

WINTER 2021  
ISSUE NO. 19

# THE TABLE

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS



# Letter from the Editor

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22: 24-30).

WHICH AMONG THEM WAS CONSIDERED TO BE GREATEST. As I encountered this passage in my recent devotional reading, so much of it resonated with what I have been contemplating over the past several months: about the purpose of the church and its people, about the coming season of Advent, about my first ever bishop's consecration service, and about our upcoming role as a pro-cathedral for the Dioceses of Christ our Hope. All these things converged for me in this moment between Jesus and his disciples.

This issue of the magazine is focused primarily on the concept, history, meaning, and role of the cathedral, all placed in the context of the liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas that are currently directing our corporate (and hopefully personal) worship. The concept of the cathedral is quite new to me—a fairly recent Anglican who is still learning the ropes. As I ponder the idea, it strikes me how easy it would be for our community, during this life season, to find ourselves embroiled in that same argument: "who is greatest?" We are the seat of the bishop now. We are about to become the center, in many ways, of the life of our diocese. Eyes are going to be on us and our work. Doesn't this honor confer greatness on Church of the Redeemer? The answer is yes, but not in the expected way. Jesus speaks---as he has been throughout his ministry, in word as well as in deed---of a Kingdom that operates quite differently from normal expectation. It isn't like the kingdoms of the world and, though his disciples are honored men who have been given God's power, they are not like the kings of the world, either. Their leadership is not about conferring honor and glory to themselves, but about elevating something much bigger than them. The one who rules must be like the one who serves, Jesus says. As you will see through essays and reflections in this issue, this is true of the cathedral—with a history and tradition that reaches into present time and confers on Redeemer a renewed calling to service and sacrificial love.

As in most pursuits of value, this is easier said than done. Leadership, title, and attention can be enticing, and even service can become corrupted by human intention. Humility gets a bad wrap: it can be seen as weak, for sure, but I mean more-so that it is easy to fake, and therefore easy to distrust. The tricky thing about humility is that it is not so far from pride as we like to imagine. It is easily worn, a convincing mask, even if the heart beneath is full of self-elevation. It is an effective tool for growing one's status. The

challenge of this quality, and its great importance to the Gospel of Christ and the building of God's Kingdom, makes it imperative to contemplate and cultivate rightly.

God has a way of surprising me in each new issue of *The Table* with Gospel hope that emerges from the often strange, and always unplanned, alignment in the words and focuses of the articles therein. This time, it was this concept of humility that has astonished and delighted me. In these pages, we want to help people wrap their minds around the idea of becoming a pro-cathedral--what it is and what it means--and also draw people's hearts into the rich contemplation of these present liturgical seasons. The unexpected overlap here is the theme *humility*.

What is more humble than a newborn infant? Yet this is the form in which God chose to start his embodiment of the heavenly kingdom announced in the Old Testament and being fully revealed in the New. With the announcement of his coming, he quickly moves forward to envelope other lowly people in this mission--women, the poor, shepherds, foreigners, the elderly. What could be clearer than this message that the kingdom of God and its invitation of radical belonging is for the humble?

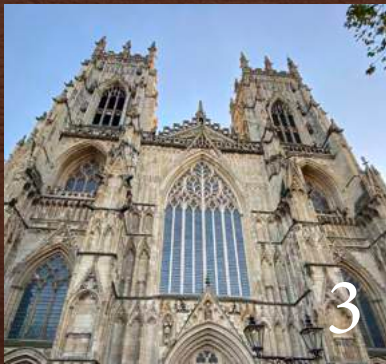
I grew up believing that humility meant to make yourself less so others could be greater, and to this end, constantly recognizing your sinfulness in order to purify your posture of humility. These elements of the quality are not wholly untrue, but as I read the Luke 22 passage and think about Jesus' humility, I am encouraged to realize that it doesn't actually require us to think of ourselves as debased and worthless. In fact, it requires us to believe the opposite: we are astronomically valuable as God's children. Serving others, then, is not about saying "I'm not deserving; I convey all deservedness to you." Jesus, our example of servanthood, was certainly deserving and valuable and did not eschew this worth for the sake of others. So, perhaps instead it means "God has made me intrinsically deserving of love: let me show you your deservedness, too." It's an intentional focusing of our energy on the work of drawing others into the knowledge and belief of their own incalculable value.

