

CLASSIC READINGS FOR CHRISTMAS



P E A C E

S T E P H E N J. N I C H O L S



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Illustrated by Simon Pemberton



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

PEACE: CLASSIC READINGS FOR CHRISTMAS

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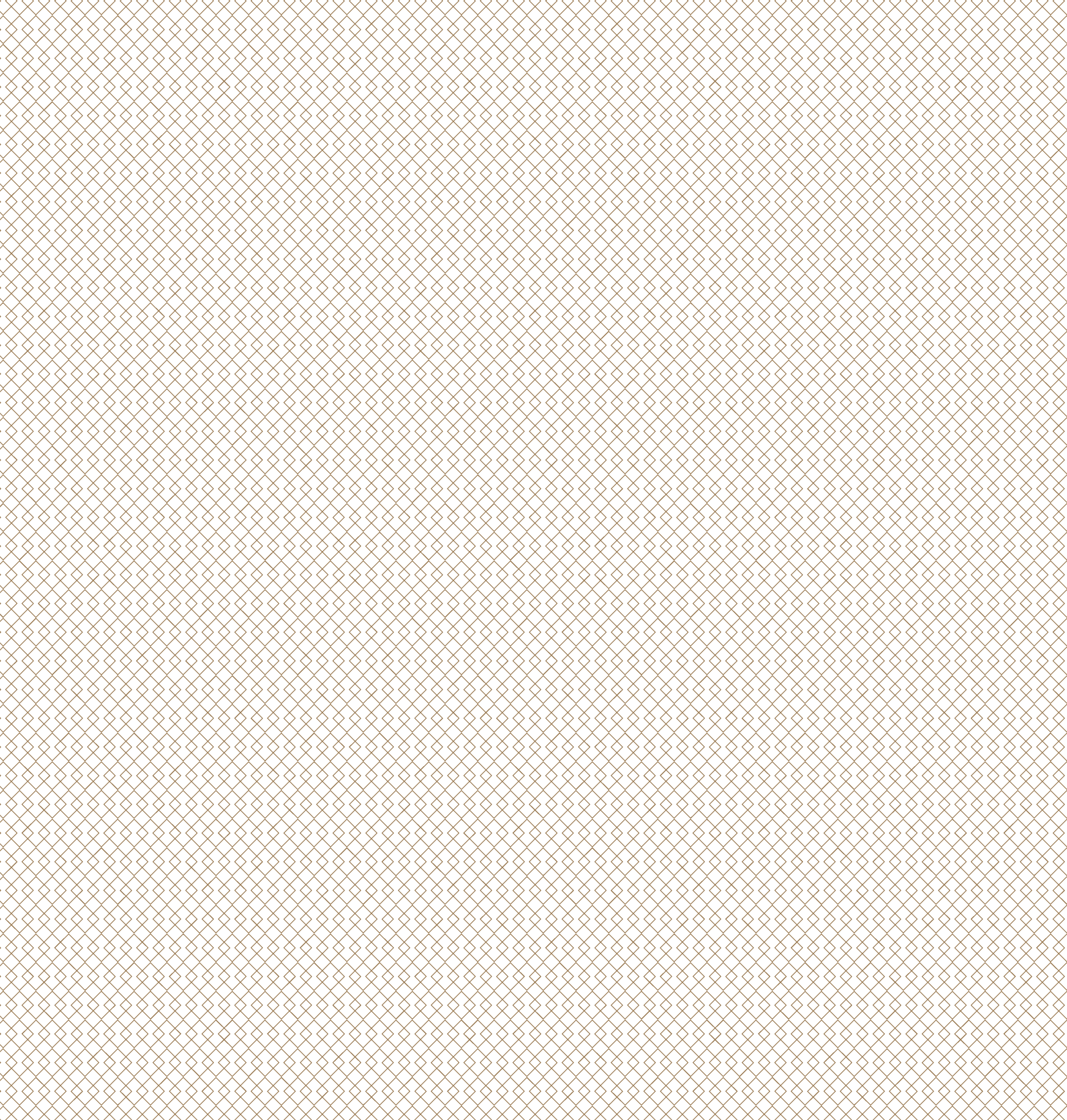
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*FOR BEN, IAN, AND GRACE—
MERRY CHRISTMAS!*



