



Celebrating Christmas

Embracing joy through art and reflections

Reflections by Amy Boucher Pye • Illustrations by Leo Boucher

Celebrating Christmas

Embracing joy through art and reflections

Reflections by
Amy Boucher Pye

Illustrations by
Leo Boucher





15 The Chambers, Vineyard
Abingdon OX14 3FE
brf.org.uk

Bible Reading Fellowship is a charity (233280)
and company limited by guarantee (301324),
registered in England and Wales

ISBN 978 1 80039 051 5
First published 2021
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
All rights reserved

Text © Amy Boucher Pye 2021
Cover and inside illustrations © Leo Boucher 2021
This edition © Bible Reading Fellowship 2021

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work

Acknowledgements

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version (Anglicised edition) copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, a Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790.

Every effort has been made to trace and contact copyright owners for material used in this resource. We apologise for any inadvertent omissions or errors, and would ask those concerned to contact us so that full acknowledgement can be made in the future.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed by Gutenberg Press, Tarxien, Malta

To Mom:
keeper of Christmas,
creator of beauty,
woman of prayer
(Amy)



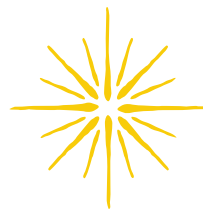
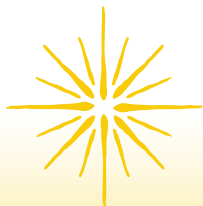
To Phyllis:
the key to each one
of my blessed memories
of Christmas
(Leo)

Contents

Introduction10

1 Symbols of Christmas

- 1 The light in the darkness15
- 2 The tree of life19
- 3 Stockings of delight23
- 4 Giving and receiving27
- 5 Music, the language of praise31
- 6 Depictions of the real35

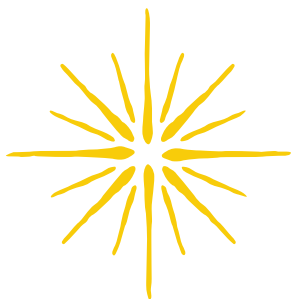


2 The joys and sorrows of Christmas

- 7 Gathering to worship at Christmas41
- 8 The body of Christ45
- 9 Blue Christmas49
- 10 Joy in the wilderness53
- 11 Giving from what we've received57
- 12 Christmas in the city61

3 He is Jesus!

13	Creator God	67
14	God with us	71
15	Light of the world	75
16	Lamb of God	79
17	King of kings	83
18	Morning star	87



4 God becomes man

19	On the journey	93
20	O little town of Bethlehem	97
21	Jesus is born!	101
22	The angels shout, 'Glory!'	105
23	Adoration of the shepherds	109
24	Treasures of the heart	113
25	Outsiders welcome!	117
	Notes	120
	About the author and artist	121
	How to use this book prayerfully – <i>visio divina</i>	122
	Questions to spark prayer, reflection and discussion	124

Introduction

The Christmas memories come flooding back... Enjoying the moments on my cousins' farm as we embark on a hayride in the snow-covered fields. Examining the gifts underneath the Christmas tree, checking the tags and wondering what could be in the ones bearing my name. Savouring the first bite of a seasonal treat. Experiencing the joy of singing Christmas carols together, the music moving us to praise God.

Christmas is a season to be celebrated, and my father and I hope that this book will accompany you, through words and images, as you ponder the wonder of God with us. Of Jesus being born as a baby, entering the world in humble and fragile circumstances, the miracle of God coming to earth. Our hope is that you'll be strengthened in your faith in the one who redeems, saves and makes all things new.

We've divided *Celebrating Christmas* into four sections, which you can dip into with a hot beverage while sitting by some sparkly lights during the twelve days of Christmas, or use during Advent as a Christmas-themed resource.

In part 1 we explore the cultural expressions of Christmas – the symbols that pop up all around us in December (or before). We can plumb many of these for rich spiritual meaning.

In part 2 we move to the joys and sorrows of Christmas. In our fallen world, we won't always experience the picture-book image of smiling faces gathered round a bounteous Christmas feast. We might feel the emptiness of someone missing or we might experience sadness over relational strife. Jesus was born precisely to give us hope in times like these.

Part 3 celebrates Jesus, as we select six of the biblical names for this baby born to be King. He truly is the 'reason for the season' and we delight to immerse ourselves in some of his attributes and character.

