

Is the Easter Bunny godly?

Catechists offer tips on how to handle those yearly visitors

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

When it comes to teaching your children about the Resurrection, the Easter Bunny is neither hare nor there, according to Pat Fox,

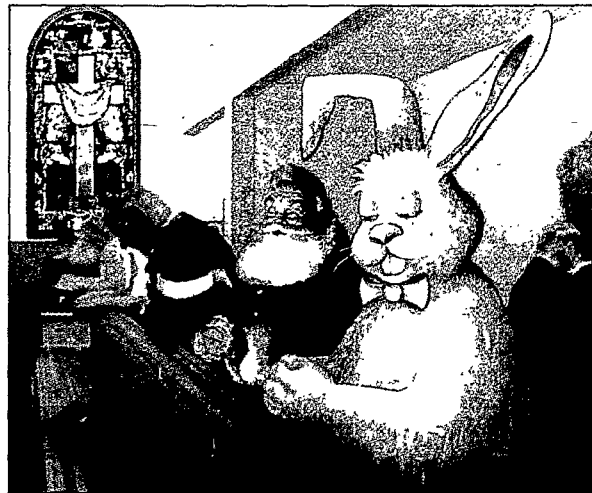
"The Easter Bunny is a wonderful story that focuses people on the secular season," said Fox, director of faith formation at St. Joseph's Parish, Penfield. "Our story from Palm Sunday to Easter is a wonderful story, too."

Fox takes a benign view of such characters as the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus — who each draw the ire of some Christians for taking the focus off Christ at Easter and Christmas, respectively. In recent years, concerns about the secularization of these most holy days have inspired such slogans as "Jesus is the reason for the season."

They also have inspired Web sites devoted to criticizing the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus. One such site, located at www.jayforrest.org, contains a commentary that likens Santa to an idol and a pagan god. Another commentary, published on the Web site of a California newspaper, says America "has become confused" because it shares the celebration of Christ's resurrection "with a pagan rabbit laying chocolate eggs."

Some Christians writing on the Internet take a much more positive approach to the rabbit and Claus, however. For example, one Web site offers a story about the Easter Bunny witnessing the Resurrection and then distributing colored eggs to homes around Jerusalem. Chicks that hatched from the eggs signified Christ's rising. And many commentaries on Santa mention his roots in the story of St. Nicholas, who worshiped Christ, not commercialism.

But to Fox, it's a waste of energy to debate the Easter Bunny vs. Jesus.



"The Easter Bunny doesn't lead anybody to Jesus, and I'm pretty sure he has no intention of leading anybody away from Jesus," Fox said.

Indeed, instead of fretting over what a bunny means to their children, parents and catechists need to emphasize what Christ's resurrection means to them, Fox noted. One way to get children interested in the Passion events is to have them act them out, said Fox, who recently led a group of third- and fifth-grade students in a re-enactment of Palm Sunday. He noted that he had the children in his class marching around yelling "Hosanna!" and that the students thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"They wanted to be Jesus and Mary and tell the story," he said.

Gail Brooks, faith-formation coordinator at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Mendon, said that her parish also brings the holidays to life through acting, holding a "Breakfast at Bethlehem" celebration each Advent. The event gives children the chance to eat with actors and actresses playing various biblical characters, she said.

"You can go to breakfast with Santa anywhere," she said. "We decided to focus on the true meaning of the season."

When talking to children, Fox advised not mixing the Easter Bunny with the Resurrection account or Santa with the story of Jesus' birth at Christmas. He was also skeptical of the catechetical usefulness of figurines that depict Santa kneeling before the crib of Jesus. Yet he said he did not believe the Easter Bunny has any designs on desecrating Christianity's most sacred day.

"The Easter Bunny is neutral," he said. "It seems to me he's more interested in his carrots and his grass than in profaning anyone."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third article in a series on raising your children in the faith.

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■ **APR. 18-27** — Glass blowing: You Design It, We Make It. Corning Museum of Glass, One Museum Way, Corning. Design an object that master glass blowers will make. 11 a.m.-11:30 p.m. daily. museum hours 9 a.m.-5 p.m. \$12 adults, 10 ages 6-17, under 6 free. Family pass \$36. 800/732-6845.

■ **SAT. APR. 19** — Bunny Hop. Corning Museum of Glass, One Museum Way, Corning. Easter egg hunts, ages 1-5, 1-3 p.m.; audiotours, ages 4-10, 1 p.m. outside, meet the Easter Bunny. Flameworking, live! Features on the spot creation of bunnies. Free admission to Bunny Hop events. 800/732-6845.

■ **SAT. APR. 19** — Star Party: Night of the Eclipse. Strassburgh Planetarium, 657 East Ave., Rochester. Ages 6 and up. Why eclipses happen, difference between solar & lunar eclipses and what to watch for on May 13 when the full moon will go dark for 1 hour 37 minutes. 1 p.m. Saturdays thru May 24. No adults. \$4.50/children & seniors. 585/271-1880.

■ **APR. 21-25** — Backyard bugs. Strong Museum, One Main St., Rochester. The Amazing World of Arthropods. 11:30 a.m. & 1 p.m. daily, plus crafts & family activities about flying & creeping critters. Mon.-Thurs. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Fri. 11 a.m.-8 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun. noon-5 p.m. \$6 adults, \$3 ages 2-7, under 2 free. 585/263-2700.

■ **FRID. APR. 24** — Story Hour. Alpha & Omega Bookstore, 160 Penfield Rd., Penfield. 11 a.m. free. 585/381-1230.

■ **SAT. APR. 26** — Garden tour. 100th anniversary of Light. Rochester Museum & Science Center, 65 East Ave., Rochester. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. \$7 adults, 10 ages 10-18 under 10 free. 585/271-1880.

■ **APR. 26-27** — Walking tour. Rochester city street Eric Canal area, explore former canal basin sites. Canal routes wide, 1/2 mi. basin equidistant more. 1-4 p.m. \$5 to register. 585/271-1880.

■ **MAY 31** — Day for kids. Strong Museum, One Main St., Rochester. Meet the W. Who combines science & art. May 21. The Dinner Deal. 9-10 a.m. \$6 adults, \$5 children. 585/263-2701 ext. 314.