

The Twelve Days of Christmas



The carol the 12 days of Christmas has been linked with different parts of the Christian story...

The First Day of Christmas

A Partridge in a Pear Tree - representing Jesus

The Second Day of Christmas

Two Turtle Doves - representing the Old and New Testaments

The Third Day of Christmas

Three French Hens - representing the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity

The Fourth Day of Christmas

Four Calling Birds - representing the four Gospels and their writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

The Fifth Day of Christmas

Five Gold Rings - representing the first five books of the Old Testament

The Sixth Day of Christmas

Six Geese A-Laying - representing the six days of creation



The Seventh Day of Christmas

Seven Swans A-Swimming - representing baptism, communion, confirmation, marriage, reconciliation, ordination, and last rites

The Eighth Day of Christmas

Eight Maids A-Milking - representing the eight Beatitudes

The Ninth Day of Christmas

Nine Ladies Dancing - representing fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

The Tenth Day of Christmas

Ten Lords A-Leaping - representing the Ten Commandments

The Eleventh Day of Christmas

Eleven Pipers Piping - representing the eleven faithful apostles

The Twelfth Day of Christmas

Twelve Drummers Drumming - representing the twelve points of the Apostle's Creed

...as you start the 12 day journey you might like to consider the invitation of God to you this Christmas season.

First Day : When the world was dark

*When the world was dark
and the city was quiet,
you came.*

*You crept in beside us.
And no one knew.*

Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?

*Will you come into the darkness of tonight's world,
not the friendly darkness
as when sleep rescues us from tiredness,
but the fearful darkness, in which people have stopped believing
that war will end
or that food will come
or that a government will change
or that the Church cares?*

*Will you come into that darkness
and do something different
to save your people from death and despair?*

*Will you come into the quietness of this town,
not the friendly quietness
as when lovers hold hands,
but the fearful silence when the phone has not rung
the letter has not come,
the friendly voice no longer speaks,
the doctor's face says it all?*



*Will you come into that darkness,
and do something different,
not to distract, but to embrace your people?*

*And will you come into the dark corners
and the quiet places of our lives?*

*We ask this not because we are guilt-ridden
or want to be,
but because the fullness our lives long for
depends upon us being as open and vulnerable to you
as you were to us, when you came,
wearing no more than diapers,
and trusting human hands
to hold their maker.*

*Will you come into our lives,
if we open them to you
and do something different?*

*When the world was dark
and the city was quiet
you came.
You crept in beside us.*

Do the same this Christmas, Lord.

Do the same this Christmas.

Amen.

*From Cloth for the Cradle Wild Goose Publishing
If you would like to listen to Johnathan Veira sing
Thorns in the straw click [here](#).*

Second Day : O simplicitas

*An angel came to me
And I was unprepared
To be what God was using.
Mother I was to be
A moment I despaired,
Thought briefly of refusing.
The angel knew I heard.
According to God's Word
I bowed to this strange choosing.*

*A palace should have been
The birthplace of a king
(I had no way of knowing).
We went to Bethlehem;
It was so strange a thing.
The wind was cold, and blowing,
My cloak was old, and thin.
They turned us from the inn;
The town was overflowing.*

*God's Word, a child so small,
Who still must learn to speak,
Lay in humiliation.
Joseph stood, strong and tall.
The beasts were warm and meek
And moved with hesitation.
The Child born in a stall?
I understand it: all.
Kings came in adoration.*

*Perhaps it was absurd:
The stable set apart,
The sleepy cattle lowing;
And the incarnate Word
Resting against my heart.
My joy was overflowing.
The shepherds came, adored
The folly of the Lord,
Wiser than all men's knowing.*

Madeleine l'Engle



Footsteps by Kate Austin

To listen to Maddy Prior sing The Angel Gabriel click [here](#)

Third Day : Mary

At first a fluttering
then a kick,
his fist pummelling my rib cage
when I knelt to pray.

They sent me away,
my belly burgeoning
shame on his name,
his eyes looking right through me.

Amazed, he took me back.
He muttered
he'd seen him too
but best not mention it in company.

I sang then,
hymning prophecies
that were poetry
inventing themselves on my tongue.

The riots and the cold
you know about.
The roadblocks.
That donkey.

