

# THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS



Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was an island in the middle of the ocean called Penal Island. All the people who lived on this island were prisoners. They had no idea how they got there, but they knew that there was no escape.

The people who lived on this island, like prisoners everywhere, were very unhappy. There was always strife and turmoil as one group fought with another over land, food, water. The prisoners lived in constant fear of one another, and of the future.

Constant fear, and a strange hope. Because these imprisoned people still hoped that some day they would find a way to escape to a better place, somewhere out there across the ocean.

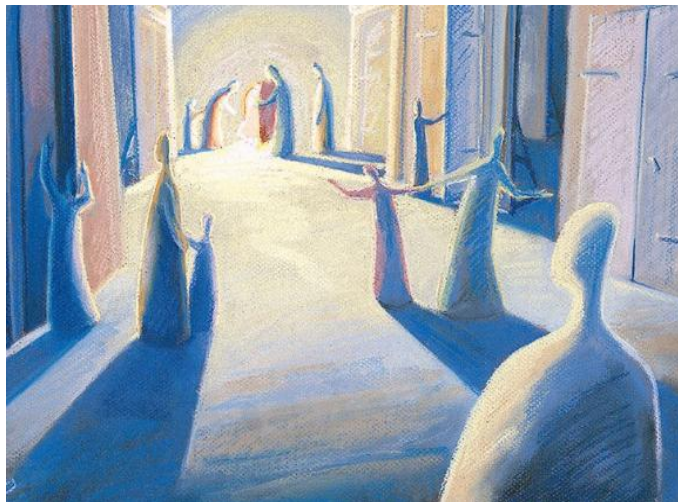
In the center of the island, near the main Market Place, was a huge rock, ten stories high and two blocks square. Nobody paid much attention to this rock. It was part of the landscape.

But one day, a door appeared in the side of the rock. On the door, in large gold letters, was the word "WELCOME!"

The island prisoners stood around looking at the door, and wondering, What does this mean? One man stood up and shouted, *"Stay away from that door! It will only lead to trouble. What else can there be on the other side of that door but a bottomless pit. You step through that door, and you're gone!"*

*"No,"* said another man. *"I believe that this could be the door to the freedom we've been looking for. I'm willing to take a chance."*

While everyone was arguing, a little girl walked up to the door, opened it, stepped inside, closing the door behind her. A hush spread over the crowd as they waited to see what would happen next. Just then a little boy broke free from his mother's grasp, and ran to the door, opened it, and disappeared. His mother came right behind him, stepped in and was seen no more. A few others followed.



So what happened to the people who went through the door?  
Were they lost forever? Or did they find something so wonderful that they had no desire to return?

***“Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight”.***

The hopes and fears of all the years are focused on this insignificant child in this out-of-the-way town in this despised corner of the earth. Because he is the door which has mysteriously appeared on our prison planet in this vast universe.

For two thousand years people have been standing around trying to decide whether the door is a good thing, a bad thing, nothing at all, or whether, perhaps, this door could be the answer we've been looking for.

Like the prisoners on Penal Island, we too have our fears.

*“Will tomorrow be safe?*

*Will I stay healthy?*

*Who can I really trust?*

*What's going to happen to me when I die”?*

And we too carry in our hearts the hope that some day, somehow, we will find our way to something better than this---to a place where there is no more sickness, no more hunger, no violence, death, deceit, pain, tears.

**That hope lives in every one of us.  
We were born with it.**

But will it ever be fulfilled?

This child of Bethlehem---the man he has become---

**Is he the answer to our hopes and fears?**

**Is he the door to the peace our hearts crave?**

**Or is this just another ritual we go through?**

Christmas is the annual ritual, when we all come together and look at the door, sing about the door, preach about the door. It gives us a good feeling each year to gather in church and sing these beautiful carols.

**But nothing happens.... so long as all we do is look at the door.**

The deliverance from our fears, the fulfillment of our hopes---

These miracles wait on the other side of the door.

And we will never know what's over there, until we go up to the door, open it, and enter.

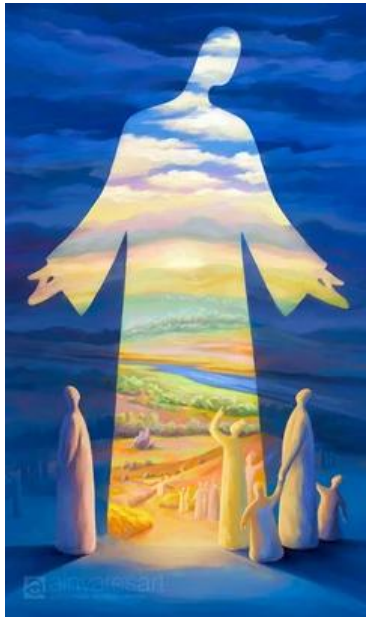
Of course, the one whose birth we celebrate this Christmas Eve is ....

No longer in a manger.

No longer hanging on a cross.

He is with you now and in a million other places on our prison planet.

## He is the Door.



And there is not a soul who will find the door locked against them.

***....."Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door, if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."***

*John 10:7-9*

Long, long ago, on Penal Island, it became an annual ritual. Every year they would decorate the Central Market Place, cover the huge rock with lights and gather around the door, and sing to it. While they were singing carols about the door, it often happened that someone would step out of the crowd, walk up to the door, and enter. Sometimes whole families would enter.

One man stood there singing his heart out, when it suddenly dawned on him, *"I've been doing this all my life. Every year I come here and sing, and every year I go home to the same old dull routine. I think it's time for me to take the step."*

He was a bit nervous about it. He wondered what his friends would think. He wasn't sure what was waiting for him on the other side. But he took a deep breath, walked up to the door, opened it, and entered.

To his amazement, it wasn't dark in there, it was light! A man came up to him and said, *"Welcome! Follow me, I'll show you the way."*

He was led to a banquet table, filled with good things to eat, that stretched as far as the eye could see. Numberless people were feasting and rejoicing. Over at the table was a chair with nobody in it. As he came closer, he discovered his own name on that chair in gold letters. It had been waiting for him all these years! What a welcome he received from the people at that table!

***Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.***

***"I am the door, if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."***

So this Christmas season, don't just look at the Door.

**Step up to it and walk in!**

Don't just sing carols about Him.

**Draw near to him.**

**Call out to him in your need.**

**Throw ourselves on his mercy.**

*"Lord, here I am. I don't just want to be looking at you.  
I want to enter you. I want to walk with you, follow you.  
I want you to live in me. I'm yours!"*

**Once you're inside the door, you are in another world.**



**You still breathe this air on earth, but you're in God's world.**

And if you walk in the light he gives you, you'll never want to go back to where you were before. Never.

Even now his Spirit speaks to your heart:

*"Don't be afraid. Draw near to me, and I will draw near to you. I will lead you into a life more wonderful than you could ask or think, beginning now.*

***Just open the Door and come in."***



*Prayer: Lord, we bring you our fears, our struggles, our loneliness, our despair. We need true deliverance from them, we need hope that there is good for us. We need miracles. We need peace. Help us to find this everlasting light in the dark streets of our souls. Help us to open the door to it. We want to enter, to be wrapped in your light, in your love. We draw near to you now, seeking your welcome. Amen.*

Message: Richard E. Bieber Christmas 2009  
Featured Artist: Courtesy of Ain Vares



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