



Christmas Voices

*Reflections, carols, poems &
prayers for the festive season*

with reflections by
Claire Musters

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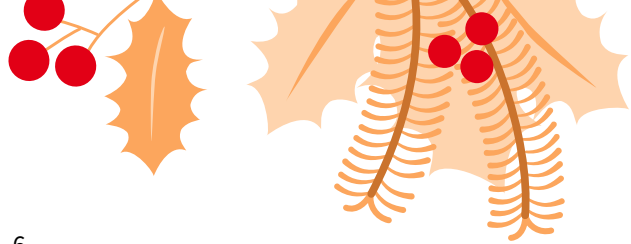
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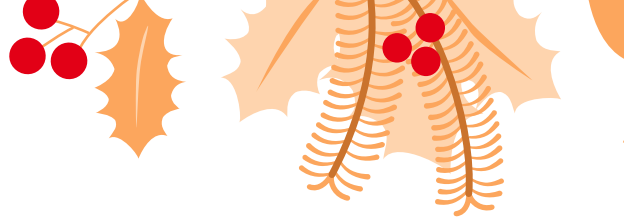
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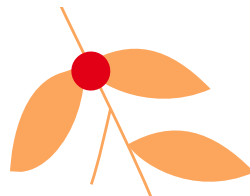
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Introduction

Whether you're picking up this book at the beginning of Advent or reading it over Christmas itself, *Christmas Voices* offers a series of precious moments to reflect and rest in God's presence.

The five sections of the book explore God's promises, the theme of preparation and making ready, and then a powerful trio of gifts: joy, peace and love. Each day, a Bible passage is followed by a reflection. We then include a hymn, carol, poem or prayer* selected by one of our 'choir of voices', who have each chosen a favourite piece and shared with us why it is special to them.

It has been fascinating to see what everyone sent in; if it had been a competition, 'O holy night' would have undoubtedly taken first prize; no fewer than seven people chose it. We therefore place this wonderful song at the start of the book and return to it as an introduction to our closing section on 'Love'.

We hope that all of these different voices, experiences and perspectives weave a satisfyingly rich tapestry, and that this book will be one you dip into time and again.

**Please note that some of the longer hymns and carols have been abbreviated.*



★
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Day 18

Making all things new

Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth’... ‘God’s dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death” or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’

REVELATION 21:1, 3–4

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.

★

ISAIAH 11:6

Reflection

Right at the start of our devotions, we saw Jesus described as ‘Prince of Peace’, and that ‘of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end’ (Isaiah 9:6–7). This prophecy occurred hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth as a baby. The same prophet, Isaiah, is also quoted here where the passage talks about God wiping away our tears (see Isaiah 25:8). In Isaiah 11:1–9 he describes the peace that Jesus will bring, when nature is returned to the harmony it was originally created to have.

During Jesus’ time on earth, he was ‘establishing and upholding [his kingdom] with justice and righteousness’ (Isaiah 9:7), and this continues today. The ultimate picture of God’s purposes, and the culmination of the whole of human history, is described in the pictorial language of our passages today. Revelation can be a confusing book, full of strange imagery, and yet it shows Jesus bringing his rule and reign – his peace (*shalom*, which means complete well-being) – once and for all. To bring about such peace, Jesus needs to bring his justice to bear on the world and his enemies, and it is upon this that much of Revelation is centred, as is Isaiah 11:4–5.

As we prepare to celebrate Jesus’ coming once again, let us remember the bigger picture. While his coming as a helpless baby can seem like such a strange plan – and many in his day couldn’t understand why he didn’t come as a warrior leader – ultimately he is the Prince of Peace, and we can look forward to a time when nothing will interrupt the peace he brings.

