



See Revealed Creation's Splendor

The 45th Annual Augsburg University Advent Vespers 2024

See Revealed Creation's Splendor

Dear Friends:

As we once again enter the sacred season of Advent, Augsburg faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends offer these words to guide you into the season of longing, hope, anticipation, reflection, and renewal. We proclaim, "See Revealed Creation's Splendor," and pray that God's faithful people might respond with care for all God's creatures.

These are anxious times for our world – wars rage, the climate is changing, we are alienated from each other; and yet we believe that God is active in our midst. This, then, is just the moment to remember and celebrate the stories about what God is calling us to be and do in the world – stories of light, hope, faith, and love.. May you find in these devotions the stories and insights that propel your lives of faith in the world.

I am so grateful for Auggies and their faithful witness echoed in these thoughtful words. I commend these devotions to you and yours.

Advent Blessings,

Paul C. Pribbenow, Ph.D.
President

Sunday, December 1

Isaiah 65:17-18a

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating.

It's all too easy to reflect on God's creation in past tense. God *created* the heavens and the earth. God *created* us God's image. A completed process. Something that has already happened, and we can but reflect back on it from our perspective in the present.

Here God reminds us that God is ever and always *actively creating*. God's creation is not like a model airplane (or an adult Lego set, to use a more contemporary illustration!) that has been built and is there for us to observe and admire. Nor is creation a clock that God has wound up, set in motion, and then passively watches as time ticks by. *God is still creating*.

Christ taught us to pray, "On earth as it is in heaven." Let us see this prayer as an invitation to join God in creating new heavens and a new earth all around us.

John Anderson

Beginners By Denise Levertov

Monday, December 2

"From too much love of living,
Hope and desire set free,
Even the weariest river
Winds somewhere to the sea--"

But we have only begun
To love the earth.

We have only begun
To imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope?
-- so much is in bud.

How can desire fail?
-- we have only begun

to imagine justice and mercy,
only begun to envision

how it might be
to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors.

It is easy to tire of hope when surrounded by so much injustice and willful neglect of our environment. But all around us we see signs of hope in the beauty of creation: tiny plants clinging to the sides of cliffs, amazing sea creatures who adapt to the harshest ocean conditions, and birds who soar over the Mississippi River. We see hope in daily acts of kindness: the stranger stopping to help a stranded motorist, a hug for a friend who is struggling, speaking up for someone whose voice is not being heard.

In the face of the struggle and sorrow, we must continue to imagine justice and mercy and imagine a world where we can live as siblings to one another and to this beautiful creation.

Janice Dames

Surely our river
cannot already be hastening
into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot
drag, in the silt,
all that is innocent?

Not yet, not yet--
there is too much broken
that must be mended,

too much hurt we have done to each other
that cannot yet be forgiven.

We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is unfolding that must
complete its gesture,

so much is in bud.

Tuesday, December 3

The Creation
James Weldon Johnson

And God stepped out on space,
And He looked around and said,
“I’m lonely —
I’ll make me a world.”

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said, “That’s good!”

Then God reached out and took the light in His hands,
And God rolled the light around in His hands
Until He made the sun;
And He set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said, “That’s good!”

Luke 1:68, 76-79

Wednesday, December 4

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them...
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.
Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel...

These were the first words Zechariah spoke - sang in fact - after 9 months of being struck mute upon hearing from an angel that his wife Elizabeth would give birth to a son. He doubted this promise. The work God was working out involved his family and none of it made sense. His son, John the Baptist, would come into the world and live an obscure life playing a small but key role in pointing the world to the fullness of God's promises in Jesus. And he would die tragically, along with the savior he was pointing the world towards.

I've never believed that “everything happens for a reason.” I think it's more likely that “everything happens.” We may look for reasons, but what matters most is that we step into everything with a commitment to work for love and with courage knowing we are not alone as we take steps into an unknown future.

