

Birth of the Chosen One: A First Nations Retelling of the Christmas Story

Terry Wildman

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The serene picture book Birth of the Chosen One retells the Christmas story from a Native American perspective.

Terry Wildman's reverent picture book *Birth of the Chosen One* adapts the story of Jesus's birth for an Indigenous audience.

Drawing on the First Nations translation of the New Testament, the book begins with a spirit messenger's appearance before Bitter Tears (Mary), who is told of her fate as the mother of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Together with He Gives Sons (Joseph), she travels to House of Bread (Bethlehem). The story unfolds on through the arrival of the wise men with minor changes to convey the transposed North American setting: The manger is a sheep cave, and the surrounding animals include bald eagles. The book concludes with a brief glimpse of Creator Sets Free as an adult in his later ministry.

The illustrations emphasize the veil between the earth and the spiritual world: Beautiful skies are ribboned with pastel swirls and starry backgrounds; main characters and the city are sometimes surrounded in bursts of light or framed in yellow halos. The serene landscapes include Southwestern deserts and flowery grasslands. The housing styles, the patterned clothing, and the feathers in the angels' wings, on birds, and in headdresses, all draw on the First Nations motif.

The book's minimalist approach includes a glossary of people and place names but keeps the focus on introducing one of the New Testament's central stories. However, the faithful interpretation of the New Testament story means that the intercultural synergy is somewhat lost; the implied parallel story is somewhat obscured in favor of a straightforward retelling with borrowed flourishes. Still, the language is direct and suited to read-alouds. The use of drop-shadowed fonts is distracting, though, as are cut-off wing tips in the illustrations and details that fall across the dividing seam.

The enthusiastic picture book *Birth of the Chosen One* celebrates a Christmas miracle in Indigenous style.

KAREN RIGBY (October 16, 2024)

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