

A universal
desire ...



CHRISTMAS DEDICATION 2023

Beloved person,

The text in this booklet allows us to reflect on what is hopeful and offers light in these dark days before Christmas. Where, on the road ahead, there are new opportunities to contribute to peace on Earth.

In this Christmas Dedication, three stories grant us the possibility of slowing down. They take you along into universally human questions. Therefore, you will surely recognise something in Tobias' ideal, Natalia's quest or José's decisiveness.

It is so hopeful that in every human being the feeling can arise again and again that a new day brings new opportunities. Christmas as an opportunity to look at our lives anew. To illuminate questions from a different perspective, anew, with less disquiet or with gentle eyes. The *answer* may well wait a little longer....

We would like to invite you to experience this Christmas Dedication together and we wish you and yours a beautiful Christmas.

Marten van der Wal and Naomi Ziere

Message from the writers

This year, we wrote three stories with the themes: beloved, liberated and connected. Born from our own experiences, nearby or from a little further away. Written from our involvement in movements in society. Things that we see happening, that are often too big to answer, but still call for a vision of your own choices. No matter how small a gesture may seem.

We would like to invite you to experience for yourself: what do I feel, think, see around me that connects to the text? What are you experiencing on the way to Christmas? Will you engage in this Christmas Dedication in one of the Communities? Share your associations and experiences with each other. And feel free to insert or substitute stories or songs.

To everyone who reads, listens to, or recites this Christmas Dedication, we hope that it brings delving and inspiration for the Christmas season, and beyond!

Reinier Démeijer, Judith de Vries and Naomi Ziere





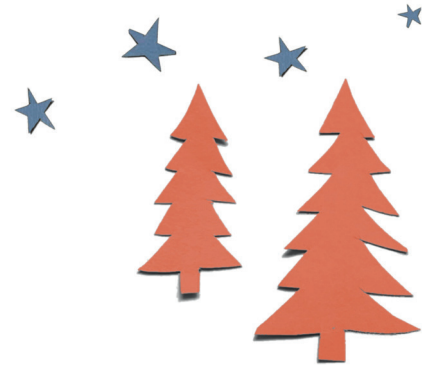
A universal desire ...

Music suggestion

In the deep of wintertime

(available on Spotify/YouTube)

In the deep of wintertime
Snow is softly falling, far away a distant clime
welcomes a new King.
In Bethlehem that city fair,
in a stable cold and bare,
Christ our Lord has come to earth
on this blessed morn;
In the deep of wintertime, He is born.



All over the world, in houses and student dormitories, houseboats and skyscrapers, there are people looking forward to Christmas. Actually no, they are not always looking forward to it. Some may be dreading it. Or hoping for the best. What we know for sure is that there are people all over the world looking forward to another human being next to them. Someone to raise a glass with, look into their eyes, pour your heart out to or play with, perhaps outside in the snow.



Music suggestion

So small, so grand

So still, so dear,
in an expectant atmosphere.
So tender, without blight,
the newborn Nazarite.

So bright, so clear,
a sign was seen both far and near.
It shone because of him:
the star of Bethlehem.

His pure light shone,
new inspiration for everyone,
a light in darkest night:
his message to set things right.

So small, so grand,
sometimes too great to understand.
So far and also near,
this work for all of us here.

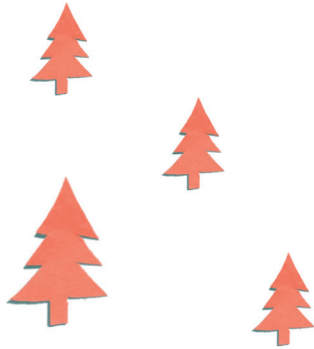


The desire for closeness is universal. Like a newborn baby crying out and then quietening down on its mother's belly. Long awaited, one hand in another, eyes meeting. Like light breaking through in a dark night.



Beloved

The story of Tobias



Music suggestion

Dare

(available on Spotify/YouTube)

When the sun sends down
its warm light on the earth,
all that lives is illuminated
by its bright, glaring rays.
If the sun is not disturbed
by clouds or fog,
then wetness and cold
is wiped away by its warmth.
If people smile nicely
to another person,
then the whole day changes,
yes, that is something to experience.

