



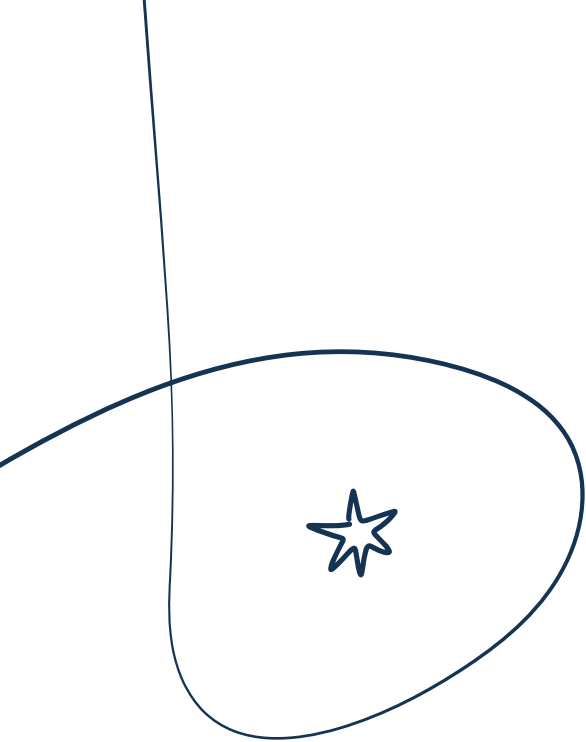
*Listening  
to your soul*

**CHRISTMAS DEDICATION 2021**

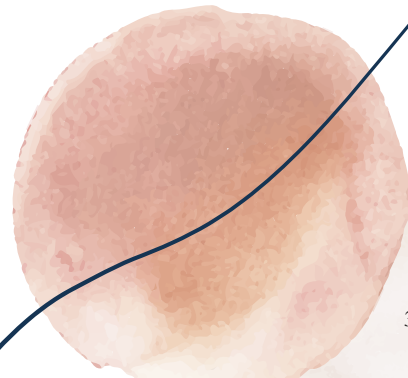
PART 1


*That from  
which we live*





*As in a flash of light,  
almost every day anew,  
just that moment without reason  
coming as if by itself.  
To be here  
on this planet  
somewhere between the stars in space.  
Nothing more or less  
than just a miracle.<sup>1</sup>*





*Nothing more  
or less  
than just  
a  
MIRACLE*



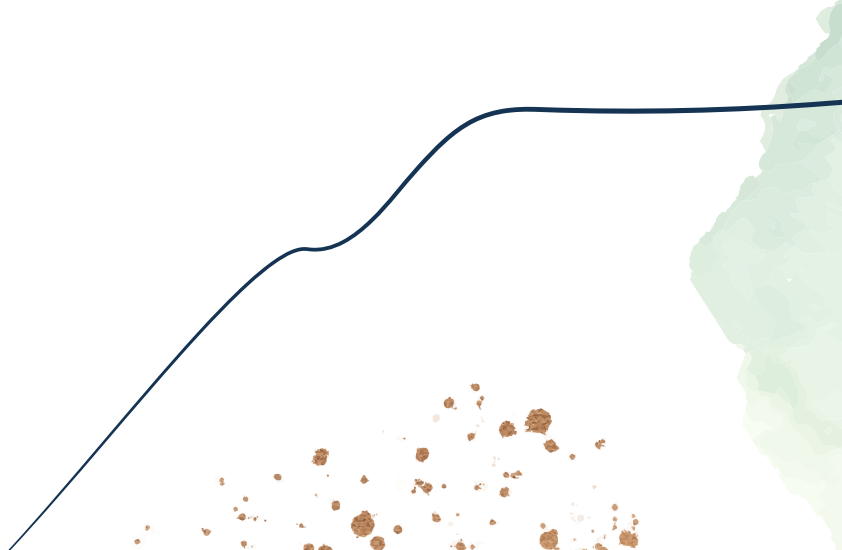
## The birth of an attitude

It is Christmas Eve and in many parts of the world people are reciting to each other that wonderful story of the birth of a child, who had expectations associated with him. For centuries, people had been looking for a saviour. They longed for someone who would put an end to all the problems and discord between people once and for all. They longed for lasting peace.<sup>2</sup>