With the state of the world today, it is difficult to see where the path forward is. While Zechariah has long since walked this world, his voice remains, inviting us to join his song... *Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Kristina Frugé

Thursday, December 5

Romans 8:22-24

We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees?

How much louder must the creation groan? The pervasive sounds are of dying not birthing. Humanity has become agents of death rather than midwives in the creation. Six years ago Swedish climate justice activist Greta Thunberg implored global leaders, “I don’t want you to have hope. I want you to panic.” Yet panic leads to fear and paralysis. However, do admonitions to hope move us to act? “The question is not what gives you hope but what inspires and activates your love? What moves people of hope is love for this life.”* The question is not FOR what do we hope but IN whom do we hope? Our hope is in the Holy Spirit whose presence and power move us to embody hope as together we restore the creation that God continues to give out of love. Yes, hope is what we do! (Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, President of Dar al Kalima University of Arts & Culture in Bethlehem)

Rev. Mark Hanson '68

*“Considering Hope in a Climate Crisis World” Norman Wizba (YouTube)

Come Beloved of the Maker, v. 1&2

Friday, December 6

Come, beloved of the Maker,
come, behold the Firstborn One;
see revealed creation's splendor
crowned in glory like the sun.

See the Morningstar now beckon
to those bound to doubt and night;
“Follow me,” Christ calls in welcome,
“come from darkness into light.”

Text: Susan Palo Cherwien (1953–2022)

In his commentary on the hymn text Paul Westermeyer notes that it “is a gentle invitation to ‘come and see,’ following Christ the morning star to newness and peace, through anguish to bliss and light.”¹ The beautiful image of Christ as the Morning Star appears numerous times in both scripture and hymnody. The great Lutheran chorale “O Morning Star, how fair and bright” rings through sanctuaries each Epiphany. In the final chapter of the book of Revelation Jesus reminds us, I am the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star.” Simeon’s song, “Lord, now you let your servant go in peace” is a part of the traditional Vespers (evening prayer) service. Often today at funerals we sing Ernest Ryden’s beautiful versification that concludes, “where Christ, the blessed daystar shall light them [the saints] evermore.” We are indeed fortunate and grateful that Susan Cherwien’s incredible text set by her spouse David (Augsburg alumnus ’79) serves as the main focus of this year’s Advent Vespers in which we encounter that radiant Star, Emmanuel – God incarnate among us.

Mark Sedio ’76

¹Westermeyer, Paul; Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship, ©2010, Augsburg Fortress, p. 91.

Saturday, December 7

Psalm 84:1-4

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints,
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.
Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.

All of God's creatures long for a home, a safe and secure place that is ours. And, as the Psalmist writes, our God is a home-maker who promises us a most lovely dwelling place, a house where we might sing God's praises. The truth is, of course, is that too many of God's beloved creatures do not have a home. Too many are unhoused due to a lack of affordable homes or to the ravages of poverty and mental illness. Others are forced out of their homes by disasters, more and more the result of climate change that leads to devastating weather. And even as the sparrow finds a home in the courts of the Lord, today too many of God's creatures are being forced to abandon their homes as they are washed away or forever changed by human or natural intrusions. For God's faithful people, our work is clear. Every one of God's creatures needs a home. We are called to be home-makers so that all might sing God's praises.

Paul C. Pribbenow

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

Whether you’re an amateur or professional historian, Luke’s Gospel may hold particular appeal. Luke, you see, is interested in the story’s location in time and space. When was the incarnate God born into the world? During the reign of Augustus, the emperor of Rome (Luke 2:1-2). When did John the Baptizer begin preaching? During the “reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee...” (Luke 3:1).

Luke’s Gospel takes pains to locate the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in a particular time and place. Luke’s story wants its audience to know this is not some fanciful tale or some far-fetched legend or some fantastical dream. Luke wants you to know: God took on human flesh, born of a woman, right then and right there, so that God can be present for you, right here, right now.

