to see him any time that she wanted to, if she had any questions or anything. And she was a very special person because people wouldn't want to be toothless.

One key reality in dealing with the tooth fairy is this: you must have a TOOTH to get a reward. With the Tooth Fairy YOU DON'T GET SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.

What about Santa Claus? Santa actually fits ADULT ideas about life. He has a job.

He's a great success with crafting and acquiring all those gifts!

He handles a huge-scale production with millions of employees (the elves).

He rewards good behavior and punishes bad.

With Santa, YOU DON'T GET SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.

Ok, then, what about the Easter Bunny? The Easter Bunny is actually a child-centered symbol. He's a very IMPLAUSIBLE symbol.

He's a MALE rabbit who carries nests of eggs in baskets.

Male rabbits don't lay eggs or make nests. The female rabbits don't do that either, come to think of it!

He is non-threatening.

He's quiet, speechless.

He's fuzzy and huggable.

His eggs and gifts are left everywhere--- all around familiar places like a home or yard.

His eggs and gifts are accessible—all you have to do is “hunt” for them.

Even the smallest child or seeker can spot some!

He has no particular system of punishments or rewards.

Friends, the messages of the Easter Bunny are not completely out-of-line with the Easter message of FAITH. God's gift of GRACE is a free gift. It's not earned as a reward for good behavior (as with Santa) nor given in exchange for some special item (as with the Tooth Fairy).

God's gift of GRACE is the unearned, unconditional, unswerving, unchanging, unending love of God, for you; for ALL. Grace came in the flesh to this world in Jesus, who by his death and Resurrection has opened the door to LIFE: life abundant in this world, and life eternal beyond it.

God's gift of GRACE is everywhere—hidden among the familiar.

God's gift of GRACE is accessible---not hard to find by even the simplest seeker.

God's gift of LIFE is found in, of all places, an empty tomb- which is as surprising and unexpected as a male rabbit carrying nests of eggs in baskets.

Seek, and you will find.

That's the Easter message from our Gospel today. The women at the tomb came seeking Jesus and they found him!

In our Epistle lesson the apostle Paul has a message for us on any day, including Easter, but not limited to Easter: ***Seek the things that are above.***

Can we learn from children to seek God's grace, to seek the things that shine with his love in this world, to seek the things above that guide us day by day, like hope, compassion, justice and mercy? Can we learn from children to seek all of these with the same energy and enthusiasm they display at an Easter egg hunt?

Children are not afraid to make mistakes. They plunge ahead with an eager, seeking spirit. This is evidenced in those lists we've passed and e-mailed around, lists of children's responses to Sunday school or catechism questions. Consider a few of these- taken from a Church of England publication:

Noah's wife was called Joan of Arc.

The fifth commandment is humor thy father and mother.

Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night.

Holy acrimony is another name for marriage.

The pope lives in a vacuum.

The patron saint of travelers is St Francis of the seasick.

A Republican is a sinner mentioned in the Bible.

Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat 12 partridges.

The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.

It is sometimes difficult to hear what is being said in church because the agnostics are so terrible.

What a spirit, what a force- what willingness to give it a whirl, and do what you can! That's where God wants us to begin today. Do what you can to seek God's grace, to seek God's will for your life! The Christian life can be seen as a life-long Easter egg hunt. Let's join in with our whole hearts! This is the best adventure of all.