

# Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare  
Saginaw, MI

## *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.

For the past 1200 years, this ancient Advent hymn has called to us. It tells us of the universal longing of our souls in this time of Advent, the darkest time of the year. Since at least the eighth century, Catholics have been singing "O" Antiphons like, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." As you know, these antiphons; O Wisdom, O Lord, O Key of David, O Dawn from the east, O King of the Gentiles, accompany the Magnificat canticle of Evening Prayer from December 17-23.

The longing for Emmanuel that the hymn, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* expresses is a longing for God. In Isaiah 7:14 we are told "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel." As Matthew records in his gospel (1:23), this name Emmanuel means, "God with us." People then, even as we do today, yearn for the assurance of the presence of God with them.

As December grows darker and colder, we sense time slipping away. We look for a deeper presence of Emmanuel, of "God with us." We yearn for the promise of new beginnings in a new year.

The prayer of this hymn, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," refers to the longing of the people of Israel who were held captive by real enemies. They were physically in bondage, and they yearned for release from their captivity.

On the other hand, we, like the people of Israel, often find ourselves captive, but in different ways. We may have very strained and complex family lives. We may be under intense economic pressures. We may be very lonely and crushed by the loss of loved ones. When we experience these pressures, we want God to be with us, our families, our communities, and our world. We want God's gift of peace and love. We pray, "O Come Emmanuel." We want new life in the midst of darkness.

I have always found that our hymns touch me deeply and help me to express my deepest longings. For me, the hymn reminds me of our desire to be at peace with one another. It reminds me of my call for strength to understand the complexities of our time, and for my hope that I will see the love and guidance of God anew in my heart.

As we gather with family and friends this Advent and Christmas season, let us join our voices with those who sang this hymn over 1200 years ago. And as we see nativity scenes, let us take the last moments of this year to remember, deep in our hearts, that we all share in the miraculous event of Christmas.

Our call, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," ***has been answered.*** Jesus chose to come to us, to ransom us from darkness, and to be with us. We no longer need to mourn in lonely exile. We know that we are never alone. We know that our Emmanuel is always with us.

(We are interested in your thoughts. Let us know at:  
<http://srsclare.com/about-us/companions-in-prayer-newsletter>)

*Sr. Laura and Sisters*