

When Jesus, Santa get together ...

by Michael Ireland

BATON ROUGE, Louisiana: "Who is Santa and why is he sneaking into our house on Jesus' birthday?"

That was the question posed by Claire Boudreaux Bateman's son, Drew, who was two and a-half years old at the time.

Up to that point, family celebrations of Christmas at the Bateman's had been centred around Jesus' birth and birthday.

"The problem in answering his question is that Christmas doesn't make sense," Mrs Bateman says. "There is a missing piece. What on earth does a big jolly fellow have to do with the birth of Jesus?"

"At the mall and on television Christmas is represented by Santa with his elves and reindeer, while in church the holiday represents the birth of Jesus. My child's question prompted me to connect the two."

The result is *How Christmas Began*, a heartfelt tale by Bateman with charming illustrations by Hannah E. Romero.

The story casts Jesus and Santa as young boys who are on a mission to discover how many people in the world live with Jesus in their hearts.

Jesus, thrilled with the list created by Santa, decides to share his birthday with those who share his "special glow". This prompts the two boys to create the biggest birthday party in the world.

The story explains why Santa watches people and what he is trying to determine. It is not the "naughty or nice" of toy commercials and holiday cartoons; Santa is looking for the love of Jesus in our hearts.

The book also explains Christmas gifts as birthday presents - Jesus and Santa are giving presents to the Jesus inside of people.



Claire Boudreaux Bateman

The story climaxes with this quote from the book: "The best present was that people started seeing that special part of Jesus inside each other's hearts. They realised that when someone

received a present, that "Christ must live inside of them. That's where the word 'Christmas' came from."

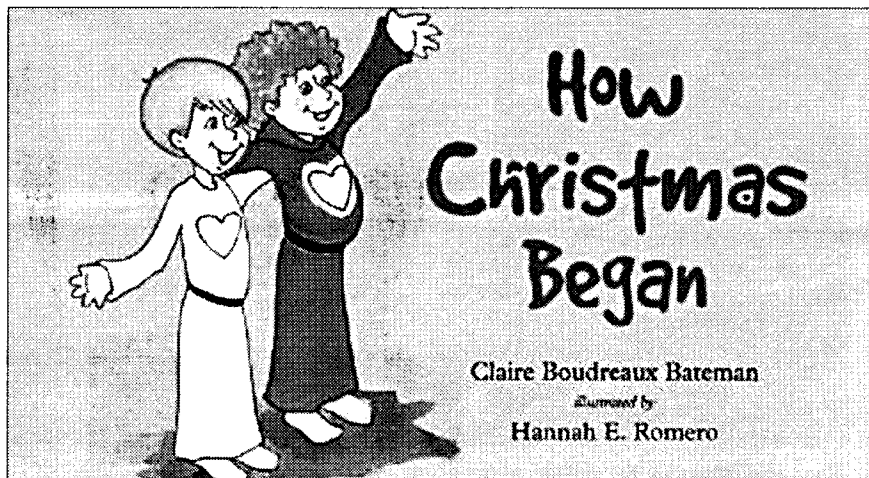
Bateman says her book in no way "knocks" Santa. "Santa is so accepted and loved unconditionally by all. I see this as an incredible opportunity to show Jesus to the world in that same light," Bateman says.

"I know I am not the only parent faced with this situation. And I am equally certain that I am not the first adult searching for the real meaning of Christmas.

"This book is a way for parents to connect two beloved traditions and teach that the 'real meaning of Christmas' is to recognise the light of the living Christ within us all."

One of seven children, Bateman was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana. A community activist at heart, she is passionate about teaching children to recognise, cherish and enjoy the light of God in themselves and others. She lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with her husband, David, and their two children. ■

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MEANINGFUL: Book connects two beloved traditions.