**But who takes that first step,
gives themselves that chance with courage?
They who express themselves uninhibitedly
are internally balanced.**

In Heerlen, Tobias steps into the quiet hall of the train station. The cloud of breath leaving his mouth betrays the temperature. He looks up at the screen showing departure times. The trains are running again after the icy December storm of two days ago. Tobias is not yet sure if he is happy about that because he very much dreads going to his family. It already started last month... In the supermarket lay the free cooking magazine, with a cheerful, 'happy family' at Christmas dinner on the cover. 'Vegan Christmas rolled roast' was printed in ornate letters across the picture. No need for him to expect that one, as it would already be newsworthy if a different sauce were made. The chances of a plant-based alternative to the annual tenderloin are pretty slim.

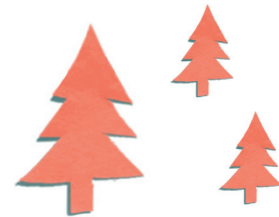
On his own, Tobias is not going to change that easily. A familiar feeling for him, because as a teenager he had been the contrarian at home. But actually, he was particularly worried. About the earth, the future, the bees, clean drinking water. "What will happen to our world if we continue doing what we are now?". After his final exams, his friends booked a plane ticket to Hersonissos (in Crete) for a week of partying. But by plane? That was a 'no-go' for Tobias.



Sometimes, not everyone around you sympathises with you. The desire to share your ideals, or what you really feel, is strong. Perhaps as strong as the desire for connection. But what if you think you will be judged on that? In a radio session¹, Peter Heerschop gives an example of this. He tells about one of his students who suffers from panic attacks. He noticed that she was withdrawing more and more. She only showed herself when she could pretend to be cheerful. He asked her if she discussed this with her friends. "No," she said, "I don't want to be a nag". Peter encouraged his student: "You're not a nag at all! Take it from me that others will also be relieved when you share your feelings. Many won't feel much different, and sharing your

feelings changes your self-image. It is sometimes said that you shouldn't let yourself be known. But on the contrary, let yourself be known!"

Sharing your emotions is difficult for more people. That is why 'Mental Health Week' took place for the first time in 2023.



A column by Danka Stuijver² from that week describes the following:

"Sharing your feelings can be easier in places where you feel safe. Those places are not self-evident for everyone. More and more people feel abandoned in some way. (...) We have liberated the individual from all kinds of oppressive group ties such as columns social divisions, churches and fixed workplaces. We thought this liberation would make us happier, but it has disappointed. We miss connection with others. Many people lack a common perspective. That makes sharing negative feelings and emotions difficult, (...) while sharing and talking helps."

Music suggestion

I'll be there (Jackson 5)

(available on Spotify/ YouTube)

You and I must make a pact
We must bring salvation back
Where there is love, I'll be there (I'll be there)

I'll reach out my hand to you
I'll have faith in all you do
Just call my name and I'll be there (I'll be there)

I'll be there to comfort you
Build my world of dreams around you
I'm so glad that I found you

I'll be there with a love so strong
I'll be your strength
You know I'll keep holdin' on

Let me fill your heart with joy and laughter
Togetherness, well it's all I'm after
Just call my name, and I'll be there (I'll be there)

I'll be there to protect you (yeah baby)
With an unselfish love that respects you
Just call my name, and I'll be there (I'll be there)

I'll be there to comfort you
Build my world of dreams around you
You know I'm so glad that I found you baby
(so glad baby)



After two hours, Tobias steps off the train. He walks to the bus stop for the last few kilometers to his parents' house. "Uncle Tobias!" he hears suddenly. From behind a billboard, his little niece jumps out. "Come quickly, we've come to get you, you can come with us on the carrier bike, do you think that will suit you?" She points to Tobias' brother who is waiting further down the road. "That will take some strong peddling," says Benno, "the oyster mushroom croquettes are already in the oven." Despite the cold, Tobias gets into the cargo bike with a warm feeling.

Our foundation states: *we want to cherish the light of love and carry it forward from one generation to the next.* Tobias feels that task. And how is that for you? And what does it mean in your daily life?

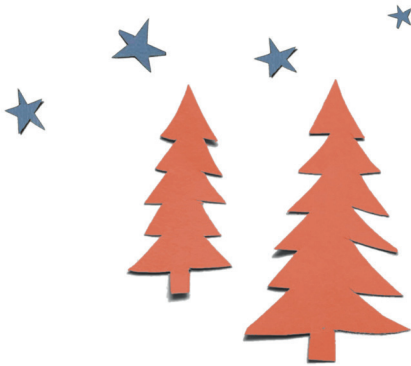
The same foundation also states: *we experience creation as an incomprehensible mystery that fills us with awe.* Beautiful sentences, but in concrete terms it means listening, delving into a sea of truths, changing perspectives. Do I still want to walk a mile in the shoes of others? Do I make the effort of truly engaging in a conversation? And do I continue to see the other as my equal, even if we disagree?

