

Prisoners of Hope

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by the Women's Apostolate to Youth,
a community of commitment and formation
for Roman Catholic Women in the Diocese of Arlington.
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COMMUNIO
MISSIO

PRISONERS OF HOPE

A CHRISTMAS NOVENA

WITH SELECTIONS FROM CARYLL HOUSELANDER'S
THE PASSION OF THE INFANT CHRIST



A gift for you from

THE WOMEN'S APOSTOLATE TO YOUTH
in Honor of the Coming of Incarnate Love

December 16

Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end it will not lie. If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Habakkuk, 2:2-3



It is of absolute necessity for our peace that we surrender ourselves wholly to God. Most people want to do this, but they do not because they are afraid. If, in their rasher moments of fervor, they have made heroic self offerings, they go about their business afterwards distinctly uneasy, fearful that some catastrophe will overtake them in order to detach them from the earthly affections which they suppose to be hindering their perfection...these anxieties can be put to rest by a little thought about God's approach to us, His way with human beings. It is not a way of detachment but attachment; not a way of indifference but of love. He approaches not by catastrophes, but by gentleness; not demanding our surrender but winning it, if we put no obstacle, almost before we realize who it is that sues for our love... "Behold!" Our Lord says, "I stand at the door and knock." An obstacle to surrender to Him would simply be not to open the door. If we opened it and saw who it was that knocked, we should not find it a difficult or frightening thing to give Him what He asked of us. Caryll Houselander

HYMN

O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has

remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

Lord, I watch for your coming;
and I long for the peace you have promised;
but as a woman fears the pain of labor
as her time of deliverance approaches,
so do I fear what your coming will require of me;
In your merciful patience, grant me the grace
of a hope that conquers fear,
so that I will open the door of my heart
when I hear you knocking
and surrender myself to the peace
your reign will bring.



Mary, hope of Christians, pray for us.

December 17

Then the Creator of all things gave me (Wisdom) a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, "Make your dwelling in Jacob and in Israel receive your inheritance." From eternity, in the beginning He created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to exist. In the holy tabernacle I ministered before Him, and so I was established in Zion. In the beloved city likewise He gave me a resting place, and in Jerusalem was my dominion, so I took root in an honored people, in the portion of the Lord, who is their inheritance. Sirach 24:8-12



The Old Testament, which many imagine to be the revelation of a terrifying God, is full of the gentleness of His approach. He comes as a "still small voice"; He covers His face, lest it should wither away the light of man's eyes by its majesty. He is compared to the coming of morning light and to rain

falling upon the thirsty earth: "We shall know and we shall follow on that we may know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the morning light, and He will come to us as the early and the latter rain to the earth..." (Hosea 6:3)
Caryll Houselander

HYMN

O Come thou Wisdom from on high,
and order all things far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge show and cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

My Christ, come quickly
and order my life according to the pattern of your own.
Replace the chaos which threatens to submerge me
with the holy calm this is the fruit of prayer
and the deep and quiet joy that is the harvest of obedience.



Seat of Wisdom. pray for us.

December 18

And the angel of the LORD appeared to (Moses) out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed... And (the LORD) said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey... Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people... out of Egypt." But Moses said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"
Exodus 3;2-12



Sometimes, indeed very often, His approach to us coincides with a catastrophe and is in the midst of it, and for that reason is hardly noticed. We are too intent on the din of the disaster to hear the "still, small voice," or we drown it with noisy tears. Disasters are not God's will, they are the result of sin and opposed to God's will; but in His mercy He does allow that the suffering resulting from them, though never the sin that caused them, can be caught up in to His love and do good. Thus Christ's first coming on earth was in the midst of the disaster of the world's suffering caused by sin, and it was precisely to take hold of this suffering and transform it by love that He came.
Caryll Houselander

HYMN

O come, O come, great Lord of might, who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times once gave the law in cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every

generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

Hope of the World, we see sin and sorrow everywhere and daily succumb to discouragement. Burn bright in our hearts when our small hopes flicker, Lord. Place our feet too on holy ground so that when you call us like Moses back to Egypt, we will hear and surrender our suffering to the purifying power of your redemptive love.



Comforter of the afflicted, pray for us.

December 19

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor; and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.
Isaiah 11:1-5



Christ came, and comes now, that we should have life and have it in its fullness, that we should be wholly human, wholly natural, wholly supernatural, that in all our loves He should be our life. If our mind and heart and eye are fixed not on self, but on the Christ-life in us, we shall realize the

wonder of truth in His words; "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."
Caryll Houselander

HYMN

O come thou Root of Jesse's tree, and ensign of thy people be;
before thee rulers silent fall; all peoples on thy mercy call.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

All my longing Lord, is for you.
The lost dreams of my youth for a world made new;
The futile hopes I cherished for myself and my own;
The desire so deep and ancient I no longer know its name--
Take and receive these broken gifts, O Holy One of God,
Give in exchange Your vision of what might be.
Come quickly, Lord, and lighten our darkness
Come quickly, Lord. We perish.