Humility: what a difficult quality we are asked to cultivate in the service of the King. We quite obviously cannot hope to practice it without the constant presence of God in our midst, purifying our intention, redirecting our hearts, and using our work even when we fail to serve from a right place. It seems to me to be a constant work that requires rapt, unwavering attention. As we prepare our hearts to become a pro-cathedral for our diocese, and as we consider the humility of Christ in this season--come to earth to show us our worth with the transformative power of love--my hope is that our community will recommit ourselves to a practice of humility in our lives for the work ahead. This is a hard calling, this tireless cultivation of humility. It will require much of us. Be encouraged to root this practice in that deep well of Love. Grow this quality from those rich and ever flowing waters. Make that endless fullness, not deprivation, the source from which service flows, so that those we serve may see and hear in our work the words "I am loved from everlasting to everlasting; come and know that you are, too."

**With Joy,  
Laura Fissel  
Managing Editor**

# THE TABLE

## FEATURED STORIES



TO BE A CATHEDRAL  
by Rev. Canon Wes Jagoe



MONASTICISM & PLACE MAKING  
by Lena Van Wyk



THE UNCHANGING RHYTHM  
by Right Rev. Canon Alan Hawkins

## CONTENT

- 7 ..... “The Modern Cathedral” by Rev. Dr. Les Fairfield
- 10 ..... Cathedral Feature: All Saints, Nairobi
- 11 ..... “Kingdom Come: Hopeful Community at the Farm”  
by Madison Miller
- 13 ..... “Advent: An Invitation to Hope & Anticipation”  
by Father Jeff Weber
- 16 ..... Cathedral Feature: Saint Peter’s, Tallahassee
- 18 ..... “Eyes to See” by Leah Wall
- 20 ..... Cathedral Feature: Saint Andrew’s, Singapore
- 21 ..... “We Will Feast in the House of Zion” by Jared Wensyel
- 23 ..... “Saint Stephen’s Day” by Leah Wall
- 24 ..... “Jesus is Near” by Lisa McCowen
- 25 ..... “Fullness of Joy” by Bethany Lancaster
- 28 ..... Cathedral Feature: Saint Andrew’s, Sydney
- 31 ..... “The Most Excellent Way” by Andrew Gilmour
- 33 ..... “Advent & the Anxious Millennial Cowboy” by Mikey Fissel

# TO BE A CATHEDRAL

by Reverend Canon Wes Jagoe

*Every man and woman in England has a birthright. Walk into any Cathedral around about teatime, just about any day of the week, and you hear the most exquisite music beautifully sung. In the streets outside, people are scrambling to get to the shops before they close, unaware perhaps that behind this decorative medieval façade a religious event of the most timeless beauty is about to take place... The choir and clergy at York Minster [Cathedral] are part of a religious college, a group of people whose job it is to offer worship to God on behalf of the whole community... Though it's well-rehearsed and strictly ordered, this is not a concert. It's an offering of praise to God.*

-BBC Reporter Joanna Trollope<sup>1</sup>

They've been called *Ships of Heaven*, *Shopwindows of the Church*, and *Supermarkets of Religion*.<sup>2</sup> Whether the ancient grandeur of the Hagia Sophia, the heavenly mystery of York Minster, or the humble diocesan centers in the developing world, cathedrals have had a prominent role in the life of the Church and the spread of the Gospel for two millennia. By definition, a *cathedral* is simply the house of a bishop's seat, or *cathedra*. Historically, it is much more than that. Being a cathedral church, especially one that also serves a parish congregation, is less a privilege than it is a great responsibility. It often requires sacrifice to best serve the city and diocese. As an avid student of cathedrals, I contend that new cathedrals, particularly in the Anglican collegiate model, may just be what is needed in this moment of American history.