Let me tell you
nothing prepares you
for that O
cracking your pelvis,

his fists flailing in air
as if from nowhere,
tarnished wings
of an angel.

They say I said nothing
but treasured these things in my heart.
Pain overruled my throat
and hasn't stopped since.

None of us gives birth
in silence.
I was no one's favourite girl
till this.

Anthony Wilson @ anthonywilsonpoetry.com



The Word by Gail Linden
To listen to Pentatonix sing Mary, did you know? Click [here](#)
More of Anthony's Nativity poems can be found [here](#)

Fourth Day : No Room

*“No room for Him,” the keeper said
That night so long ago,
“My inn is crowded, don’t you see,
The rooms now overflow.”*

*“It’s just a Child,” he must have thought,
“A family, poor and plain:
My inn is filled with paying guests.
How could I dare explain?”*

*And thus, he turned aside from One
Who chose a humble birth
To enter into human form
And save all men on earth.*

*But lo, the shepherds in the hills
Were called, the Babe to greet;
They followed then the brilliant star
And worshipped at His feet!*

*“No room for Him,” cry men today,
As through the world they plod;
“My life is crowded, don’t you see?
I have no room for God.*

*How could I dare explain to all
My friends who question me,
That Jesus came to save my soul
From sin, to set me free?”*

*O God, forbid that we become
As keepers of the inn,
And have our lives so crowded
That we have no room for Him.*

*But now may we, Thy children dear,
Unworthy though we are,
Become as shepherds long ago,
And follow now His star!*

Kathryn Slasor



Abandoned by Kate Austin
To listen to Liz Shea sing Breath of Heaven click [here](#).

Fifth Day : The song of the shepherds

*We were familiar with the night.
We knew its favourite colours,
its sullen silence
and its small, disturbing sounds,
its unprovoked rages,
its savage dreams.*

*We slept by turns,
attentive to the flock.
We said little.
Night after night, there was little to say.
But sometimes one of us,
skilled in that way,
would pipe a tune of how things were for us.*

*They say that once, almost before time,
the stars with shining voices
serenaded
the new born world.
The night could not contain their boundless praise.*

*We thought that just a poem —
until the night
a song of solar glory,
unutterable, unearthly,
eclipsed the luminaries of the night,
as though the world were exorcised of dark
and, coming to itself, began again.*

*Later we returned to the flock.
The night was ominously black.
The stars were silent as the sheep.
Nights pass, year on year.
We clutch our meagre cloaks against the cold.
Our aging piper's fumbling fingers play,
night after night,
an earthly echo of the song that banished dark.
It has stayed with us.*

Richard Bauckham



Annunciation to the shepherds by John Piper Tate Gallery (Fair Use)
To listen to Kate Rusby sing While Shepherds Watched click [here](#).

