

The Sounds of  
Christmas



Jeffrey and Kathi Pelton

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25 Days of Devotion

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# Dedication

To all who rejoice and know the Light has come;  
who sing His lovingkindness in the morning  
and His faithfulness by night;  
and who love His appearing...



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# I ntroduction

by Jeffrey Pelton

**We are** one of those corny families who really loves Christmas music.

Now, we are painfully aware that many people do not. A common complaint during the holiday season is “Everywhere I go, all I hear is Christmas music!”

Well duh; that’s one of the things we really like. It makes us happy to hear the same old tunes year after year, in a communal celebration of joy and warm nostalgia and, yes, sappy sentimentality. Honestly, I am not tired of them even after weeks of (over)exposure.

Someone may say, “That’s all well and good, and I’m glad you can go through a mall without going crazy; but seriously: a whole book about Christmas carols?” That viewpoint is understandable, but there is a lot more to the idea behind this small book than just applying a religious gloss over happy little holiday ditties.

First, a note to the purists among us: we realize that almost certainly Jesus was not born on December 25. Also, we get that Christmas trees really have nothing to do with mangers—in fact, there is a lot of information out there about the pagan origins of this custom, and many others (like shopping, but you didn’t hear that from me).

But never fear. Kathi and I are not secret Druids seeking to infect the church with Saturnalia festivals. We are Christians who passionately love Jesus, and we love our families, and we love the holiday season. There is a lot of weird, hokey kitsch involved in our culture's "holiday spirit," to be sure; but there is much that is beautiful and joyous that points to the true meaning of the celebration we have come to call "Christmas."

Many of the songs in this book have special meaning in our hearts, because they are suffused with the richness of years of memories: innocent childhood excitement and the joy of raising children to experience that same thrill; happy celebrations involving food and gifts with family and close friends; the tenderness of hopes that we really can live in "peace on earth" and that people would become "men and women of goodwill." A few of our selections are of fairly recent origin; most of them are quite old. They all have lyrics that speak powerfully and poetically and if we will ponder the meanings contained therein, we will find them an indispensable guide, ushering us into true worship of the King of kings who left His throne to become like us, sharing our sorrows and joys, giving Himself wholeheartedly for our redemption.

Music, more than any other art form, appeals directly to the emotions. God likes emotions; we know that because He experiences them and He created us to experience them as well. We are each commanded to *love* God with all our heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37). So the fact that these songs bring us great joy *and* teach us more about

our incredible Lord certainly make them a fitting subject for a book.

The great nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, *If the angels ushered in the gospel's great Head with singing, ought I not to preach with singing? And ought not my hearers to live with singing?*

We agree. Come read and sing, and together let us adore Him.



A vertical winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees and falling snowflakes. The background is a soft, hazy white with faint silhouettes of trees and buildings. The foreground shows a close-up of a snow-laden tree branch.

First day

The Gift  
Exchange



## I

**T**he Christmas season has begun! The lights, the joy, the decorations, the presents, the food, the get-togethers; it is an exciting and joyful time. It is a season that awakens the child in us all. We love to connect with family and friends and exchange gifts with people we care about—it's fun to give and fun to receive.

It is exciting to anticipate the joy of giving and receiving gifts during the holiday season. Often, the anticipation is more fun than the present itself. Our family always feels a bit sad when the brightly wrapped offerings have been turned into a wasteland of empty boxes and discarded paper and ribbons. But we build memories upon memories with the gifts we give to each other, expressions of gratitude and love. And as sweet as our encounters remain as the years pile up, the most wondrous exchange of all took place when God the Father sent his Son as a gift for all mankind. It was an eternal gift of infinite value.

We had nothing to offer in return. Most of us

would admit that we even turned our back on his gift initially and decided we would do better living the way we wanted. However, God graciously and freely continued to offer forgiveness and healing and love, until our eyes were opened and we responded to his overtures. Because the Lord is patient and gracious and generous, this season is a celebration of life; a cause for rejoicing, a triumph of love over hatred and light over darkness.

Tragically, some people experience Christmas as a time where they find themselves broken-hearted, lonely, and frightened: victims of a corrupt and uncaring world. The festivities just make them feel worse. It seems all around them are proclamations of joy and peace and brotherhood, but these people face crushing sorrow and chaos and ugly bitterness. They are without real hope, bowing their heads in despair at the crushing weight of the anguished hopelessness they feel. Even those of us who are happy have to admit that the great sorrows of living do not magically cease just because we celebrate Christmas.

*And in despair I bowed my head,  
"There is no peace on earth" I said,  
"for hate is strong and mocks the song  
of peace on earth, good will to men."*

("I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day")

We see the holiday portrayed in popular culture as an annual societal eruption of joy and benevolence and hearty good-will, but too often holiday rejoicing plummets into consumer excess and avarice. Noise,

crowds, clamor; the whole chaotic scene is enough to tempt a person to ask the same questions Ebenezer Scrooge asked his nephew: “What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry?”

Well, Mr. Scrooge, there is an answer. Those of us who have been privileged to push aside the tinsel and the trappings, and have looked deeper into the mysterious promises that were released with what we refer to as the “first Christmas,” have found something waiting for us that gives us far more than a few reasons to be merry because of a holiday. We have been welcomed by a living Savior; we have been offered true joy; we have found not only fulfillment for our lives, but the very Source of life itself. We have been allowed to find the very reason for our existence.

We do not live as individuals disconnected, floating without moorings or purpose through a vast and uncaring universe. It is true that our lives are short, and there are troubles and trials to be endured. But despite that, Christmas offers the promise that we—who were rebels against our good and glorious Creator—have been given the opportunity to have close, intimate, loving fellowship with God himself.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand  
(Romans 5:1-2).

And we have the understanding that we have been

changed. Scripture assures me that I am not the person I was before I came to new life in Jesus.

... if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!  
(2 Corinthians 5:17).

We who have been captivated by the love of God in Christ Jesus have been freely given the most astonishing gift exchange ever offered: peace for fear; hope for despair; joy for mourning; beauty for ashes. These are pretty amazing reasons to be merry! Through faith in his death and resurrection, we are brand new creations. We have a genuine story to share with those around us who are hurting and confused, harried by expectations that can never be completely fulfilled here on earth. We carry the glorious message that because of the Baby born in Bethlehem, there truly can be “peace on earth, goodwill to men.” He came to dwell among us, and still chooses to be involved with our lives, because he cares about us. Today, you can proclaim the good news that “God is not dead, nor doth he sleep!”

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy  
and peace in believing, so that you will abound in  
hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Romans 15:13)

A soft, wintry scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a light, hazy grey with falling snowflakes. The text is overlaid in a black, elegant serif font. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

Second day

Light Has  
Come



## 2

**C**hristmas is celebrated during the darkest part of the year in the northern hemisphere. Dusk begins early, and the long night provides a velvety backdrop to sparkling, illuminated decorations.

With childlike wonder and joy, we venture into winter darkness to view the multicolored luminescence of our neighborhoods. The beauty reminds us that our kind Father sent us His only Son when we were lost and fumbling about in darkness and shadow, not able to find our way to true joy and peace.

*O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer  
our spirits by Thine advent here.*

*Disperse the gloomy clouds of night  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.*

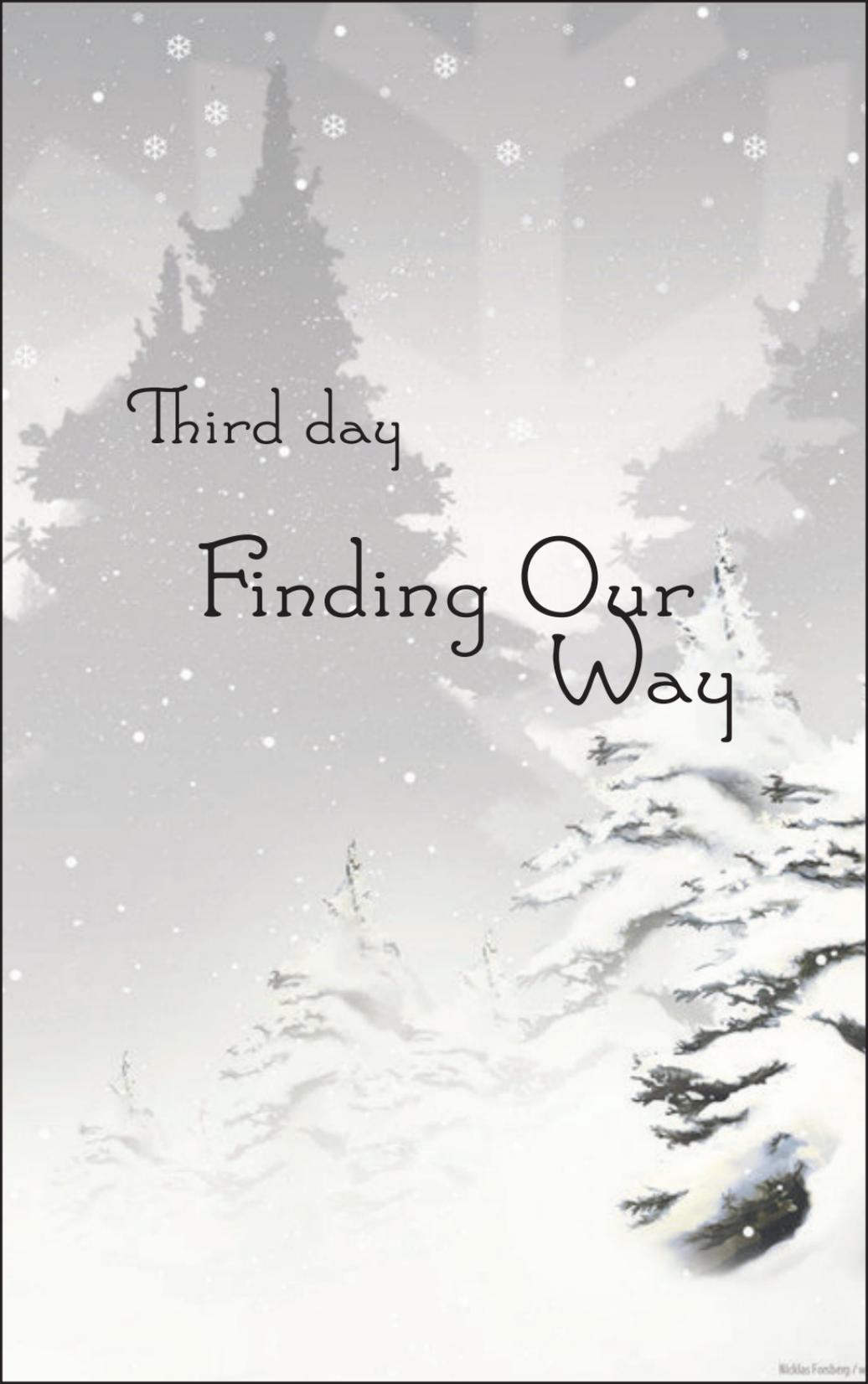
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

(“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”)

More than 700 years before the birth of Christ, the





A vertical winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees and falling snowflakes. The background is a soft, hazy white with faint silhouettes of trees. The foreground shows a close-up of a snow-laden evergreen branch. The text is overlaid on the scene.

Third day

Finding Our  
Way



### 3

**G**od rest ye merry, gentlemen,  
let nothing you dismay;  
remember Christ our Savior  
was born on Christmas day  
to save us all from satan's power  
when we were gone astray....

(“God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen”)

When I (Jeffrey) was nine years old, I went astray. My father had taken my brother and me to a large public event, and when it was over, I needed to use the bathroom. Dad walked over with me and waited by the exit with my little brother, but somehow, as I walked out I turned the wrong direction and was swallowed by the swarm of people rushing to get to the parking lot.

I was only lost for about ten minutes, but to me—and my father—it seemed like hours. Even now, I remember the desperate loneliness and sick panic that

flooded me as I frantically searched for my daddy. When we finally spotted each other, we ran to each other and I jumped into his arms and sobbed.

To go “astray” is to wander from the correct path, to deviate from the right destination, both in the literal and moral sense. While I was astray from my father, heading the direction I *thought* was correct, I was alone and vulnerable to anyone stronger and smarter than me who might have wished me harm. Initially, I thought I was going the right way (it seemed right to me) so I wasn’t aware of my error. For a few moments I thought everything was fine. But then, the truth of my situation dawned on me, and I realized I was in trouble.

This is the condition of all humanity. Every one of us just *knows* we are able to chart a proper course for our lives over rough and rocky paths and through the dense wilderness of this world. After all, we are convinced we are intelligent, strong, good people. Unfortunately, the wisdom of God contradicts us.

All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way...  
(Isaiah 53:6).

We have an enemy—satan, the deceiver and accuser—who is able to seduce us into pathways of destruction and death. He has nothing but evil intent for every man, woman and child. If we go our own way, we will ultimately end up in serious trouble.

But praise our merciful God! Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day and He vanquished every dark

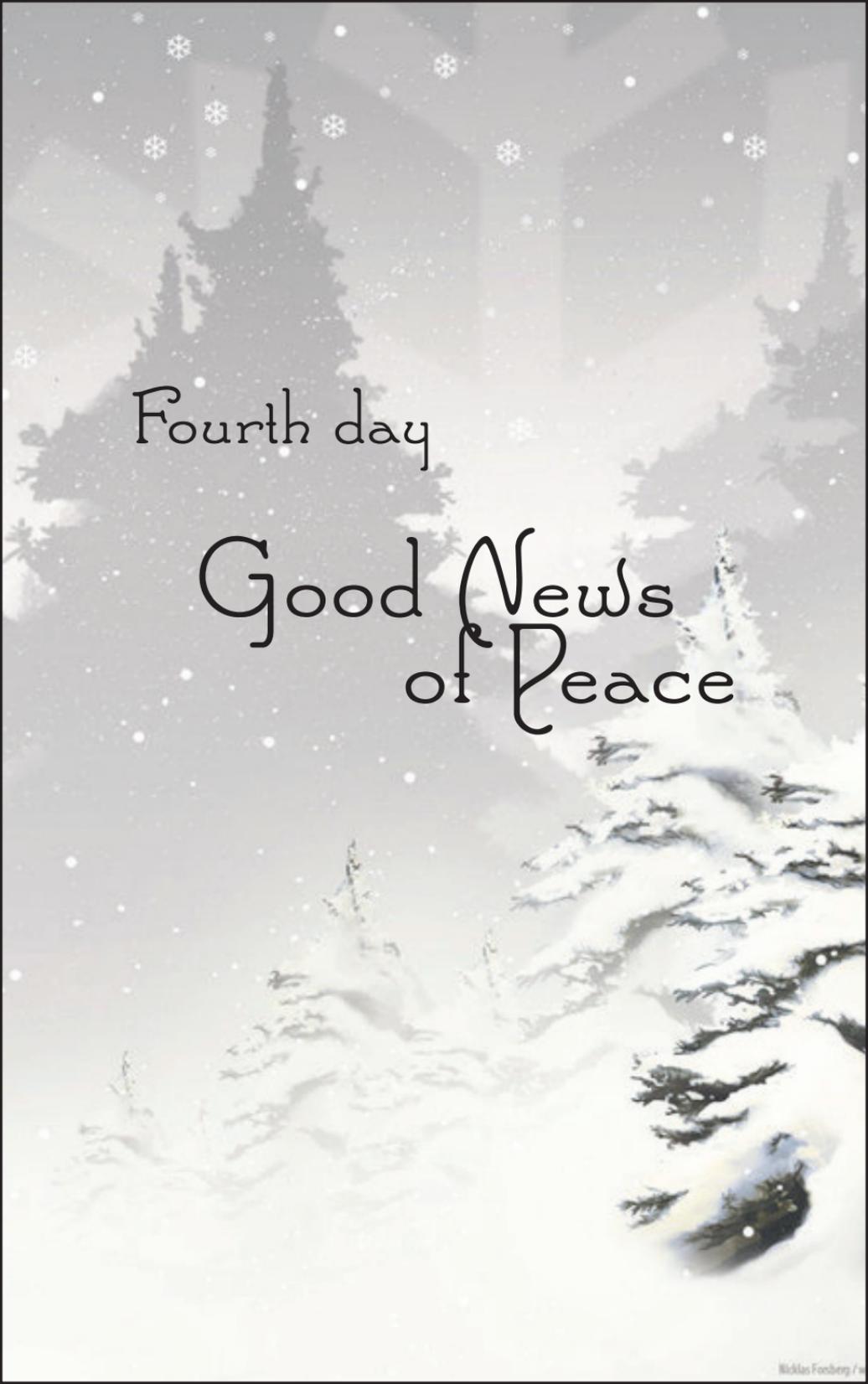
power, stripping them naked and humiliating them (read Colossians 2:15). The devil and his dark forces are destroyed by the power of the mighty God, and those of us who follow Him need not fear, for He always leads us in paths of righteousness and goodness.

“God rest ye merry” was an old expression wishing the recipient(s) peace and joy and happiness. It is fitting that we sing that with one another this time of year, for we no longer need to go astray, frightened and alone. Jesus is our way into the gracious arms of our strong Father.

Sing the carol today with renewed wonder and gratitude. Sing it loud and sing it strong:

*O tidings of comfort and joy,  
comfort and joy,  
O tidings of comfort and joy!*





Fourth day

Good News  
of Peace



# 4

**W**hile shepherds watched their flocks by night  
all seated on the ground,  
the angel of the Lord came down  
and glory shone around;  
and glory shone around.

(“While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks”)

One day as I (Kathi) pondered these lyrics, I was shown a vision of fathers and mothers sitting in dark bedrooms, watching over their children as they slept. I could feel the deep concern in the hearts of these parents for their children’s futures. I was also aware that these families struggled with broken relationships and deep financial needs. The parents’ faces were lined with pain and fear as they silently wept, overwhelmed with burdens too heavy to carry.

Then, just as the angel appeared to the shepherds watching their flocks, I saw angels visit these parents

to announce good news of peace. Just as was true on that first noel, angels will be busy this Christmas season, reminding families of the hope and favor that rests upon all who put their trust in Jesus as Savior.