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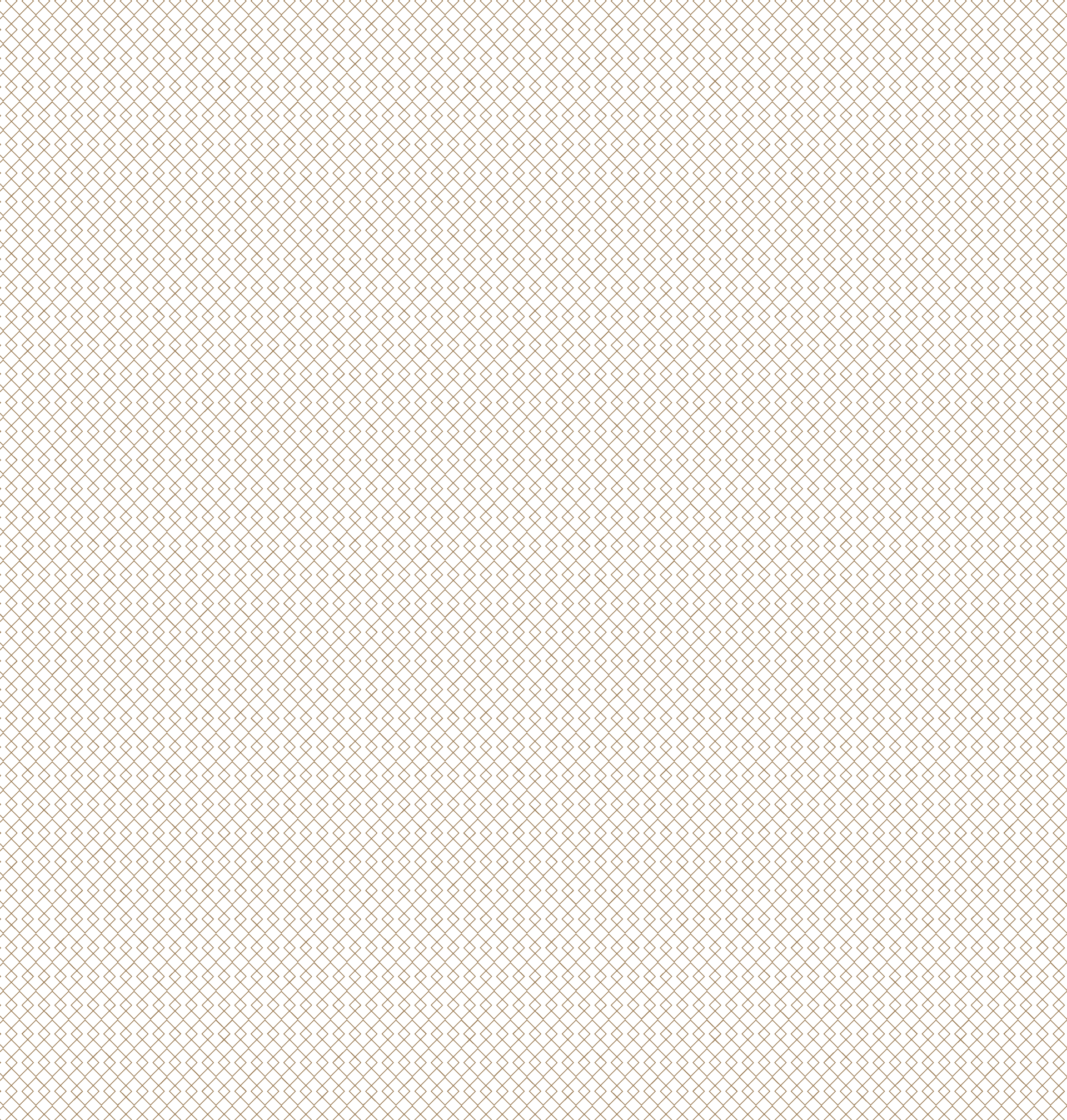
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FOREWORD