Monday, December 9

People, Look East vs. 1-2

People, look east. The time is near
of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east, and sing today—
Love, the Guest, is on the way.

Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,
one more seed is planted there.
Give up your strength the seed to nourish,
that in course the flow'r may flourish.
People, look east, and sing today—
Love, the Rose, is on the way.

Text: Eleanor Farjcon (1881-1965)

Advent, of all the seasons in the church year, seems to have an especial affinity for nature metaphors. For those of us familiar with the heavy winters of the midwest, a barren Earth that is waiting to spring forth with new life is a metaphor that we get to live out each year. This year, especially, in the wake of devastating hurricanes, floods, fires, other natural disasters, and draining human political activities, we all feel this wintry lack of hope and energy, and are in need of new life.

The time for that new life to spring forth is almost here! God has already planted the seeds of hope in us. Can we make ourselves ready for it to grow? What needs to be given up to provide space and nourishment for the seeds of hope that lay within each of us? The Guest, the Rose, of Christ in us is on its way, promising new life to all of creation. Look East and prepare to greet it with the rising Spring sun!

Lucas Carlson

Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things. Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spend enough time with the tiniest creature, even a caterpillar, I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.

We live in a busy world with many demands on our time. This reading reminds us to slow down and take time to notice the divine in the most overlooked parts of our lives. The divine is present all around us. God is not distant from us but is entwined in every aspect of our lives. If we spend enough time we can learn to see that the world around us is filled with the testimony of God's creativity, power, and love. Not only is God present in nature, but God is present in each and every one of us. Eckhart says that even the simplest caterpillar contains limitless sermons, however it is up to us to decipher them.

Carson Vincent '24

Wednesday, December 11

from The Creation
James Weldon Johnson

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled Him down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of His hand;
This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till He shaped it in His own image;

Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

The work, complexity, and love that is inherent in the creation of each and every one of us calls us to be stewards of creation's splendor. God made us a part of this splendor of creation, and we have shirked our responsibility to God and to creation for far too long. We have caused the warming of our planet to a nearly irreversible degree. Which causes more frequent natural disasters and sea levels to rise. All of this disproportionately harms our most marginalized relatives in the world, human and nonhuman. All of us were created in the image of God. We are inextricably linked to creation, not just in our own splendor created in the image of God, but in our responsibility to care for and repair the world. But there is hope. We are not charged with this endeavor to care for the world on our own. We have God, the very maker of all creation to guide us in this repair of creation's splendor.

Luke Owens '24

God of Grace and God of Laughter, v. 2

Thursday, December 12

When our lives are torn by sadness,
heal our wounds with tuneful balm;
when all seems discordant madness,
help us find a measured calm.
Steady us with music's anchor
when the storms of life increase:
in the midst of hurt and rancor,
make us instruments of peace.

Text: Carl Daw (b. 1944)

German composer Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) famously observed that “people who make music together cannot remain enemies, at least while the music lasts.” Having experienced the rise and fall of the Nazi regime firsthand, these words were not trite moralizing, but a testimony to music's power to overcome human evil.

In an Advent season in which all seems “discordant madness” and we observe “hurt and rancor” all around us, I marvel at the power of music, especially in the student musicians I have the privilege of teaching every day. I experience hope for the future when I observe these emerging leaders behaving as instruments of peace, healing wounds with their tuneful balm.

Calling to mind our Vespers theme of “See Revealed Creation's Splendor,” let us remember that “God saw that is was very good”

...and it still is.

Brian De Young

Surely God is my salvation;

I will trust and will not be afraid,
for the Lord is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.”

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

And you will say on that day:

“Give thanks to the Lord;

call on his name;

make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.

Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.

Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Here in First Isaiah we hear an apocalyptic dream of a God who dwells deeply in creation. We hear of a world where all creation drinks from a deep well of redemption. But in this Advent season, in this time of waiting for “that day,” I am parched and afraid. Do you feel it too?