How different these high expectations turned out to be. The Christmas story is about ordinary, fallible people like you and me. When it transpired that his fiancée Mary was pregnant, Joseph did not want to bring her into disrepute and thought about disowning her secretly. But in a dream he, a descendant of David, heard that he should not be afraid to take Mary with him.<sup>3</sup> She will bear a son. You must name him Jesus. He will save and deliver his people, he was told.<sup>4</sup>

It was under this star that the child to whom all this was attributed was born. The birth did not take place in a palace, but in a stable, because there was no room for them in the inn. His father was a carpenter and had improvised a cradle for their baby from a manger with the help of some straw. And the first people to find him were not dignitaries, but simple shepherds from the field. They had heard of the child's special qualities and knelt in reverence and silence before him.<sup>5</sup> And yet, for us, the deeper meaning of the Christmas story is that in those humble circumstances a special (attitude?) attitude came to light. Jesus' attitude to life focused on values other than the liberation from the Roman yoke that many hoped for. He did not only *speak* of the light of love, he loved unpretentiously. He did not only dream of peace, but he fulfilled it in his dealings with people. He not only believed in

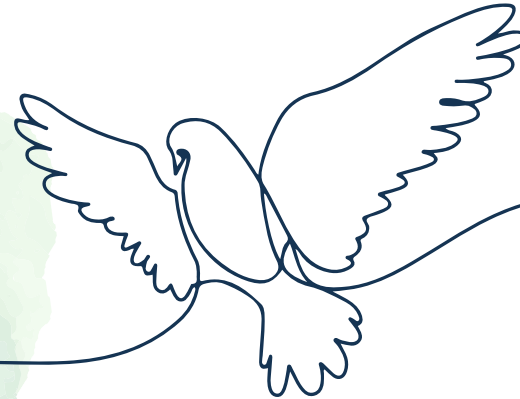
compassion, but he had a genuine concern for his fellow man. Especially for those on the fringes of society. This makes his message an inspiration for us to this day.<sup>6</sup>





## Our story of faith

For us, Jesus' attitude to life is expressed in the religious-humanistic philosophy of our faith. Amazement about creation, life and our own existence evokes a feeling of grace and gratitude. This feeling becomes truly meaningful when it leads us to act in a humane way. Dignified human action that extends not only to my fellow man, but to all life, to how we treat animals and nature.<sup>7</sup>



It makes a big difference where your cradle stood and what you have been given. Everyone wants to be acknowledged and appreciated. It starts with seeing yourself as a unique expression of life, with the realisation that it is good that you are here. But sometimes there were obstacles, which prevented your self-respect from developing fully. Obstacles such as shyness, misunderstanding, insecurity, perfectionism, an overprotective upbringing or not having been sufficiently loved. All these things can have a deep impact and require you to overcome yourself in order to rise above it. Sometimes you can find the strength within yourself, sometimes you just cannot quite manage it now. Maybe someone else will help you take a step further.<sup>8</sup>





*Come with glasses to clink,  
so many times we shared our feast,  
sang together and told stories of  
how far we have come,*

*but to share in the silence,  
in the fear and in the delusion  
brought us so much further  
than we might otherwise have gone.*

*Come with smiling faces,  
Comfort with hands full of strength,  
Let your arms embrace widely,  
speak with voices, warm and soft,*


*but to share in the hunger,  
in the loneliness, the pain,  
made us inexpressibly greater  
than we might otherwise have been.<sup>9</sup>*

## Equality and diversity

The belief that all life stems from one origin implies that I am connected to the life that surrounds me and that I acknowledge my fellow man to be of equal value to myself. People differ in their talents, abilities and circumstances, which is why every person needs help and complementation from another. I feel it is my duty to be a bridge builder. In whatever way we are different, we all have the talent to love and to forgive. By being prepared to serve and by showing practical solidarity, the other person can develop, and I contribute to harmony in society. Not service because I know better, but cooperation based on the acceptance of my fellow man as fully equal.<sup>10</sup>







