

## Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

### Jesus Isn't Santa Claus

*“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”*

—The Gospel of Mark

By Ken Woodley

When I was a child, I believed in Santa Claus.

I believed in God.

And I believed in Jesus.

I was told by adults that all three of them are real, and I unequivocally believed what I was told.

There was no doubt in my mind, or in my heart, of their existence.

When I was a child, all three of them were as real as real can be.

For years, I believed that all three of them genuinely existed. I clung to that faith long after many of my friends had peeled away the veneer and discovered the fiction behind it all.

Eventually, I grew up, and also accepted the truth that I'd been trying to avoid.

I learned that Santa Claus lives in our hearts.

But that is all. That is the only place where Santa Claus resides. The North Pole is a frozen wasteland. None of the animals there have red noses. Only the wind-chilled scientists and explorers have red noses, and none of them guide Santa's sleigh.

As an adult, I have also grown to understand that God, too, lives within our hearts. Or can reside there.

As does Jesus. If we let him.

But—and this is a gloriously hallelujah ‘but’—that is not all.

That is not the only place.

God is real.

Jesus is real.

Both of them genuinely exist whether I let them live in my heart or not.

I simply know that to be true.

I believe it to be true.

Nor do I feel compelled to prove it to anyone in order to reinforce my own faith. But there is still plenty of evidence.

The existence of God and the risen Jesus are demonstrably proved by the post-crucifixion turnaround in the disciples, from cowering cowards to bold preachers who feared nothing for their physical safety.

Only a genuine encounter with the resurrected Jesus can account for that. And Jesus can only exist as our resurrected savior if God exists. Therefore, the fact of Christ confirms the fact of God, and a loving God, at that.

Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, transforming him from a murderer of Christians—an accessory before, during and after the fact—to an obsessed disciple of Christ, is another stunning piece of forensic evidence.

Nor are those two examples the only New Testament “exhibits” one could place before any jury that doubts the existence of God and Christ.

But I have also had enough “thin moments” and “close encounters” with the Holy Spirit, and with Jesus (therefore with God, as well) to personally cement my faith.

And I accept those “thin moments” as genuine encounters, as a child would accept Santa Claus, sitting on his lap at the mall. I do not look cynically for any other “explanation” that might seem more rational to an adult mind.

One moment, on July 2, 1980, was so intimate—beyond “thin”—that it felt like nothing at all was separating me from the love of God, the Love that is God, of which Jesus spoke.

I was driving home from a Buckingham County School Board meeting—wrestling with a profound years-old wound—and had to pull off to the side of the road, sobbing with joy. That Loving Presence embraced me for hours.

Such a moment hasn't happened again but it has been enough to sustain me with the truth about God's Love. And that helps me to keep rising above that wound.

I know that I can pull on the beard of Christ as hard as I want but it isn't coming off. He's no seasonal, moonlighting phony.

The kingdom of Heaven is real.

Waiting for us to enter.

And so transform the world through our own individual, intimate and ongoing transformation.