As temperatures and oceans rise, what’s revealed is not creation’s splendor but creation’s slaughter. If creation is where the deep of God dwells, what does that say about God? If God dwells in the deep wells of creation, is God drying up like a well in drought? I am parched and afraid. Does God feel it too?

In this Advent season we are not called to give false hope in an age of climate catastrophe. We are not called to wait for “that day” where a parched world can drink from a dry well. No. We are called to dig deeper.

We are called to build power and love with nothing but bread and wine. We are called to build a community worth calling beloved. We are called to where God dries up—to dig until we hit the water of redemption. Amen.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul's invitation to the Philippians seems like a tall order at this moment in our common life. "Rejoice" when bombs rain down on Gaza? "Do not be anxious" when our country is divided by fear and mistrust? "Let your gentleness be known" when the most vulnerable among us are threatened? Pray with "thanksgiving" as environmental destruction grows?

And yet, we believe in a God of peace who "surpasses all understanding". When we reach the end of our understanding, when we cannot imagine a new future, may we turn to the God who creates. Our God who existed before the world began, resides in our midst and beckons us into the future. May we believe the God of Love, in whom all things are possible.

Rev. Gretchen Roeck

Friday, December 15

Isaiah 11:6-9

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

In February of this year, Senator and pastor Raphael Warnock (D-GA) made remarks on the floor of the United States Senate pleading for a negotiated cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war. In these remarks, he drew upon this beautiful vision of the prophet Isaiah where war and genocide ends because the leaders of the world would be guided by a shared concern for the little children of all nations (Isa. 11:6). He said of this passage:

Honestly, I never quite understood what Isaiah meant. It seems too idyllic and other-worldly, even for the preacher. But perhaps the prophet is saying something much more practical than we think. To be sure, peacemaking is not easy work by any stretch of the imagination. But perhaps when we allow our children and our love for our children, our concern for their future, and our children's inextricable connection to all other children to lead us...we will find ourselves on the path that leads to peace.

May it be so.

Rev. John Schwehn

Now the Heavens Start to Whisper, v. 1&2

Saturday, December 16

Now the heavens start to whisper,
as the veil is growing thin.
Earth from slumber wakes to listen
to the stirring, faint within:
seed of promise, deeply planted,
child to spring from Jesse's stem!
Like the soil beneath the frostline,
hearts grow soft to welcome him.

Heavy clouds that block the moonlight
now begin to drift away.
Diamond brilliance through the darkness
shines the hope of coming day.
Christ, the morning star of splendor,
gleams within a world grown dim.
Heaven's ember fans to fullness;
hearts grow warm to welcome him.

Text: Mary Louise Bringle (b. 1953)

When I was pregnant with my firstborn child. I experienced a dawning awareness of a presence inside my body. It started with a ripple, a flutter, a whisper of movement. It was there and gone before I could attach words to what I was experiencing. Eventually, my mind caught up to what my body knew. My unborn baby was stirring! This sensation was quiet, astonishing and growing. My daughter was making herself known.

“Now the Heavens Start to Whisper” puts us all in a place of dawning awareness. Long-anticipated, hopeful change is coming. We may not be able to put to words the change we sense is coming but we feel the need for it deeply in our bodies. The earth stirs, the clouds drift away and the ground warms. Christ, the morning star of splendor, is coming! May we all be ready to welcome God's life-changing, life-affirming gift of life.

KC Gubrud

Sunday, December 17

Before the Marvel of this Night v. 1&3

Before the marvel of this night,
adoring, fold your wings and bow;
then tear the sky apart with light
and with your news the world endow.
Proclaim the birth of Christ and peace,
that fear and death and sorrow cease:
sing peace; sing peace; sing gift of peace;
sing peace; sing gift of peace!

The love that we have always known,
our constant joy and endless light,
now to the loveless world be shown,
now break upon its deathly night.
Into one song compress the love
that rules our universe above:
sing love; sing love; sing God is love;
sing love; sing God is love!