*Hey,  
how are you doing?  
Catch your breath.  
We don't need anything to feel at home.  
No plus or minus, no position.*

*Do you remember? Time.  
Moments of open hands clasped together  
that only clench into a fist to pass on keys*

*Here,  
from me,  
for you.*



*Be careful, but come in.  
Let the same foot, on which you want to continue,  
rest.  
Come and see without wanting to.*

*Here we are then.  
Only a loose door handle in our hands.  
In an open field.  
No walls, hinges or barriers,  
just the wind telling us its secret:*

*'Looking longer makes you meet,  
receptivity above reason.  
The benefit of doubt is  
the precursor of peace.'*<sup>11</sup>



PART 2

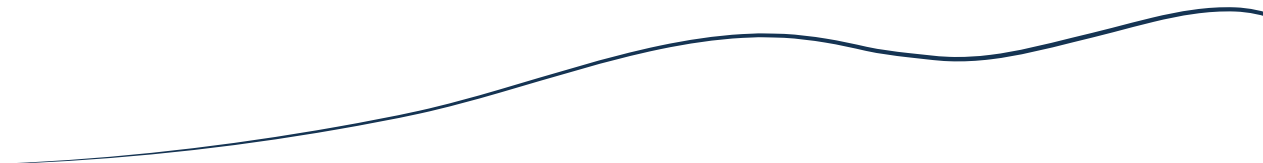
# *The future requires space*



## Challenges we face

People like to hold on to what they know. And rightly so because many customs or traditions are based on valuable knowledge and experience. At the moment, however, circumstances are changing so rapidly and so radically that we are forced to recalibrate what we know with new insights. That is where we stand now and it is exciting. The fact that we do not yet know exactly what the changes entail can make us anxious and uncertain. We are asked to step out of our comfort zone without knowing what we will get in return.<sup>1</sup>

We need the power of imagination to be able to change direction, to go beyond the familiar, the ordinary. Will we succeed? We need to get underway and not procrastinate. And we will have to be agile, prepared to take risks and make mistakes. This requires room to experiment, to adjust ideas and to start again. In doing so, we will discover new opportunities and possibilities.<sup>2</sup>



'Doing more than the ordinary' is a radical incentive to be creative and to align our behaviour with a greater whole. Many people before us recognised that living is about change. They showed us how to let go and invited us to take on new challenges. They stimulated our power of imagination by their actions. One of those challenges is to be in solidarity with our fellow man, nearby and further away. We will have to work together more, make commitments, and share experiences to really move forward. Are we prepared to do this, even if the other is not yet in solidarity with us? The effect of I am because we are\* can be quite abrasive.<sup>3</sup>





Do not be  
afraid of  
DREAMING  
too big



*don't be afraid  
you are allowed to begin anew  
determined goal oriented  
or feeling hesitant  
stick to the rules  
follow your own mind  
let go of that hand  
or grab hold of one*

do not be afraid  
of dreaming too big  
proceed if you know for sure  
and if you hesitate wait  
how vain are the things  
you have intended  
the most beautiful things  
that happen to you  
are those least thought of <sup>4</sup>

## Embracing uncertainty

Although we do not know the future, we do know what does and does not help. In recent years, we have been confronted with the consequences of the never-ending depletion of nature. Three quarters of Dutch children are concerned about the climate and three out of ten sometimes lie awake because of it... In order to ensure that the interests of future generations are looked after, philosopher-politician Roman Krznaric argues that young people should have a voice in political decisions, and that citizens and administrators should learn to think in the very long term.<sup>5</sup>

In the world, the door to hope is cautiously ajar. What is possible in terms of vaccine development, must now also be possible in terms of climate control and prevention of pandemics. And in terms of fighting racism and poverty. This moment in time teaches us something fundamental, namely what it means to live together, to breathe together. Fortunately, oxygen makes up 21% of the air everywhere and is free. And yet, if breathing together stands as the model for living together, then the subsequent question arises: are we really breathing *together* as a global community?<sup>6</sup>