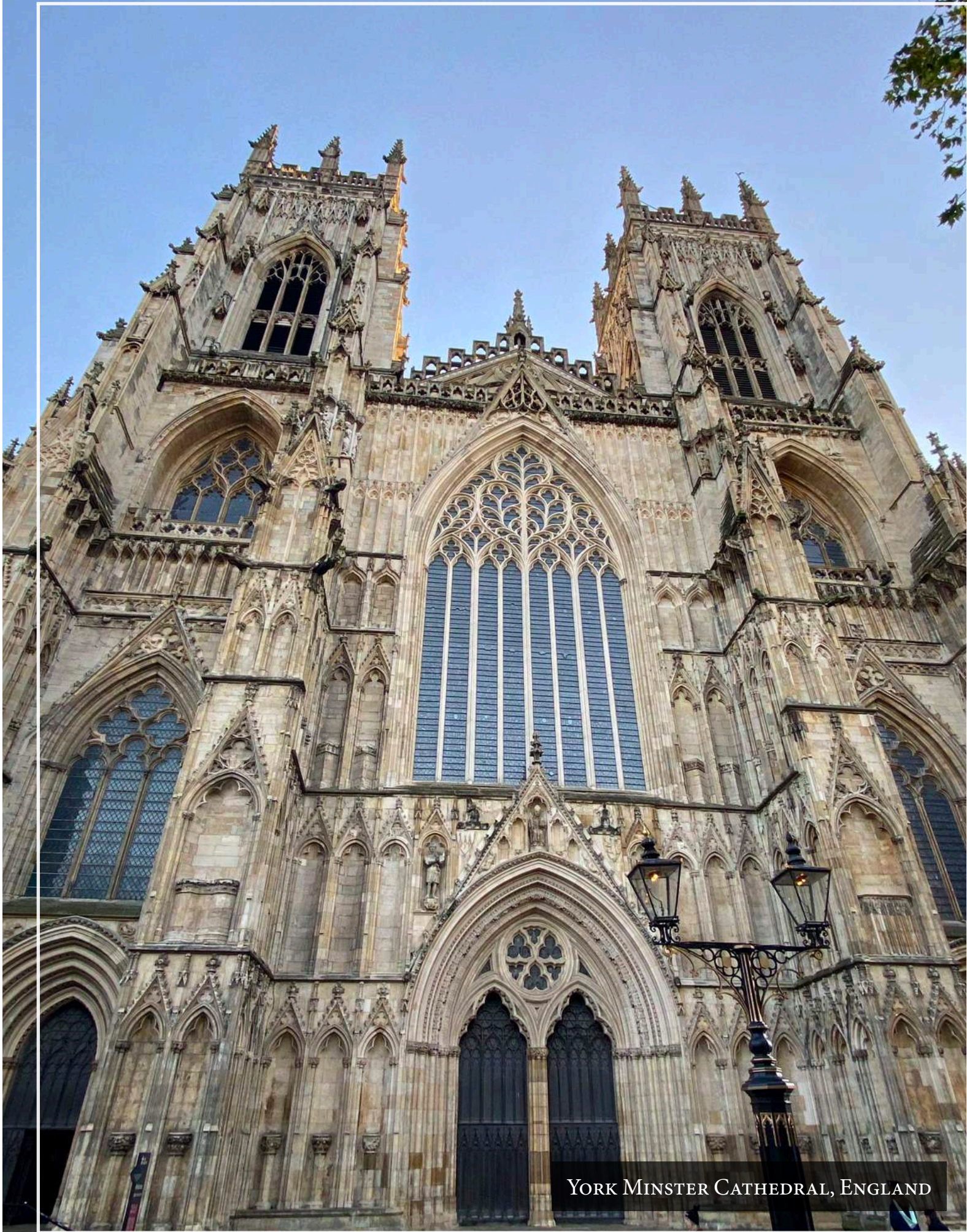
## HISTORY OF CATHEDRALS

In the early church, bishops were effectively the senior priest over the city's small underground Christian community, with whom he could personally pastor. When Constantine Christianized the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the office of bishop became a distinct and powerful influencer in the spiritual and civic life of every metropolitan area. Bishops were given Roman town halls called *basilicas* from which to minister. Like all civil magistrates, he exercised his duties in the hall from a large *cathedra*. The *basilica* in each metropolis was the hub of Christian life and the base for traveling missionaries who ministered to the rural areas. To assist with ever-expanding day-to-day ministry and administration, a bishop's household included scores of clergymen and laymen, women, and children collectively called his *familia*.