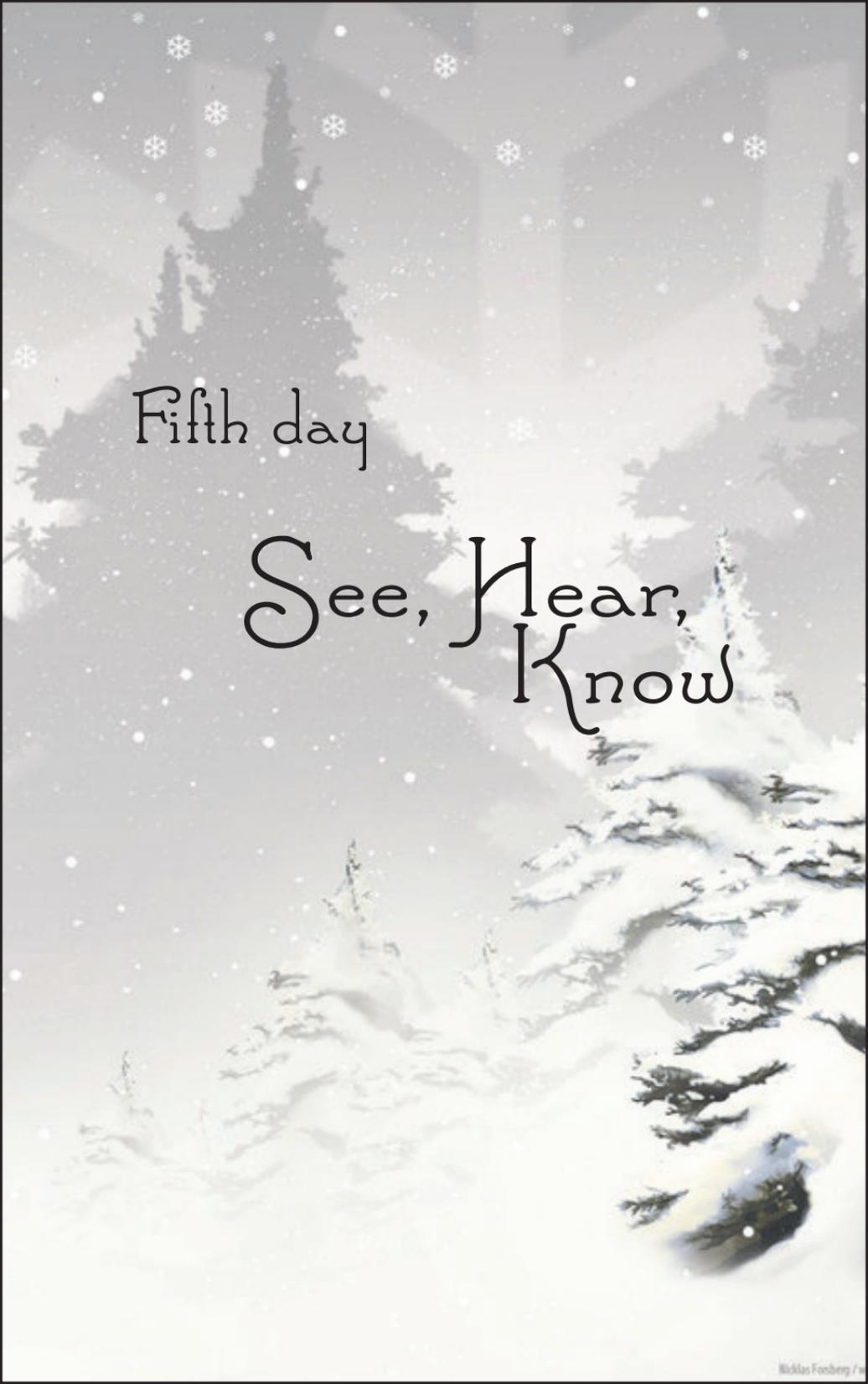
*Do not be afraid...*

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:10-14).

The proclamation delivered to shepherds that night so long ago, announcing the birth of the long awaited Messiah, is still resonating to this moment, two thousand years later. Our Lord is assuring our hearts with His love, telling us not to fear. Over all of us, over the entirety of our lives, the angels declare: “...peace to those on whom his favor rests.”





A soft, wintry scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a light, hazy grey with numerous small, white snowflakes falling. The text is overlaid on this scene.

Fifth day

See, Hear,  
Know



## 5

**M**any Christmas songs are constructed with phrases of call and then response. In the well-known anthem “Do You Hear What I Hear?” each of the first three refrains begin with a question:

- Do you see what I see?
- Do you hear what I hear?
- Do you know what I know?

Then, in the chorus of each verse, as intensity and drama builds, the answers are declared:

- A star.
- A voice.
- A Child.

We would be wise if, still today, we would ask these

questions of each other, and search together for honest and faith-filled replies.

Do you see the light that came to earth and then ascended to heaven? .....

Do you hear the voice that announced the arrival of the Messiah, and still today declares salvation for all mankind? Do you know that the baby that shivered in the cold still longs for a place in the hearts of men to rest His head? .....

Help me to be aware of the  
 pictures in my life  
 that are everywhere  
 around me and at all  
 times showing me something I  
 need to see, telling me something  
 I need to hear, offering me  
 something I need to receive.



~KEN GIRE

We live in an age when, increasingly, all our human wisdom and resources are dreadfully inadequate to solve the world's problems such as failing marriages, broken homes, starving children, and overwhelming financial crises. But we have been offered a great light to show us the way; we can look through the windows of humility and let the eyes of our hearts be enlightened. We have heard the whispers of a voice that reveals wisdom and truth; we can quiet the chattering of our own understanding so that we will have ears to hear. We can choose to trust our hearts to the God who is faithful and know the abiding presence of the King of kings who has offered us eternal life.

Jesus told us,

“I am the light of the world. If you follow me,



you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life" (John 8:12) and "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand" (Mark 4:9).

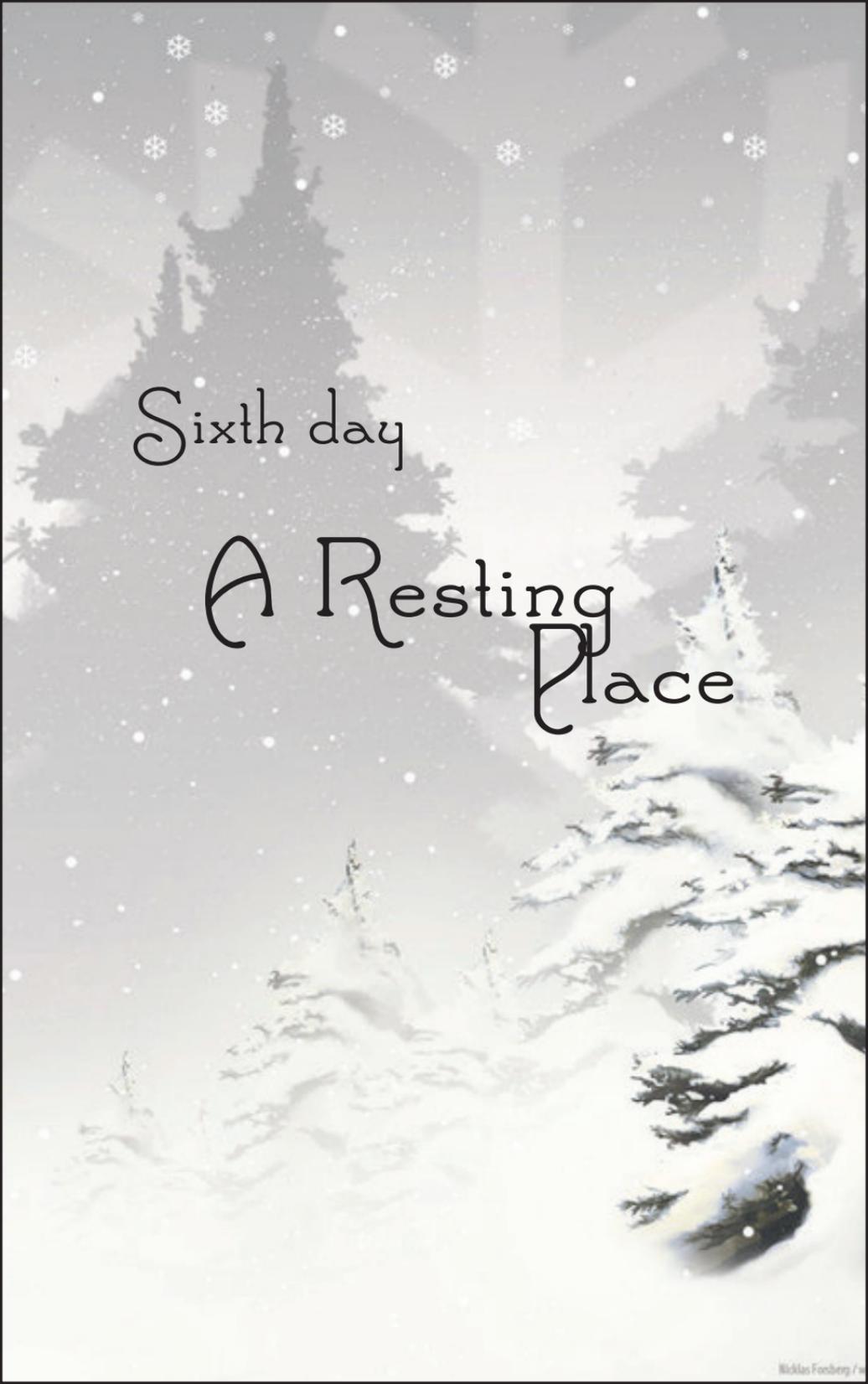
When we live in Christ, the amazing Holy Spirit is resident within us, and we can see, hear, and understand. The Spirit of God is our promised Teacher and Counselor and Comforter. He is God who has come to live with us and within us. He grants us peace and gives us strength. He lives the life of Jesus through us!

Today, and every day, take time to look, listen, and learn. You have the mighty power within you that raised Jesus from the dead! (Ephesians 1:18-20.) You can truly answer:

**"Yes, I see. Yes, I hear. Yes, I know. For He has brought me goodness and light!"**

*The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night,  
He will bring us goodness and light....*

("Do You Hear What I Hear?")

A vertical winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees and falling snowflakes. The background is a soft, hazy white with faint silhouettes of trees. The foreground shows a close-up of a snow-laden evergreen branch. The text is overlaid in the upper half of the image.

Sixth day

A Resting  
Place



6

**A** way in a manger,  
no crib for His bed;  
the little Lord Jesus  
lay down His sweet head.

(“Away in a Manger”)

The Son of God, who enjoyed continual communion through face-to-face intimacy with his Father, chose to leave his heavenly home to enter our world as an infant. This great being, deserving of all honor and worship, was born a baby with no place to rest his head. We would have imagined that the Father would form His Son in the womb of a girl from a wealthy and influential family, but instead he picked a young virgin who was betrothed to a carpenter living in humble means. Then the Father went a step further and allowed a census to be called, forcing the young couple to travel to Bethlehem.

This was to fulfill the prophecy spoken by the

prophet Micah that a ruler would come out of Bethlehem.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me, the One to be ruler in Israel...  
(Micah 5:2).

Because of the census there was no room in any inn for Mary to give birth, so the Son of God was born in a rough feeding trough; it was in rude and humble surroundings that “*Immanuel*” was first laid. The glorious King was born with no crib for his bed.

God’s ways are not our ways. We would have planned for the King of kings to arrive enthroned in the finest earthly palace, but He arrived as a baby, lived as a carpenter, and was known as a friend of sinners. As He obeyed His Father, fulfilling His destiny, He continually discovered that He had “no place to rest His head.”

It is good for us to understand this in our own journey through life. The Father always makes a way for us, but rarely is it the way we might have chosen or planned according to our good ideas. The journey was not forced on Jesus but fully agreed to by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our journey has not been forced on us either. We have been invited into the unity of the Godhead (John 17:20-23) and therefore have agreed to His will and not our own. His will is the best way and the only true way.

Today, let's pause and embrace true gratitude, rejoicing that we would be given a chance to know this humble King and to follow His example. May we thank Him for giving up everything so we could inherit an eternal Kingdom that will never pass away. May we bow down and worship this King who was born in a manger with no crib for his bed. We desire that our hearts would become a resting place for Him to lay His head.



...what was this room, for so long locked, which I was entering?

Why, it was my own heart. And why had I been afraid? Because I thought I'd find it empty, a hard unfeeling thing.

But there, in the room, was my father.

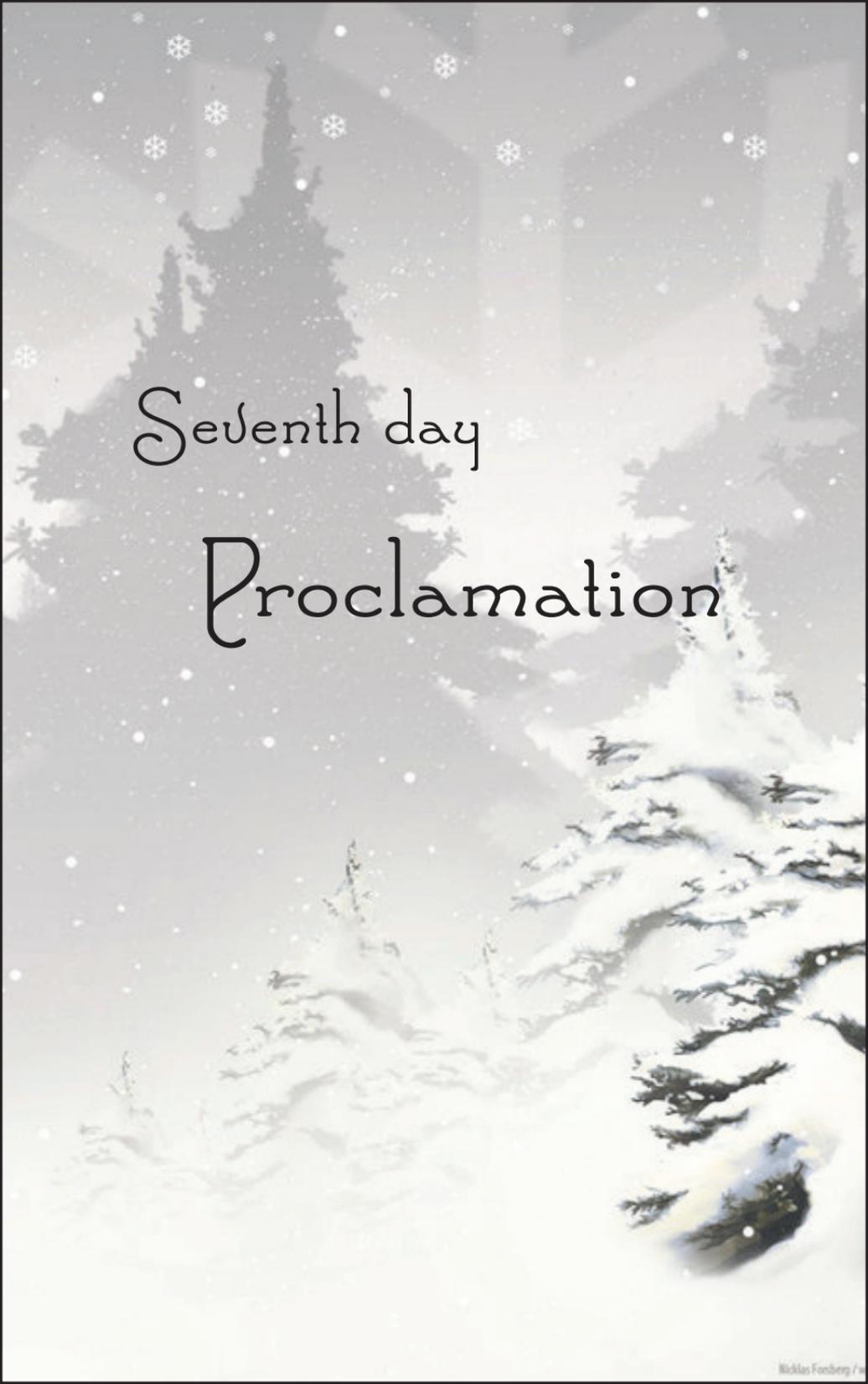
And there, in my father, was the love that had furnished this room, preparing it for us no differently than he had last year prepared it, yet trusting and yearning, desiring our joy.

And what else could such a love be, but my Jesus drawing near?

~WALTER WANGERIN JR.

The Manger is Empty



A vertical winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a soft, hazy white with falling snowflakes. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

Seventh day

Proclamation



7

**I**n the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, all His angels sang for joy (Job 38:7). Creation was birthed in beauty and immensity simply by the breath of the Lord's power.

The LORD merely spoke, and the heavens  
were created.

He breathed the word, and all the stars were born  
(Psalm 33:6).

The marvels of the universe declared the wonder of His imagination, and as celestial bodies of light were formed, the angelic hosts—themselves magnificent beings of fire and wind—erupted with ecstatic worship and all the cosmos reverberated with the sound.

Tragically, that good creation was defiled by the rebellion of Lucifer, and then by Adam's disobedience. Sin and death entered the very fabric of space-time, and the heart of humanity was turned to selfishness, leaving

us to live as hopeless shadows of our original design. But the glorious Ancient of Days decreed that at the proper time, the Last Adam would be born; the Son of Man would restore the true balance of the cosmos.

And just as the morning stars and sons of God shouted and sang at the original creation, so once again they released their worship as God Himself came to dwell among us.

