

Local Author Finds Real Meaning Of Christmas - 10/25/2002

(BATON ROUGE, La.) Claire Boudreaux Bateman's son Drew was two and a half years old when he asked, "Who is Santa?" Up to this point, their family celebrations of Christmas were centered around Jesus' birth and birthday.

"The problem in answering his question is that Christmas doesn't make sense," Bateman says. "There really is this missing piece. What on earth does this big jolly fellow have to do with the birth of Jesus? At the mall and on TV, we have Santa with his elves and reindeer, while in our churches we have the baby Jesus. I was forced 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 join on a mission to find out 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 is watching people and what he is really looking for. It's not the "naughty or nice" of toy commercials and holiday cartoons – Santa is looking for the love of Jesus in our hearts. It also explains Christmas gifts. They are really birthday presents. Jesus and Santa are giving presents to the Jesus inside of people.

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 realized 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 – 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 recognize the light of Christ within us all."

How Christmas Began (ISBN 0-9706732-1-3, \$18.50)

· Claire Bateman is available for interviews by request

· Advance review copies are available for book reviewers by request

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