Text: Jaroslav J. Vajda (1919-2008)

Before the angels announced the life changing news of the birth of Jesus, they took a moment in prayer. Before the world was illuminated in light, and love, and peace, they folded their wings and bowed in reverence; in humility and honor of the creator and all creation. Then, the angels proclaimed the good news and the promise of peace in a broken world. What if our present-day still, quiet moments of prayer and reflection could bring such revelation? What if our thoughts and the words we speak reflected the joy, peace, and promise of this marvelous night? Even in troubling times let us come back to the marvel of this night and sing peace; sing God is love!

Michon True Smith '97

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

When was the last time you leaped for joy over someone? Perhaps it was your partner returning from a long trip, getting together with a cousin you only see every few years, or maybe it's having dinner with a former co-worker that you bonded with. I think it's safe to say that there are a lot of distractions in the world and sometimes we get wrapped up in the negative pieces of life and neglect to celebrate the joyous ones. This time of year we are often told to slow down and concentrate on the birth of Jesus, but let us also take some time to focus on those in our lives that we take for granted, those who we see every day and rarely appreciate what they add to our lives. They may not offer you more than a chuckle after a long meeting, or a quick message when they know you're down, but focus on those in our lives that we often forget to acknowledge.

Advent is a season of waiting. In the reading Mary, Martha, and an unborn John the Baptist are waiting for Christ, but what or who are you waiting for? Are you leaping with joy over the anticipation or are you a nervous wreck making sure you clean up the pile of clothes on the chair in your bedroom that your guests will never see?

Take a breath.

Leap for joy over the people in your life.

Anticipate what is coming both on the liturgical calendar and in your own lives.

Tuesday, December 19

Luke 1:46b-55

And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Mary's song, the Magnificat, are words of a woman of faith, an exemplar for us all. When we closely read this passage, we can see that the model she gives us is not the holy card saint, dressed in blue, demurely gazing heavenward. No, this Mary magnifies the Lord by her humble gratitude for what God has done for her and by boldly proclaiming God's justice for the oppressed. Advent is a time to reflect on how we can emulate Mary. Like her, how can we magnify the Lord? How can we be grateful to generous Creator while intentionally living compassionate lives, serving the neighbor by forcefully calling for justice for the lowly ones, for the most marginalized in our own society? We, like Mary, can be full of grace, birthing love and justice in our world.

Matt Maruggi

Hazelnut
Julian of Norwich

Wednesday, December 20

And in this [vision] God showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.

My husband, David, has a buckeye on his desk in our home office. One of the neighbors gave it to him one day when he was out walking our dog, Hank. Sometimes I notice David turning the smooth and shiny buckeye over in his hands, contemplating it. Unlike Julian of Norwich's "vision of God... no bigger than a hazelnut," it is an actual buckeye. But I imagine that he is contemplating the same grand idea, that it represents everything that is made and loved. It reminds me of Thich Nhat Hahn's tangerine meditation. For many years, I have led students in this exercise in mindfulness. Each time, students - silently and slowly - peel their fruit and eat the juicy segments. The fragrance of citrus fills the room as I narrate Hahn's words about the sunshine and rain, the blossoms, and the first appearance of the tiny green fruit. The meditation ends with these words, "each time you look at a tangerine, you can see deeply into it. You can see everything in the universe in one tangerine."

In this advent season of waiting and hoping, what will you notice? Where will you see the love of God in everything? It might be something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, or a buckeye, or a tangerine.

Lori Brandt Hale

Thursday, December 21

Matthew 2:8-12

When the magi had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The journey of life is one thing that all living creatures have in common. One of the biggest questions of this journey is: “what is my purpose?” We are able to see in our text that the Magi are overcome with joy when they see the star they had been following had stopped. The Magi realized more of their purpose in that moment because they were one step closer to finding Jesus. When they arrived at the stable they completed the purpose of all living things, which was and still is, to lay at His feet and worship. As we enter into the Advent season I encourage all of us to be reminded of our purpose. To adorn Him with gifts, kneel at His feet, and worship Him.

