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CNS Story:

SANTA-BOOK Dec-19-2005 (610 words) With bookcover. xxxn

Louisiana Catholic woman takes book she wrote about Christmas on tour

By Carol Zimmermann
[Catholic News Service](#)

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- At some point, most parents have some explaining to do about Santa.

Claire Boudreaux Bateman, a Baton Rouge, La., mom, took her explanation a step further than most parents. Instead of just giving a quick response to her son's questions about why Santa visits on Jesus' birthday, she came up with a detailed story of the friendship between Jesus and Santa. She wrote the story down and before long was reading it to local schoolchildren.

During the story's first public debut, at her son's kindergarten class, one student came up to her afterward and asked her if she wrote it and wondered why she didn't staple the pages of her story together.

That got Bateman, a parishioner at St. Aloysius Parish in Baton Rouge, thinking not only of finding a way to keep the pages together, but of possibly publishing the story. A teacher at a local Catholic high school put her in touch with a former art student, Hannah Romero, who illustrated it. In 2002 Bateman's story, "How Christmas Began," was published. It costs \$18.50 and is available online at www.amazon.com and www.barnesandnoble.com.

Since its publication by a Lake Charles, La., company, Shell Beach, the children's book has primarily been sold in local stores in the Louisiana area. But all that changed after this year's hurricane season.

In a Dec. 15 interview with [Catholic News Service](#), Bateman said that many of the stores which were selling the book had either closed or could only take limited inventory after the storm damage. The situation forced her to do some of her own promotion and marketing.

She also was continuing to read the story at local school libraries and classrooms, which she described as "the best part of the whole deal."

"It's incredible. I am able to see Jesus in all of their little eyes," she said.

Bateman is also convinced the Christmas story that gives Santa an important, but less prominent role than Jesus, is particularly relevant

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this year amid all the discussion about the holidays and the confusion about what Christmas greetings people should say.

"It's a welcome message for people who are looking for a way to close the gap between Jesus and Santa," she said about her book, adding that she never set out to "alienate children from Santa, but simply wanted to keep the focus on Jesus."

Bateman, who is currently writing another children's book, said storytelling comes naturally from her southern Cajun culture and said she has been telling children's stories since she was a baby sitter.

Her Christmas book and an upcoming work, "This Little Light of Mine," both stress the theme of God's light in each individual, something Bateman said she became even more convinced of this year after the ravages of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Working in a triage unit after Hurricane Katrina, she said, she "saw that light everywhere." Bateman also said the hurricanes provided an "incredible opportunity to reach out and help people," something she noted people in the South, with their "warmth, hospitality and cooking," are already known to do.

She also saw people express an increased need to be with their faith community.

The Sunday after Hurricane Katrina, she said the Mass crowd was "standing room only," similar to what it was after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. People showed that they "needed their faith community. This comfort, this home is irreplaceable," she said.

That realization is what she hopes people will also remember during the Christmas season as they "slow down and realize they have the light and the light is shining all over the place."

END

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