The early Christians in the British Isles lived in similar church-centered communities, though not centered around bishops, who held very little status or authority. They were called *minsters*, an Anglo-Saxon word loosely applied to any Christian community of lay and ordained who lived some form of Christian life together. When Augustine of Canterbury arrived in the sixth century, he brought with him papal jurisdiction and the hierarchical church structure from Europe. His first project was to plant Canterbury Cathedral and found a *minster* to operate it. As new dioceses and bishoprics were created, so too were more purpose-built cathedrals. After the Norman Conquest of England, William the Conqueror moved all rural cathedrals inside the walls of major cities, erecting the fortress-like structures that stand today in the heart of cathedral cities today. Later, Medieval feudalism ushered in the parochial system, that is the individual village parish churches each with a dedicated priest. While daily ministry shifted to these local congregations, every parishioner and cleric had "their cathedral" that remained essential to the diocese and community.

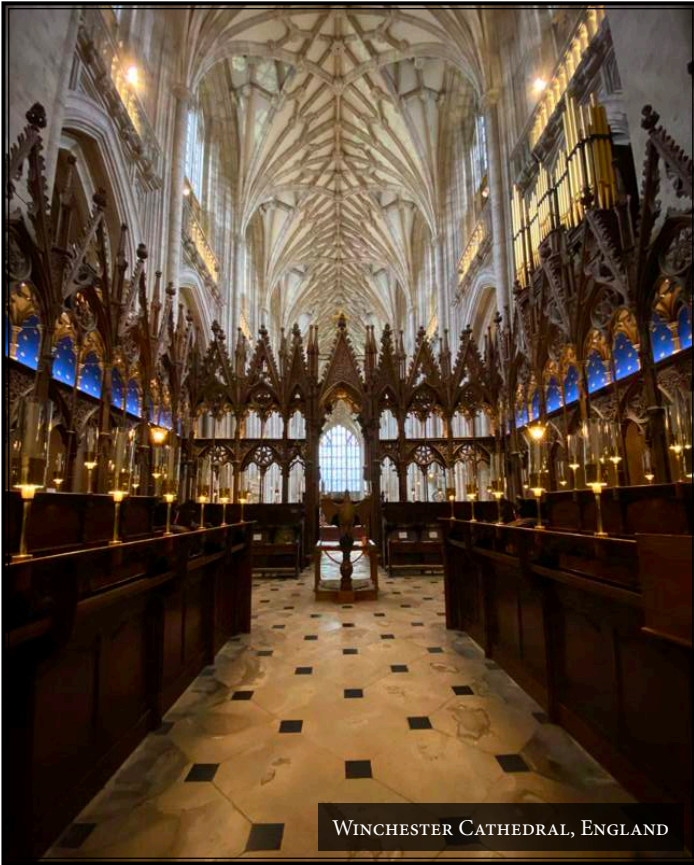
As strict monasticism became popular, some bishops converted their cathedrals and *minster* churches into monastic, or *religious*, chapters under a rigid rule of life, such as the Rule of Saint Benedict (Benedictines). Those that did not, called *secular*, continued to maintain a common rule of life, or *canon*, more amenable to the non-religious. These clergy came to be known as *canons* and created formal corporate governing bodies called a *College of Canons* at cathedrals and other large churches (*collegiate churches*). At the Reformation, all monastic cathedrals in England were secularized. All 42 British cathedrals and countless other collegiate institutions, bodies of clergy, lay *ministers* and singers maintain daily morning and evening prayer and observances of the Christian year.