Living in connectedness is meaningful in the present and the key to the future, the time when we are no longer here. Will our children's children thank us for the choices we make now? Do we hear their voices in our dreams? Are we good ancestors? And just to be clear, you do not have to be a father or a mother to be an ancestor. These are questions of conscience for all of us. Are we doing everything we can to leave behind a good, liveable world? Which perspective do we choose, the long term or the short term?<sup>7</sup>

## Consciously working towards a hopeful future

The long-term perspective requires practice in 'cathedral thinking': doing or not doing things that do not immediately benefit us, but which we know will help to leave behind a liveable world. Out of love for life. Jesus already knew: each one of us is a child of God. If we look at ourselves, at others and at the earth in this way, the world has a future.<sup>8</sup>

Do I choose that positive connection with the world?  
Do I dare to embrace uncertainty or do I continually see threats from perceived certainties? Out of fear I want to preserve what I have, out of courage and hope I dare to let go and take steps towards a future that I do not yet know, but that I can help shape. Trusting that *the years will teach you the things that the days do not know*\*.<sup>9</sup>





The background features abstract watercolor-style shapes in light orange and yellow. Two hand-drawn black stars are positioned in the upper right area. Thin, dark blue curved lines are scattered across the bottom and left sides of the frame.

DEEL 3

# *Determining direction*

## Listening to your soul

Determining direction and taking steps towards a hopeful future requires introspection. Two thousand years ago, Jesus grew up to be a young man. After he was baptised by John, he spent forty days in solitude and silence in the desert. He eats only what he finds and that is not much. In these circumstances, he thinks and tries to sort things out. What has he started? What is he going to do? While he is starving, the thought grows that man cannot live by bread alone. His soul also needs nourishment. And so he comes to the decision of how he wants to proceed.<sup>1</sup>

Back in Galilee, Jesus sought out the synagogue where he read aloud the ancient words of Isaiah: 'I have been sent to bring the good news to the poor, to announce the release of prisoners, to give sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed.' Thereafter he rolls up the scroll, looks

at all present and says: 'From now on these words will be fulfilled.' Again there is a birth: this time of a disposition, an attitude aimed at human dignity.<sup>2</sup>

