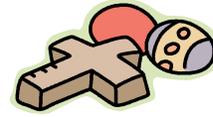




## The Easter Puzzle



Our furry friend the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus and even the Tooth Fairy can seem more believable in many ways than Jesus Christ. That does not make Jesus a myth however and helping you put together a picture of him is what this seasonal article attempts to do.

### The Difficulty of Believing

It's easy to rationally determine that no one can deliver presents to millions of homes in any 24 hour period. So at some point, we say good bye to our belief in Santa Claus and get on with our life. Many do the same with Jesus and for seemingly good reasons. What follows are some beliefs about our three mythical characters compared to what many Christians believe about Christ.

### The Easter Bunny vs. Jesus

Without realizing it, a young child attributes unbelievable characteristics to the Easter Bunny. He (almost universally the bunny is male) must know where each child lives, be able to prepare millions of hard boiled eggs in a short period of time, and apparently maintain an unlimited bank account to facilitate the purchase of the candy he hides.

Jesus *is* human so that's easier to deal with than Mr. Bunny. But then we claim that his conception was accomplished without the aid of a man. His virgin mother, unable to visit a fertility clinic, still becomes impregnated. You could call it supernatural insemination.

Then to make things really hard to accept, we say that this human child was also God; the very same God who created everything.

### The Tooth Fairy vs. Jesus

The Tooth Fairy always seems to come through for children. If they leave their tooth under the pillow at night (some leave it in a glass of water), miraculously something of value appears the next morning. Kids have faith in the Tooth Fairy but eventually learn that the 'miracle' gift they found beneath their pillow was staged by mom or dad.

For many, faith in God (remember Jesus is God) relies on answered prayer. Children easily believe stories about God doing something miraculous in response to praying. As people age however, it's not uncommon to wonder why God didn't answer the fervent prayer to keep a loved one alive or a marriage together. Some conclude he's unable to help or that their request was unanswered because God is no more real than the Tooth Fairy.

### Santa Claus vs. Jesus

Santa keeps track of everything children do and delivers a reward to the good little boys and girls whose performance is up to his standard. The others (the bad kids) find nothing in their stockings. God says all little boys and girls at some age will do things wrong on purpose. And before they reach

adulthood, every man and woman will commit many of these deliberate acts of misbehavior. The Bible calls them sin.

Like Santa, God has also established a benchmark for appropriate behavior; be perfect or be punished! And it doesn't help that the punishment is eternal and hellish.

### **A Very Confusing Puzzle**

I can see why people scoff at the Christian faith. Let's recap some of the things they might have to deal with.

- Jesus was conceived without his mother having intercourse.
- The Christ child born in a stable was also God (not a god - the God).
- God seems unable to answer the really important prayers.
- His expectations for our behavior seem unrealistic.
- The punishment for failing is excessively harsh by our standards.

It's easy for me to see why people lump God into the same category as the Easter Bunny and Saint Nick. But there's more to the puzzle than we've let you see so far.

### **All the Puzzle Pieces on the Table**

Consider again the section about Santa Claus vs. Jesus. If mankind *has* deliberately rebelled against God's standards for human behavior, we have a problem. Since God by definition must be perfect in wisdom and integrity, he would have to be completely just in his choice of punishment and sentencing. So if the Bible is accurate regarding our punishment and there is hell to pay, it won't be anything that we don't deserve.

Fortunately for us, equal to the justice God displays is the love he deployed. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus came as much more than an example for us to follow. His primary purpose was to become the substitute for us when it came to the penalty we deserved. He met the standard for human behavior by being perfect and received our punishment in full when he was executed by crucifixion. The Christian celebration of Easter recognizes the greatest gift ever bestowed on humanity; Christ's death, burial and resurrection!

### **Are You Beginning to See the Picture?**

There are many reactions to the story of Easter; disgust, uncertainty and fear are some of them. People can hope the story is true but still have gnawing doubts or believe it in principal but not when they try and apply it to themselves. They just can't imagine how their particular behavior could ever be forgiven.

A number may sense the rightness of the whole idea; for them the picture is fairly clear but something may still hold them back from fully embracing the message. And then there are those who experience in their heart a kinship with the Christ of Easter.

They recognize the behavior in their life that the Bible calls sin and more importantly, they know their guilt deserves punishment. They hear of Christ's act of love that freed them from the coming penalty and all they can say is, 'Thank You!' For some inexplicable reason, they fully believe the Easter story; they trust it with all their heart.

### **A Final Word and Offer**

We've laid the puzzle pieces out as carefully as we could. You've taken and arranged them in a way that corresponds to your personal spiritual journey. What do you see? Does the picture anger you, is your heart touched by the portrait of love and forgiveness you see, or are you somewhere in between?

It would be our privilege to hear your opinion of Jesus after reading this seasonal article, regardless of what that opinion might be. Plus we welcome any opportunity to answer your questions or explain more fully any idea we tried to communicate.

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