



# ADVENT VESPERS

Devotional 2019



**AUGSBURG**  
UNIVERSITY®

*Advent Vespers*

*Devotional 2019*

# *Light for the World to See*

Dear Friends:

As we celebrate Augsburg's 150 th anniversary – our Sesquicentennial – alumni from many decades offer these words to guide you into the season of longing, hope, anticipation, reflection and renewal. I pray, “Stir up your power, O Lord, and come; be our light for the world to see!” As I wrote for Christmas Day, the culmination of our Advent journey: “Do we see it – the light that shines for all people? Do we believe it – the light that shines in the darkness? Will we live it – as children of light called like John before us to testify that there will be no more night? May it be so.”

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

Psalm 38:9-10, 15, 21-22

O LORD, all my longing is known to you;  
my sighing is not hidden from you.  
My heart throbs, my strength fails me;  
as for the light of my eyes — it also has gone from me.  
But it is for you, O LORD, that I wait;  
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.  
Do not forsake me, O LORD;  
O my God, do not be far from me;  
Make haste to help me,  
O LORD, my salvation.

The mystics remind us that the incarnational essence of God is darkness. After all, God never says, “Let there be darkness.” God only says, “Let there be light.” Darkness then is a place of growth and rest and germination. Darkness is a place of longing and God’s presence. It is in this holy place that we can experience the questioning and strengthening we will need when all is exposed to the light. God, who is our salvation, dwells with us in the darkness, waits with us, and brings us the answers we long for there. Darkness isn’t the opposite of light, but instead it is because there is darkness we can experience light and because of light we know darkness. God is wrapped up in both, making haste for us, and bringing salvation.

The Rev. Melissa Pohlman ’00

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

In the beginning— God created. The first interaction that the universe has with God is creation. This act of creation, devoid of criticism, was good in and of itself with no strings attached and without contingencies. As creations of God, formed in darkness— as light forged out of a void and called good in the womb— we are called to recognize God’s creation. We are called to recognize the things around us that God has crafted and claimed with a mother’s loving hands and a father’s tender embrace. This world in which we dwell was called forth by God who first used voice to create. God spoke and change occurred... marrying two opposites, night and day, to be one entity—unique yet together whole. Perhaps we too, as God’s creations, have the opportunity to learn from this model of change-making put forth by God. It is an opportunity to learn to use our voices to create change with the same kind of harmony found within night and day. And just maybe, we have the ability to create good for the sole purpose of reveling in the creation of God through us. And God will see that it is good.

**Tuesday, December 3**

Isaiah 45:3-8

I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places,  
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD,  
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.  
For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen,  
I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.  
I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god.  
I arm you, though you do not know me,  
so that they may know, from the rising of the sun  
and from the west, that there is no one besides me;  
I am the LORD, and there is no other.  
I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe;  
I the LORD do all these things.  
Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness;  
let the earth open, that salvation may spring up,  
and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also;  
I the LORD have created it.

Sometimes God uses unexpected vessels for his work. I know I have been one, and I don't think I even knew it at the time. But whether we are aware or not, God calls us by his name; a name that we may not think we can have or deserve. The riches, that often aren't so easy to see in the distance, begin to come to light as we go through our life journey. The riches of friends, new opportunities, community service, and advocacy sometimes come from being pushed in unexpected ways. Not only can God be a light, but God can use unexpected vessels to shine light to the world.

Scott Cooper '13

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold the face of God?  
My tears have been my food day and night,  
while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?"  
These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:  
how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.  
Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.  
My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you  
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.  
Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows have gone over me.  
By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

We are all anxiously searching for something. Searching for an answer, searching for a sign, searching for comfort in times of struggle and pain. We may also be searching and longing for God with that same feeling of our souls being disquieted. We ready our souls through prayer, scripture, and worship. Let us also take care to BE the light for someone else. May we see God in the people that are placed in our care, in our lives, and in our communities. Can we be their light? Perhaps WE are the ones they have been waiting and searching for. We are the ones who can reflect God to others in their time of need.