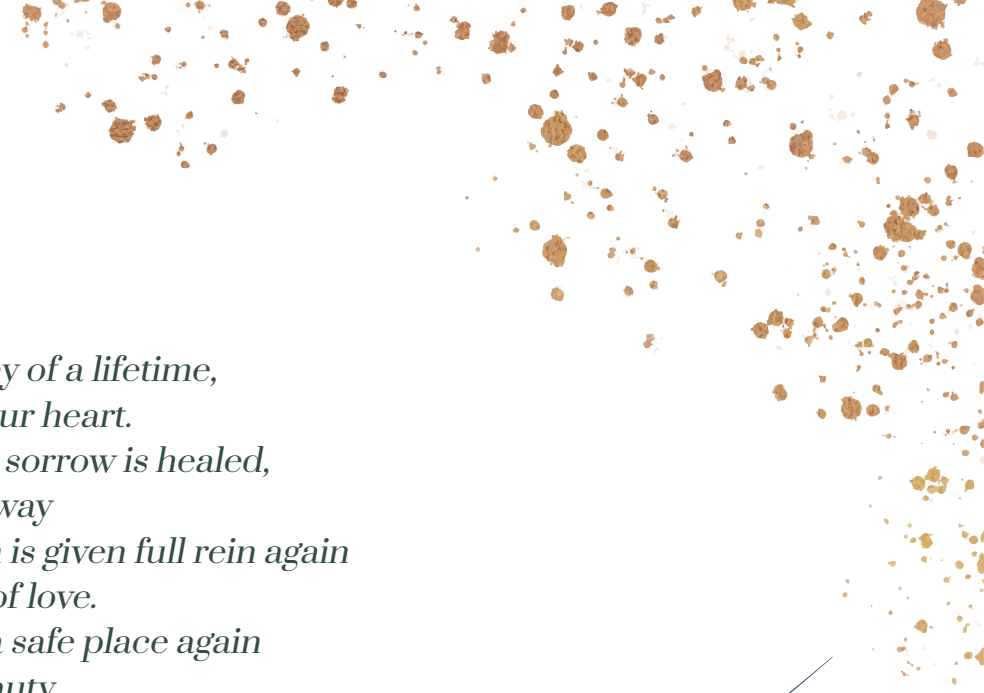
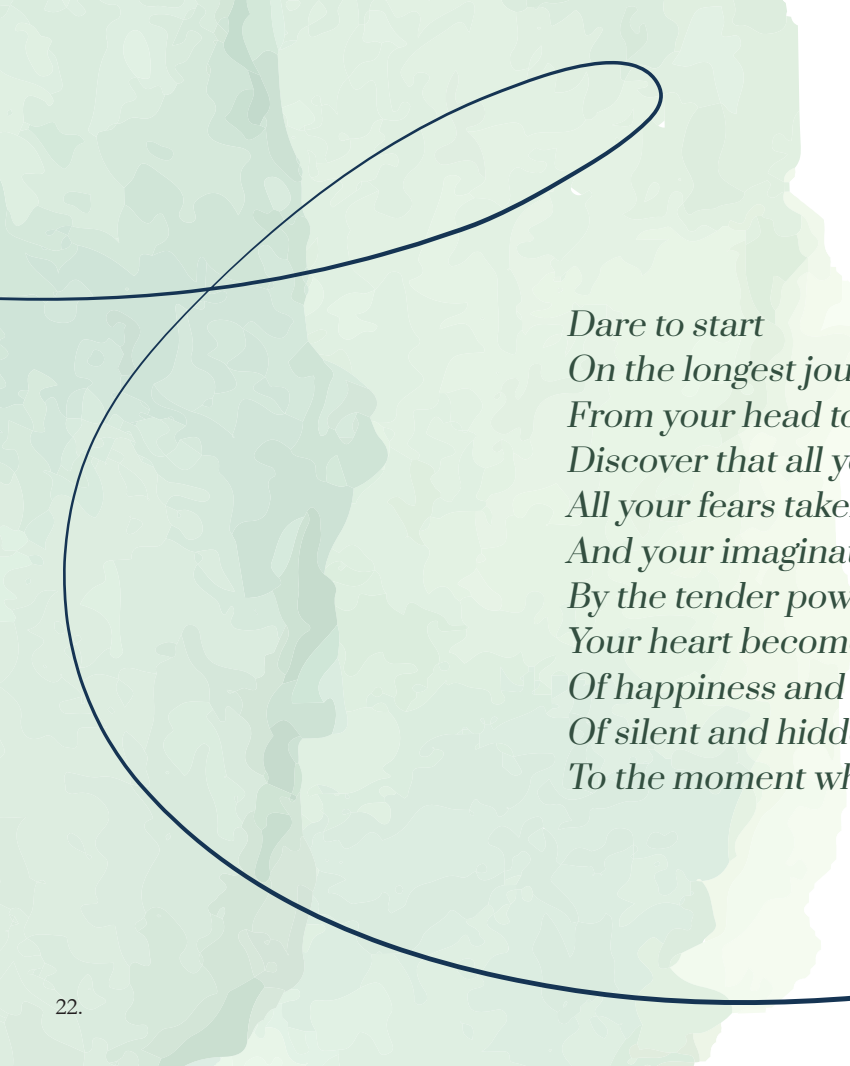
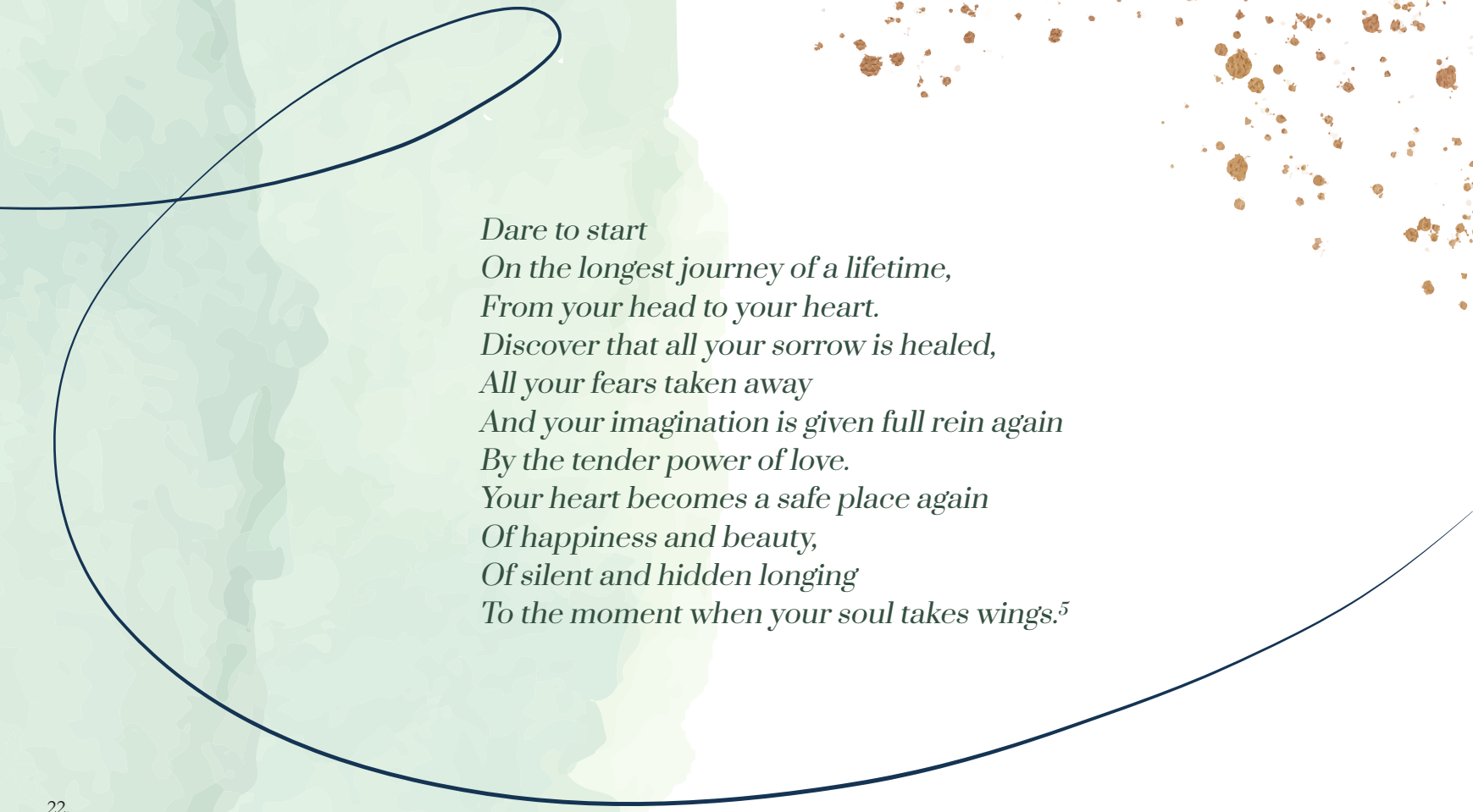
This story brings me to the question: Who do I really want to be? To be able to think about this, it is sometimes good to be alone for a while. I do not have to go to the desert for this. It can also be in my room before I go to sleep or in nature.<sup>3</sup>

