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CASTING CROWNS TO RELEASE FIRST CHRISTMAS ALBUM *PEACE ON EARTH* ON OCT. 7

CHRISTIAN MUSIC'S TOP-SELLING ACT HEADLINES 14-CITY CHRISTMAS TOUR

(Nashville, Tenn.) September 2, 2008 – GRAMMY-winning, multi-platinum artist **Casting Crowns** announces the forthcoming release of its first Christmas album titled *Peace On Earth* on Oct. 7. The top-selling artist's premiere Christmas project follows up the last 12 months of landmark touring, radio and album sales success surrounding its RIAA certified Gold *The Altar and The Door* studio project, including last week's debut of *The Altar and The Door Live* which exceeded both debut sales weeks for the band's previous RIAA Platinum live projects *Live From Atlanta* (2004) and *Lifesong Live* (2006).

For *Peace On Earth*, Casting Crowns selects a song list pointing audiences towards rediscovering the worship in Christmas songs and encouraging listeners to connect with the original meaning in world-renowned classics that are truly worshipful in nature.

Mark Hall, frontman/ principal songwriter, says, "I want to see people rediscover the worship that Christmas songs have in them. A lot of times, when we sing carols, we sort of shift into Christmas carol mode—singing songs that we've been singing for so long, we might not be hearing what they're really saying."

Peace On Earth's featured single "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," which features a Chattanooga, Tenn.-based boys choir personifying the bells, was originally penned by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The poetic lyrics document how hope emerged from a crisis of faith the writer experienced after he lost his wife in a house fire and soon saw his son crippled in the Civil War.

"He wrote about how every year when these Christmas bells ring, it reminds him that there's peace on earth, good will toward men," explains Hall. "But this time around, the reality of the world he lives in at that moment rushes in. The verses change, and suddenly he's saying, 'But there is no peace. There's war, and there's hate. And this hate mocks the song of the bells.' He's working through his understanding of Christmas. And as the bells keep ringing, he just has this moment when he realizes God is not dead, nor does He sleep. Good will prevail. God is going to save the day." Hall adds, "This generation needs to hear this song. My kids need to hear this song."

Peace On Earth also boasts moving renditions of "Silent Night" (Hall's all-time favorite), "Joy to the World," the Paul Baloche-penned "Christmas Offering," "O Come All Ye Faithful," "Sweet Little Jesus Boy," and "Away in a Manger" (as it originally appeared on 2005's *WOW Christmas*). The album also includes the Amy Grant classic "God is With Us," featuring shared lead vocal duties with keyboardist Megan Garrett and violinist Melodee DeVevo, and an instrumental in the form of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" highlighting DeVevo's musical arrangements and entrancing violin.

In addition to the beloved Christmas faves on *Peace On Earth*, fans will also experience a popular Casting Crowns song in a new light. Unbeknownst to most, Hall originally wrote "While You Were Sleeping" as a Christmas song when he was in college. Thematically inspired by "O Little Town of Bethlehem," the composition's lyrics were eventually changed to make the song less "seasonal" before including it on Casting Crowns' second platinum album, *Lifesong*. Now, to Hall's delight, fans will hear the original version.

The aptly titled album emphasizes the relentless hope pervading Casting Crowns' Christmas album. "How do you know there's peace on earth?" asks Hall. "Jesus said, 'They will know that you love Me by the way you love each other.' And at one point, He even said, 'They will know that I come from God by the way you love each other.' As long as the people of God are here, there's hope."

Casting Crowns, who headlined the top-grossing Christian music tour of the '07/'08 season selling 450,000 tickets in more than 80 cities, will headline the 14-city "Casting Crowns Christmas Celebration" with full orchestra and choir in November and December. The tour will also feature Natalie Grant, Denver & the Mile High Orchestra, Avalon, Michael English, and pureNRG.

Casting Crowns with lead singer Mark Hall led the 39th Annual GMA Dove Awards with seven wins including **Group of the Year** for the fourth consecutive year, and **Song of the Year** for its No. 1 hit "East to West." The group's third studio recording *The Altar and The Door* achieved an historical debut at No. 2 on *The Billboard 200* chart with 130,000 first-week copies sold, making it the highest debut in America that week. The album sailed to RIAA Gold status in 10 weeks, securing Casting Crowns as the No.1 selling artist of 2007 on Billboard's Christian/Gospel year-end chart.

Lead singer Mark Hall is a full-time youth pastor, serving his 17th year in youth ministry as a student pastor at Eagle's Landing First Baptist Church in Atlanta. All seven band members remain active in student ministry in the Atlanta area and tour part-time around their local church duties. For more information on Casting Crowns and for concert listings, please visit www.castingcrowns.com.

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