Dear God, help us to remember in our search for you, that others are searching too. And that because we know you, we can reflect your light for the world to see. Amen.

Abby Schnedler '05

**Thursday, December 5**

Romans 8:18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 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 is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

For several years, I found myself co-leading the Christmas play. It was always a headache. Kids were rarely very focused. Some kids loved their parts (especially if they were Mary or the star) while others hated their parts (especially if they were Joseph or a camel). We prodded kids to speak and sing loudly... but don't shout! Yearly I thought, "Why do we do this?" Then, the pageant day arrived. Some parts were great and others were just okay. Nevertheless, we came together and celebrated that God became human. As we remembered that story, hope filled us.

During Advent, let's remember that our hope is not dependent on us. If our Christmas pageants are a little "rough around the edges," our frustrations are not the final answer. The hope that awaits us in Christ is always the final answer.

Lord, help me see beyond my struggles and know you are my hope. Amen.

The Rev. Jeanette Clark McCormick '07

Zechariah 2:10-13

**Friday, December 6**

Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the LORD. Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent, all people, before the LORD; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

“People, look east, and sing today - Love, the Guest, is on the way!” The prophet Zechariah’s words put me in mind of this line from Eleanor Farjeon’s advent hymn “People, Look East.” Advent is a time of joy and anticipation and preparation as we get ready for God to come and dwell in our midst. The One who loves us doesn’t stay far off but chooses to be right in the thick of things, living among us. Jesus shows up to stay, whether our houses and lives are ready or not, with or without an invitation. And he always overstays his welcome! Challenging us to ever more radical acts of love, mercy, and grace. Persisting in love for us when we turn away. Reminding us of who we really are - the light of the world. Come, Lord Jesus!

The Rev. Sylvia Bull ’10

**Saturday, December 7**

Isaiah 40:21-23, 26-28

Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?  
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;  
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to live in;  
who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these?  
He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name;  
because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.  
Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,  
“My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God”?  
Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

Have you not known? Yes I've known.

Have you not heard? Yes I've heard.

Have you been told? Yes, I've been told.

Have you understood? Yes, I've understood.

Even so, it doesn't hurt to be reminded of the majesty and power of God. We are called by name to remember the faithfulness of God who sits above this earth, who promises redemption. Though we may experience powerlessness in our lives, we have an assurance that God is not powerless but powerful and full of majesty. This Advent season we are invited to remember all we know, have heard, been told, and understand of the Love and saving power of God in Christ Jesus, to share the Light for the World to see. Amen and Amen.

The Rev. Babette Chatman '06

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.  
O my God, in you I trust;  
do not let me be put to shame;  
do not let my enemies exult over me.  
Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;  
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.  
Make me to know your ways, O LORD;  
teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.

Sometimes as a parent, your kids help you relearn the same lesson you're trying to help teach them. We have a saying in our house that we use pretty often with two children under 5:

"I'm going to need you to put on your patient pants."

It's usually around getting a snack or going to the park or having a friend to play with.

We say it playfully, but patience is hard. Putting on our patient pants is not easy. It's not my natural predisposition or a five year old's. Especially with the tyranny of the urgent – whatever that list is for you.

But that's the invitation of Advent. The season of waiting. The path of patience. Take a breath. Lift up your soul. Give it to God. It's ok to wait. Light and love will come. New life cries. It always does.

Have you put on your patient pants today?

The Rev. Peter Westin Miller '09

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people;  
from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me!  
For you are the God in whom I take refuge;  
why have you cast me off?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because of the oppression of the enemy?  
O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.  
Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy;  
and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.  
Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Sometimes we are able to be light that shines for the world to see. Other times we struggle to be a light. The Psalmist here is challenged by people and with struggles we don't know. On top of that the writer feels like God is far away and is left alone to make decisions, find strength, and get direction. Most people have known a similar lament.

But hopefully we can find trust that runs just as deep. Even in the muck the Psalmist knows that God's light and truth can still break in, still be the ground-  
ing for life, still come alive to renew one (or even more) lives.