Every human being longs to be seen, to be loved. Do you know what that feels like? If you do, take the opportunity every now and then to pause and feel: I am loved. That realisation can fuel the desire to give another person that feeling too. And giving the other person that feeling matters. For today, but also for tomorrow. For the children of the children of the children.



Liberated

Natalia's story



Music suggestion

Questions and answers

There are many questions,
many questions in me;
all searching for answers,
so continuously.

But then when emotion,
despite doubts in my soul,
connects all my questions
to the miracle of all,

an answer arises
from the carrying stream,
which strengthens and guides me
to a next pressing theme.

A question, an answer;
never ending they'll be.
Sometimes I will find them
and sometimes they find me.



In a small living room in Amsterdam, Natalia is staring silently ahead, the phone still in her hand. She has just spoken to her parents in Russia, and the conversation is still buzzing around in her head. The emptiness of the conversation especially grips her. Dazed, her gaze drifts along the wall where a photo hangs of the last time she was home. The faces of her family evoke memories of that visit. Outside in the streets and in the city, there was tension in the air, but inside with her parents it was warm and familiar. They could just sit together and say very little. Being together in silence.

But the silence on the phone is a different one. Natalia no longer talks to her parents

about what is really going on. This is too difficult for them. After all, they are living in the middle of it.

They can't talk about it. But then, what is left to share when you talk to each other? They talk about the weather, plans for the weekend, about the neighbour's cat, about everything really, except what Natalia is worried about every day.

Six years ago, Natalia came to the Netherlands for love. But at the exact moment that war broke out, that love was over. Going back to Russia was suddenly no longer an option. She had made negative comments about the regime in the past and she did not want to risk being arrested.

"How can I be close to my parents without freely sharing what I really think, feel, hear and experience?" Natalia ponders. "Distance makes the gap between us ever wider. When I could still visit them, it was bridged by just being with each other. But how do I stay connected now that I can no longer go there?" That is the question that holds Natalia captive. While being free. In conflict with herself, in a country without war.

In the past, if you called someone and something went wrong, you would hear "the connection has been ended". You literally couldn't hear each other anymore. We all recognise the feeling of speaking to someone, but not really talking about what moves you or worries you. Dirk de Wachter shares with us how, despite life's imperfection, you can find meaning and purpose.

Video

Psychiatrist Dirk de Wachter on the beauty of connectedness

bit.ly/schoonheidvanverbinding

A knock on the door startles Natalia from her deep musings. It is now 10.30pm and Elena, her Ukrainian flat mate, steps into the room. "I need to get out," Elena exclaims. "I keep going over it in my head: the winter in Ukraine, my parents without heating. My brother will be forced to fight sooner or later, maybe even my father too! And I am here. What should I do?" "For now, let's just go outside," Natalia suddenly says decisively, wrapping an arm around her friend.

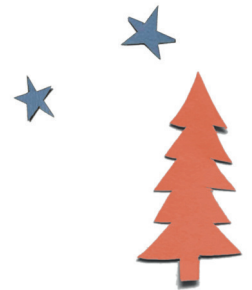
And so, on a cold chilly evening, a Russian and a Ukrainian walk along Amsterdam's canals. They talk, they laugh, and they are silent ...

Poem

Everything we put in between³

What would you do if you dared?
What would you dare if you had?
What would you have if you let go?
What would you let go if you chose?
What would you choose if you wanted?
What would you want if you could?
What could you do if you were allowed?
What would you be allowed if you were worth it?
What would you be worth if you did?

What would you do if you dared?
What would you dare if you had?
etc. etc.



Connected

José's story

In the book *The Power of Vulnerability*, Brené Brown writes⁴: "In our culture, you have to be happy and perfect. You have to have a perfect marriage, perfect children, a perfect job. But we all have dark places within ourselves. We all struggle with life. If we don't want to talk about that, if we don't acknowledge that, we can't get to the bright spots either, the joy of life." While we strive to do something as well as we possibly can, it is liberating to realise that we are not flawless. The very realisation of our imperfection connects us to each other and makes it so that I need the other.