*O morning stars together  
proclaim the holy birth;  
and praises sing to God the King  
and peace to men on earth.*

("O Little Town of Bethlehem")

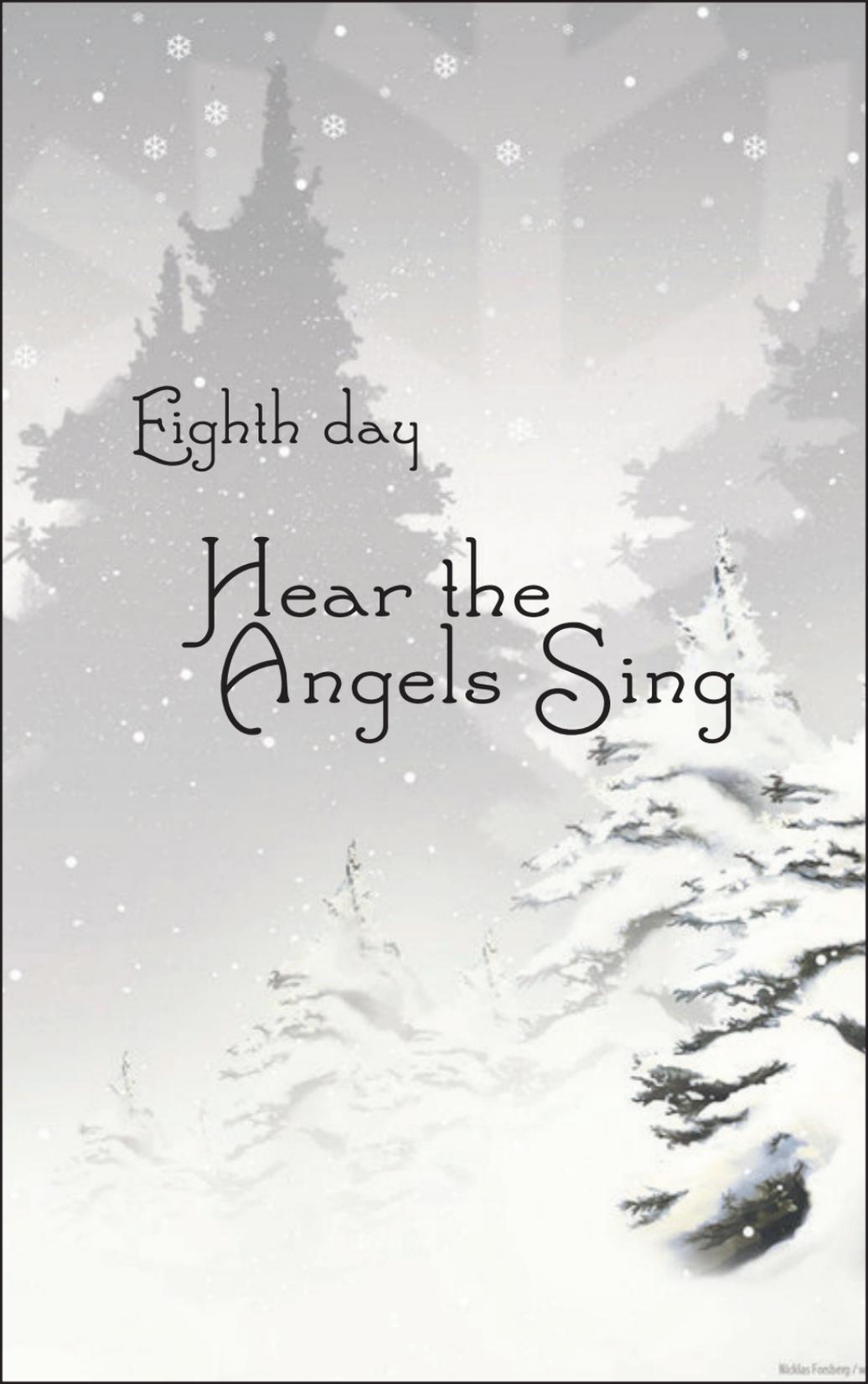
Humble shepherds, quietly watching their sheep in the deep night, were suddenly blinded as the angelic hosts, fresh from the presence of the Holy One and unable to contain their excitement, cracked open the sky, obliterating the darkness with God's glory in their proclamation of the birth of the King of kings.

On that special night, the celestial messengers became a bridge between heaven and earth, releasing pure and holy praise to God, and communicating His wondrous purposes and desire to humankind. The angels were allowed to proclaim the deep secret of the Father's heart: that he desires peace throughout the earth, and his kind intentions towards us are full of grace and mercy.

Let the Christmas story inspire us all to understand the wondrous love the Lord of creation has for us. He is our Father and has a Father's protecting, tender love

for everything He has made. That is why He notices when even a small bird falls to the ground; why weeds in open fields are dressed in vibrant colors; why we are fearfully and wonderfully made and He numbers the hairs on our head.

This holiday season, we can proclaim tidings of goodwill from the heart of our Father. He, the Master Artist, makes all things beautiful and glorious.

A serene winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees and falling snowflakes. The background is a soft, hazy white, suggesting a snowy landscape. The text is overlaid on the scene, with the first line in a smaller font and the second line in a larger, more prominent font.

Eighth day

Hear the  
Angels Sing



## 8

**I**n 1849, Edmund Sears, a parish minister, wrote a poem titled “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” as he was recovering from a nervous breakdown. Sears was deeply troubled by the social unrest that plagued society, as evidenced from the recently concluded Mexican-American War, and the continuing strife that ultimately led to the American Civil War.

Rev. Sears felt that the world had lost the message the angels sang that night in Bethlehem when our Savior was born. He focused on the sin and turmoil around him, deeply disturbed by the cold and bitter hearts of mankind. Today, it can be the same with us, if we view the world through our human understanding. What we perceive all around us could cause us to despair, just as Edmund Sears did. But despite what our human eyes see, the angels’ song still rings true, proclaiming the message of hope and joy.

There remains an eternal promise of peace and

goodwill from our gracious King. Peace is not found in earthly prosperity, but through the holy Babe who came to redeem men to God. The angels sang a song of love that heals the hearts of men. Even in the midst of a world of toil and strife, we receive the sovereign gift of peace and goodwill in the benefits of Christ.

What a glorious song we have the privilege to join with the angels in singing!

*...o'er all the weary world;  
Above its sad and lowly plains,  
They bend on hovering wing,  
And ever o'er its babel sounds  
The blessèd angels sing.*

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load,  
Whose forms are bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way  
With painful steps and slow,  
Look now! for glad and golden hours  
come swiftly on the wing.  
O rest beside the weary road,  
And hear the angels sing!*

("It Came Upon the Midnight Clear")

This song is a refrain and exhortation to us to turn away from the sounds of chaos and listen to the truth that is daily proclaimed by the love of God. Even when the beautiful melody seems faint—or perhaps gone altogether—we may still have the quiet assurance that Jesus has conquered over sin and death. He has come to give life, and that more abundantly.

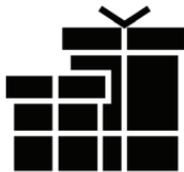


Though the world achingly sings a melancholy tune, still today there is peace, joy, and rest for those who open their ears to hear the angels sing. Heaven's song is loud and clear and remains true throughout the ages.

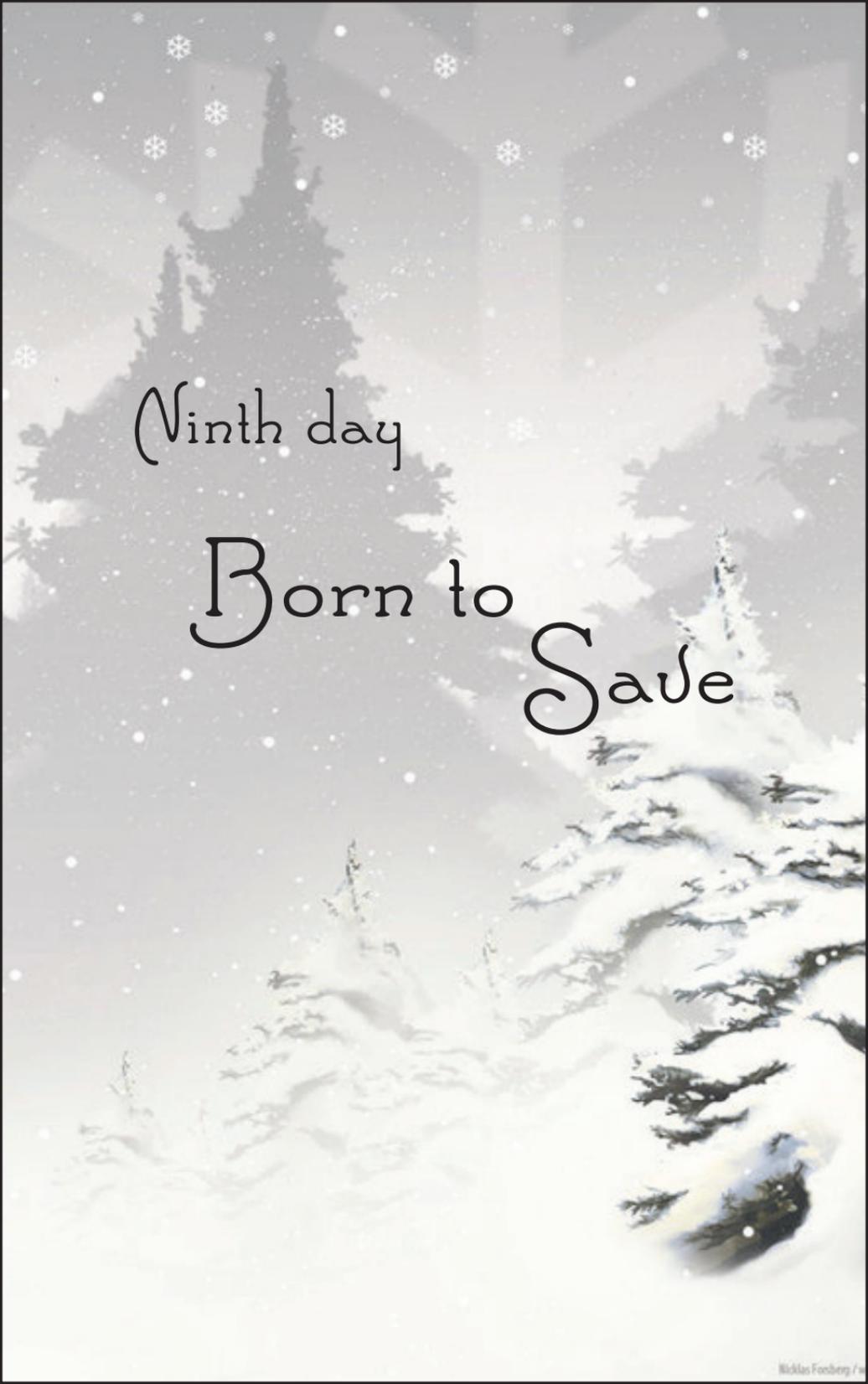
*"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men, from heaven's all-gracious King."*

Advent is the time of promise; it is not yet the time of fulfillment....

Space is still filled with the noise of destruction and annihilation, the shouts of self-assurance and arrogance, the weeping of despair and helplessness. But round about the horizon the eternal realities stand silent in their age-old longing. There shines on them already the first mild light of the radiant fulfillment to come.



~ALFRED DELP  
*Advent of the Heart*

A vertical photograph of a winter scene. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape with snow-covered evergreen trees. In the foreground, a large, detailed evergreen tree is heavily laden with snow, its branches drooping. The sky is filled with numerous small, white snowflakes, some of which are larger and more distinct. The overall color palette is muted, consisting of various shades of white, grey, and dark green.

Ninth day

Born to  
Save



## 9

**G**ood Christian men, rejoice  
with heart and soul and voice;  
now ye need not fear the grave:

*Peace! Peace!*

*Jesus Christ was born to save...*

(“Good Christian Men, Rejoice”)

Most people realize that we celebrate and sing because of the wonderful Baby who came to dwell among us. Even the unchurched find a softening in their hearts in this season and enjoy the tenderness of the age-old story.

But ask the proverbial “person on the street” about the meaning of the Child’s name, and the chances are good you will get a blank stare or a mumbled reply.

His name Yeshua (Jesus) means “salvation.” Matthew tells us that an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and explained that Mary carried a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. Of course, this was no

ordinary baby, and He would be born for no ordinary purpose, as the angel explained:

“...she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

John the Apostle began his account of the life of Jesus with these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-4).



*Christ doth not love  
believers with a low, flat,  
dull, common love, with  
such a love as most men  
love one another with, but with a  
love that is like himself.*

~THOMAS BROOKS

It is important to remember as we celebrate the humble Babe born in a stable, that He was—and is—the Word or Voice of God Almighty. He spoke all things into existence. He is the King of glory written about in Psalm 24. He is the Holy One of Israel. He is the Desire of all nations. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world.

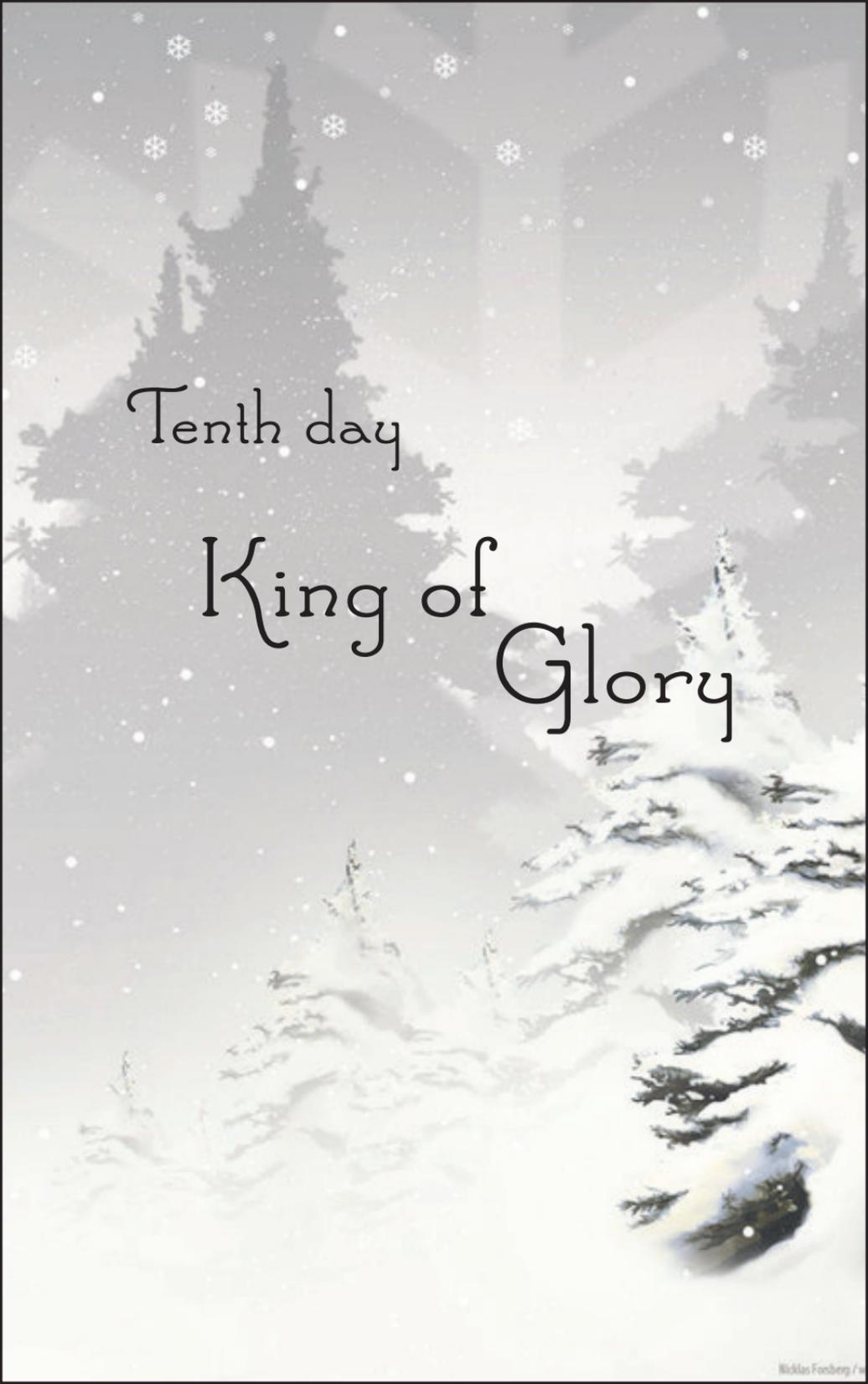
This story is far more than sentiment. It is a ruthless invasion of love and light and good into a



world writhing with bitterness and darkness and empty despair. We want to believe that we can somehow achieve heaven on earth, but we need salvation from our sins, and even from our own good intentions and best efforts. Without Jesus, we are lost.

Good Christian men (and women!) who know Him truly "...need not fear the grave," because He conquered death and hell, and we have peace with God. In Jesus' Name, we have salvation and life everlasting. This is fantastic news of peace.

So rejoice!

A serene winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a soft, hazy white with numerous small, white snowflakes falling. The trees are dark green and heavily laden with white snow, creating a peaceful and festive atmosphere.

Tenth day

King of  
Glory



## IO

**T***hou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,  
when Thou camest to earth for me;  
but in Bethlehem's home was there found no room  
for Thy holy nativity.*

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,  
there is room in my heart for Thee.*

(“Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne”)

More than any other season of the year, Christmas is a time of great contrasts. People differ in their emotional responses, in their memories and traditions, in their celebrations—and in their expectations. Some people focus on childlike wonder, hoping the holidays will be magical. Many pour themselves into parties and endless socializing. Others find it to be a time of gentle nostalgia and reunion with loved ones.

And some people, unfortunately, find it to be a time of desperate emptiness and loneliness. Or they suffer hectic anxiety and inner turmoil as they seek to conform to all the pressures of our cultural expectations.

It has been more than two thousand years since the blessed birth, and still there are so many who have no room in their hearts for the living Christ. They may love the old story and revisit it each year with a wistful smile; sort of like reading “The Night Before Christmas” each year and remembering their innocent belief in Santa Claus. The census-journey, the manger-birth, the angelic songs, the lowly shepherds—it is all sweet, non-threatening fable.