Would it be possible: to live life with love and therein find meaning, fulfilment and happiness? I believe that every human being is born with the talent of love. Therefore, I also believe that we can live in a loving manner. To find his answer, Jesus went the way of introspection, to his deepest self. Do I dare to go that way too? And what answers will I find there?<sup>4</sup>



Have a good  
journey  
to your  
HEART





*Dare to start  
On the longest journey of a lifetime,  
From your head to your heart.  
Discover that all your sorrow is healed,  
All your fears taken away  
And your imagination is given full rein again  
By the tender power of love.  
Your heart becomes a safe place again  
Of happiness and beauty,  
Of silent and hidden longing  
To the moment when your soul takes wings.<sup>5</sup>*

## Making choices and taking responsibility

We are creative people and every day we create with who we are, with what we do and don't do. It is not surprising that precisely because of this, every human being asks questions of meaning from the moment we become aware of ourselves and our surroundings.<sup>6</sup> We are often faced with choices. They can be clear, but they can also be quite complex. Either way, choices have consequences for our personal lives. On what basis do we make choices? Earlier we talked about 'cathedral thinking'. This requires, first of all, a solid and sustainable basic principle, a foundation. And then to find answers to the questions: What do I want to build upon and what is needed for that?<sup>7</sup>

The core of what is needed is the two-thousand-year-old advice: love God above all else and your neighbour as yourself. He is like yourself. This reflects our religious-humanistic vision of life: the desire of people to give peace, compassion and humanity a face in everyday practice. And to love life in all its beauty and inscrutability, with all its opportunities and limitations.<sup>8</sup>



## **Belief in yourself and faith in each other**

Giving a face to peace, compassion and humanity is an achievable ideal. After all, I can apply it every day in my everyday life. From the awareness that every human being matters, I believe in that ideal. It does require belief in myself, in that my contribution counts. It requires standing up when I have fallen, feeling supported by the power of life. And experiencing that I do not have to face things alone. Because you are there, standing next to me, I see you in everything you are. When I look at things this way, I start to see the value of the other more and more. And when I believe and imagine that everywhere in the world people are working towards that ideal in their own way, then my hope and faith grows.<sup>9</sup>

With that personal input, everyone writes their own life's story. Stories that remind me that good can triumph, that there is always a new beginning, that a new birth in ourselves is possible.<sup>10</sup>

*What could give greater joy to existence  
than the birth of a new, innocent life.  
What is of deeper, more essential value,  
what has a stronger connection with peace on earth.  
An open future beckons, a blank page.  
A new path to follow, a path never trodden.  
Protecting new life, new possibilities.  
Following in the footsteps of a new innocence.  
A new chance for peace, for renouncing violence.  
Isn't that what the new-born tells us?  
Unspoken, it asks us for care and compassion,  
A defenceless child demands this, a prayer for protection.  
To provide it, is that perhaps  
the wonderful task that Christmas shows us?<sup>11</sup>*

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## Notes

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## Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines. On the left side, there is a vertical green watercolor wash that fades into the white background. On the right side, there is a vertical orange watercolor wash that also fades into the white background. The central area of the page is completely blank and contains no text or markings.

## Notes

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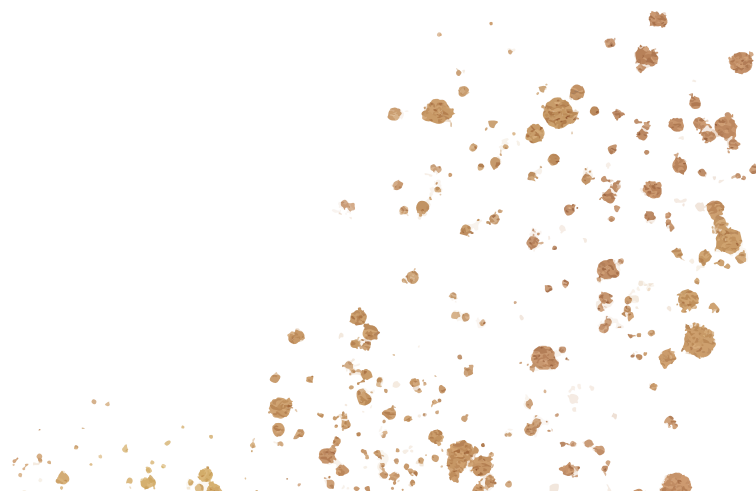
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Backgrounds and more information on the  
Christmas Dedication on: [apgen.nl/kerstwijding](https://apgen.nl/kerstwijding)