The English cathedral model spread with the British Empire. However, because the cathedrals were associated with the monarchy, they were not popular among post-Revolution Americans. It wasn't until the late 1800s that Episcopalians realized the benefits cathedrals can play in the life of the Church, community, and nation. Though some dioceses never designated a cathedral, many did simply by elevating their largest parish church, though most have never had the collegiate life. Several purpose-built cathedrals were erected in the United States, though only a few come close to the choral and collegiate foundations of those in England, namely Washington National Cathedral and The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City.



YORK MINSTER CATHEDRAL, ENGLAND

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CATHEDRALS



The historic collegiate cathedral model can do what most parishes churches cannot. Perhaps even better than monasteries, they can best exemplify the fullness of the Christian life and Anglican tradition for the life of the average Christian. While I am not advocating for all cathedrals to mimic the formal and medieval character that typifies most in the Anglican tradition, it would be profitable to consider their historic character as we look to the future.

### *Liturgically*

Even though the 1662 Book of Common Prayer expectation was that all parish clergy publicly pray the Daily Office in their churches, most cathedrals are staffed to do it corporately and musically every day. Frankly, the people have the right to expect it from their cathedral. A cathedral without such a daily life is like visiting your favorite camp or retreat center when there are no sessions or guests. Aside from perhaps the daily office routines of staff, it feels empty and lifeless. As one would expect the Divine Office to be prayed in a monastery, such has been the expectation of cathedral churches through the ages. Such a shift must happen gradually and with the dedication of the clergy and staff, lest it becomes a burden. In addition to the great spiritual benefits, daily corporate prayer (particularly with music) will draw parishioners and visitors during the weekday and give them touch points with ministry staff. Furthermore, Christians are being urged in books like *The Benedict Option* to move near and interact more with their churches. It is not uncommon for some to dream of spending retired life living near their cathedral volunteering as stewards, docents, gardeners, “holy dusters,” broderers, or simply being a part of the worshiping community. It is far more appealing to move near a church

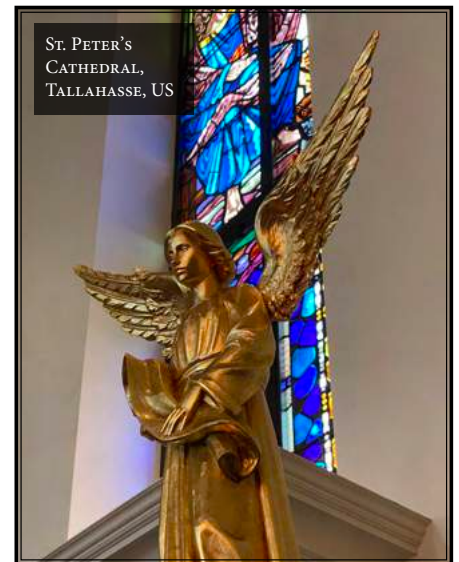
with beautiful daily worship in a sacred space than a church that, apart from Sunday morning and Wednesday evening, is empty.

Cathedrals have always served as an example for all aspects of liturgy and music. They serve as laboratories for music and liturgy and training grounds for new clergy and music scholars, all while maintaining fidelity to the prayer book rubrics and established norms. They have high standards of training, rehearsal, and dress for their servers, lectors, and singers. For better or for worse, what a cathedral does is assumed to be acceptable within the diocese. This typified elaborate and formal worship is commonly called *cathedral worship*. It is not necessarily synonymous with High Church or Anglo-Catholic churchmanship, but rather a style naturally fitting of such grand spaces with a large body of ministers and singers.

Cathedrals should embody the fullness of liturgical and musical expressions of the diocese, exceptionally for what can be referred to as *cathedral occasions*. These are the times when the parish will be filled with visitors from the diocese or greater community, such as diocesan synod, consecrations, ordinations, Lessons and Carols, Christmas, and Easter. At my former cathedral, which was grounded in organ and choral music, we brought in another parish’s praise team to sing communion music at diocesan synod, knowing that it would greatly edify the people and make them feel at home in their cathedral. It is not unusual for people (like me) to seek out and travel in search of traditional worship on major holy days, times when one might expect beloved seasonal hymns and a prayer book service. When there is none to be found at one’s parish church, they look to their cathedrals. Furthermore, on such visitor-heavy occasions, well-done timeless choral music is far more likely to attract the unchurched. While this is what many come to expect of cathedrals, parish-cathedrals should not seek to become something they are not. A more informal and contemporary setting can also bless people in a unique and personal way, but it is important to remember that the cathedral belongs to more than just its attached parish.