NO HOLIDAY STIRS THE HEARTS of millions as does Christmas. Indeed Christmas is not celebrated for a single day but usually involves a month's season of celebration and contemplation. We've all heard of the lamentations about the commercialization of Christmas and the secularization of Christmas and even those protests from within the Christian community that Christmas is a pagan holiday that should not even be acknowledged. Nevertheless the significance of this time of celebration refuses to go away. No number of Grinches are sufficient to steal it from our culture and from the Church. That's because it is the day among all days when we celebrate the entrance into this world of our Redeemer. In the final analysis, the celebration of Christmas is not so much about the delivery of a baby but is rather the celebration of the incarnation of God (though that incarnation came by means of the bearing of a baby). That baby's birth is of singular importance and significance for the whole of human history, not only for religious considerations, but it is of cosmic significance because the whole explanation of the meaning of creation is found in His person and in His work. Indeed as the Scriptures teach us this baby who was born, was in His pre-incarnate state, the Creator of the world. He is the One in whom, through whom and by whom all things are made. If we travel the world, particularly to the countries of the West, we see the multiple traditions that have arisen by which Christian people celebrate this moment in time. Each of these traditions gives us something to savor and contemplate about the sweetness of our Savior's incarnation.

This book, *Peace*, brings refreshing and profitable insights into the meaning, purpose and the significance of Christmas. It is a valuable book for all of us to have and read as we contemplate this glorious moment of human history.

— R.C. Sproul
Chairman and Founder of Ligonier Ministries
Sanford, Florida
April 2013





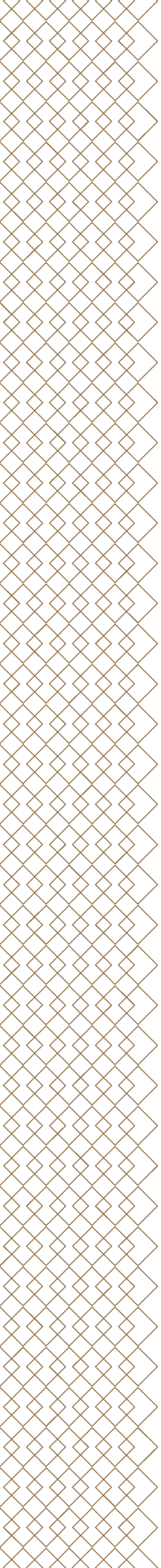
CHAPTER I

P E A C E
C H I L D



WHETHER YOU ARE A CHILD OR NOT, Christmas is the most anticipated time of the year. It is a time for giving in a culture of receiving. It is a time to think of others when we so easily and quickly think of ourselves. It is a time to yearn and long for peace when we are surrounded by war, strife, and conflict. It is a time for family. It is a time to celebrate hope.

Just the mention of Christmas conjures up nostalgic images of bells ringing, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, and the family gliding across a snow-covered bridge in a horse-drawn sleigh on the way to Grandma's. It is a time to dream of things that are not. It is a time to wish for all that is off-kilter to be set right. Christmas is a season full of promise. This is the Christmas imagined, the Christmas of commercials and Thomas Kinkade paintings.



In reality, Christmas can be a time of disappointment. It can be a time when some hopes and dreams go unfulfilled. The tranquil family dinner can sometimes careen into strife and conflict. Presents, sacrificed for and lovingly presented, may elicit only a yawn, or a half-hearted “Thank you.” The sweater we thought they would love so much gets put right in the drawer, never to emerge again.