God, break in again to lead me, ground me, and stir my joy.

The Rev. Karsten Nelson '83

[Jesus said]: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

My heart is troubled and crying. The light is dim; sure, hope is still alive within me.

Is being caged the way to God? Is being forced to take treacherous paths to safety the way to God? Is Jesus there witnessing all of this? Is this really the way to God?

I wish these troublesome times to end and that those carrying out these atrocities see the light in their hearts again.

And the Lord's light may help us make room to welcome the stranger and welcome back those who dwell in darkness.

Juventino Meza '11

**Wednesday, December 11**

Luke 1:68-75, 78-79

Then Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:  
"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.  
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,  
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness  
before him all our days.  
By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Tender mercy takes time. Dawn breaks on high after dark nights spent waiting to be saved from enemies like hate. Sit in darkness long enough, and I forget who to hate. I end up hating myself, hating you, hating my neighbor, hating God.

Tender mercy comes and sits in the darkness—my darkness. Tender mercy breaks upon me and stays. Tender mercy guides my stumbling feet. Tender mercy takes me by the hand, teaches me how to walk again. Tender mercy knows the way out of the darkness. Tender mercy is the way of peace.

Prayer for Prophets: "Tell us again, O prophets, about God's tender mercy. Where are you? Give us ears to listen. We have been waiting our whole lives for you."

The Rev. Dr. Mark R. Olson '90

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness 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.  
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 thoughts 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 helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

The Magnificat has been set to music more often than any liturgical text other than the Mass, and had been done in a variety of ways. In Bach's version the instruments and voices rush, soar, and swirl, giving us a representation of Mary's rejoicing.

In Advent as we watch and prepare we rejoice in the promise of something coming. We trust that it is the Messiah. Mary notes "according to the promise made to our ancestors," and in Psalm 23 we remember that God "restoreth my soul: and leads me in the paths of righteousness for God's name's sake."

God has never and will never break promises, and Advent is the promise fulfilled from generation to generation. May we rejoice in the promised Messiah!

Dear Lord: In this season of watching and waiting, fill our hungry soul and lift our lowly, weary spirit. In you, we find the joy of your never-ending promise.

The Rev. Jack Koch and Katie Koch Code '01

**Thursday, December 13**

Genesis 15:1-6

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Sometimes - most times - we need help trusting in God's promise; we need help having faith. Especially when all of the evidence surrounding us suggests God is not a promise keeper - or even present - at all. God pointed Abram to the stars and something about those tiny twinkling dots of light in a vast ocean of darkness moved Abram to trust in God's promise simply because God is God. In a tiny infant we trust God comes to us, despite all evidence to the contrary.

O God, as we gaze at the night sky, kindle faith that you are moving in our world. Bring hope in the hopeless place. Amen.

Abby Ferjak '09

The Israelites said to [Moses and Aaron], “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD.”

Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. Like the Israelites waiting for God to provide in the wilderness, we too wait for God to provide. It is easy to turn to grumbling and wondering when and maybe even if God will provide. But God keeps God's promises and just as the Israelites were sustained in the wilderness with manna, we are sustained by the Incarnation. God becomes flesh and lives among us in Jesus, providing the nourishment and substance we need for the journey. This is no longer bread from heaven, but instead is the Bread of Life who will sustain us through all of our wilderness times. As the Israelites brought in and prepared manna, let us prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ, the Bread of Life. Because of this one, we will never go hungry.

Marty Wyatt '12

**Sunday, December 15**

Mark 4:4-8

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Step right up! Step right up! Come and see this marvelous attraction, this stunning curiosity! Look at his leather belt! Feel his camel hair clothing! Watch him devour a whole dish of locusts and wild honey! Follow your curiosity and listen to the words he is saying. Confess all your shameful actions, your gnawing doubts, your lurking prejudices. He will not only listen, but offer you baptism in return. The best part is...He isn't even the main attraction! His communion with nature, his mesmerizing preaching, even his baptism is drawing you in, and preparing you for what is ahead. And what is ahead will be indescribable! It will wash over you like the Spirit. You will be transformed in ways you can never imagine. Come for the attraction, but stay for the transformational salvation!