# References

## PART 1 That from which we live

- <sup>1</sup> Poem by Theo Olthuis: Amazement remains, freely translated. See also weekly letter 19, 2020: *Reconsidering, again and again*, Apostolic Society
- <sup>2</sup> Text Henk Canten, Mieke Onderstal
- <sup>3</sup> Adapted from Matthew 1:19–20
- <sup>4</sup> Adapted from Matthew 1:21
- <sup>5</sup> Text Henk Canten, Mieke Onderstal
- <sup>6</sup> Text Henk Canten, Mieke Onderstal
- <sup>7</sup> Adapted from a lecture by Inge de Bos: 'Reflection on book by Hans Alma: *Het Verlangen naar zin*' (The longing for purpose), Van Oosbreestichting, 2021, [bit.ly/verlangennaarzin](https://bit.ly/verlangennaarzin)
- <sup>8</sup> Adapted from the book: *A Living in Love*, page 393, KokBoekencentrum, 2020
- <sup>9</sup> Poem by Marcel Heerink: *Friend*, agenda 2005, Apostolic Society
- <sup>10</sup> Freely translated from the book: *Foundations in perspective*, pp. 25 and 26, Apostolic Society, 2019
- <sup>11</sup> Poem by Typhoon: *Forerunner of peace*

## PART 2 The future requires space

- <sup>1</sup> Adapted from an interview with Floris Alkemade, VANDAAG magazine, spring 2021
- <sup>2</sup> Adapted from the book by Merlijn Twaalfhoven: *Het is aan ons*, Atlas Contact, 2020
- <sup>3</sup> Adapted from weekly letters 14, 2018: *The sense of responsibility for the other*; 19, 2021: *Precious inheritance*, 13, 2021: *Hope-inspiring solidarity*  
\* Ubuntu: (South) African word that expresses a deep sense of interconnectedness.
- <sup>4</sup> Extract from Freek de Jonge's poem: *Do not be afraid*; see also weekly letter 35, 2020: *Learning to live life*, Apostolic Society
- <sup>5</sup> Adapted from newspaper article in Trouw, 5 March 2021
- <sup>6</sup> Adapted from weekly letter 3, 2021: *Breathing*, Apostolic Society
- <sup>7</sup> Adapted from weekly letter 7, 2021: *Attention to generations after us*, Apostolic Society
- <sup>8</sup> Adapted from weekly letter 7, 2021: *Attention to generations after us*, Apostolic Society
- <sup>9</sup> Adapted from weekly letter 3, 2021: *Breathing*; quote from weekly letter 36, 2013: *The years teach you the things that the days do not know*, Apostolic Society
- \* Quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

## PART 3 Determining direction

- <sup>1</sup> Adapted from Matthew 4:1–4 and from the book *Bible Stories* by Sipke van de Land, Kok, 1976
- <sup>2</sup> Adapted from Luke 4:15–21
- <sup>3</sup> Adapted from the book: *Bible stories* by Sipke van de Land, Kok, 1976
- <sup>4</sup> Text Henk Canten, Mieke Onderstal
- <sup>5</sup> Poem by David Hodges
- <sup>6</sup> See weekly letter 28, 2011: *Dream, dare, do*, Apostolic Society
- <sup>7</sup> Adapted from weekly letter 8, 2021: *Making choices*, Apostolic Society
- <sup>8</sup> Adapted from weekly letter 15, 2020: *Liberation Work* and from the lecture by Inge de Bos: 'Reflection on book by Hans Alma: *The Longing for Sense*', Van Oosbreestichting, 2021, [bit.ly/verlangennaarzin](https://bit.ly/verlangennaarzin)
- <sup>9</sup> From the lecture by Inge de Bos: 'Reflection on book by Hans Alma: *Het Verlangen naar zin*', Van Oosbreestichting, 2021, [bit.ly/verlangennaarzin](https://bit.ly/verlangennaarzin)
- <sup>10</sup> Adapted from the book: *Kom vanavond met verhalen, Eigentijdse kerstvertellingen*, volume by Joost Roselaers, Balans, 2018
- <sup>11</sup> From the book: *Kom vanavond met verhalen, Eigentijdse kerstvertellingen*, volume by Jan Terlouw, Balans, 2018

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# APOSTOLIC SOCIETY

a place for religious humanistic philosophy