Music suggestion

Fantasy (by Earth, Wind & Fire)

(available on Spotify/YouTube)

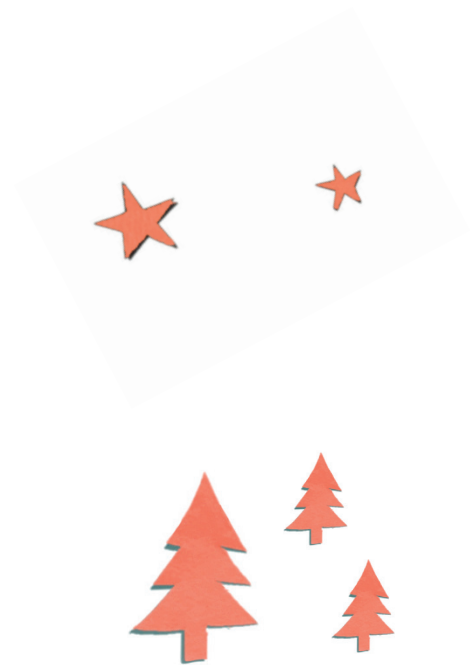
Every man has a place, in his heart there's a space
And the world can't erase his fantasies
Take a ride in the sky, on our ship, Fantasy
All your dreams will come true, right away

And we will live together, until the twelfth of never
Our voices will ring forever, as one

Every thought is a dream, rushing by in a stream
Bringing life to our kingdom of doing
Take a ride in the sky, on our ship, Fantasy
All your dreams will come true, miles away

Our voices will ring together until the twelfth of never
We all, will live forever, as one

Come see victory, in the land called, "Fantasy"
Loving life, a new decree
Bring your mind to everlasting liberty



In a flat in Delft overlooking the park, José walks to the dining table in front of the window with a clinking cup of coffee. The sun shines on her face as she sits down in her favourite spot. Here she has a nice view of the lawn in front of the flat. The strong wind makes the trees bend. After the dark days of last week, the sun is doing its best today, lighting everything up. Warmly dressed children play hide-and-seek, the postwoman makes her rounds, a man with a pram walks by.

José thinks about the upcoming Christmas time. This year, she will be celebrating it with the whole family at her daughter's home. Her sons are also coming with their families. Even her grandson is coming back from his

internship in London, because Christmas is the highlight of the year for the whole family. Although she is very much looking forward to it, sometimes it is hard work to keep enjoying it as much as before.

She is now 86 and, like her friends, she has lost quite a few people around her in recent years. Some in circumstances that are quite easy to accept, others too young, or too sudden. She had to let her own dear husband go three years ago. Her friend Karima, who experienced the same thing, cannot manage to enjoy the Christmas season anymore. She prefers to stay indoors, with the curtains closed.



José is reminded of a philosopher mentioned in a Weekly Letter⁵ earlier this year. He wrote that children, young people with a whole life ahead of them, need our encouragement. According to him, pessimism is not only unjustified but also morally reprehensible. He talks about the moral imperative to believe in a better world. No matter how difficult that is sometimes, with all that is happening around us. José, too, has resolved to keep looking at the good. She does not want to hide and to keep the curtains closed. This doesn't happen automatically, but she still gives herself a push in the right direction.

Video

Justin Samgar: In movement

bit.ly/justinsamgar

Yesterday, like every Monday, Jose went to the community centre for a cup of coffee and maintaining the community garden. While working, conversations arise naturally. Sometimes about daily events, sometimes the conversations go deeper and they talk about everything that may happen to you in life. Yesterday morning, for instance, she saw Jeroen, the manager of the community centre. He told her he hadn't been there for a while because he recently got divorced. "I find it very hard not to be together anymore, but you are an example to me. You are always cheerful and upbeat, even after setbacks. And if you can do it, so can I."

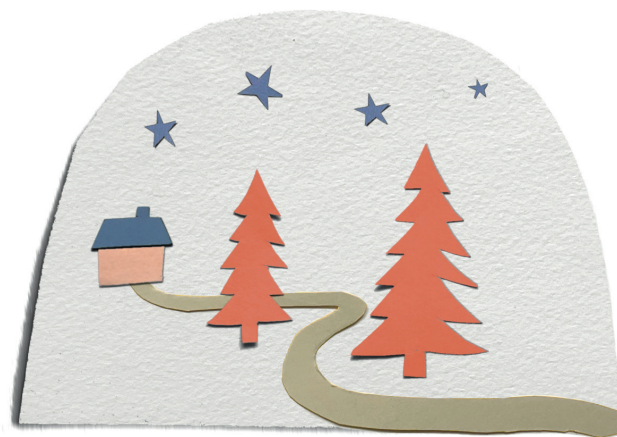
José smiles and thinks about her resolution. She would like to live in connection, to sincerely say what she thinks about something, daring to live from her ideal and keeping her eyes on the good. She would like to be a connecting link in the places she visits. It's not that it just happens naturally. José, too, has days when she would rather not go outside. But the prospect of being with her family, or the brief chat in the gallery with her friend Karima, puts a smile on her face even on such days.