Sixth Day : BC-AD

*This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.*

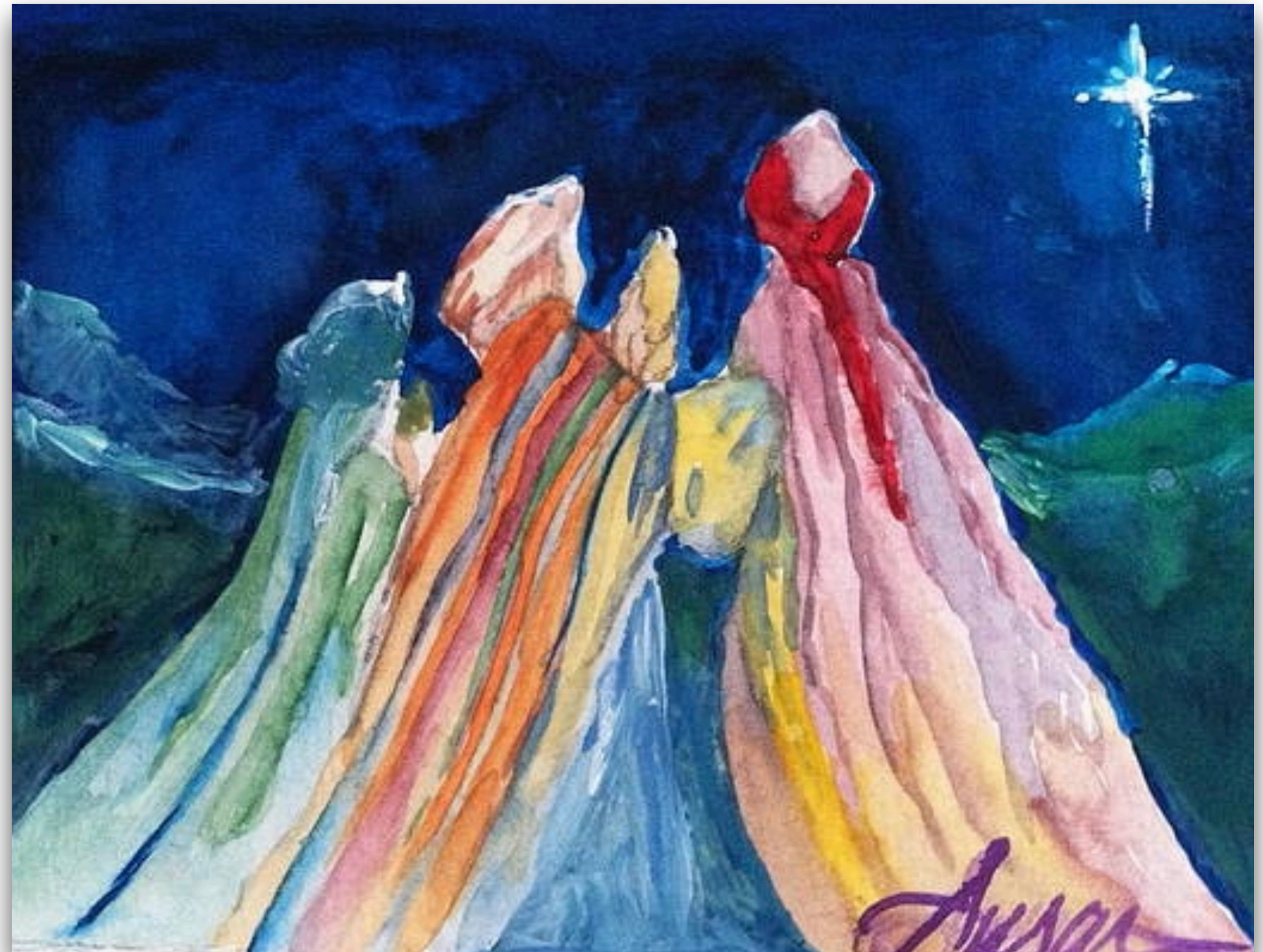
*This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.*

*This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.*

*And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect*

*Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.*

U A Fanthorpe



© Holy Night by Susan Voigt (Fair Use)
To listen to Fox and Hound sing We Three Kings click [here](#)

Seventh Day : Breathing under water

*“I built my house by the sea.
Not on the sands, mind you;
not on the shifting sand.
And I built it of rock.
A strong house
by a strong sea.
And we got well acquainted, the sea and I.
Good neighbours.
Not that we spoke much.
We met in silences.
Respectful, keeping our distance,
but looking our thoughts across the fence of sand.
Always, the fence of sand our barrier,
always, the sand between.
And then one day,
- and I still don't know how it happened -
the sea came.
Without warning.
Without welcome, even
Not sudden and swift, but a shifting across the sand like wine,
less like the flow of water than the flow of blood.
Slow, but coming.
Slow, but flowing like an open wound.
And I thought of flight and I thought of drowning and I thought of death.
And while I thought the sea crept higher, till it reached my door.
And I knew, then, there was neither flight, nor death, nor drowning.
That when the sea comes calling, you stop being neighbours,
Well acquainted, friendly-at-a-distance neighbours,
And you give your house for a coral castle,
And you learn to breathe underwater.”*

Breathing Under Water (Carol Bieleck)



www.sarahannbird.com ©

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Happy Place by Sarah Ann Bird
To listen to Lauren Harris sing Come to the water click [here](#)

Eighth Day : Ring out, wild bells

*Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.*

*Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.*

*Ring out the grief that saps the mind
For those that here we see no more;
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.*

*Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.*

*Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes
But ring the fuller minstrel in.*

*Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.*

*Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.*

*Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.*

Alfred Lord Tennyson



To listen to the instrumental Our God is Able click [here](#)

Ninth Day : Come, Lord Jesus

*Into our world as into Mary's womb...
Come, Lord Jesus.*

*Into the forgotten places, as into the stable,
Come, Lord Jesus.*

*Into the lives of the poor, bringing hope;
Into the lives of the powerful, bringing caution;
Into the lives of the weary, bringing rest;
Into the lives of the wise, bringing vision;
And into our lives and longings,
Whatever our estate,
Come, Lord Jesus.*

*This is the good news:
Christ is coming,
And blessed are those who wait on the Lord.*

Therefore come quickly, Lord.