### *Physically*

Cathedrals are sacred spaces. Their very edifices point one to the majesty, mystery, and transcendence of God. Side chapels, prayer rooms, stained glass, carvings, tapestries, votives, stations of the cross, paintings, libraries, banners, gardens, courtyards, artifacts, columbaria, and memorials--there is plenty for the pilgrim to take in. They are living museums and bastions of the sacred arts. Not all can, nor should be, reminiscent of the gothic cathedrals of old. For example, the natural beauty and more rural character of Church of the Redeemer serves as sacred space and a reminder of our Creator in ways classic cathedral settings can’t.



## Educationally

The early collegiate and monastic cathedrals and churches were at the forefront of modern education. In fact, the ancient colleges like those at Cambridge and Oxford began as collegiate churches whose priests educated new clergy and “poor boys”—all of whom shared in their daily prayer life, often serving as singers and acolytes. Cathedrals host regular public lectures, special workshops, and bring in keynote speakers and preachers. They are home to some of the finest libraries and archives in the world. From traditional liberal arts colleges, theological institutes, and boarding schools to homeschooling co-operatives, technical training centers, and lay ministry, the boundless opportunities for education immersed in the Christian (and Anglican) life are exciting.

## Missionally

Mission-minded hospitality has been a priority at most cathedrals because they naturally bring the mission field to their front porches. People inherently know that cathedrals are always open to the passerby. Whether they come to pray or simply sight-see, they know that a visitor is just as much at home in a cathedral as a regular worshiper. Even many unchurched instinctively look for such public churches to go after times of tragedy, such as 9/11. My childhood cathedral volunteered to hold funerals for two victims of a mass shooting, bringing in hundreds of non-believers. Memorial Day, Veterans’ Day, baccalaureate services, services honoring specific groups (emergency personnel, teachers, doctors, etc.), and funerals for public officials—these missional liturgies bring people into the church who otherwise would not find themselves in such a space.

Many cathedrals, especially in the developing world, have guest houses, cafes, and bookstores, such as I have experienced in Nairobi and Cairo. Like daily prayer, this brings life to a place. Cathedral campuses are trusted physical and spiritual safe havens for foreign travelers. Many, including Anglican clergy, frequent Roman Catholic and Orthodox monasteries for personal or small group retreats. They are drawn to them over a hotel or resort because they are invited into the prayer, rest, work, study, and meals



GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL, ENGLAND

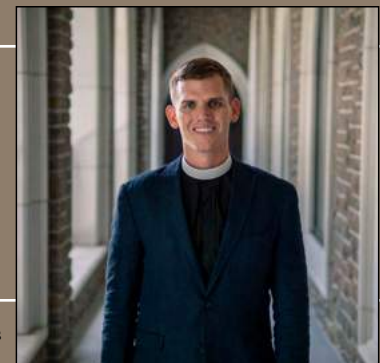
of the monastic chapter. How great it would be to have similar institutions throughout the Anglican world! Being at the intersection of three major interstate highway systems and in proximity to several major metropolitan areas, Church of the Redeemer is located in a prime resting place for Anglicans and others passing through. This presents incredible opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and embody Christian hospitality.