Ross Murray '00

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Light in the shadows...

The sun rises through the trees on the northern edge of Ein Kerem, where Elizabeth in her old age conceived a son. The sun's light bends around the trees, firing the morning dew into a hazy mist. The trees' shadows hem the hazy light, making the light more visible, more noticeable.

Jesus, the Light for the World to See, was hemmed in shadows, in darkness. The power from the Most High overshadowed Mary. Mary held Jesus in the darkness of her womb. What is impossible to us is not impossible for God: light will grow from within the darkness. Darkness will reveal light.

Paraphrasing the prophet Micah, Abraham Heschel writes: “when we sit in darkness, God is our light.” For God, too, is in the shadows.

The Rev. Jeni Grangaard '02

**Tuesday, December 17**

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Life comes to us from God's Word – the incarnate Word, the living Word, the visible Word.

As a member of the Augsburg Choir many years ago I learned much from Dr. Leland B. Sateren about music. More profoundly, I all learned much about God's Word, as we sang and studied a rich variety of texts from scripture and the poets.

One imagines that during the forty days and nights of fasting Jesus found strength in remembering: remembering the providence and promises of God... remembering the care and compassion of God...remembering that God is the source of life.

These words I sang, learned, memorized, and still live by:  
"It is of Jehovah's loving kindnesses that we are not consumed. Because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness," from Lamentations, chapter 3.

These words are a gift to us all in these Advent days.

The Rev. David Halaas '76

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The Hebrews knew the story, having heard it from the prophets down through history. Parents taught the children to plead "Tell us a story, Poppa. A true story with your own mouth."

But now the story itself is new.

The story came in the person of God's own Son. A Son who gains the highest seat at the banquet.

The people thought that angels were the most powerful beings...super lands with super heroes and super powers.

They saw the reflection of all the lights of the world, flashing lights, and rainbows and sunsets showing the glory of God, Son of the Father.

Inez Schwarzkopf '59

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness,  
you that seek the LORD.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn,  
and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Look to Abraham your father  
and to Sarah who bore you;  
for he was but one when I called him,  
but I blessed him and made him many.

For the LORD will comfort Zion;  
he will comfort all her waste places,  
and will make her wilderness like Eden,  
her desert like the garden of the LORD;

joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the voice of song.

Listen to me, my people,  
and give heed to me, my nation;  
for a teaching will go out from me,  
and my justice for a light to the  
peoples.

I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,  
my salvation has gone out  
and my arms will rule the peoples;  
the coastlands wait for me,  
and for my arm they hope.

Seventy years ago I stood in front of our congregation with other three year olds for our Christmas program. Holding a candle in my hand, I said, "I am just a little boy. I am only three, but I can shine for Jesus as this candle shines for me". These simple lines come to mind again as I think of the theme of Augsburg's 40th Anniversary of Advent Vespers, Light for the World to See.

Through the Prophet Isaiah, God spoke to the exiled people of Israel whose future looked bleak. God told the people to hold onto their roots and to remember God's promises. "Listen to me my people," God said, "for a teaching will go out from me and my justice for a light to the peoples." In these uncertain times for us as individuals, as a nation and as a whole world, God promises justice and light. "Let your light shine."

The Rev. Richard Mork '66

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has  
risen upon you.

For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.

Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of  
your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together, they come  
to you;

your sons shall come from far away,  
and your daughters shall be carried  
on their nurses' arms.

Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,  
because the abundance of the sea  
shall be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come  
to you.

A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and  
Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.  
They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall proclaim the praise of the  
LORD.

Love is a Verb

The very first word of this reading from Isaiah 60 makes it clear that we are called to move... to do something. Arise! Shine! We can shine our light from anywhere but if we sit still and do not move, our light (and God's light that shines through us) will not be as visible and won't have as great an impact. If we move, do God's good work, and shine our light in the world for all to see, God's love is declared and proclaimed in a way that God's glory will appear and be known. Although darkness has covered the earth, we are called to action... love is a verb!

