

From the January 7, 2008 Issue

## ***Hocus Pocus***

We don't believe in magic, right? We're good Christians who don't dabble in the occult and the superstitious.

Magic is essentially the idea that you can control whatever gods or forces of nature there may be in the world if you know the right words, incantations, or rituals.

Interestingly, one of the well known magical phrases - "hocus pocus" - is believed to have its origins in a Christian ceremony. In the Latin mass of the middle ages when the priest lifted up the bread he said "hoc corpus" and it was believed that at that moment the bread was "transubstantiated" from bread to flesh (that is to say, its substance was changed even if its appearance remained the same.) Some scholars think "hocus pocus" is a corruption of that Latin phrase.

If you're performing a magic trick you say "hocus pocus" at the moment of transformation, when the dove flies out of the handkerchief or the stick becomes a bouquet of flowers. The trick pretends that you have learned the right incantations by which to control nature and force the gods to do your bidding.

We often think that something similar happens at the "moment of salvation." Call it transubstantiation of souls. It's the idea that we *are not* - are not safe, are not included in God's life, are not loved children of the Father. And then we say the magic words and we are transformed - we are saved, we are included, we are loved.

Can you see how this is magical thinking? We suppose that by knowing the magic words ("I believe", "I accept Christ", etc.) we have the power to change our nature, transform our souls, and compel God to do what we want: accept us, forgive us, let us into heaven.

The good news of Jesus is that even though we have no magical power to change ourselves the Son of God has entered into our humanity and changed us (Rom. 5:18.) The gospel is the wonderful announcement of a fact: we are like, loved, included, adopted, and saved by the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

When we say "I believe" or "I accept Christ" we don't cause our salvation to happen. It already happened in Jesus, when we were adopted and reconciled in him (Eph. 1:1-5, Col. 1:20, Eph. 2:6.) Our words of belief are simply our admission that Jesus really is telling us the truth when he tells us that we are already included in his life and his relationship with our Dad.

We aren't adopted into the Triune Life because we say the magic words. We are adopted because our Dad loved us so much that he never let us go.

~ Jonathan Stepp