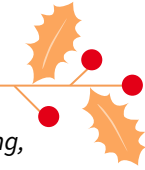
We have an eternal destiny with Jesus in which all the old order – all the pain, death and mourning – will be no more. What an amazing truth to keep hold of. It is far too easy to look at what is going on in the world today and allow ourselves to be robbed of peace. But ultimately there is a future far beyond what we can imagine now – with the Prince of Peace himself. We need his perspective in our everyday lives; what a difference that makes!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I thank you that you are the Prince of Peace, and that you are coming again to make all things new. Help me to remember that the whole of history is held in your hands and you are in control. I trust you with my life today.



Hark! The herald angels sing



*Hark! The herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn king:
peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies,
with th'angelic host proclaim,
'Christ is born in Bethlehem!'*

*Hark! The herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn king!'*

*Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the virgin's womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
hail th'incarnate Deity,
pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.*

*Hark! The herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn king!'*

*Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth.*

*Hark! The herald angels sing,
'Glory to the newborn king!'*

Words by Charles Wesley (1707–88),
adapted by George Whitefield (1714–70);
music by Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47),
adapted by William Hayman Cummings
(1831–1915)

I love this carol, with its clear proclamation of truth and its call to action. I was thrilled when my fellow journalists at the *Eastbourne Herald* sang it enthusiastically each Christmas, putting the emphasis on the ‘herald’ while unwittingly declaring ‘God and sinners reconciled’! I rejoice at its subliminal prophetic expectation that one day people ‘from every nation, tribe, people and language’ will stand before the throne and before the Lamb and cry out: ‘Salvation belongs to our God’ (Revelation 7:9–10). *Maranatha* – come, Lord Jesus.

Catherine Butcher, author, journalist and communications consultant

I must admit that when it comes to Christmas carols, I can quite quickly go into autopilot mode once the season rolls in to start singing them. A while ago, I took it upon myself to really pay attention to the lyrics, and year upon year, I’m always struck by these words from ‘Hark! The herald angels sing’:

*Mild he lays his glory by,
born that man no more may die,
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth.*

How powerful. What a Saviour!

Naomi Aidoo, coach, author and entrepreneur

You know that old saying, 'If you want something done well, do it yourself'? Well, this carol is proof that real perfection comes with teamwork. When the great Charles Wesley wrote this carol in 1739, the first line was 'Hark how all the welkin rings'. He knew 'welkin' meant the vaults of heaven, but no one else did, so his ministry colleague George Whitefield tactfully changed that first line to 'Hark! The herald angels sing'. Then, 40 years later, when Tate and Brady brought out their new hymnbook, they decided that this carol would be even better with the addition of the chorus that we all now know and love. And Wesley had stipulated that this carol needed stately sombre music – with exactly the same determination as, a century later, Mendelssohn insisted that the melody he wrote to mark the invention of the printing press should *never* be partnered with sacred words. So, both men would have turned in their graves to know that, 15 years after that, William Cummings, a young English organist, picked up those words and that melody, and created one of the most perfect and best-loved carols of all! Teamwork won through in the end – and I can just imagine God smiling at the blessing it's given us all.

Pam Rhodes, broadcaster and author

The Christmas season often appears full of jollity. We sing carols with gusto and enjoy laughter with friends and family. And yet the joy that we find in God transcends all seasons and circumstances. The joy of our salvation can hold us even in moments of weeping.

In 25 short reflective pieces written by Claire Musters, we travel through promise and preparation to joy, peace and finally love. Along the way we encounter a choir of 40 diverse voices sharing their favourite carols, hymns, poems and prayers, illustrated throughout with original colour artwork.

This Christmas, let us take the time to slow down, reflect and thank God for all the ways he is at work in our lives each day.

Including contributions from Carl Beech, John Bell, Catherine Butcher, Paul Goodliff, Isabelle Hamley, Liz Hoare, David Kitchen, Chine McDonald, Lucy Moore, Pam Rhodes, Margaret Silf and Jo Swinney.



Claire Musters is a writer, speaker, editor, wife, mum, church leader and host of the *Woman Alive* Book Club.



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