Commercial holiday celebrations display no comprehension of the wonder that is the true meaning of our celebration. The holy Son of God put aside His heavenly glory and came to earth for us—all of us. The Unapproachable One became human flesh and blood, so we could

*...the birth of Jesus made possible not just a new way of understanding life but a new way of living it. It is a truth that, for twenty centuries, there have been untold numbers of men and women who, in untold numbers of ways, have been so grasped by the child who was born, so caught up in the message he taught and the life he lived, that they have found themselves profoundly changed by their relationship with him.*

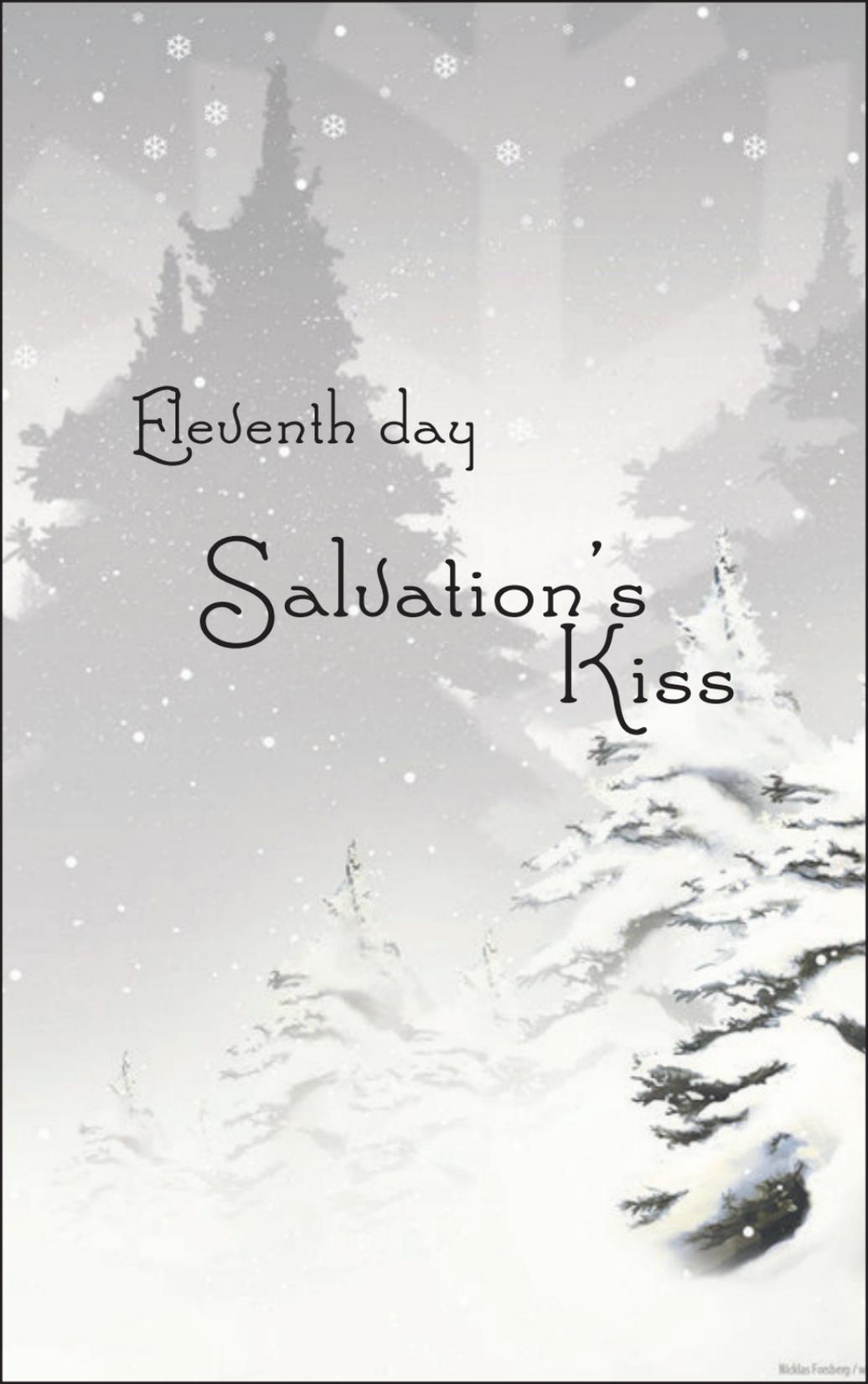
~FREDERICK BUECHNER

touch and see and hear Him. Through Him, we now have unhindered access to God, and we will find His love stretching to meet us, no matter our situation.

But the Child is a baby no longer. Here is John the apostle’s account of the resurrected Jesus:

I (John) was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last".... Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death...."  
(Revelation 1:10-18).

This one left His throne and came in humility as a servant, to be our Savior. And still today He seeks to find room in the hearts of all people. This is the real beauty of Christmas; the incomprehensible reality we can proclaim: the King of glory loves us. Amidst our busy schedules and all the trappings and responsibilities of the holiday, may we be certain to take time to bow before Him in adoration and humility.

A soft, wintry scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a light, hazy sky with numerous small, white snowflakes falling. The overall tone is peaceful and serene.

Eleventh day

Salvation's  
Kiss



## II

**A**ngels and archangels may have gathered there,  
cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;  
but His mother only, in her maiden bliss,  
worshipped the Beloved with a kiss.

("In the Bleak Midwinter")

This is a tender stanza from a lovely and poignant carol.

Probably the first thing every mother does when she is handed her baby for the first time is to give the newly arrived little one a gentle kiss.

Mary kissed her infant son: the first Christmas kiss! For her, the pain of a long, grueling ride astride a donkey while heavy with child faded away. The discomfort of finding no real shelter that night was forgotten. Even the pain of giving birth subsided. A kiss welcomed our Savior. A kiss welcomed the solution to the pain and hopelessness suffered by our world desperately in need of a Savior.

Mary's kiss was not only given to her tiny Son, but it was also a kiss for all those He came to save. As she kissed her baby, she kissed the One who was born to die for all mankind.

The young mother who tenderly kissed her Son's tiny, innocent hands and feet would, one dark day, kiss her adult Son's innocent, nail-pierced hands and feet. The pain that had so quickly faded in the manger would now pierce Mary's tender mother-heart with searing agony. Her beautiful Son took upon Himself every mother's desperation; every father's dark hopelessness; every child's midnight terror.

Our Savior suffered so we could truly be offered the kiss of salvation; and He rose again in triumph over everything that stands against the Father's astonishing purity and love.

Each new day we are kissed with God's mercies, because they are new every morning.

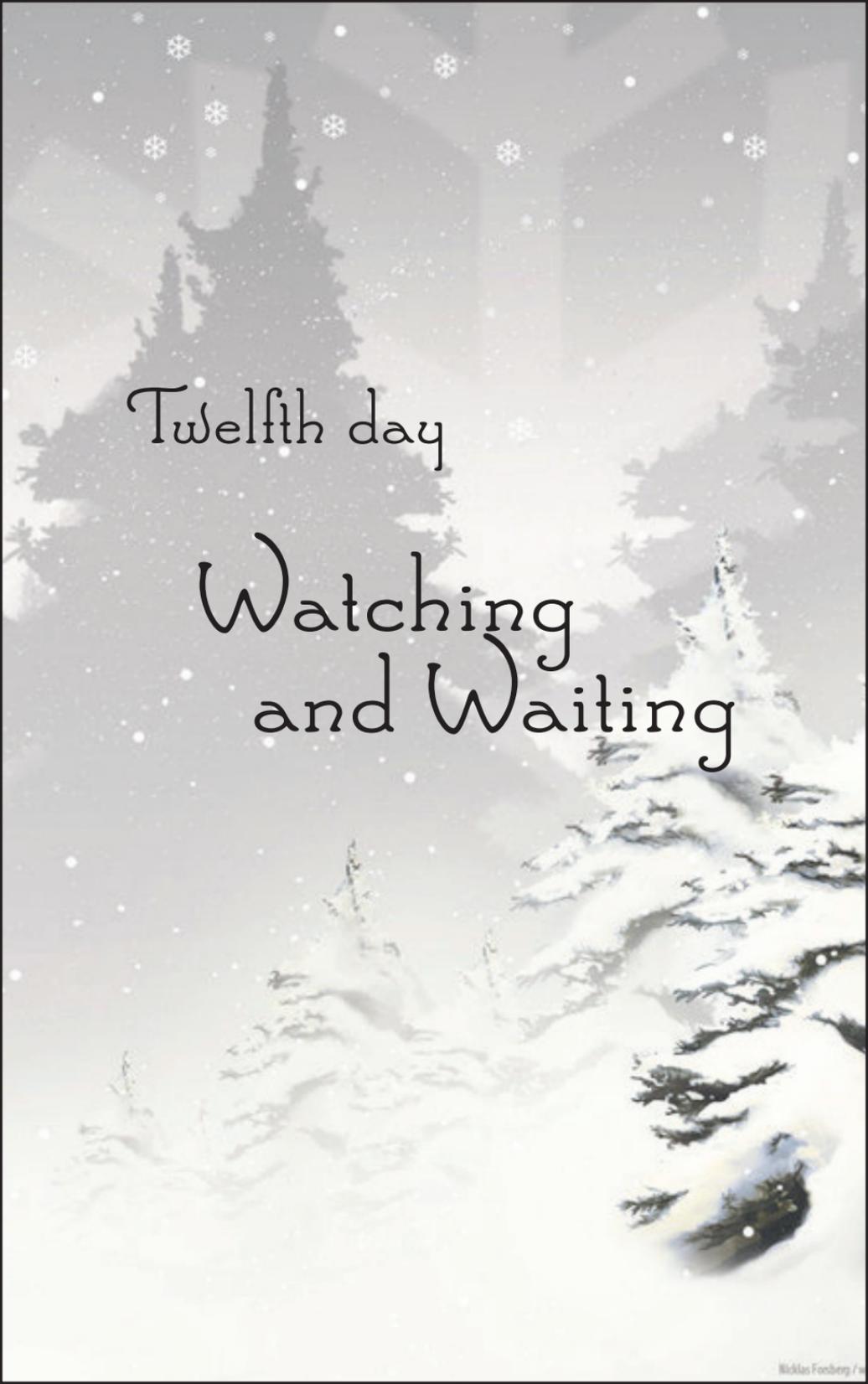
Older than eternity, now he  
is new. Now native to earth as I am, nailed  
to my poor planet, caught that I might be free,  
blind in my womb to know my darkness ended,  
brought to this birth  
for me to be new-born,  
and for him to see me mended  
I must see him torn.



~LUCI SHAW  
"Mary's Song"

Every sunrise is another reminder of the unwavering love offered to each of us—the faithful covenant-love and kindness of our tenderhearted Lord who will never fail us. This Christmas season may we receive the kisses of our Savior who gave the greatest gift mankind could ever receive: salvation by grace.

It is His kiss.

A soft, wintry scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a light, hazy grey with falling snowflakes. The text is centered in a black, elegant serif font.

Twelfth day

Watching  
and Waiting



## I 2

**S***aints before the altar bending,  
watching long in hope and fear,  
suddenly the Lord, descending,  
in His temple shall appear:  
come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn King!*

(“Angels From the Realms of Glory”)

After Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary, in obedience to the Law of Moses, took Him to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate Him to ADONAI.

The temple was filled with priests and scribes, yet none of them took note of the insignificant, humble couple moving among the crowd, nor to the infant they carried in their arms. But God always has a few individuals who live lives of worship and humility, who are sensitive to the wind of His Spirit.

Simeon was a man just and devout, a man full of the Holy Spirit. Simeon had been promised by God

that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah, and he had lived for years in daily expectation. The day Jesus was dedicated, Simeon was in the temple by the leading of the Spirit, and when he saw the couple with their Baby, he knew immediately that his promise had been fulfilled. With joy, he took the infant in his arms and blessed Him and prophesied.

Anna was a prophetess—the only woman mentioned explicitly this way in the New Testament. Widowed after only seven years of marriage, she had lived without a human husband almost her entire life, instead living a life devoted to Israel’s husband (Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 3:14, Hosea 2:16). She found her life fulfilled through constant worship, fasting, and prayer.

When Anna heard Simeon’s proclamation, she also realized that Messiah had come, and she worshiped and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38).

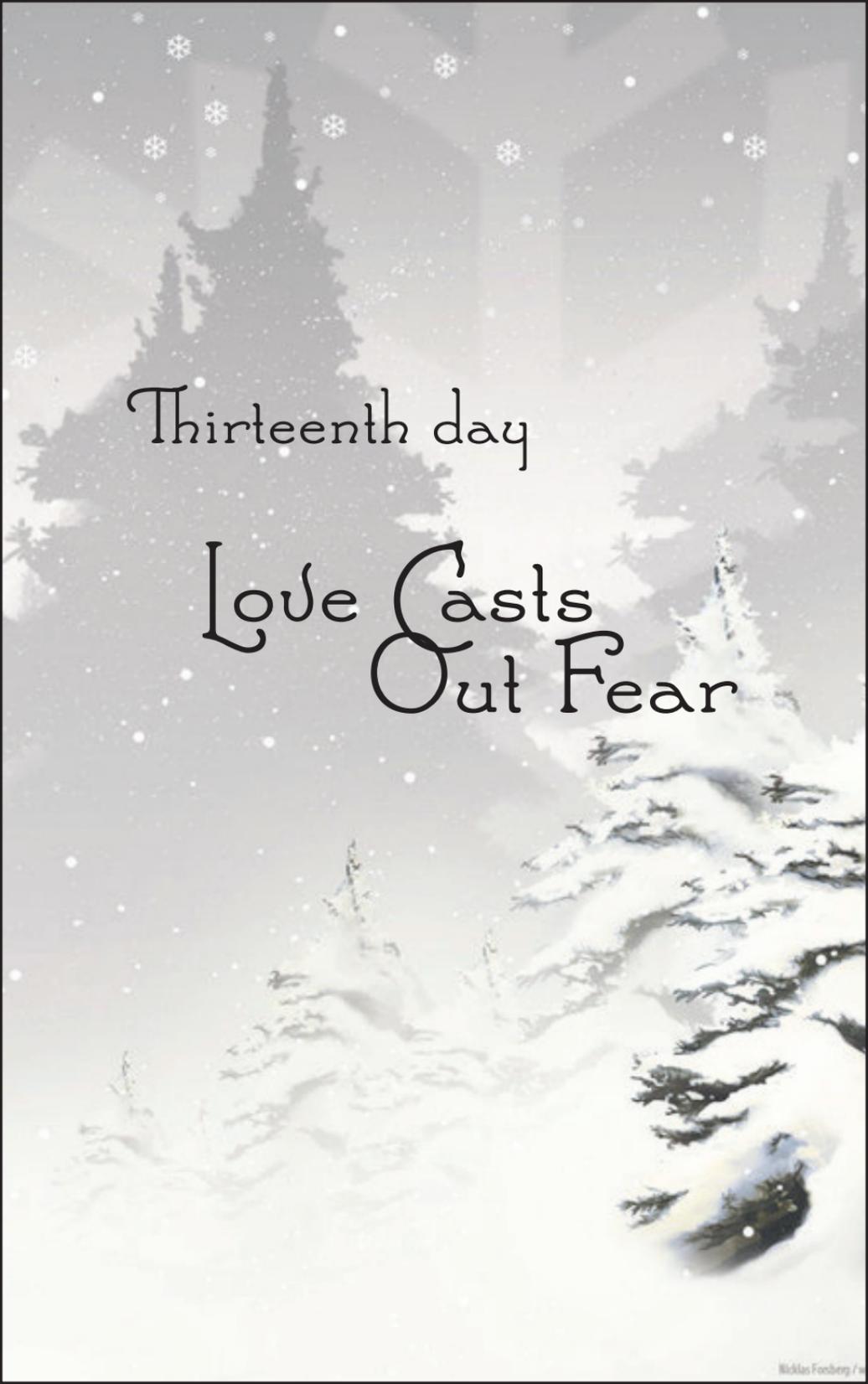
God tells us in Scripture that when we seek Him, we will find Him. Simeon and Anna were watching and waiting, humbly believing that God is always faithful to His promises. We are not told how long these two waited to see the answer to their prayers, but they were given that special opportunity because they did not give up hope.

It is the same for us today. Those who are wise still seek Him; and if we believe His words are true, we will find Him, because, as Paul told the men of Athens, “He is not far from each one of us...” (Acts 17:27). Sometimes He will “show up” in our lives when we least expect it, in ways we wouldn’t have considered. He is eternally

creative, the God of mystery and surprise. That is why we can find joy watching and waiting and worshipping.

If you have been discouraged by what seem like delays in His promises or by unrest and wickedness in the world and you are having difficulty finding joy this holiday season, remember Simeon and Anna. They waited in humility, and trusted until they saw the Promised One. Just as the Lord was faithful to them, He is—and will always be—faithful in your life as well.



A soft, wintry scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a light, hazy grey with falling snowflakes and a subtle geometric pattern. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

Thirteenth day

Love Casts  
Out Fear



## I3

**S**ilent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light.  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
with the dawn of redeeming grace.  
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth!

(“Silent Night”)

Into a world crushed under excessive burdens of hatred, fear, deceit, and shame, Jesus was born to testify to the truth of God, and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. Scripture tells us that in Jesus the Messiah, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's sins against them. This is magnificent news to all who are weary and troubled and fearful.

There is no fear in love. but perfect love drives out fear.... (1 John 4:18).

This truth is a beacon of hope; radiant energy piercing the darkness of the prevailing spirit of the age. Our world is energized by agitation. Human leaders achieve power using threats and dire warnings of punishment or chaos. When people are afraid, they make poor choices and are easily manipulated.

But the child of God, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, does not need to fear the world or the systems and powers of the world. God is greater by far than every earthly authority and every dark demonic host.

This is not a time for us to be swayed by the narrative of our culture and live in fear. For us who know His love, He makes all things work together for our good. For those who have not yet come to the realization of His kindness, He is reaching always with mercy, proclaiming that now is the chosen time, now is the day of salvation.

As the story goes, today's carol "Stille Nacht" was written for a Christmas Eve service in a small town in Austria. It was meant as a simple tune that could be sung accompanied by guitar, since the church's organ wasn't working; some accounts say it was because of rust, while others blame mice. Either way, just like the people who had to deal with a broken organ in the Austrian Alps, we recognize that often life is troubled by circumstances completely beyond our control.

But we are offered the opportunity to trust our Lord and His love for us and possibly, through that trust, make our lives a simple melody that can have world-wide impact. We belong to the One who shone with purity of love, given as a gift of grace. And because

we are His, we are given the gift of His great love in our hearts. As we respond to that love, as we love Him and love one another, we shine like the radiant beams from His face. We can be bright outposts of hope for the people living in darkness.

For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God  
lightens my darkness (Psalm 18:28).