Toby Reinsma '23

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

This passage from St. John's Gospel echoes the opening words of Genesis, reminding us that out of chaos and void came the richness of creation. What began "formless and empty" eventually became "the heavens and the earth" through the power of God's Word.

The composer Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) produced two of his best known works during a time of great upheaval. The Napoleonic wars and their precursors instigated intense fear, significant social and economic disruption, and millions of lives lost across Europe. It is against this backdrop that Haydn wrote *Missa in angustiis* ("the Mass for troubled times") and, aptly, *The Creation*. These remarkable musical expressions evoke feelings of comfort amid chaos, creation following destruction, and life springing from nothingness.

When chaos or emptiness enters our own lives, we can be left feeling broken and even despondent. In this uncertainty, let us listen for a call to create, restore, and renew. The Word that brought light to the void is present, active, and ushering in newness today.

Sarah Erkkinen

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly.

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

We often hear of the angel’s announcement to Mary. But Matthew centers the story of Jesus’ birth on Joseph, and we learn that Joseph is righteous. In the midst of debates about masculinity, Joseph shows us what a righteous man is. To be righteous means to be in right relationship with God and with others. Joseph was also compassionate and discrete, refusing to expose Mary to public embarrassment. Joseph did not fear; he trusted in the promise the angel announced. He took Mary as his wife, and when Joseph was instructed to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt; he obeyed the angel’s command. In contrast to patriarchal views of domineering masculinity, Joseph teaches us that to be a righteous person means that one is courageous and compassionate, discrete, maintains right relationships, trusts in God, cares for family, and follows God’s commands. Let us all practice these traits of righteousness as we—like Joseph—await the savior’s birth.

“Silent Night” v. 1-2

Sunday, December 24

Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight;
glories stream from heaven afar,
heav'nly hosts sing, alleluia!
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Text: Joseph Mohr, 1792-1849; tr. John F. Young, 1820-1885

Originally “Stille Nacht” was a poem created by Joseph Mohr, an Austrian priest who wrote it to express hope for his impoverished and traumatized congregation.

In my holy imagination, I think of this night, silent and holy and filled with promise. The cosmos is radiant and bright. On this Christ-mas eve, we are reminded of a promise from God in the birth of Christ, the Savior, Christ our Savior. For the coming of the Christ child brings us “expressed Hope”. God is present in our midst bringing peace and calm. Christ is sent for all to experience the radical love and care of God.

I imagine also, communities for whom this world is filled with poverty, division, fear and trauma, suffering silently. God is present and also in their midst.

Our prayer this Advent season is for every community and people to experience this hope and peace promised. That the good news comes to all of God's creations. As the heavenly host sings Alleluia, throughout the universe, and in the splendor of creation, Christ, the Savior, our peace is born!

Amen

Rev. Babette Chatman

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COVER ART:

On August 26, 2024, Augsburg lost a cherished and steadfast member of our community. In a fierce summer storm, the enormous plains cottonwood tree (*Populus deltoides*) that overlooked our Cedar-Riverside neighborhood for nearly a century came crashing down. A few days later, neighbors, clergy, and biologists gathered around our fallen friend - known in the neighborhood as 'The Loveliest of Trees' - and cried tears of gratitude and grief. Eagles circled in the sky above as we bid farewell to a friend that daily gathered us beneath her generous boughs. Can you imagine this majestic tree on our campus? Like The Loveliest of Trees, the Christ child, born in a manger, gathers beasts, nations, and angels into a peaceable kingdom. O Come, let us adore him!

Our program art was created by Nolan Mehle, a student in Augsburg's Design and Agency program. It is an homage to our dearly departed friend, The Loveliest of Trees.

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