

SATURDAY, THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

The First Cries of the Christ Child

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2:7

*The paradox of expectation indeed is that those who believe in tomorrow can better live today, that those who expect joy to come out of sadness can discover the beginnings of a new life in the center of the old, that those who look forward to the returning Lord can discover him already in their midst. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, 59)*

On the holy night of Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Mary's son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In this moment, when the first cries of the Christ Child pierce the cool night air of his humble circumstances, we realize that what we have been waiting for has been with us all along.

In this time of waiting, we were already living in God's presence. In the anticipation, we were already filled with God's glory. God has always been with us. And yet, the way that God is with us now is new and special. Wrapped in cloth, laid in straw—in the words of St. John, this is the one "we have heard ... we have seen with our eyes ... we have looked at and touched with our hands" (1 John 1:1).

No one can take these beautiful moments from us. We kneel before him in awe. Our hearts are full of his light and presence.

Lord Jesus, Emmanuel, you are the firstborn son of Mary and the eternal Word of God. Fill us with the joy of your presence always. May this Christmas be a fresh celebration of that ancient belief: You, O God, are with us. Amen.

Acknowledgments

Henri Nouwen was one of the most innovative and influential spiritual writers of the past century. His vision of spirituality was broad and inclusive, and his compassion embraced all of humankind. Nouwen wrote 39 books on spirituality and the spiritual life that have sold millions of copies and been translated into over 30 languages. The passages quoted in this booklet are taken from certain of his published works, listed here, all of which are available through www.henrinouwen.org.

Behold the Beauty of the Lord by Henri J.M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1987, 2007 by Ave Maria Press[®], Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, Indiana, 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Heart Speaks to Heart: Three Gospel Meditations on Jesus by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1989, 2007 by Ave Maria Press[®], Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Life of the Beloved by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 2002. All rights reserved. Used with permission of The Crossroad Publishing Company, www.crossroadpublishing.com.

Out of Solitude by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1974, 2004 by Ave Maria Press[®], Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community by Henri J. M. Nouwen, Foreword by John Dear. Copyright © 2005 by Orbis Books. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Orbis Books.

The Selfless Way of Christ by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 2012 by Orbis Books. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Orbis Books.

With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1994 by Orbis Books. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Orbis Books.

With Open Hands by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1972, 1995, 2005 by Ave Maria Press[®], Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted (or in excerpted text), Scripture quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. All rights reserved.