Kirsten Kelly '00

**Saturday, December 21**

Luke 2:27-33

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,  
“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
    according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
    which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
    and for glory to your people Israel.”  
And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

Do I hear Simeon’s prayer with the same amazement as the child’s father and mother? What is it about Mary’s spirit that she is able to be continually amazed? This is, of course, the fourth time she has been told of the babe’s identity that she had just released into the world – first the angel Gabriel, then Elizabeth, followed by the shepherds, and now. What is it in my life that distracts me from hearing these words and seeing this light with the same awe? Master, dismiss your servant in peace.

The Rev. Mike Matson '06

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Let us never forget that Jesus’ Spirit-led ministry does not only include invisible wonders but also concrete actions and clear purposes to bring light to a hurting world filled with oppression and injustice. As we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, let us not only fill this world with ‘thoughts and prayers’ but with actions. Let us be courageous for Christ who stood against a broken system of oppression and violence to bring salvation to everyone—the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed, the minority, the rejected, etc. In his eyes, we shared identity as children of God. As Jesus offers us the gift of peace, love, and salvation, we are called anew to share our compassion and love in service to others.

Ha (Cassie) Dong ’19

**Monday, December 23**

**Ephesians 3:7-12**

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Paul valued simplicity when preaching the gospel. If salvation was a course, there is no grade we can earn. There are no tests to pass or rankings to achieve -- no honor roll, dean's list, or outstanding classmates. Students that have failed miserably, disrespecting the lessons of the course are those who stand out. Those who underestimated their abilities, slept during class, gave up on coursework, and the person taking the course for the fourth time are among the greatest of learners. Unsure of a major, but still attending classes, are the students with the most promising futures. Grace is the instructor, showing all who accept her guidance that our credit for the course has already been accounted for. She is the substitute teacher that is mistreated and misunderstood. However, the students who discover obedience through failure will be lifted on high. Their reward of salvation will encourage them to be disciples, spreading the word that the course is available to anyone -- familiar or unfamiliar, rich or poor, faithful or hopeless, priest or layperson.

Dear Lord, I pray that I accept my spot in your course of salvation, acknowledge my failures and become obedient to your grace. I want us all to become students of your school then admission counselors, inviting the world to learn - whoever they may be!

Brandon Williams '19

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. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Close your eyes. Pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see the world through the Light of Christ. The stranger seeking safe haven will be seen as one to be welcomed with generosity and justice. The person with whom you have the deepest disagreements will be seen as a beloved child of God. Your visual field will be widened to see every living creature as a gift of God's creating goodness. Your tendency to look first at your own faults and failures will be refracted by God's grace and mercy so that you can see yourself as forgiven and free. The darkness of the valley of death and the arduous path of grief will be illumined by the Light of the Word made flesh who is life, the light of all people, full of grace and truth.

**Wednesday, December 25**

Revelation 21:22-26;  
22:1-5

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

These words from the Book of Revelation about the end times offer us a horizon for our lives of faith in the world – “and there will be no more night.” The child in the manger comes into our world so that all might believe in just such a remarkable promise. Do we see it? Do we believe it? Will we live it?

On this holy morning, we gather at the manger with the shepherds to behold the face of the infant Jesus. Do we see it – the light that shines for all people? Do we believe it – the light that shines in the darkness? Will we live it – as children of light called like John before us to testify that there will be no more night? May it be so.

Paul C. Pribbenow  
President of the University

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COURTNEY PERRY

## ABOUT THE COVER

The cover art comes from “Trans: Perspective,” a sculpture by artist Bebe Keith, which is suspended from the ceiling of Gundale Chapel in Augsburg University’s Norman and Evangeline Hagfors Center for Science, Business, and Religion. The sculpture’s theme arises from a dynamic and ever-changing university and community. Bebe Keith is a self-taught artist whose work includes book projects and public art at hospitals, clinics, libraries, an airport, and an event center.

*Cover photo by Stephen Geffre*