Mirror of Justice, pray for us.

December 20

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: "The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the keys of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens, I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name... Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world... I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. Revelation 3:7-11



We must put the Infant Christ in our souls, into the Father's arms. We must trust Him to hold us in His hands, to put us wherever we should be, to arrange the environment that is best for us, to rock us to sleep when we should sleep, to wake us when we should wake, to ease our pain when our pain should be eased, to feed us when we should be fed, to lift us up and put us down according to the wisdom of everlasting love. Caryll Houselander

HYMN

O come, thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home,
The captives from their prison free, and conquer death's deep misery,
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

Small victories grant, O lord, to those who wait and love.
Small victories grant to those who wait and weep.
Small victories grant to those who wait in weakness.
The tiniest flicker of hope sustains those
who are content to wait for your coming.



Gate of Heaven. pray for us.

December 21

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then you shall see and be radiant, your hearts shall thrill and rejoice... Isaiah 60: 1-5



Christ came out of the darkness of the womb. He was the Light of the World. He came to give the world life. The life of the whole world burnt in the tiny flame of an infant's life, it began the age-long fight with death in the least and frailest that human nature can be; in the helplessness, the littleness, the blindness of any infant, life prevailed. The Light of the World shone in darkness. Caryll Houselander

HYMN

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thy justice here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,

and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

Rouse me with beauty, Lord.
Light Unimaginable, penetrate the darkest places of my being
with that same delicacy by which dawn comes daily
to a sleeping world.



Morning Star, pray for us.

December 22

Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you see will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap.. and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver... Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of

children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse. Malachi 3:1-3; 4:5-6



Christ is not only born at Christmas, though it is at Christmas that we keep the Feast of the Incarnation. He is born day after day; in every infant or adult as they are baptized, in every sinner who is sorry for sin and absolved, in everyone in whom God's grace quickens the supernatural life (which is the Christ-life) for the first or the millionth time... We can say (that) on any night, anywhere--in a tenement, prison, hospital, school, church: wherever Christ is born or reborn in a human life, that place becomes a new Bethlehem. Caryll Houselander

HYMN

O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind.
From dust thou brought us forth to life; deliver us from earthly strife.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for a world in which everything signifies,
in which every word, thought and deed
carries the weight of Eternity,
and where prophets rage
when we forget
that Happiness is ours
to win--or lose.



Refuge of sinners. pray for us.

December 23

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bears shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hold of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6-9



Knowing that God supplies all our necessities, and that one of our necessities is that we surrender to Him, we should not be surprised that He comes to us as an Infant: for surrender to an infant, any infant, is easy. Surely never did God receive more fully what is due to Him from man than when He was an infant. Every infant demands and receives the most complete self-giving that we are capable of. The perfection of surrender to God is Mary with the Infant Christ. Caryll Houselander

HYMN

O come, O come Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me,

and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

How perfect your condescension, Child of Heaven;
To come as helpless Love nestled in crude crib's straw!
How, then, resent God's choice to clothe us in fragile flesh? Teach us, Little Lord, how to live in the mystery of our mortality.
May your coming in humility chastise our proud hearts
and thus prepare them for for your coming in glory.



Mystical Rose. pray for us.

December 24

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a colt, the foal of an ass... because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your captives free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double... Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning... On that day the LORD their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. Zechariah 9:9, 11-12, 14,16.



At Bethlehem Love and Death met in the Body of Christ, and Love prevailed. Over and over again in every human life, love and death meet face to face. No human power of splendour or strength; no material might or wealth can overcome death--the death of the soul. But if the life in the soul is the tiniest

spark of the life of Christ, love prevails and death is overcome in us. Caryll
Houselander

HYMN

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.
Come and behold him, born the King of Angels;
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

MAGNIFICAT

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my
Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all
generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every
generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud
in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has
lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he
has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has
remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our father, to
Abraham and his children forever.

PRAYER

Welcome, Infant Lord;
Gift of Life for languishing souls;
Healing Hope for all who despair;
Freedom for hearts held captive by lesser loves.
The door of my heart is open to receive you.
My hands are empty; my mind no longer labors in futility
to secure false claims of future comfort and success;
for You are here, and Everything has changed:
Pure Possibility descends, as benediction,
on all the ordinary places of my life.
My God and My All sleeps blissfully
in the arms of the Virgin.



Cause of our joy, pray for us.