From Cloth for the Cradle Wild Goose Publishing



Image from an installation at Lincoln Cathedral
To listen to Lauren Daigle sing Rescue click [here](#)

Tenth Day : Lamb of God

Given that lambs
are infant sheep,
that sheep are afraid and foolish, and lack
the means of self-protection, having
neither rage nor claws,
venom nor cunning,
what then
is this 'Lamb of God'?

This pretty creature, vigorous
to nuzzle at milky dugs,
woolbearer, bleater,
leaper in air for delight of being, who finds in astonishment
four legs to land on, the grass
all it knows of the world?
With whom we would like to play,
whom we'd lead with ribbons, but may not bring
into our houses because
it would spoil the floor with its droppings?

What terror lies concealed
in strangest words, O lamb
of God that taketh away
the Sins of the World: an innocence
smelling of ignorance,
born in bloody snowdrifts,
licked by forebearing
dogs more intelligent than its entire flock put together?

God then,
encompassing all things, is
defenceless? Omnipotence
has been tossed away,
reduced to a wisp of damp wool?



Image by Gordon Lamb
To listen to Christy Nockels sing Wrap this one up click [here](#)

And we
frightened, bored, wanting
only to sleep 'til catastrophe
has raged, clashed, seethed and gone by without us,
wanting then
to awaken in quietude without remembrance of agony,

we who in shamefaced private hope
had looked to be plucked from fire and given
a bliss we deserved for having imagined it,

is it implied that we
must protect this perversely weak
animal, whose muzzle's nudgings

suppose there is milk to be found in us?
Must hold in our icy hearts
a shivering God?

So be it.
Come, rag of pungent
quiverings,
dim star.
Let's try
if something human still
can shield you,
spark
of remote light

Denise Levertov

Eleventh Day : Nunc Dimittis

*God, you can now release your servant;
release me in peace as you promised.
With my own eyes I've seen your salvation;
it's now out in the open for everyone to see:
A God-revealing light to the non-Jewish nations,
and of glory for your people Israel.*

Luke 2:29-31 The Message



Simeon and Anna by Jan Vant Hoff
To listen to Michael Card sing Emmanuel click [here](#)

Twelfth Day : Empty Water Jar

*Jesus, I come to the warmth of your Presence
knowing that You are
the very emptiness of God.
I come before You
holding the water jar of my life.
Your eyes meet mine
and I know what I'd rather not know.*

*I came to be filled
but I am already full.
I am too full.
This is my sickness
I am full of things
that crowd out
Your healing Presence.*

*A holy knowing steals inside my heart
and I see the painful truth.
I don't need more
I need less
I am too full.*

*I am full of things that block out
Your golden grace.
I am smothered by gods of my own creation
I am lost in the forest of my false self
I am full of my own opinions and narrow attitudes
full of fear, resentment, control
full of self pity, and arrogance.
Slowly this terrible truth pierces my heart,
I am so full, there is no room for You.*



*Contemplatively, and with compassion,
You ask me to reach into my water jar.
One by one, Jesus, you enable me
to lift out the things
that are a hindrance to my wholeness.
I take each on to my heart,
I hear You asking me
" Why is this so important to you? "*