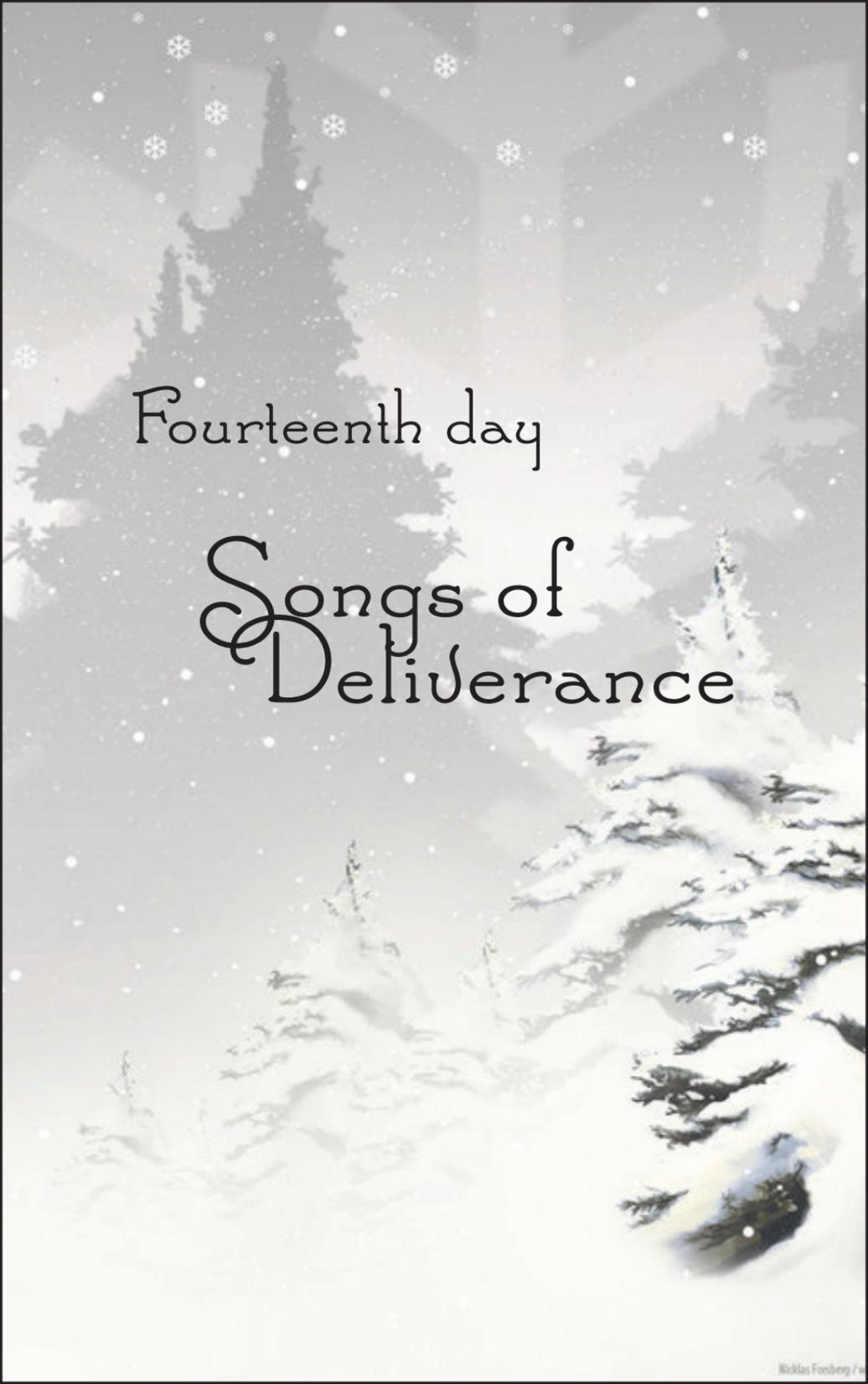
Jesus is the Light of the world, and those with eyes to see will bow and worship Him in joyful adoration. He

And is it true,  
 This most tremendous tale  
 of all,  
 Seen in a stained-glass  
 window's hue,  
 A Baby in an ox's stall?  
 The Maker of the stars and  
 sea  
 Become a Child on earth  
 for me?  
 ~SIR JOHN BETJEMAN  
 "Christmas"  


was Lord at His birth; He has been Lord from ageless eternity; He will forever be Lord of all. Christmas is a season of holy light; a season of holy giving; a season of holy reflection; a season of joyous, holy love.

What better time than the season of light to proclaim the truth of the Son of God, love's pure light? The Light of the world has dawned upon us, and in the illumination of His love,

we can journey unafraid, our hearts filled with joy.

A serene winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a soft, hazy white with falling snowflakes. The text is centered over the scene.

Fourteenth day

Songs of  
Deliverance



## I4

**A**ngels we have heard on high  
sweetly singing o'er the plains;  
and the mountains in reply  
echo back joyous strains:

*Gloria, in excelsis Deo;*  
*Gloria, in excelsis Deo!*

(“Angels We Have Heard on High”)

Sometimes, life is so hard that we struggle with our trust in God’s goodness. We understand that the Bible says God is love and He is supremely good, but difficult circumstances can pound against us until our emotions become raw. We cry out, like the psalmist:

LORD, how many are my foes!  
How many rise up against me!  
Many are saying of me,  
“God will not deliver him” (Psalm 3:1-2).

It is easy for us to become our own enemy, because we listen to our own thoughts fearfully announcing “God may not (or will not, or cannot) deliver me this time....” But those are lies! The truth is, He has answered us. He is never unfaithful to His word, or capricious in His love. He is our Deliverer.

But you are a shield around me, O LORD;  
you bestow glory on me and lift up my head....  
from the LORD comes deliverance.  
May your blessing be on your people (Psalm 3:3,8).

Our hope of deliverance is true and sure, but the manifestation often seems delayed. We may not understand why, but our hope is not based on our ability to reason, but in His faithfulness. Christmas reminds us that while we were helpless and hopeless, God sent His only Son. The angels sang “Glory to God in the highest” with inexpressible joy, and the mountains themselves rang with the echo of God’s glory, His goodness, and His mercy for us.

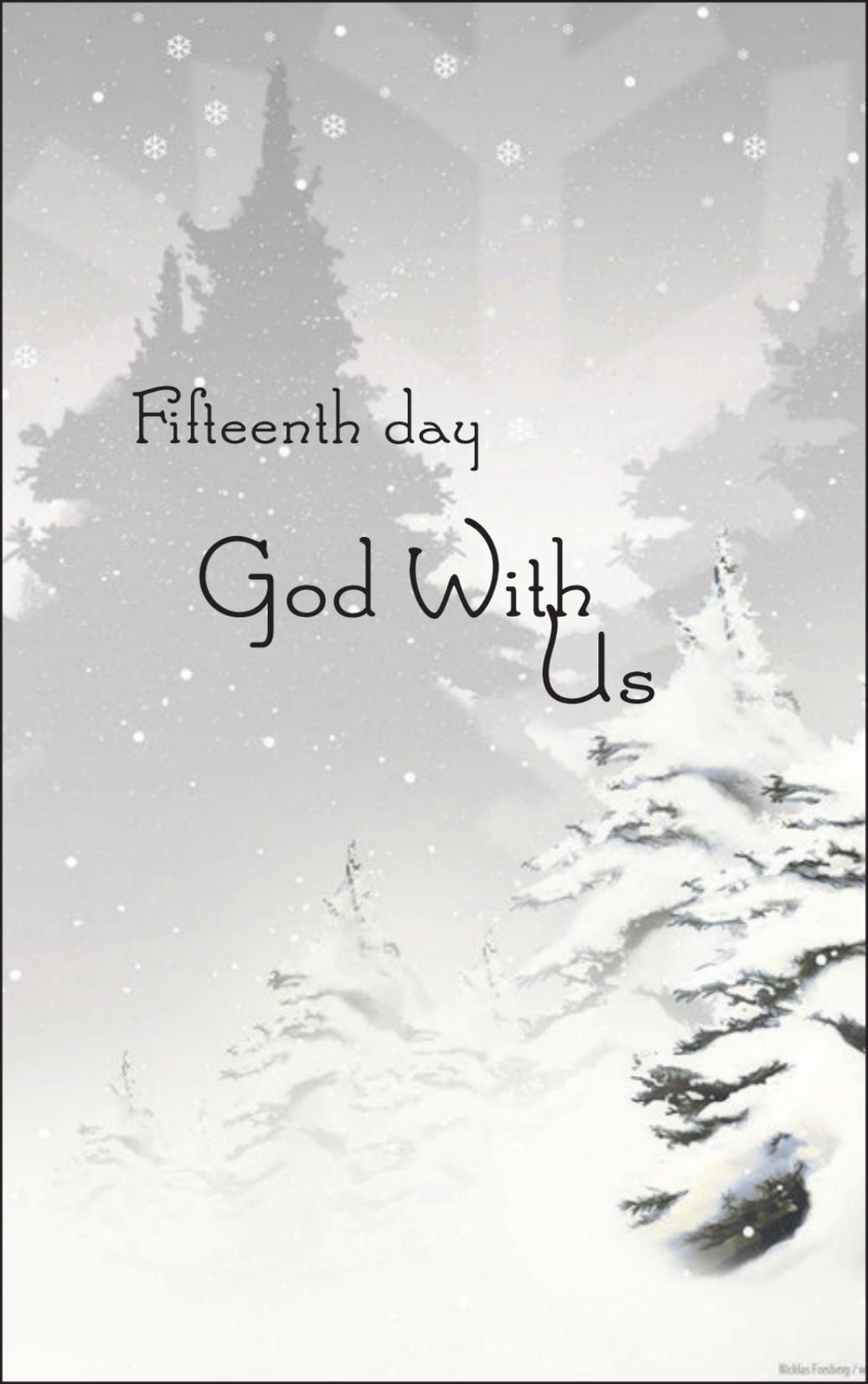
This is a season of reflection, but not a season of regret. You may feel as though you have stumbled and faltered in your relationship with Jesus, but you are never too far from His rescue and love. Do not focus on regrets that keep you from the fullness of the beauty of His forgiveness and the peace of His presence. Together, the manger and the cross display His absolute intention to forgive and restore you, and dwell with you in intimate relationship.

After a woman gives birth, she doesn’t focus on the

pain she just endured; her heart is enthralled with the wonderful and precious baby she holds to her breast. Mary birthed Jesus in difficulty and discomfort, but after the pain, she and Joseph held the Gift of all the ages in their arms.

Don't let pain from circumstances blind you to the beauty God is producing in you. You do not approach the Father in any goodness you possess, but rather in the righteousness of Christ, who never fails. Let Him wash your shame and guilt, let Him restore the joy of your salvation, let Him fill your heart afresh with wonder and love. Hear the news the angels sing:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth  
peace among men with whom He is  
pleased (Luke 2:14).

A serene winter landscape featuring snow-laden evergreen trees. The scene is filled with soft, falling snowflakes, creating a peaceful and festive atmosphere. The background shows a soft, hazy view of more trees and a light sky.

Fifteenth day

God With  
Us



## IS

**V**eiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
hail th'incarnate Deity  
pleased as man with men to dwell,  
*Jesus our Immanuel.*

(“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”)

The Gospel of Matthew recounts the story that before Jesus was born, an angel visited Joseph in a dream and told him about the wonderful Child Mary carried. Matthew then gives further explanation and quotes Isaiah 7:14:

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us” (Matthew 1:22-23).

God with us! Three small words that contain a truth

regarding abundance beyond anything we might dare to ask or think. It is one of the most beautiful and profound announcements ever given to mankind.

I (Kathi) once had a dream where I was approached by several people I knew, who were in the middle of severe need. They asked me to pray for them, which I was happy to do, but I felt overwhelmed by what they faced, and barely knew what to pray.

As I sought the Lord, I suddenly heard what seemed to be the audible voice of Jesus: **“I am closer than any need you will ever have.”**

The moment I heard that I became intensely aware of His presence. Every need that I ever faced and every question that I ever asked were suddenly unimportant as

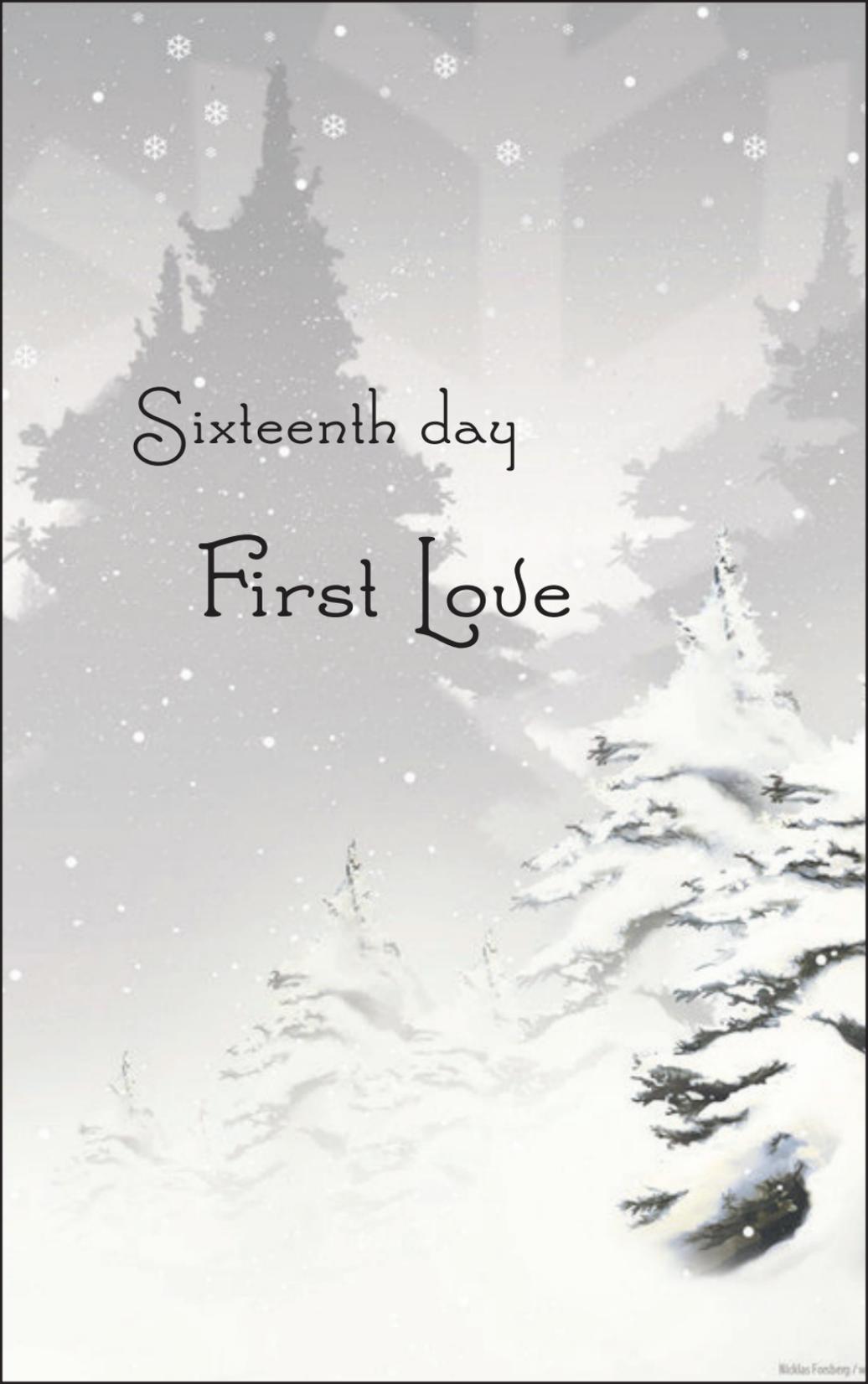
<p>In a world like ours racked with suffering, wars and overshadowed by wickedness, Christmas may seem too comfortable. God's answer to such evil was to send His son, Jesus, to redeem us.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">~RAY ANGLESEA</p>		<p>I experienced Him pulling me close to Himself. I felt that I experienced the truth David knew when he sang “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”</p> <p>At that moment, I had no need or want of anything but Him. The fearful circumstances that had weighed so heavily upon me just moments before suddenly appeared small in the peace of His</p>
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presence. “God with us” was the answer. It was so simple, yet I have rarely experienced such calm assurance, such awareness of rest in His faithfulness and incredible

love.

Daily life has a way of pressing us with urgent and frantic demands. Christmas is no exception; usually, life becomes even busier! For a lot of us, the holiday meant to be joyful has become a reason for stress and excess. We can combat the relentless pull of cultural expectations by remaining rooted and grounded in Jesus' love, remembering that He is closer to us than our greatest needs. He is Immanuel, God Himself, who came "veiled in flesh" to dwell with us. And He is with us still.

Glory to our King.

A soft, monochromatic winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a light, hazy grey, with numerous small, white snowflakes scattered throughout, some appearing to be falling. The trees are dark against the light background, with their branches heavily laden with snow. The overall mood is serene and peaceful.

Sixteenth day  
First Love



## 16

**W**hile he was on earth, everything Jesus did was motivated by love, and guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Christmas is such a beautiful season because we are reminded of the priceless gift of love we have been given.

However, the last few years have been a difficult time for many in the body of Christ, causing them to become weary. Many of us have found ourselves coming to the end of our own resources and abilities, which is actually a blessing from God because He will not leave us to rely on our own strength. Even Jesus, fully God, but also fully man, relied completely upon the Holy Spirit to perform and fulfill His eternal purpose. We also must completely yield our lives to the Spirit of the Lord in all we do; whether loving our families, caring for a friend, praying for the sick—even balancing the hectic demands of the holidays—we must ask the Holy Spirit to impart what we need.

As God's people, we are commanded to love one another. True love does not hesitate even at a cost of

sacrifice. Love ignores the chattering of self-interest and listens to the rhythms of Heaven. Love is the reason Jesus paid the price on the cross for all mankind. Love is the reason the Father sent His only Son. Love is the reason Jesus came. Love doesn't live focused on self, but on others.



In Matthew 22:37, we read that Jesus told His listeners the first and greatest commandment is this:

 <p>The joy of brightening other lives, bearing each other's burdens, easing others' loads and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts becomes for us the magic of Christmas.</p> <p>-W.C. JONES</p>	<p>You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.</p> <p>Christmas is a wonderful time to ask the Holy Spirit to give us grace to return to our first love. We can humble ourselves before Him, asking Him</p>
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to search us and know us.

As we dedicate ourselves anew, He responds with His love and presence, filling us afresh with passion for the Lover of our souls, the One whose coming we celebrate.

