

## EXCERPT



### **Radiant Birth** *Advent Readings for a Bright Season*

September 5, 2023 | \$22, 224 pages, casebound | 978-1-5140-0833-1

## Advent Reflections from Eugene Peterson, Luci Shaw, Madeleine L'Engle, Philip Yancey, and More

Every year, come December, I vow to do better and still end up hosting these same uninvited guests—exhaustion, guilt, inadequacy, perfectionism, anxiety, failure—who push through my doors and shadow my every move. Maybe my mother was right. Maybe we should just let the baubly hullabaloo pass by our doors entirely. How much simpler and maybe more spiritual the season would be!

Don't we all do this? We all bring our complicated family histories to the season, which we live out in the midst of a noisy culture hawking its own version of celebration, and some of us add to that cacophony our local church culture, with its own peculiarities and traditions. Are the holy days supposed to be this hard?

No. Let's make it easier. Paul Willis and I are here with twenty-four others, wise guides all who will help shepherd us through the mistletoe wickets of the season. Let us start right now by turning around and looking behind us for a moment. How did the ancients in the faith observe the Advent season? Consider the first Christmas sermon preserved and passed down through the centuries. It was preached in Antioch in AD 386 by St. John Chrysostom, a priest who later became the Bishop of Constantinople. Can you see him standing in a cathedral, the gathered sitting beneath him? How did he begin? "Behold a new and wondrous mystery!"

"Behold!" Were they missing it already so soon, the wonder that "He who is, is born?" The miracle that "He who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below?" With eloquence and beauty and likely a measure of thunder, St. John called his listeners to holy attention.

Are we listening? One thousand six hundred and thirty-seven years have passed since that first sermon. More than two millennia now since God split the night with angels and delivered a bloody mewling infant from the body of a teenager. We try not to forget. We've created an elaborate web of remembrance and celebration. We hope we're doing enough. We wonder if we remember wonder. As the years go by, we behold through dimming eyes.

This is why we're here. We are here in these pages to behold, together, anew. We are following our namesake. All of us in these pages belong or have belonged to The Chrysostom Society, an informal gathering of writers of faith. Saint John spoke so eloquently, so passionately that he was named *Chrysostom*, meaning "golden-tongued." We do not claim such eloquence, but we do as he did: twenty-six of us here use our pens to call ourselves and others to attention one more time. To behold—again. To hear the good news—again. To know hope—again. We offer up these poems, short stories, essays, and meditations as a choir of voices singing the "tidings of great joy" again.

-From the introduction by Leslie Leyland Fields

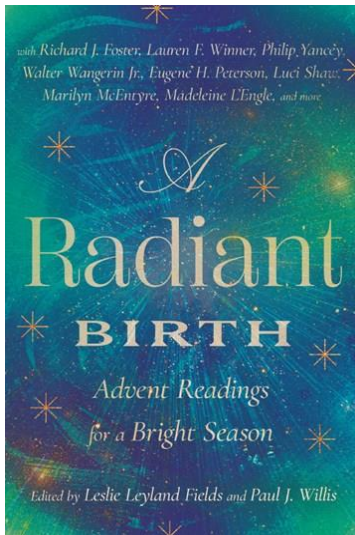


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In this volume, Christian literary writers of the Chrysostom Society reflect on Advent and Christmastide as a bright and meaningful season of anticipation and glory. Through forty-two readings from the first Sunday of Advent through Epiphany, contributors prepare us in watchful waiting for the coming of Jesus.

## **Leslie Leyland Fields, Paul J. Willis Reflect on Advent and Christmastide with Chrysostom Society Writers**

*"In Advent we prepare for the coming of all Love."* —Madeleine L'Engle

*"At the birth of Jesus, an event of cosmic significance by which we humans still mark our calendars, the invisible and visible worlds come together."* —Philip Yancey

*"Help us to realize, as those who love and believe in you that we, too, are pregnant with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that day by day we are being enlarged."* —Luci Shaw

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**Leslie Leyland Fields** is an international teacher, speaker, and the award-winning author of twelve books, including *Your Story Matters*, *The Wonder Years*, and *Crossing the Waters*, which won a *Christianity Today* Book Award in Christian Living. Since 2013 she's been leading The Harvester Island Writers' Workshop on her family's island in Alaska with guest writers like Ann Voskamp, Philip Yancey, Bret Lott, Luci Shaw, Jeanne Murray Walker, Paul Willis, and Gina Ochsner. Leslie's other books include *Surviving the Island of Grace*, *Forgiving Our Fathers and Mothers*, and *The Spirit of Food*, which won three "Best Book of 2010" awards. Her books have been translated into nine languages and her essays have appeared in publications including *Christianity Today*, *Books and Culture*, *Belief.net*, *The Atlantic*, *Orion*, *Best Essays*, and many more, earning her a number of Evangelical Press Awards.

Leslie has three graduate degrees (in English, journalism, and an MFA in creative nonfiction) and has taught extensively, including being a founding faculty member of Seattle Pacific University's MFA program. She leads faith and writing retreats around the world and directs an online community in the craft and art of spiritual memoir. She's also a professional audio narrator, contributing regularly to the popular Our American Stories radio network and audio recording books of the Bible for her.Bible.org.

Visit her website at [leslieleylandfields.com](http://leslieleylandfields.com).

**Paul J. Willis**, now retired, served for many years as professor of English at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. He has published seven collections of poetry, the most recent of which is *Somewhere to Follow*. He is also the author of an eco-fantasy novel, *The Alpine Tales*; the young-adult novel *All in a Garden Green*; and the essay collections *Bright Shoots of Everlastingness* and *To Build a Trail*. He has served as poet laureate for the city of Santa Barbara and as artist-in-residence in North Cascades National Park. Each January he hosts a community reading of the poems of William Stafford on the banks of the Santa Ynez River in Los Padres National Forest.

Visit his website at [pauljwillis.com](http://pauljwillis.com).



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