

Lorenzo and Jesus - The Whole Story

These comments are based on John P. Hatch's article in the *Journal of Mormon History*, 2016, Volume 42, Number 3: From Prayer to Visitation: Reexamining Lorenzo Snow's Vision of Jesus Christ in the Salt Lake Temple.

In 1933 a small article, not significant enough to be included in the table of contents, was printed in the *Improvement Era* magazine. The article, which claimed that President Lorenzo Snow had been visited in person by Jesus Christ in the Salt Lake temple was printed 35 years after the fact, and it went mostly unnoticed at the time. It would take decades for this piece of Mormon folklore to snowball into the faith-affirming story that is so familiar to Latter-Day Saints today.

The entire historical record of this story begins and ends with one man, LeRoi Snow, son of Lorenzo's ninth wife Sarah Minnie Jensen. LeRoi, one of over 40 children born to Lorenzo Snow and his wives, was born when Snow was 62. It wasn't until decades after the supposed event that LeRoi penned the first and only account, either public or private, of this supposed visitation. Get that? The ONLY account.

Although he is our sole source of President Snow's face-to-face visit with Jesus, LeRoi never claimed to have direct knowledge of the event, nor did any of Lorenzo's other children, nor did any of his wives, nor did any of the apostles or other authorities of the church. LeRoi's sole source was his niece, Allie Pond, who was a granddaughter of Lorenzo. Allie was apparently the only person with whom Lorenzo had shared his wondrous story. Unfortunately Allie left no written record of what her grandfather actually said to her. Although the story as we read it is told in first person and with great detail, we have only LeRoi's 3rd-hand account, decades after the fact, as filtered through Allie's personal recollections much later in her life.

LeRoi supported his story with claims that the miraculous event was also confirmed by three men: President Heber J. Grant, Anthon H. Lund, and Arthur Winter. LeRoi claims that these men confirmed Allie's story after LeRoi presented it at an MIA conference in 1919. Unfortunately, there is no record that anyone ever acknowledged the story, and reasonable evidence that no one did.

First, we have the minutes from the Quorum of the Twelve meeting where Lorenzo Snow himself relates the story of what happened that night. President Snow says that he knelt in prayer for guidance about whether he should reconstitute the First Presidency after President Woodruff's death. The minutes say, "His prayer was answered, the Lord manifesting unto him clearly what he should do...In accordance with the light given me, I now present to you the name of Geo. Q. Cannon as my first counselor, and of Joseph F. Smith as my second counselor." (Journal History, September 13, 1898, 4). So there seems to be a general idea of inspiration suggested here, but certainly no personal visitation. This sounds more like the type of inspiration a bishop receives when he names his counselors. President Snow died three years later and not once in those three years did anyone ever suggest that he claimed to have

been visited by Jesus in the temple. None of the apostles or presidency members, nor any relatives or associates of President Snow, mentioned such an event in their journals. It was not mentioned in his eulogy or in any histories or remembrances of him up to that time.

So what do LeRoi's supposed witnesses say about this event? The minutes of the MIA conference do not indicate that LeRoi Snow played any part in the conference apart from passing the sacrament. Just seven years after the supposed MIA conference confirmation, President Grant was asked in a letter which church leaders had actually been visited personally by Jesus Christ. Grant responded, "I know of no instance where the Lord has appeared to an individual since His appearance to the Prophet Joseph Smith." (First Presidency Letterpress Copybooks, Vol. 72)

LeRoi claimed to have had a meeting with Anthon H. Lund and Arthur Winter "a few days" after the MIA conference in which they confirmed that they had heard President Snow tell the story of his visit. Unfortunately there is no mention of this visit in LeRoi's diary or anywhere else. Winter had been President Snow's secretary. He was aware of Lorenzo's prayer and inspiration about the formation of his presidency but never recorded anything about a visitation. (Winter Diaries 1989-1899)

So what really happened? This story has all of the markings of a folktale that starts from almost nothing and gains a life of its own. Allie Pond seems to have believed that her Grandfather saw Jesus in person. Apparently she told this to her uncle LeRoi. Pond's husband confirmed that she had told the story frequently in her later years, which was when LeRoi heard it and apparently became very excited at the prospect, although he had never heard it mentioned by his father, his mother, or anyone else in the immediate Snow family. No one knows what Snow actually told his granddaughter, and there is no reasonable explanation for why he would have only shared the one and only physical appearance of Jesus Christ since Joseph Smith's visions to a single young girl and no one else. We might imagine that Lorenzo could have told his granddaughter something like, "I could imagine the savior standing before me..." or "I dreamed I saw the Lord..." It is easy to see how Allie might have misunderstood, overlooked, or simply failed to remember one or two words. Or did Lorenzo merely tell her about the inspired feelings he received that night in the temple and Allie's imagination filled in the details? Or was it LeRoi who originated the details of a physical visitation, intentionally or unintentionally, in the years between hearing the story and actually writing it down? Based on his distorted recollection about the other purported witnesses it is obvious that LeRoi was taking great liberties in his enthusiasm to make this wondrous event as real in the minds of church members, as I'm sure it was for him.