In the book *The Meaning of Life*⁶, columnist Marjoleine de Vos answers the question of what the meaning of her life is: “A few days ago, while on a walk, I thought of perhaps the best answer: ‘Come outside with me and take a look around you.’ You then see the light, that multitude of colours, scents, sparkles, transitions, space. It’s about that experience, which fills you wordlessly. Those, are certainly not the times when I think, ‘What is the meaning of existence?’ You feel it then.

I don’t think ‘purpose’ is the right word. That suggests something that must be given, something higher. I prefer to talk about the meaning of our lives. You can determine that yourself or find it in something. The

challenge, though, is to keep believing in it. If you see meaning as a coat of paint you have applied, meaninglessness lurks underneath. It takes work to experience life as meaningful.”



The park is empty. José finishes her coffee and looks at the stack of Christmas cards she had received from the children of the first youthgroup. Suddenly she knows to whom she wants to send one of the cards ... On her regular walk to the community centre, she always walks past a shelter for young women. They are building a new life together in this house. José does not know any of the women, but grabs her pen and writes: "I don't know you, but I walk past your beautiful house every Monday. I want to let you know that I think of you and wish you all the best in the world. Know that you are a special and loved person. Merry Christmas, love from José."

Song suggestion

Light in the soul

When the light in my soul rises like a dawn
and a sense of God liberates itself
from the shadows,
I feel a radiant glow deep within
that greets the world in loving beckoning.

When that light of love warms people
and one then embraces the other in friendship,
and the ice in hearts gradually melts,
peace can flow, discord clears the field.



José, Natalia, Tobias: there are people longing for closeness everywhere. People longing to be seen and to feel connected. Especially now at Christmas time. On this day, the child was born who would change the world through his loving-disposition. In that story, we cherish the realisation that we may all, each in our own way, live in loving connection with the greater totality.

Therefore, even now in these days: lose yourself in the longing for warmth and light. Let yourself be touched by that feeling. Realise that this universal longing has always been there and will always be there. And that the way is not in 'more', but perhaps in 'less'. In simplicity, in me and us, very nearby. In

decorating the tree, picking a spot for the nativity scene, experiencing the Christmas Dedication, opening up and connecting. With that which transcends you, with yourself and with the other.

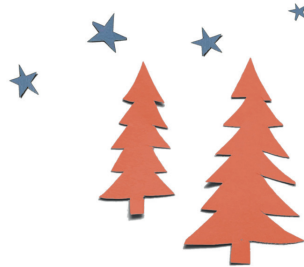
Poem

Let us be loving people

Let us be loving people
Take a first step
Ask the question
Let us start anew
Ignite the light wherever possible
Endure the dark
If we must
Let us see each other

Let us eat together
Expect the good
And share
Share, share in love
Until there is more than enough.

Because:
How heavy the lifting would be
what a toil
if everyone did not want to please anyone
If everyone did not support anyone⁷
Let us be loving people.



Music suggestion

The light of love

You are who you are,
a creation of life,
a brief, fleeting moment in time.
The question then is:
in this moment so short,
can you spread the radiance of love?

You know you are part of
this infinite life,
a world full of pleasure and pain.
By finding the strength
within each human soul,
God's power of love will remain.

Footnotes

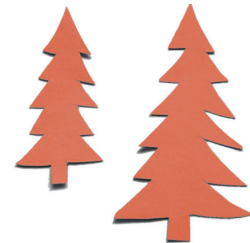
- ¹ Adapted from a column by Peter Heerschop on NPO radio 1, 1 July 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CuJiN3VoLFR/>
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CuJiN3VoLFR/>
- ² Column by Danka Stuijver, de Volkskrant, 24 May 2023
- ³ Poem *Alles wat we er tussen zetten* (Everything we put in between) from the collection *Zachtig* by Dorothée Loorbach
- ⁴ Quote from the book *The Power of Vulnerability* by Brené Brown
- ⁵ Reference to weekly inspiration 'What doesn't exist can be dreamt of', 9 July 2023
- ⁶ Interview with Marjoleine de Vos in *De zin van het leven, gesprekken over de essentie van ons bestaan*, Fokke Obbema
- ⁷ Quotation from the poem *Er is nog zomer en genoeg* (There is still summer and enough) by Judith Herzberg. Amsterdam [1992], Thomas Rap, Poetry Range 1, G. (included in Zoals)

Extra suggestions can be found on apgen.nl/kerstwijding

Colophon

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Printer: Tromp Print & Packaging
Publisher: Apostolic Society, PO Box 116, 3740 AC Baarn, the Netherlands
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