



Santa Claus?

“Oh no!” to that silly “Ho, Ho!”

Just how did this jolly fellow with the cotton-puff beard come to be?

Although we currently know him as Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas was originally a bishop that lived during the fourth century in Asia Minor, now known as modern day Turkey. After his death, legends about his life and goodness became popular. The most famous story is when he discovered that a poor man was having difficult financial trouble. This man had three daughters and was about to sell them into slavery or prostitution. When Nicholas heard about this, he used his own money to buy a bag of gold. During the dead of night he threw this bag through the window of the poor man’s house, supplying the family with ample money. Eventually St. Nicholas became associated with gift-giving to children because of this incident.

In 1003 Vladimir of Russia came to Constantinople to be baptized. When he returned to his native land, he brought back relics and stories of the revered St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas thus became the patron saint of Russia and his name became widespread. Eventually he became known as the patron saint of children, scholars, virgins, sailors, and merchants.

Prior to the rise of the Protestant Reformation, St. Nicholas became well-established as a bringer of gifts to children. This often happened on the evening of December 6, St. Nicholas Day. However, patron saints were “jeopardized” with the coming of the Reformation. A number of countries revised his name and kept the custom of St. Nicholas by utilizing other names to keep the tradition, i.e., Father Christmas in England and Christkindlein in Germany. The Dutch kept the St. Nicholas name, but its pronunciation changed to Sinterklaas.

When the Dutch settled into the New World in the seventeenth century, the tradition of Sinterklaas continued although it didn’t catch on among the rest of the Americans. However, a few authors picked up on the tradition and wrote about it, sometimes jokingly. Through these writings, the image of Santa Claus began to be formed, in particular an anonymous poem, “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” published in the Sentinel on December 23, 1823. This later became known as “The Night Before Christmas.” Since St. Nicholas was known as the patron saint of Russia,

the arctic-type weather of Russia inspired the ideas of Santa having heavy clothing, a stocking cap, a sleigh, and reindeer. By 1860 the name Santa Claus gained popular acceptance as also drawings and descriptions of him were published. The finishing touches of the now-pictured Santa with rosy cheeks came in 1920 when a picture of him was used in a series of Coca-Cola ads.

An interesting trivial tidbit regarding the jolly fellow is that of the formation of the Santa Claus Association in 1914. Its stated purpose was “to preserve children’s faith in Santa Claus.” The association would obtain letters addressed to Santa Claus from the Post Office. They would then investigate the letters for those cases of children in need and then attempt to fulfill their requests for toys and presents. However, in 1928 the postal authorities refused to give any more letters to the association since there were allegations that the group was involved with fraud. Although nothing was ever proven, the organization disbanded.

He sees you when you’re sleeping, he knows when you’re awake ...

The myth of Santa Claus has been greatly accepted according to the words of the famous song, “Santa Claus is Coming to Town.” By looking at the words of this song, along with the traditions of Santa today, we can see that Santa Claus is quite a bit more than a cheerful, jolly sort of guy. In fact, we begin to see similarities with what Scripture tells us about the LORD God:

- 1) God is omniscient - He knows all things. Santa is claimed to know everything about us. He knows when we’ve been sleeping, when we’ve been awake, whether we’ve been bad or good, etc.
- 2) God is omnipotent - He is all powerful and is able to do anything He so pleases. Santa is pictured as being able to do almost anything as well. He can cover the entire world in one night when he brings Christmas gifts from house to house. If he doesn’t do something just the way we would like him to, then there must be some good reason for it.
- 3) God is omnipresent - He is everywhere. Although Santa isn’t described as being everywhere at once, he is described as being able to see everyone. It is as if he peers over the entire world from some particular place away from earth or perhaps from the North Pole.

4) Others: God is holy, eternal, unchangeable, sovereign, good, just, righteous. These all fit the scheme of Santa in one form or another. He is described as a jolly, decent guy with whom there is no fault. He remains the same from year to year - the old man with the white beard and plump belly.

Better watch out & better not cry, for workrighteousness is nearby!

Santa is described as always watching out for the goodness in all little boys and girls. Those who are nice and good are acceptable in the sight of Santa and will thereby receive gifts as rewards for their goodness. But notice that this only happens one time a year. It is as if the child needs to be nice some time prior to the day of judgment (this day being Christmas) and will thus receive his or her reward for his or her good deeds.

What kind of affect does this have upon a child? It could influence our children to believe that it is O.K. not to be concerned about God until the actual Judgment Day. As that Day approaches, the children may be led to believe that we need to be good in order to be acceptable to God. This type of belief is fatal for it fails to look to Christ as the only One who is acceptable before God.

All people, including children, are sinful and continue to fail in God's expectations of what He has determined as good. Yet Jesus Christ fulfilled God's will by living a perfect life. He then became the sacrifice for the sins of the entire world by suffering and dying in our place. Because He is the Perfect One who took upon Himself the weight of the world's sins, we are acceptable in the sight of God. God sees Christ's righteousness, not our own righteousnesses or good works. We are not acceptable to God by how good we are or by the good things we've done. This would lead many people to despair since the sinful flesh constantly causes one to sin. But rather, we are acceptable to God because of our Savior Jesus Christ, the One who loved and gave Himself for us.

That red little (?) devil!

Much of what the Santa Claus game has to offer is dangerous in a very subtle way. The whole image of Santa leads children to believe in an individual who does not exist. This whole image is based upon secular beliefs of what God is really like. And yet when parents lead their children into playing this fanciful game, the children trust that what the parents are saying is true.

What happens when the children come of age and learn that Santa isn't real? Will the children continue to trust their parents about other things they once had depended upon as being true? Will the children begin to question their parents when it comes to matters of true religion? We certainly do not want to mislead our children into thinking that our Savior is someone who is a fake just as Santa Claus is. And yet the danger is very evident when Santa is so closely associated with God in both their attributes and in the matter of how one stands approved before each of them.

Notice how society infiltrates our children's minds with this faith in Santa? Satan knows how impressionable young minds are in matters of faith. He will use this opportunity, no matter how innocent it may seem, to destroy the solid foundation of Jesus Christ.

Instead of influencing the minds of our children with the Santa game, our job as Christian parents and fellow believers is that of raising our children in the fear and love of God. We are to point our children to the life and forgiveness that is found in Christ Jesus, that little child born in the manger. He is the real reason for the season. He is the One all of us are to hold dearly in our arms as Mary did that first Christmas Day. He is not only Mary's baby and Savior, but ours as well. That Savior we hold in our arms at Christmas time is the God-Man, the One who was so instrumental in gaining our salvation. May we all keep our focus on Him during the Christmas season, as well as throughout the entire year.