Then there are the lonely hearts. Every Christmas carol, every ad depicting the giving of a diamond necklace or of a red bow-clad Lexus, only pounds out the inexorable loneliness that some people experience at this most wonderful time of the year. Psychologists tell us that people’s experience of depression peaks around holidays, especially Christmas. This, sadly, is the Christmas experienced by many. The season that starts off so full of promise may very well end in disappointment.

This gap between all that we hope for in this season and all that we actually experience has led to a quest. Charlie Brown will tell you this is the quest for the real meaning of Christmas.

The goal of the quest may be summed up in the greatest of all the wishes and dreams of the Christmas season: peace on earth. Peace among nations, peace among brothers and sisters, peace with our selves. We give gifts, sing carols, and roast chestnuts—well, maybe we only sing about this and don’t actually do it. In any case, we do all these things in the hope of finding peace. But peace always seems to remain elusive.



One of the most remarkable stories of Christmas comes from one of the darkest moments of modern history. World War I ravaged a continent, leaving destruction and debris in its wake. The human cost, well in the millions, staggers us. But from the midst of this dark conflict comes the story of the Christmas Truce of 1914. The Western Front, only a few months into the war, was a deplorable scene of devastation. Perhaps as if to give the combatants one day to breathe again, a truce was called from Christmas Eve through Christmas Day.

As darkness settled over the front like a blanket, the sound of exploding shells and the rat-tat-tat of gunfire faded. Faint carols, in French or English voices on one side and in German voices on the other, rose to fill the silence of the night.