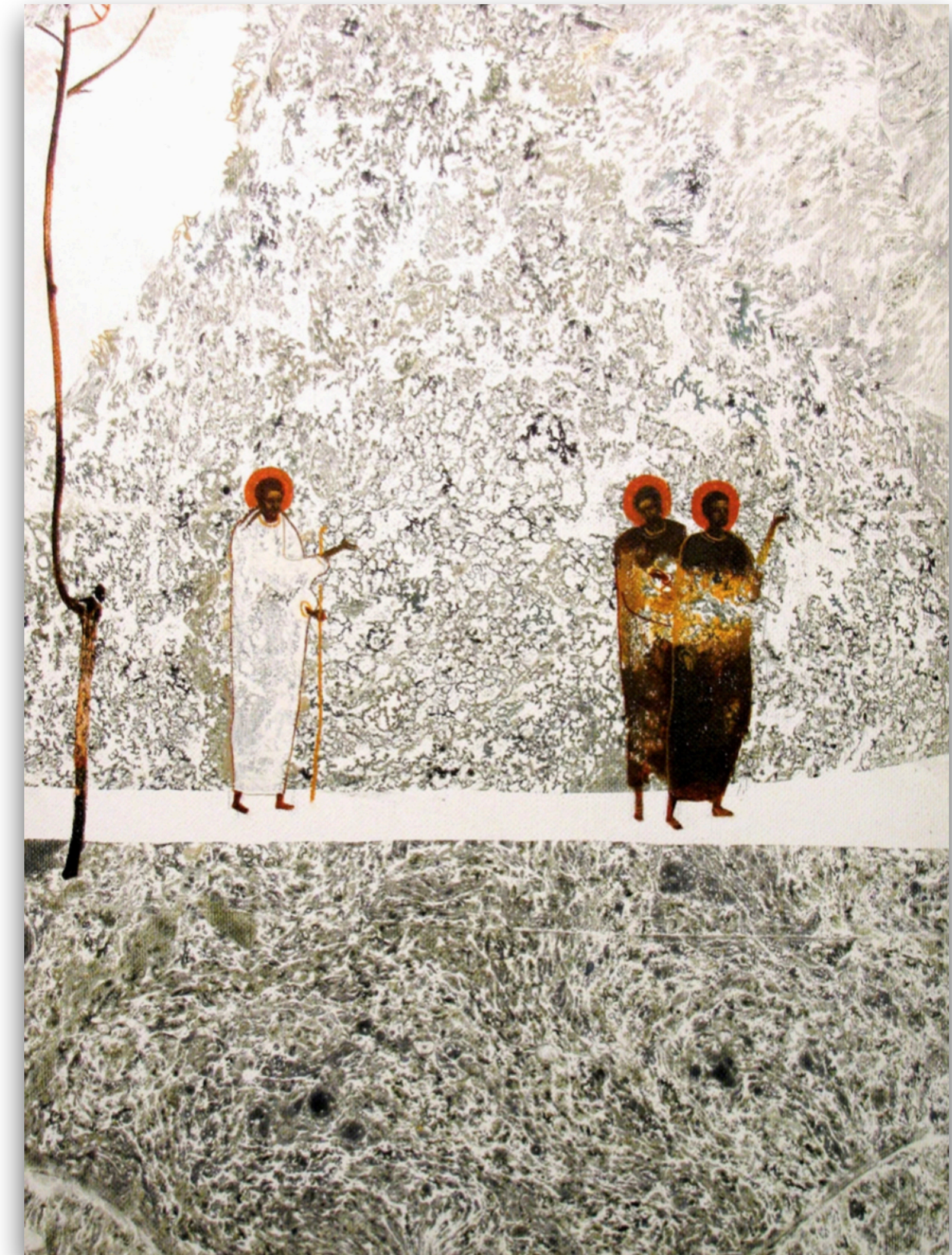
*Like the murmur of a gentle stream
I hear You calling,
" Let go, let go, let go! "
I pray with each obstacle
tasting the bitterness and grief
it has caused.*

*Finally
I sit with my empty water jar
I hear you whisper
You have become a space for God
Now there is hope
Now you are ready to be a channel of Life.
You have given up your own agenda
There is nothing left but God.*

Macrina Wiederkehr

To listen to Rebekah Young sing What is he to you? Click [here](#)

- As you look back over the last 12 days of Christmas
 - What have you to give thanks for?
 - Where have you felt drawn by God?
 - Where have you turned away?
 - What is God's invitation to you now?
 - How do you want to respond?
 - What gift of God do you want to ask God for as you start this next stage of the journey?



The Road to Emmaus Ivanka Demchuk
You might like to listen to Psalm 23 [here](#).