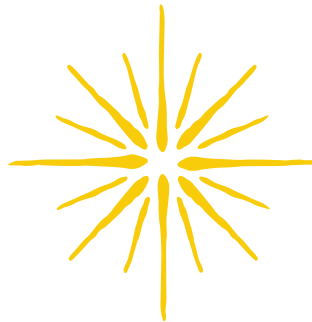
In part 4 we move to the nativity story itself, as told in the gospels of Luke and Matthew. As the story reaches its climax, we remember what the fuss is truly about – the miracle of new life, of God who becomes one of us. God revealed himself to us through his Son, Jesus, and he continues to show himself to us today through his indwelling in his followers and through the gift of his Holy Spirit. Entering into the story of the birth of Jesus again will bring us joy, faith, hope and love.

My dad and I would like to thank those at BRF: Karen Laister, for the initial idea for this book; Olivia Warburton, for how she's shepherded it through the publishing

process with grace and panache; Daniele Och, for his editorial and production skills; Alison Beek, for her design talents; and Eley McAinsh, for spreading the word. We're also grateful for Tanya Marlow, Amy Scott Robinson, Penelope Swithinbank and Amy Young, for their insightful comments during the writing process, and for our family on both sides of the Atlantic, who have cheered us along each step of the way.

We pray that you'll be refreshed, inspired and encouraged as you enter these pages, which we hope will be a gift to you. May you experience peace and joy as you ponder the mystery of Jesus, God incarnate.

Amy Boucher Pye



Part 1

Symbols of Christmas

When we think of Christmas, images might pop into our minds of Christmas trees and decorations, carollers at the door, mulled wine and rich baked treats. So powerful are these evocative symbols of Christmas that sometimes they can overpower the true meaning of the holiday. Let's take a closer look.





The light in the darkness

A hush descends as the lights are switched off. The congregation is bubbling with anticipation. A young child says, 'It's dark!' to muted laughter. We watch as the vicar lights the candle held by the person at the end of the row, and they light the candle next to them, and so on. Little glowing circles move down the rows until all the candles are lit and, faces aglow, we marvel at the beauty of light dispelling the darkness.

At the beginning of Advent, our church holds a service with Christingles, a symbol created with oranges and candles in 18th-century Germany to help children understand how Jesus is the light of the world. The flames dotted around the congregation speak of God's love dwelling in his children through his Spirit and Son, a mystery made possible because Jesus came to earth as a baby.

Light is warming, comforting and heralding, and God as the source of all light is a rich theme in the Bible. Indeed, light is the first thing that God creates in the Genesis

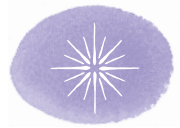
account – even before the sun (Genesis 1:3–4). God then reveals himself as a light to his people, such as when he appeared to Moses ‘in flames of fire from within a bush’ (Exodus 3:2) or as a bright cloud or a pillar of fire (see Exodus 13:21–22).

In the New Testament, Matthew in his gospel says that Jesus fulfils Isaiah’s prophecy that ‘the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned’ (Matthew 4:16). We might feel overcome by the darkness around us – the diseases, betrayals and injustices – but God shines his light on us through Jesus.

Similarly, John starts off his gospel with an affirmation of Jesus being the light of life: ‘In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it’ (John 1:4–5). We live in a world permeated by darkness, but the black clouds and oppressive sense of nothingness will not win out against the light.

As you light your Advent candles, Christingles or other festive sparklers, ponder the glory and power of light – and of Jesus, the light who has come into the world.

Jesus, you bring light and life. As I yield to you, your presence within me burns away that which is not holy. Help me to welcome your clarifying light, that I might be free of any sin that clings. May your light within be a gentle and welcoming beacon, a signal in these dark times of a safe haven. Amen





Grab a cuppa and sink into a cosy chair as a father-daughter duo leads you into the celebration of Christmas through their art and reflections.

Considering not only the story of Mary and Joseph journeying to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, but also our modern-day expressions of Christmas, they point to God's light and life during what can be a fraught and exhausting season.

'Daughter and father, wordsmith and artist, combine seamlessly to create a celebration of the warmth, love, promise and glory of Christ's birth on earth, and what that means for us today.'

Pam Rhodes, broadcaster and writer

'Here, in word and skilful paint, is not just an invitation to think about Christmas differently, but a winsome invitation to live it differently... to see not just Christmas but life afresh.'

Mark Greene, author of *Adventure: Christmas poems*



Amy Boucher Pye and **Leo Boucher** share their art and reflections from London and Minnesota. Amy is a writer, speaker and spiritual director and the author of *7 Ways to Pray*. Leo is a retired data systems analyst and creator who paints in his art studio and volunteers with his church and other organisations. Find them at amyboucherpye.com.



Front: 'Outsiders welcome!'; above: 'Gathering to worship at Christmas' © Leo Boucher;
author photos by Donna Ford (Amy) and Daniel Mick (Leo).



brf.org.uk