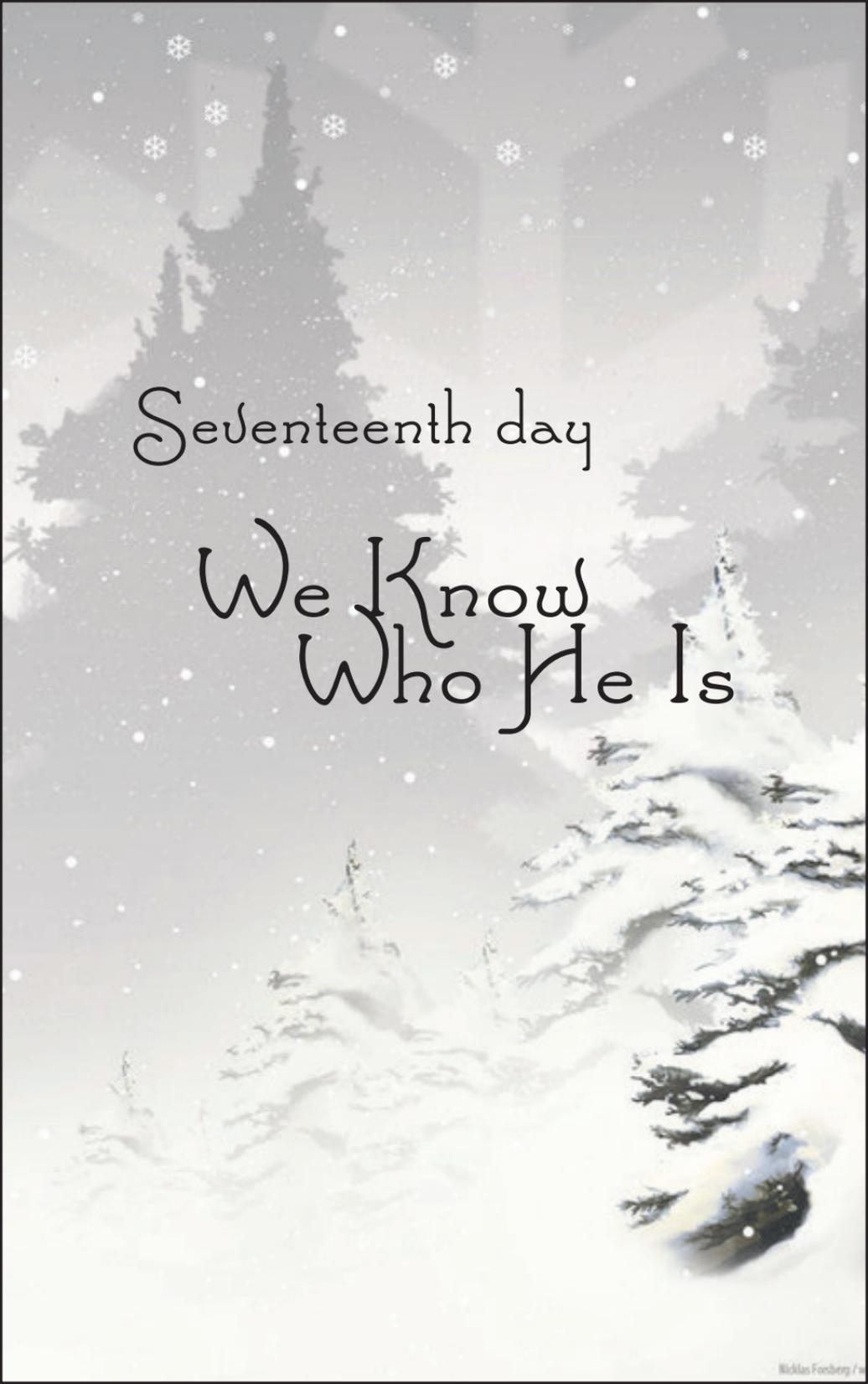
This season is truly a time filled with melodies and



expressions of profound and genuine compassion. As the love of God fills us, we are vessels for Him to pour out mercy on the weary world that needs Jesus.

*Oh, lay aside each earthly thing  
and with thy heart as offering,  
come worship now the infant King.  
Tis love that's born tonight!*

(“Some Children See Him”)

A serene winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees and falling snowflakes. The background is a soft, hazy white, suggesting a snowy landscape. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

Seventeenth day

We Know  
Who He Is



I 7

**T***he world treats you mean, Lord,  
treats me mean too,  
but that's how things are down here;  
we didn't know who You were.*

(“Sweet Little Jesus Boy”)

The kingdoms and systems of this world generally depend on fear, greed, intimidation, and threat. News media thrive on the latest tragedies and warnings of impending catastrophe. Vicious despots intimidate their citizenry with threats of violence. Aggressive corporations pursue their interests regardless of costs to the environment and human need.

Even our joyful celebration of the Savior's birth has become steeped in consumer frenzy and controversy: Do we say “Merry Christmas” or “Happy holidays”? Or perhaps, “Pleasant winter solstice”? It is no longer “politically correct” to focus on the real reason for the

season.

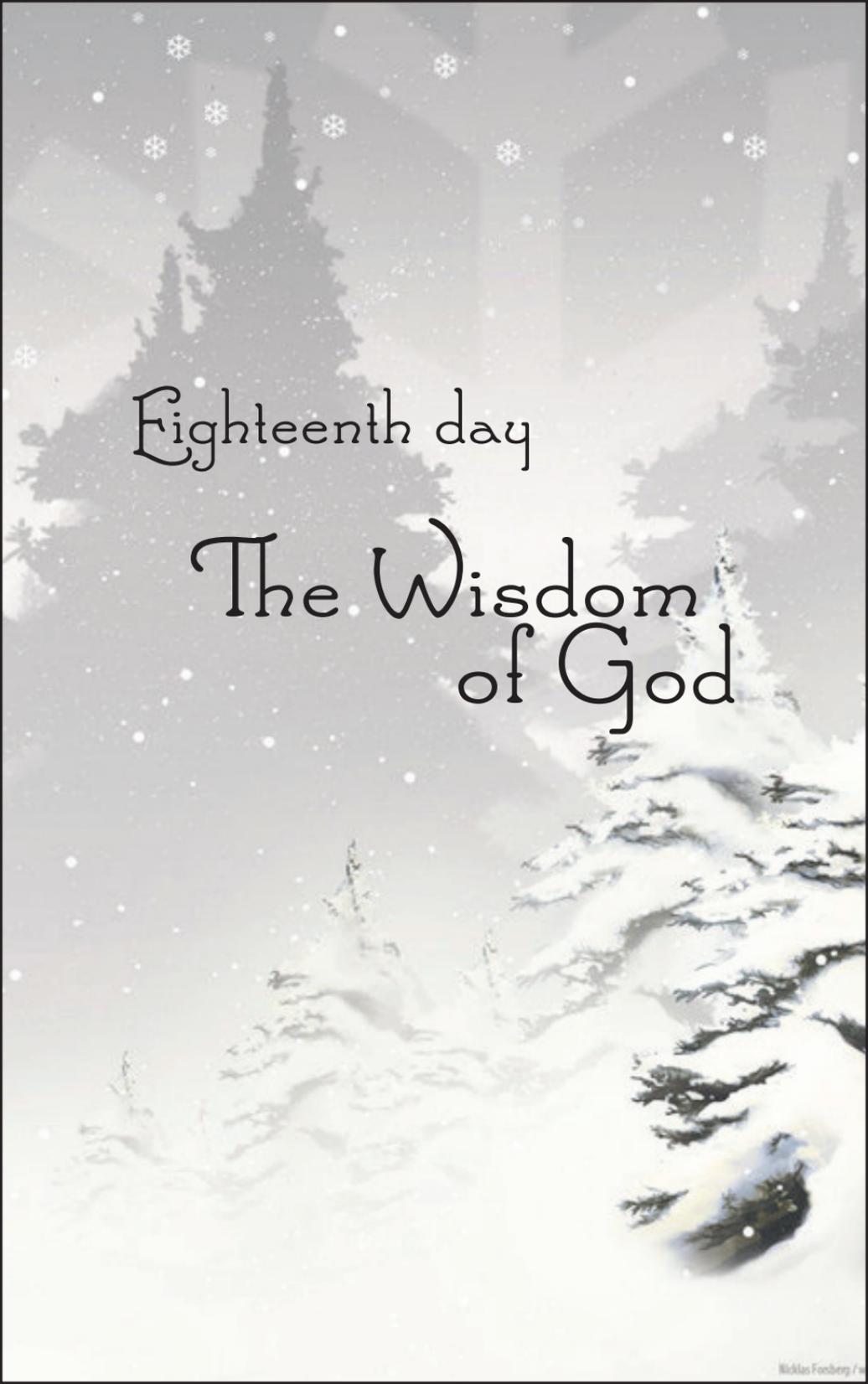
The way we run things was never our Father's intention for His creation. The Apostle John, beloved friend of Jesus, wrote these words of holy wisdom:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever(1 John 2:15-17).

We were created to live in love for God and for one another. While on earth, Jesus reminded His disciples that the rulers of the world lord their power over others, but it will not be so with those of us who follow Him. Jesus is Lord of Creation, yet He came humbly as a servant. God is capable of acting as the Ultimate Intimidator, but He chooses instead to woo us to Himself with mercy and kindness. The day will come when every knee will bow before the Son and He will bring final judgment, but today we live in the opportunity for mercy and in God's kind expectation that we will respond to His overtures of love.

The world, and the kingdoms of this world, do not recognize who Jesus really is. But we do! Although this world “treats us mean”, we can rejoice as love-filled, grateful children of the King. Today, pray for those who need the touch of His love, and everywhere you go, release kindness and mercy.

The world is used to being treated “mean,” even during Christmas. (Anyone who has ever worked behind a retail counter can tell you about people’s attitudes, especially the closer it gets to the Big Day.) But our loving Lord reaches to us all with mercy and goodwill. He longs to draw all people to knowledge of the truth. May we release His truth and express His love to anyone who doesn’t know who He really is.

A serene winter landscape featuring snow-covered evergreen trees and falling snowflakes. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly blurred style, creating a peaceful and atmospheric setting. The snowflakes are scattered throughout the frame, adding a sense of movement and depth to the scene. The overall color palette is dominated by whites and light greys, with the dark green of the trees providing a subtle contrast.

Eighteenth day

The Wisdom  
of God



## I 8

**A**nd by the light of that same star  
three wise men came from country far.  
To seek for a King was their intent;  
and to follow the star wherever it went.

(“The First Noel”)

Scripture doesn't really explain much about the star that led the three magi to Jesus. We simply know what Matthew tells us, that a star appeared in the sky, leading those visitors from Asia to travel to find the King of the Jews. In chapter 2, verse 9, we read that the star “went on ahead of them” until it guided them to Jesus.

There are many theories and conjectures of what this star might be, but no one can be certain. What we can realize is that the three wise men were taking note of the signs of the times, and they followed what they discovered in order to find Jesus so they could worship Him. After they did that, they were guided by a dream

and directed to avoid Herod, the wicked ruler who sought to kill the Child King.

It should be the same with us as we follow our Lord. He guides us in many different ways, and He is continually creative in His leading. It is important that we trust Him, and that as God's children, we follow His wisdom and counsel. We may often appear to the world around us that we are foolish in the way we live and in the decisions we make, but when we obey in faith and follow the Holy Spirit, it is noticed in heaven. We can be sure that our faith and acts of obedience are not in vain.

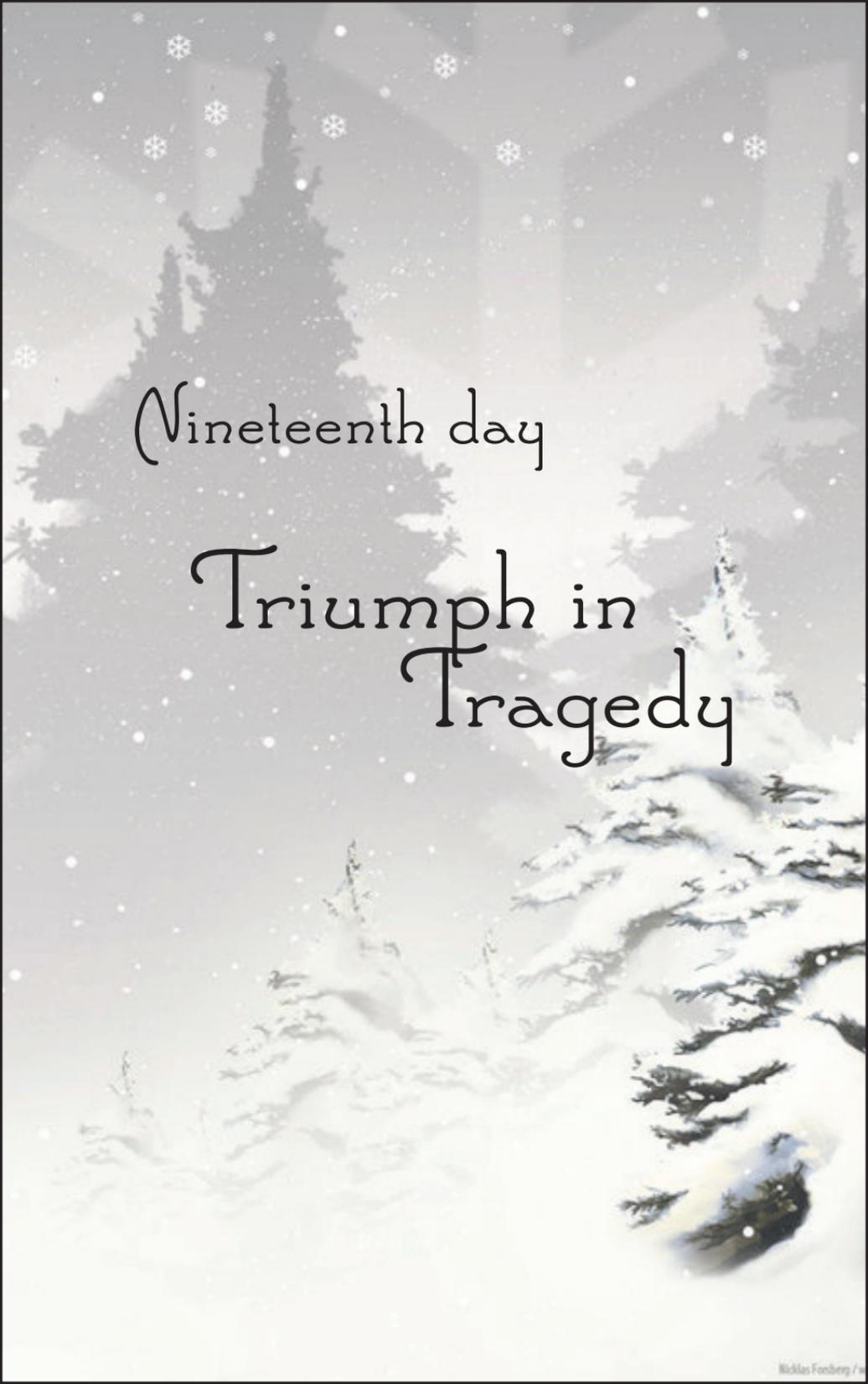
God invites us into His ways, His truth, and His peace. We can enjoy life in the midst of any environment, following His guidance, trusting His goodness in our lives. The magi were known as wise men, and they proved their wisdom by seeking and worshipping Jesus—the Wisdom of God.

In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul wrote that Christians have the mind of Christ. The Lord's thoughts are not the world's thoughts; His ways are not the world's ways. Through Jesus, we understand Truth that is greater and more powerful than any earthly "reality." We are subject first and foremost to the government that rests on the shoulders of the Child that will prevail. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, and that is our greatest victory. No evil or fearful thing can overcome His love that surrounds our lives.

...to those whom God has called...Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength (1 Corinthians 1:24-25).

If we are wise, we will seek His face—not just during special times, but at all times.



A soft, wintry scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a light, hazy grey with falling snowflakes. The text is overlaid on the scene.

Nineteenth day

Triumph in  
Tragedy



## I9

**O**h come, all ye faithful,  
joyful and triumphant!  
Oh come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold Him  
born the king of angels.  
Oh come, let us adore Him....

("O Come, All Ye Faithful")

It can be difficult to reconcile the idea of rejoicing with peace and goodwill when tragedy strikes. Today's carol is an anthem of praise and triumph. We love singing it in Christmas services and in our holiday gatherings, surrounded by loved ones in warmth and safety.

Yet, at the same time, people are suffering poverty and anguish, violence and terror. How do we reconcile the joy of this season with the meaningless, random cruelties of life?

I (Jeffrey) have suffered in the past with dreadful

bouts of clinical depression. Many years ago, I was going through a horribly difficult time, to the point that I questioned the goodness—and frankly, even the existence—of the God I had loved so passionately for so long. I had serious concerns and questions, and answers were not forthcoming, either from God or men.

But one Sunday evening church service, I was graciously given an encounter with our heavenly Father that changed my perspective. In the midst of my pain, I sensed His presence so profoundly in peace and joy that I began laughing from someplace deep within me. Yet even as I started to delight in Him, I was still deeply troubled. Why was I laughing when there was so much wickedness and chaos in the world?

Since His presence was so immediate, so tangible, I began to have a dialogue with the Almighty. I was laughing, but what of those screaming in terror? I was comfortable and safe, but what of children suffering sexual perversion and exploitation? I was well-fed and (now) happy, but what of babies starving to death as their parents watched helplessly?