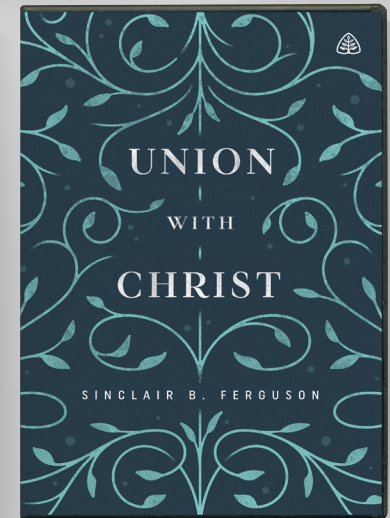
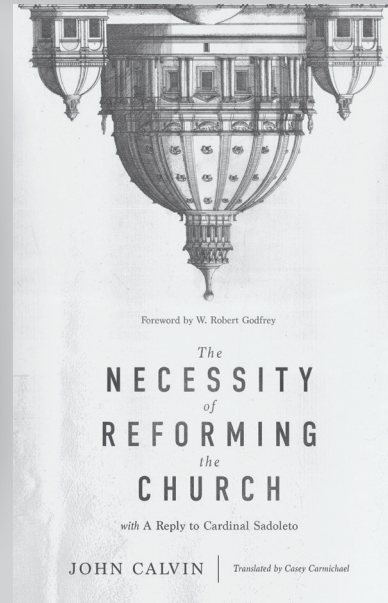
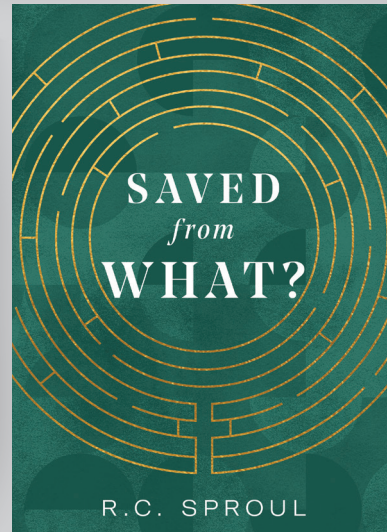
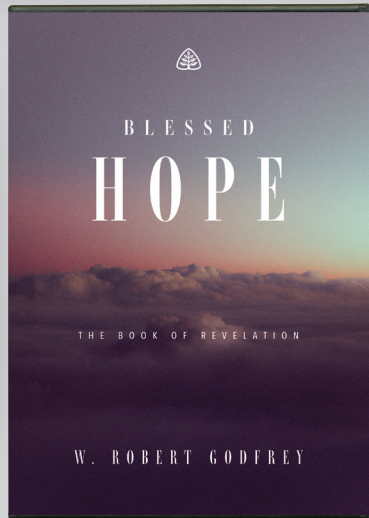
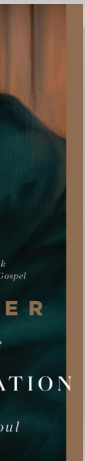
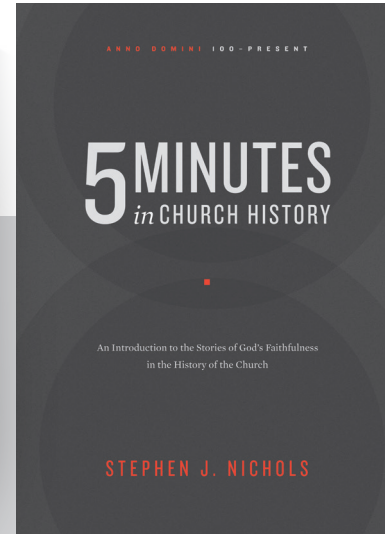
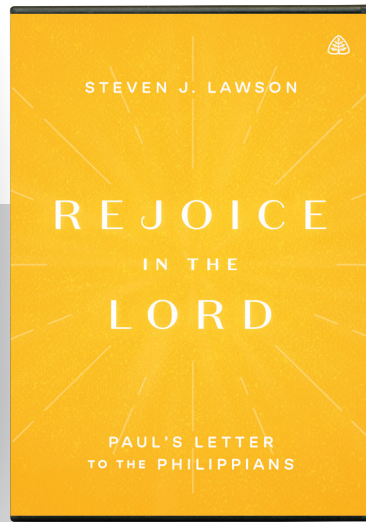
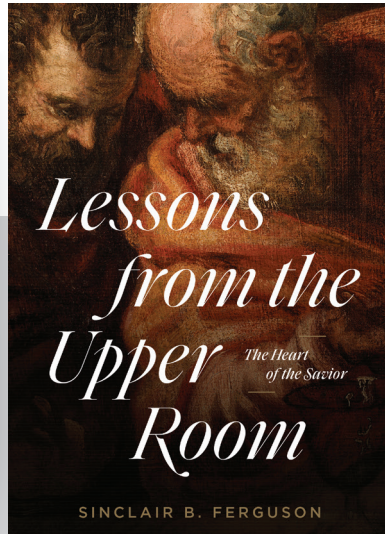
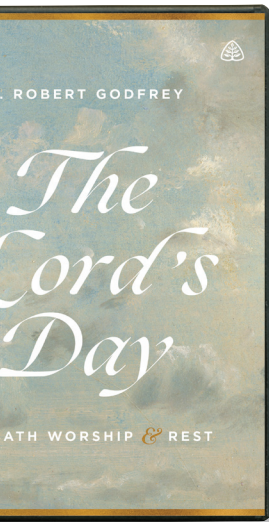
By morning, soldiers, at first hesitantly, began filing out of the maze of trenches into the dreaded and parched soil of No Man's Land. There was more singing. Gifts of rations and cigarettes were exchanged. Family photos were passed around. Soccer balls appeared. Up and down the Western Front, soldiers, who only hours before had been locked in deathly combat, now faced off in soccer games.

For one brief but entirely remarkable day, there was peace on earth. Some have called the Christmas Truce of 1914 "the Miracle on the Western Front."

Anxious to print some good news, The Times of London reported on the events of the Christmas Truce. Soldiers recorded the day in letters home and in diaries. Some of those lines made it to newspapers, while others remained



We want to see men and women around the world connect
the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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