

## Lo, the fairies led the three snowmen

By Esther C. Baird

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Well it's Dec. 12 and I'm writing this beneath a grove of palm trees. The warm sand of Florida's eastern coast is a few yards away — because no matter what commercials show, taking your laptop onto a beach is a recipe for a disaster. I'll stick to the patio thank you. And, oh, there goes a flock of pelicans above my head.

'Tis the season! It's useful to have parents who live in Miami when you live in Boston. But it's also, I'm finding, all getting a bit confusing for our daughter as we celebrate Christmas.

This will be her third Christmas but so far she hasn't had a traditional northeast Dec. 25. On her first Christmas we were again visiting my parents here in Florida. Last year, as some of the regular readers may recall, we were living in Australia. We spent Christmas Day driving into the desert-like outback with temperatures over 100 degrees. And now, here we are again celebrating an early Christmas with my parents amidst the palm fronds, orchids and iguanas.

We will actually be back in Beverly by the time this goes to print. And we'll celebrate Christmas Day with my husband's family in whatever — hopefully chilly — weather the Northeast whips up. Our daughter can finally experience a Christmas morning in polar fleece pajamas where snowflake-wrapping paper makes sense.

Still, as of now, the concept of a cold Christmas is foreign to her. To help her along we've talked extensively about building snowmen, going sledding and making snow angels. Living on the North Shore, I know that we'll eventually get enough snow so that she'll never misunderstand winter again. But will she understand a "white Christmas" by this coming Monday?

The fact that, in our family, the most important part of the holiday is teaching our daughter about the Biblical nativity account only heightens the confusion. Throwing the story of sheep and mangers, frankincense and myrrh, into the mix of beaches, tropical lizards and snowflakes has only solidified in her mind that Christmas is a hodge podge of weather and events taken from all walks of life. Anything goes; when in doubt throw it into the Christmas story!

This was confirmed one evening when I was reading a children's version of the nativity story to her: "Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem and there was no room in the inn," I said, flipping the pages. My daughter studied the sandy hills that Mary and Joseph traversed as if that made perfect sense. Naturally there was sand at Christmas time — there always was in her experience. Not to mention the palm trees. Check it out. There are lots of palm trees in children's nativity stories. "And Mary had to have the baby in the manger," I continued flipping to the page where Joseph had his hand on Mary's shoulder as she lay in the hay.

At this point my daughter interrupted me and suggested, "Joseph is giving Mary coffee because she is tired."

"Well," I stammered, not wanting to cause a major theological rift in her mind, and yet, I couldn't really argue with the principle — it probably was the best thing Joseph could have done at the time. I hurried on. "And there were shepherds in the fields nearby and the angel of the Lord came to them."

The page showed some traditional bathrobe-clad shepherds and some bright angels flying in the sky.

"Look mommy," my daughter exclaimed, "fairies!"

"No, sweetie," I said recalling her current obsession with Tinkerbell and Peter Pan. "I think they are angels coming to tell the shepherds about baby Jesus."

"No!" she insisted, a stubborn tone creeping in. "Fairies! They are fairies."

Well, OK, I thought, and kept going.

"And there were three wise men in the east who followed a bright star that led them to the manger."

“Snowmen!” my daughter declared.

“Oh no honey, these are *wise* men — see, there is no snow, they are just men called wise men.”

“Three snowmen! There are snowmen at Christmas!”  
And so it went.

All the pieces of her life were coming together on Christmas – the great blend of concepts. And how could I really correct her, given her experience?

Maybe next year when she is almost 4, the snowmen can stay in Beverly; the fairies can go back into Peter Pan and the sand and palm trees can mostly belong to Miami awaiting a later education on the similarities of Florida’s climate with the Middle East. Though, if we must revise all of biblical history, I vote we let Joseph bring Mary some coffee.

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