Those questions were like a torrent in my mind, like a raging river of pain and doubt. Yet deeper than the thoughts, it was as if I heard the Voice of my Father, powerful and majestic, tender beyond imagination speaking to me: **“Yes! I know all about those things. And I know what I intend to do about them!”**

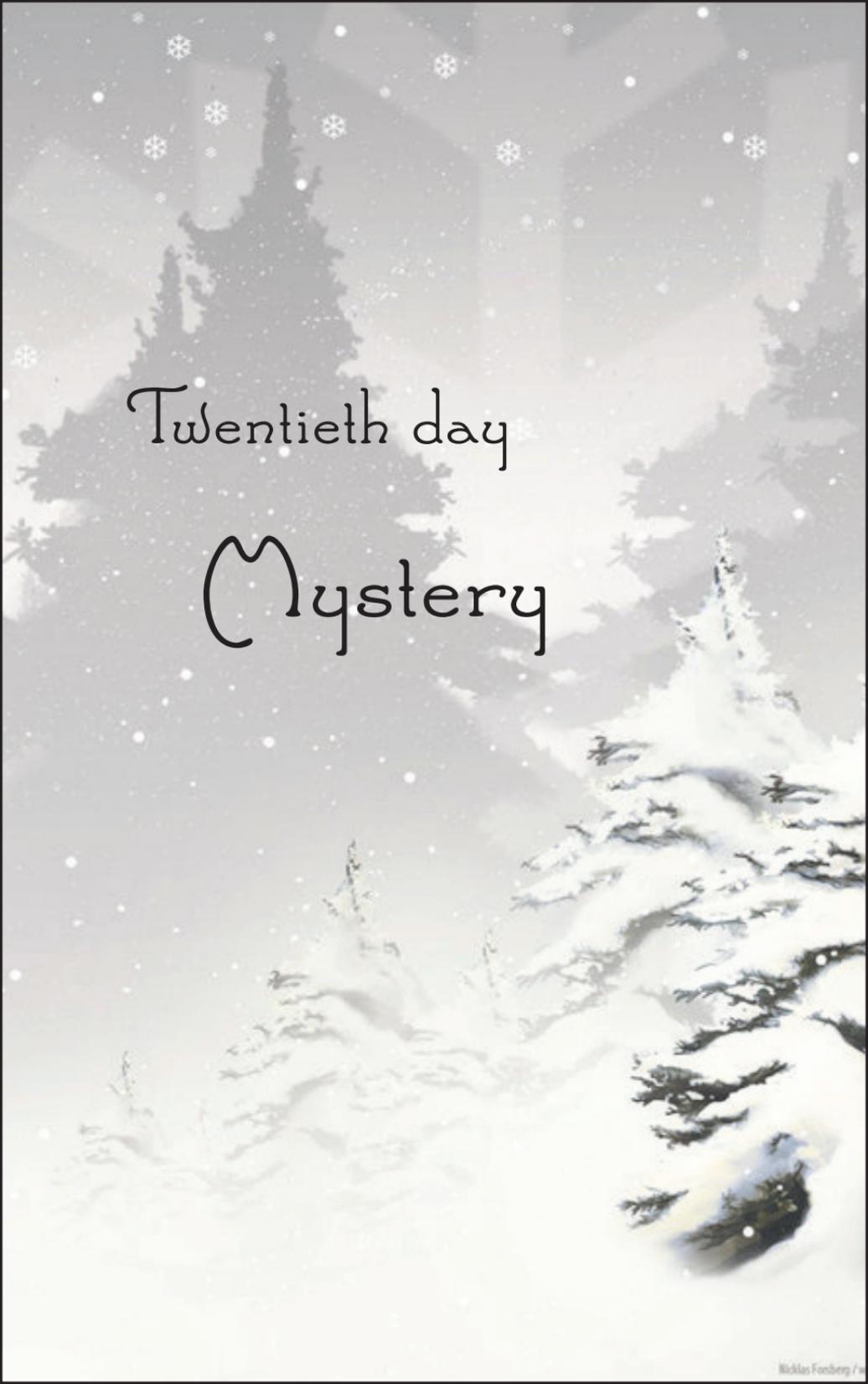
Those words, beautiful and profound, filled me with hope for my future and the future of generations that will come after me. Our God is good. He sent His Son as payment for all the filth and bitterness and terror

and selfishness of all people for all time. No suffering has happened that has not, and does not, touch His heart.

And believe it, or do not believe: He knows what He is doing, and what He will do to repay every injustice and bring healing to every wound. One day He will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death, sorrow, or crying. This is the destiny of all who know Jesus, the Child-King who is now risen Lord of lords.

At Christmas, and every day of our lives, we can trust the goodness and faithfulness and justice of God. The Son of God came to us to bring hope and life when we wallowed in despair and death. Jesus triumphed over death and hell, and He leads us, His people, in triumph with Him into eternity.

Come, let us adore Him.

A vertical winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees. The background is a soft, hazy grey with falling snowflakes. The foreground shows a close-up of a snow-laden tree branch. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

Twentieth day  
Mystery



## 20

**I** wonder as I wander out under the sky,  
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.  
For poor on'ry people like you and like I...  
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

("I Wonder as I Wander")

At its heart, Christmas is mystery.

Children know and demonstrate this best. Their eyes sparkle as they wonder at the explosion of lights and decorations. They wiggle with expectation as they view the growing mound of presents under the Christmas tree. They bounce with glee in anticipation of Santa's arrival. They lose themselves in the reverie of imagination as they picture Joseph and Mary and the Baby and animals and shepherds and angels and the star and magi and brilliant light...

As we age, we become responsible. Christmas is a lot of work, no doubt about it. We have much to do,

much to care for, much to accomplish in our adult worlds. But what of wonder? Above all else, the birth of our Savior should fill us with awestruck, childlike, humble adoration of the glorious One who made the stars, who was willing to leave His throne of light to come and die for “on’ry” people like us.

It is not a mark of maturity to be only and always analytical and practical; let’s be real, we are cynical. But Francis Church of the New York Sun got it right when, in his editorial of September 21, 1897, he responded to young Virginia O’Hanlon in regard to her question about the existence of Santa Claus.

*VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds....You may tear apart the baby’s rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond.*

In the familiarity of the Christmas story, and in our rush to create a holiday that is memorable, we must be careful that we don’t lose the innocent wonder that is the “supernal beauty and glory” of Jesus’ coming. We really are children before our great God, and we are

told to live before Him with the trust and excitement of children. When we let life harden us, weather our souls until we become tough and inflexible, we lose the refreshing that comes from genuine celebration of life and love.

This holiday, take time to wander, and to wonder. Be fun, be carefree. There is still a child inside you, so be innocent and excited!

Delight in the story of your life, folded as it is into the Great Story of the purposes of God, for it is a tale of mystery, intrigue, adventure, glory, and romance.

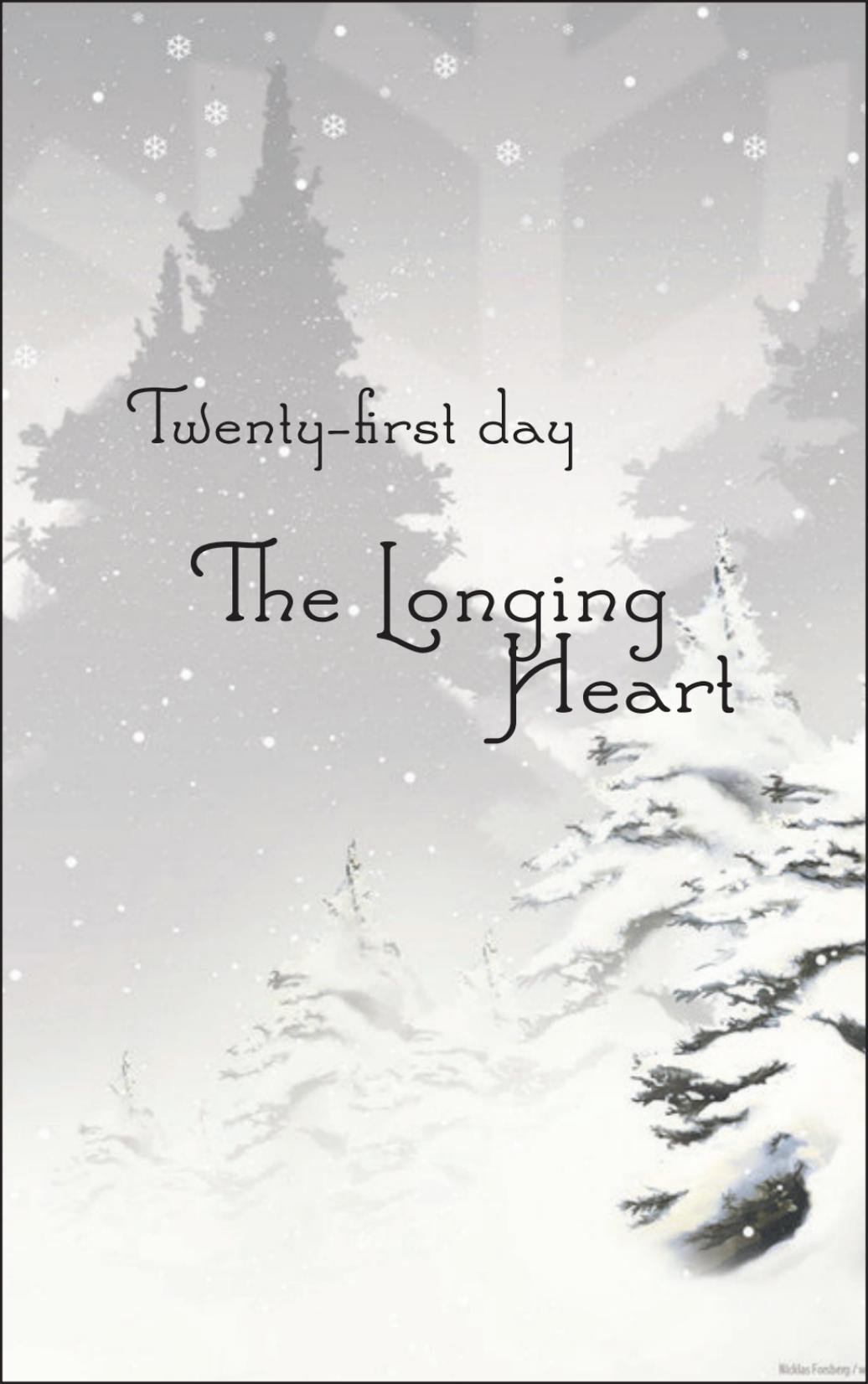
And we are all invited take part in it. Imagine the possibilities and the wonders that await the adventurous and childlike heart.

Children, like bears,  
 go over the  
 mountain to  
 see what they  
 can see. Adults  
 go over the  
 mountain in  
 order to buy  
 a twelve-hundred-acre plot of  
 ground and subdivide it into  
 shopping centers...The life of  
 a child is the most exciting,  
 adventurous, and fresh life in the  
 world. All because a child hasn't  
 lost the wonder of it all.



~JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Be an explorer. Be a Virginia.

A vertical winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees and falling snowflakes. The background is a soft, hazy white with faint silhouettes of trees. The foreground shows a close-up of a snow-laden branch. The text is centered in a black, elegant serif font.

Twenty-first day

The Longing  
Heart



## 21

**A** thousand years before shepherds knelt in adoration before our infant Savior, a shepherd who had become king of Israel cried out in astonished awe:

When I look at your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and stars that you set in place—  
what are mere mortals, that you concern  
yourself with them;  
humans, that you watch over them with such care?  
(Psalm 8:3-4).

Prophets and priests, warriors and kings, poets, musicians—when men and women throughout history have come in contact with the eternal Creator, they have been transfixed with awe and fear before the fiery blast of holiness in the presence of God. There

is nothing and no one like Him; there are no words to adequately describe Him. Yet, the Bible is clear that He loves us and desires our companionship. When we begin to get the tiniest understanding of who He really is, we are speechless with the thought that He would reach out to us while we were still sinners, rebels who wanted nothing to do with His love. At Christmas, we realize the astonishing depth of His kindness, His love, and His pity for us.

He wanted us so much, He gave up glory to come in humility.

*Why lies He in such mean estate,  
where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here  
the silent Word is pleading.*

(“What Child is This?”)

Our Creator is always reaching for mankind. From ageless past, He has desired a family. He longs to share His love, His goodness, His very life with people whom He created in His image. We are destined to be carriers and partakers of everything that He is. We are vessels created for honor, for we bear the very imprint of the Eternal King.

Even though we have all turned from Him and gone astray, God has always reached out for us with longing to share His heart, desiring that we would receive and return His love. Throughout Scripture, we see His longing for us, and His constant wooing of His errant children:



I said “Here am I, here am I,” to a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts...” (Isaiah 65:1-2).

“As surely as I live,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11).

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Love does not desire forced affections, nor will it force itself on others. God took the initiative and came to us to make a way for us to return to Him. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all actively took part in the magnificent gift of love we celebrate.

His love reaches to us today and every day of our lives. His love stretches across the earth, nourishing

life, cherishing every breeze, every leaf, every snowflake, every hair of our heads. If we listen, we will hear the

.....  
 : A church full of  
 : love, is a church  
 : well built up. I  
 : had rather see a  
 : church filled  
 : with love a thousand times, than  
 : filled with the best, the highest,  
 : and most glorious gifts and parts  
 : that any men in this world may  
 : be made partakers of.  
 :  
 : ~JOHN OWEN  
 :  
 : .....

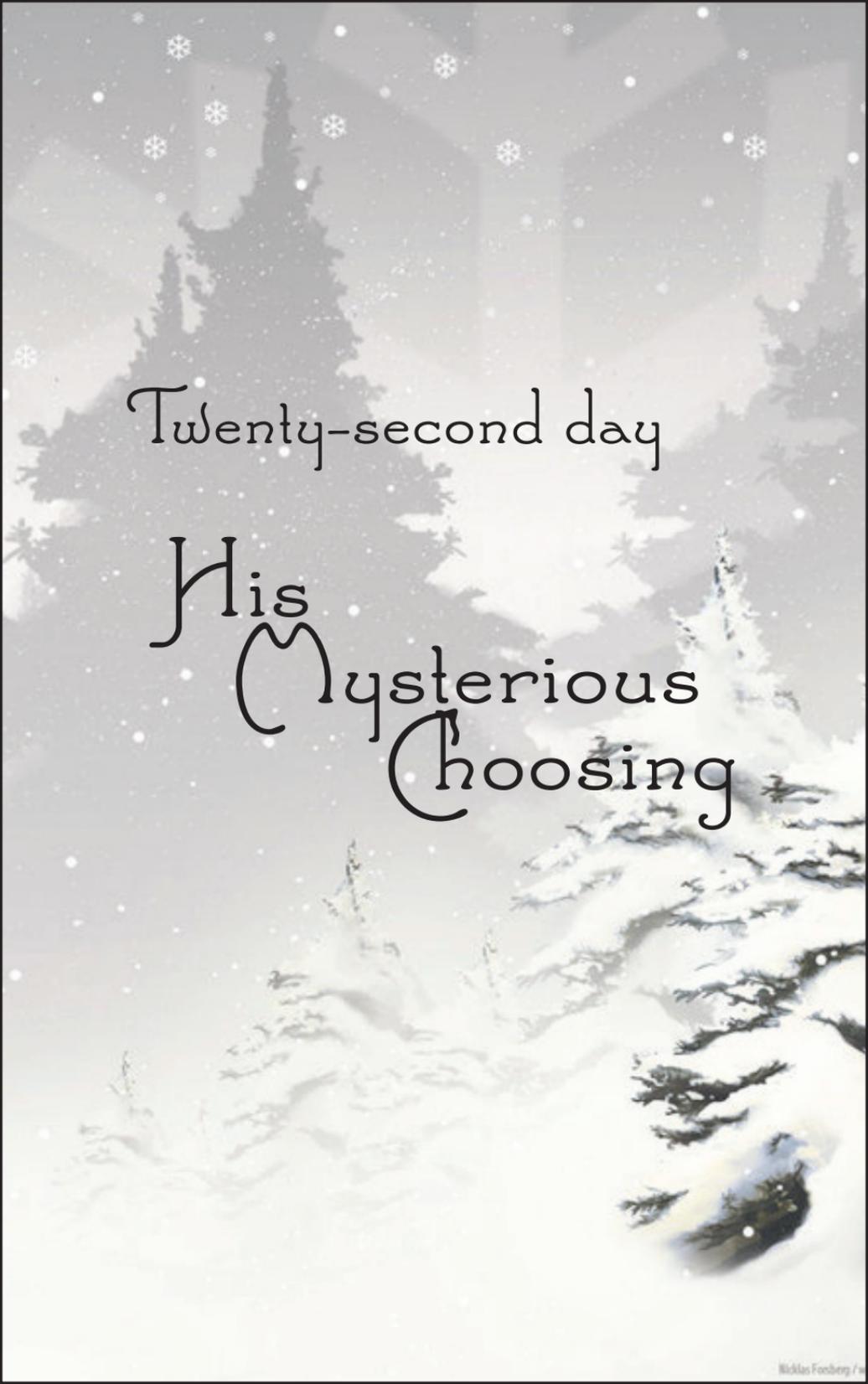


gentle Voice within  
 us speaking loving  
 encouragement and  
 gentle correction,  
 always drawing us,  
 inviting us to come  
 closer, so we can  
 understand and see  
 more clearly the  
 glorious destiny He  
 has prepared for each  
 of us.

Remember today  
 that Jesus, the Word

of God, also pleads for the hearts of people who don't know Him. As we rejoice in His goodness, we honor Him and have the chance to display our gratitude for the great gift of Christmas. We will spend infinity with the One who has loved us with everlasting love.



A vertical image with a soft, hazy winter background. The scene is filled with snow-covered evergreen trees, some in the foreground and others in the background. Numerous small, white snowflakes are scattered throughout the image, some appearing to be falling. The overall color palette is light and muted, with shades of white, light grey, and pale green.

Twenty-second day

His  
Mysterious  
Choosing



## 22

In the darkness of deep night, the man guards his exhausted wife and the baby she has just delivered. His hands are calloused and thick, his palms hard wooden paddles. The blunt tips of his coarse fingers are devoid of feeling, worn by long years of sanding and handling rough, splintered wood as he crafts raw materials into items useful and appealing. His forearms ripple and twist with brutal potency, knotted with muscle and sinews stretched and strengthened by years of diligent exertion.

He is a silent tower, stern and unmoving; yet in his powerful, rugged hands he gently cradles a tiny sleeping infant. He gazes with amazed tenderness at his baby boy; he examines the newborn face still mahogany from the pressure and blood of birth, ruby-flushed from his first wails as breath begins in the pungent air of a Bethlehem manger.

This baby is the first-born in the household of Joseph, carpenter from the small town of Nazareth.

As the humble workman gazed at the King of heaven folded into human form, did he tremble with mingled love and fear? Joseph had been chosen to provide an example of earthly fatherhood to the Child who had been face-to-face with the Father of glory. In his arms this common man held a son who was the Son of Man, the one Daniel saw coming in the clouds as He approached the Ancient of Days.

Joseph would raise this son in his home, a Son who was greater than any earthly father. This Son belonged not to one family, but to all mankind.

How could any mortal fulfill such overwhelming responsibility?

