

IT'S STILL ALL ABOUT JESUS!!!!

It's December! What? How can it be December already? December in our Lutheran schools means practices for Christmas programs, preparation for Christmas gifts, throwing a Baby Jesus birthday party, and the list can go on and on! And, of course, we are still TEACHING!!!! Then add in all the extra family responsibilities – shopping, decorating, baking, and planning for those always successful family gatherings! How can we get everything done?

To answer that question – at least in part – may I share with you some lessons learned from an oft-repeated interaction with my granddaughters?

Setting - The play room, complete with a teepee (the 'house')

Participants - Harper (age 4 years 11 months)

Sydney (age 2 years and 11 months)

Grandmoo (age irrelevant)

The Scene Begins

Harper: "Grandmoo, let's play HO HO!" (HO HO is Harper's name for Santa – a carry-over from when she was two.)

Me: "OK! Are you ready?"

Harper: "Yes, I will come to the store."

I proceed to sit on the floor, stretching my legs out. Harper takes several steps away from where I am sitting, then proceeds to take very slow steps toward me as she 'waits' her turn to sit in HO HO's lap. Sydney proceeds to sit next to HO HO, as she has chosen to be Santa's helper this time rather than another child waiting in line.

Me: (in my best Santa voice) "Well, well, who do we have here?"

Harper: "It's me, HO HO. It's Harper!"

Me: "Ho, ho ho! Harper, it's so nice to see you again. My goodness you are getting so big."

Harper: "Yes, I will be 5 on my next birthday!"

Me: "Ho, ho, ho! That's wonderful! Come and sit here on my lap and tell me what you would like for Christmas."

Harper: (settling on my lap and looking around the play room) "I would like a _____." (Harper fills in the blank, based on the toys that are her current favorites.)

Me: "That's a good choice, Harper! I think we can make that happen. Now, I have two questions for you. Have you been kind to your little sister and to your new baby sister?"

Harper: "Yes, I am kind."

Me: "Thank you Harper. Santa is happy when we are kind to our family. One more question – Harper, do you remember why we celebrate Christmas?"

Harper: (with a big smile, knowing how the games goes) "Yes, Christmas is Jesus' birthday!"

Me: “Yes, Harper, you are right! We praise and thank God at Christmas time for sending Jesus to us! Christmas is Jesus’ birthday! We give presents because God gave us the best present – JESUS!”

Harper: “I know!” (she’s almost 5 you know!)

Me: “Well, Harper, there are other children waiting to see Santa. Merry Christmas to you Harper! I’ll see you on Christmas Eve.”

Harper: (getting up and giving Santa a hug) “Merry Christmas, HO HO!”

Harper proceeds to her ‘house’ and curls up inside and ‘goes’ to sleep.

Me: (looking to Sydney, Santa’s helper) “Little Elf, do we have _____ in our toy shop? That is what we will be delivering to Harper’s house.”

Sydney: (proceeding to walk around the play room and selecting the desired toy) “Yes, here it is! We can take it to Harper!”

Sydney and I ‘travel’ via sleigh (the couch cushion) and proceed to disembark at Harper’s ‘house’. We quietly open the fabric doors and slip the desired toy into the house. And then, quietly and with reverence, we kiss her cheek and wish her a “Merry Christmas and Happy Birthday Baby Jesus!”

One of the sweetest blessings of being a grandparent is the opportunity to engage completely with one’s grandchildren!

Harper and Sydney will play this game all year-long and over and over and over again! The early childhood educator in me LOVES this creative activity – lots of language development, sequencing, social foundational skills, and imaginative play! And, of course, I am building priceless, irreplaceable memories with these special girls! More importantly is the FAITH FOUNDATION I have the privilege to build upon with these precious daughters of God!

OK, so the question is - how does this sweet story relate to you as you teach and lead in your classrooms this Christmas season? May I offer three thoughts for reflection –

- 1. In the ‘busyness’ of the season, are you taking time to talk with your kids about Jesus’ birth and what it means to you? Is this TRUTH not only the ‘reason for the season’ but at the heart of all you do?*
- 2. Are you building in time to listen to the kids in your classroom? As adults, we know that Christmas can be a very difficult time of the year. This is also true for children. Christmas can present both real and imagined stresses to children, and sometimes the one thing they need is a caring, compassionate, Christ-centered adult to listen to them.*
- 3. And finally, will you take time to care for yourself during this Christmas season? Your own health – spiritually and emotionally, as well as physical – is central to your well-being and your effectiveness as an educator. Allow God to ‘minister’ to you as you celebrate the greatest gift of all?*

REMEMBER – IT’S STILL ALL ABOUT JESUS!

