



TWO CHILDREN TELL: CHRISTMAS WITH REBECCA AND NICK

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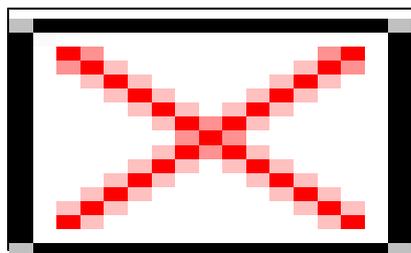
[Virginia Lowe](#) [1]

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Byline:

A Christmas special

In the latest of her series describing children's early responses to stories and language, **Virginia Lowe** gives us a Christmas special.



Coming from a Christian upbringing myself, I felt the children should know what was being celebrated at Christmas. When my daughter Rebecca was 3y0m (3 years, 0 months) I was heavily pregnant with Nicholas, and had trouble telling her the nativity story without tears ? it seemed so poignant, Mary having nowhere to give birth.

So we borrowed two books from the library which contrasted in both words and pictures. Bruna's **The Christmas Book** has his usual simplistic bright pictures. I loved the homely Mary, in contrast to most illustrations of her, and his down-playing of the religious aspect. Northrop's (ed.) **The Christmas Story** illustrated with works from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, has the words of the two relevant gospels in the King James Bible as its text. I read it to Rebecca with only occasional glossing of words. She was surprised to discover it was the same story as in the Bruna. I explained it had been told by lots of different people, in lots of different ways. It was a very important story to many people.

Nicholas at 3y10m heard Nussbaumers' **Away in a Manger**. He wanted to know where God was in one of the pictures.

N: Is God with the hunters? (people with sticks)

J: Yes, God is everywhere.

But a little later in the day, Nick was still working on it, and he made his puzzlement even more clear.

N: Is God with bad people?

J: Yes, with everyone.

N: Even with people who kill God?

J: He can't be killed. He's there all the time and forever.

His atheist parents had not worked out what explanation we were going to give, at this stage.

Something for Christmas is about a little mouse trying to think of something to give his mother. But he can't make presents without materials, and finally Mother shows him that she is happy having his love ? that's what Christmas is all about. At four, Rebecca really enjoyed this, but when it was finished, wanting to reassure herself, she remarked

R: And it [Christmas] is about presents too.

She commented on several following days

R: I want some love from you at Christmas, Mummy.

She also at four remarked that there was always snow at Christmas in books, and told me about a dream (clearly a made-up story) about having Christmas in Sydney and it being all white outside, and that she had broken off some icicles and put them in a bottle. After Christmas (4y1m by now) one afternoon she started a game ?writing? letters. One ?urgent letter? she read:

R: A man died at Christmas just as he was about to eat his Christmas pudding. He was very hungry and he died and died and died until there wasn't any left.

Just a few days before we had tended a sick possum, and I had told her it would die if we couldn't get it to eat and drink.

The same year, she complained on the phone to her grandmother that she had received too many books for Christmas, and remarked that books aren't presents at all. As they were around all the time, including many new ones, books certainly had no novelty value ? they were like food ? pleasant but necessary so not very exciting.

We were reading **The Fairy Doll** by Rumer Godden when Rebecca was 5y0m. She was fascinated to compare our Christmas tree with the one in the book, (?why haven't we got candles that you can really light? And ?none of our angels have got wands?). She wanted to know what the difference was between angels and fairies (which is challenging to explain, by someone who doesn't believe in either). She continued

R: Is Baby Jesus real?

After Easter, at 6y4m:

R: I'll tell you three things I don't believe in: Father Christmas, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny.

I moved this on to a discussion about not upsetting others who did believe in them.

When Nicholas was 6y10m and Rebecca 10y0m, I read the two versions of the Nativity from the King James bible.

N: What does ?virgin? mean?

V: She'd never had sex.

N: Well how could she have a baby then?

Only the previous week we had reread **The Origin of Johnny** and **Where Do I Come From?** so he was sceptical.

Nick complained that the Famous Five had had three Christmases but they were not any older, when he was reading the series to himself at 8. I decided he'd reached the stage of reading critically.

The Montessori School they attended for their first few school years, encouraged sampling all religions. Our family continued many of the Christmas traditions, Christmas tree, Christmas pudding, even carols, in a secular way. As children they were exposed to the traditions of their culture. And of course we continued to buy books for Christmas, as

well as 'real presents', as one does.

Dr Virginia Lowe lives in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. She is the proprietor of **Create a Kids' Book**, a manuscript assessment agency, which also runs regular workshops, interactive writing e-courses, mentorships and produces a regular free e-bulletin on writing for children and children's literature generally. See www.createakidsbook.com.au [3] for further details. Her book, **Stories, Pictures and Reality: Two Children Tell** (2007) is published by Routledge (978-0-4153-9724-7, £29.99 pbk).

The Famous Five series, Enid Blyton, Hodder Children's Books

Something for Christmas, Palmer Brown, NYRB Children's Collection, 978-1-5901-7462-3, £6.99

The Christmas Book, Dick Bruna, Simon and Schuster, 978-1-4711-2112-8, £10.00

The Fairy Doll, Rumer Godden, Macmillan Children's Books, 978-1-5098-0507-5, £5.99

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