*Father, show me where I fit into this plan of yours;  
how can a man be father to the Son of God?  
Lord, for all my life I've been a simple carpenter;  
how can I raise a king?  
How can I raise a king?*

(“Joseph’s Song” by Michael Card)

Our Lord has a way of charging us with more responsibility than we would ever imagine we could fulfill. His plans are so much greater than ours for our lives. His dreams for us are wild and wonderful adventures that would seem to us to enter the boundaries of fantasy. We sense instinctively that His trust in us is misplaced; but He who is Wisdom itself knows the end from the beginning and He is infinitely acquainted with the gifts and callings He has placed

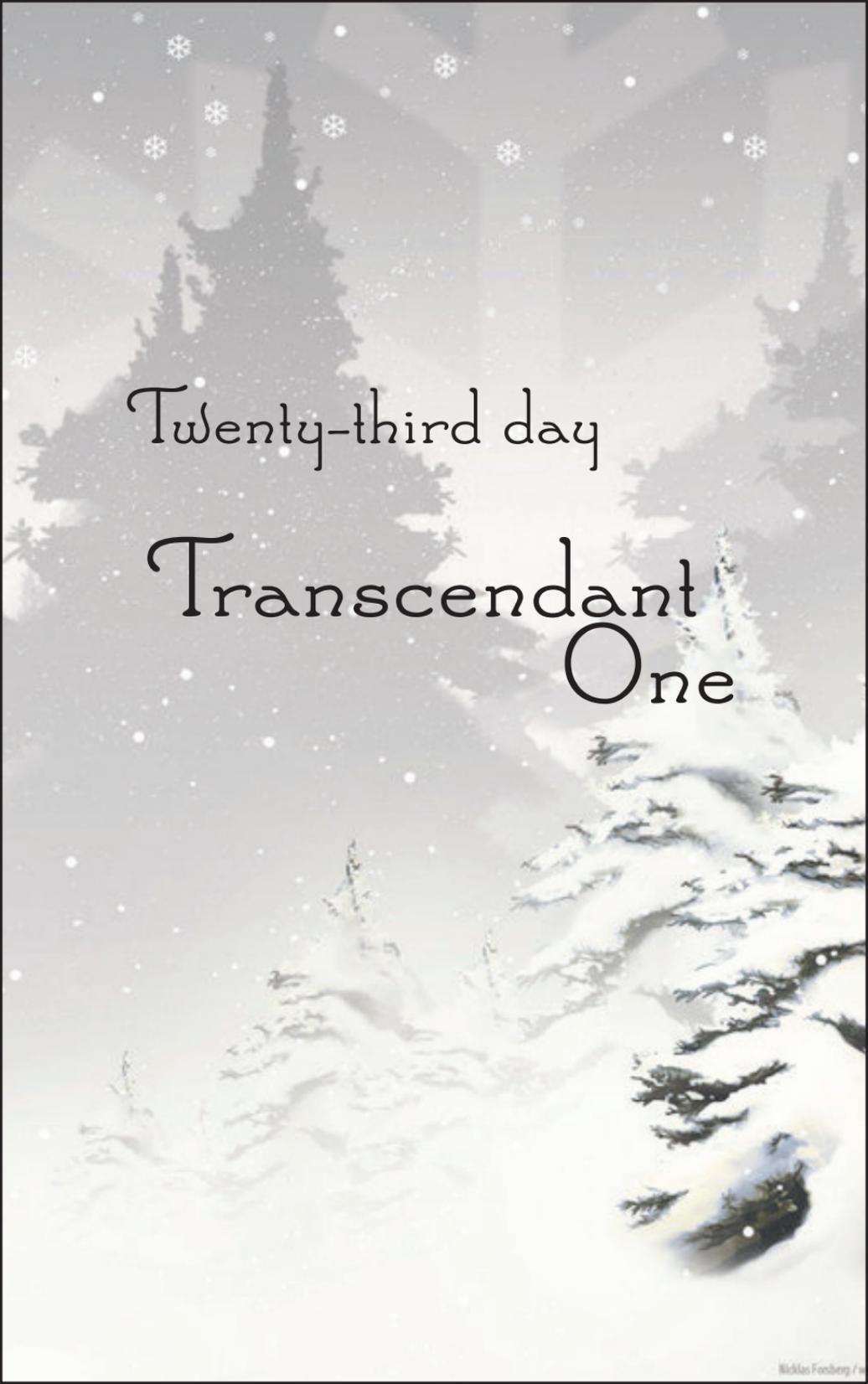
within us. He has all power and understanding of how He intends to bring His purposes into stunning fruition. The God who upholds creation in His mighty palm is fully capable of completing all that He intends to do in us.

We know very little about Joseph, but we know that he must have been a godly example for God in the flesh. Jesus grew strong and pure. He learned his father's trade. He learned to fully accomplish His Father's will.

Joseph humbled himself before God and did not shrink back from the most awesome parenting responsibility in history. His obedience is an example for us to trust the will and purposes of our good Father for our lives. Our prayer can echo his: "Lord, show me where I fit into Your plan. Show me how to live what You have given me."

*He was created of a mother  
whom He created. He was  
carried by hands that He  
formed. He cried in the manger  
in wordless infancy. He, the  
Word, without whom all human  
eloquence is mute.*

~AUGUSTINE

A vertical photograph of a winter landscape. The scene is dominated by snow-covered evergreen trees. In the foreground, a large, snow-laden tree branch curves across the bottom right. The background shows more trees and a soft, hazy sky. Numerous white snowflakes are scattered throughout the image, some appearing to be falling. The overall color palette is muted, consisting of various shades of white, grey, and dark green.

Twenty-third day

Transcendant  
One



## 23

**M**ary did you know that your Baby Boy is Lord of all creation?

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your Baby Boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?

The sleeping Child you're holding is the Great I AM.

("Mary, Did You Know?")

Over the next couple of days, billions of people around the world will celebrate the holiday—the “holy day”—we call Christmas. There are as many different ways to remember the day as there are people taking part, but regardless of the expressions, it is a time of celebration and reflection.

For Joseph and Mary, holding the newborn Savior, it was a time of celebration as well, tempered by fatigue and probably relief that the birth had been successful. Upon the arrival of shepherds, they discovered that heaven itself had also burst forth in celebration. The

angelic messages they had received months earlier were being fulfilled.

But how much did Joseph and Mary really understand about the blessed event? How could they know the all-encompassing glory this birth represented? How could they perceive just how powerful was the redemption born to earth this night, and how great would be the cost to purchase salvation? How could they begin to imagine how great was this Baby born in such humble surroundings?

In Exodus chapter three, we read that God spoke to Moses from a burning bush and commissioned him to stand before Pharaoh, demanding Israel's freedom from Egyptian bondage. Moses asked for God's Name, so that he might be able to tell the people who had sent him. God simply replied "*ehyeh-asher-ehyeh*" ("I AM THAT I AM"). He is the original, uncreated Being, the Source of all existence. All that exists is contingent upon His existence, and He is existent within Himself. He depends on nothing and no one except Himself.

In our western culture, we primarily use names as identifiers or labels. But names in Hebrew language describe dynamic function. They tell who someone is and what he is doing—inviting us into relationship.

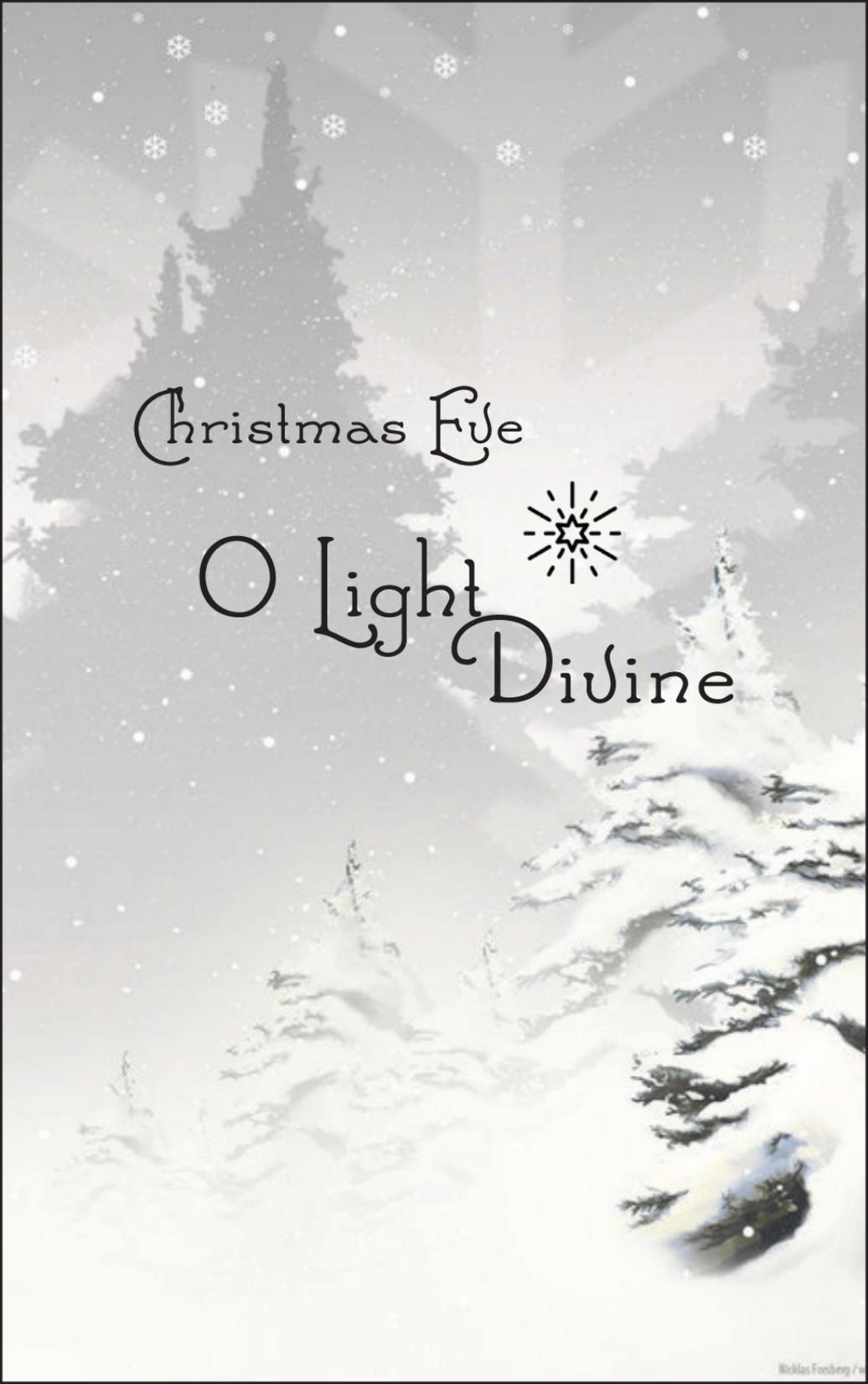
His Name tells us that He is absolutely transcendent above everything in creation, both seen and unseen. Yet in revealing His Name, the Jewish sages tell us He is extending mercy to His creation.

The Bible tells us Mary pondered many things in her heart about her Son—with good reason. So much mystery, so much glory, so much promise surrounded

this Child from the beginning. He was born into poverty and difficulty, yet He grew and released the riches of God and proclaimed freedom from bondage to all people. He grew to be a Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, yet He drew the outcast and downcast and gave them joy and hope. He died an agonizing and shameful death yet He rose again and now rules with all power and authority as Lord of lords and King of kings. He is Yeshua—salvation from sin.

This great and eternal God, existing from unending infinity past, extending into infinity upon infinities of endless future, became flesh, available to be touched and held in the present moment. He is available to us still.

The Great **I AM** still speaks to us this Christmas. He is all-sufficient for everything we need, and the answer to our deepest heart desires. In His Name, we celebrate the season!

A vertical winter scene featuring snow-covered evergreen trees and falling snowflakes. The background is a soft, hazy white with faint silhouettes of trees. The foreground shows a close-up of a snow-laden tree branch. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

Christmas Eve

O Light   
Divine



## Christmas Eve

**O**n the night our precious Savior was born, the world had not been introduced to the grace that came through Him to deliver us from the curse that comes from disobedience to the law. A star shone brightly that holy night, lighting the way to the Babe in the manger.

On this “*night divine*” a young virgin gave birth to grace, hope, and love. She labored to bring forth the Light of the World.

*Fall on your knees,  
oh hear the angel voices;  
oh night divine,  
oh night when Christ was born.  
Oh night divine!  
Oh night, oh night divine.*

(“Oh Holy Night”)

The Light born on that holy night over two thousand years ago has come into the hearts of man to

shine forth to all who are trapped in darkness. We who know Him are temples of His light and have become the “stars” that shine in the darkness to lead the way to Jesus.

Christmas Eve, Christians around the world celebrate the night that Light came into the world. Tonight we echo Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church, asking God,

“...the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. {We} pray that your hearts will be flooded with light, so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called....” (Ephesians 1:17-18).

Miracles and light became tangible when the promised Messiah was born. To this present day, God’s people need the miracle of His light to fill our hearts, to

enable us to be a light in this darkened world. We fix our hope on His mercy and His promise to come again. With hearts of joy, we celebrate the reminder of His coming the first time, even as we await His return.

The “night divine” so long ago continues to fill us with hope. The Divine came and lived among us, and one day we will behold His glory face-to-face for eternity.

 In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.

~C.S. LEWIS



Christmas Day



Rejoice!



# Christmas Day

**N***o more let sins and sorrows grow  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found....*

(“Joy to the World”)

On this day that we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, we declare with the angels that God has proclaimed peace on earth! Of all people, Christians should rejoice this day in the love, joy, and peace God has graciously provided for us as His children.

When the angels announced tidings of “great joy” to simple shepherds, a great company of heavenly hosts appeared with the angels declaring:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth  
peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

The Father announced through the heavenly choir that he was bestowing his marvelous favor to earth, a

gift of righteousness and mercy; and to the people upon whom he rests his favor, he also gives the gift of peace. So, who are these people on whom his favor rests?

For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
the LORD bestows favor and honor.  
No good thing does he withhold  
from those who walk uprightly  
(Psalm 84:11).

His favor rests upon those who walk uprightly. Because we are accepted in the Beloved, we walk uprightly in the righteousness of Christ. We receive favor, honor, and peace. No good thing does He withhold. This is His promise and His Word. It is good and acceptable to believe it! It is right to walk in the assurance of faith and it is right to rejoice, because our Messiah came to bring his shalom on earth.

Jesus came to redeem us from the curse of sin and sickness and sorrow. In the Lord Jesus, we have now entered the Sabbath rest that He freely offers us through His death and resurrection. He has truly and completely triumphed over all works of wickedness.

Today we not only remember that Jesus came to bring us life, but we also look for the day that He will return to establish His kingdom reign forever. There will be no more wickedness, no more pain, no more sorrow. Everything will be new; for eternity, we will behold Him who now we perceive only dimly as through a glass.

*He rules the world with truth and grace  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness  
And wonders of His love....*

One glorious day, we will all join with Him in the great feast--the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. All creation anticipates that day; every moment of history in this present world throbs with the “resounding joy” of His wondrous love and mercy extended.

So we celebrate His first coming, and eagerly desire His return.

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”  
And let the one who hears say, “Come!”  
Let the one who is thirsty come;  
and let the one who wishes take the free gift  
of the water of life...  
(Revelation 22:17).

Amen. Even so come,  
Lord Jesus!

# Acknowledgments

The past few years, we have distributed portions of these scribblings via email to our Inscribe Ministries family of supporters, who were gracious and encouraging in their responses. We hereby offer this book with love and gratitude to Jesus for His glory, and to those who would—like the shepherds—journey “even unto Bethlehem” to see what all the fuss is about.

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Books by  
Jeffrey and Kathi Pelton

*Joy*

*Finding Home*

*The Yielding: A Lifestyle of  
Surrender*

*Courage*

*Peace*

*The Sounds of Christmas*

## About the Authors

Jeffrey and Kathi Pelton understand our culture's need for encouragement and hope. Through writing and speaking, they escort individuals into awareness of God's profound compassion and mercy that heals brokenness, and they have a unique ability to help anyone seeking pathways into his kind embrace.

For several years, the couple led a house of prayer located in Kelowna, British Columbia. They often travel internationally, working with prayer and prophetic movements. When home, they attend Father's House City Ministries in Portland, Oregon.

Jeffrey is a published author and professional editor, and founder and owner of Inscribe Press. Kathi is an author who began writing many years ago for The Elijah List, an online newsletter, as well as other prophetic publications.

The Peltons are the founders and directors of Inscribe Ministries, teaching and encouraging individuals and churches in prophetic proclamation and clear biblical teaching. They also serve as part of the leadership team of their local congregation.

Jeffrey and Kathi live in Hillsboro, Oregon and have four adult children and three grandchildren.

# Inscribe Press

Inscribe Press was formed to publish literary prophetic works that ignite the fires of wholeness and holiness in readers. Through our publishing house and training programs, we encourage and inculcate human creativity and diversity; qualities which display the majesty and versatility of our Creator, whose very essence is the fountain of all beauty and truth.

Beauty is vital for human flourishing as we walk in humility and love with God. Truth is not nebulous or subjective; it is objective and universal and, rightly lived out, it sets us free.

If you would like more information about opportunities for publishing your work, or to learn more about honing your craft and walking in the calling of an artist, please write us at [admin@inscribepress.com](mailto:admin@inscribepress.com).

**Inscribe Press**  
Creativity Unleashed

There truly is a “reason for the season,” and it has nothing to do with gifts, reindeer, shopping, or chocolate (well, maybe chocolate). But it is easy for us to forget that transcendent purpose as we find ourselves caught up in the materialistic maelstrom that is the modern cultural event known as Christmas. As the end of the year approaches, instead of experiencing an invitation into deeper devotion and wonder and excitement, we find ourselves wondering when, exactly, we seem to have swallowed a lump of coal. If you have ever considered changing your name to Ebenezer for the month of December, then this is for you. Join Jeffrey and Kathi Pelton as they walk through the weeks leading to the Big Day in a winsome and encouraging journey of devotion and discovery, fueled by the lyrics of songs you know—or at least, think you know.



Jeffrey and Kathi Pelton believe art and beauty display the majesty and versatility of God through human creativity and diversity; and they have discovered that truth, rightly understood, sets people free. They travel and speak internationally, giving them unique insight into every person's need for encouragement, hope, and authentic interaction.

Jeffrey and Kathi live in the greater Portland, Oregon region and have four adult children and three grandchildren. Oh, and they love Christmas.



Inscribe Press  
Creativity Unleashed