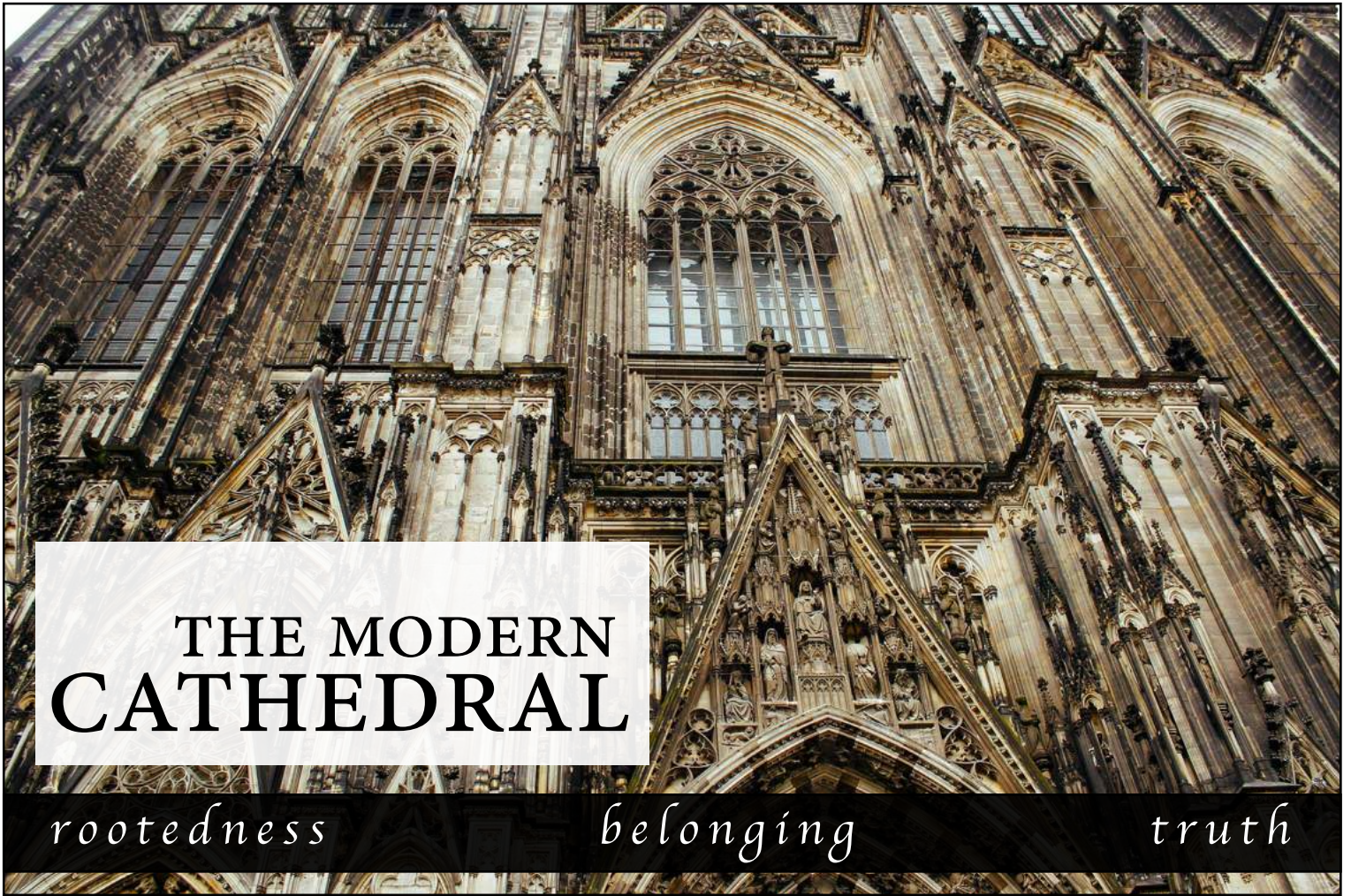
Are cathedrals important to the life of the Church and the Kingdom? They certainly are not essential to the faith, but they have been pivotal in the past and may uniquely be needed in our present time. In an age of subjective truth, destruction of tradition, and burgeoning hostility to the Christian faith, people are seeking to be more deeply connected to the ancient

truths and traditions of the Church. They are longing for community, especially within the Church, more than just a Sunday morning service or attractive programs. The idea of living life liturgically with fellow believers in the ancient patterns of our Christian ancestors is prompting people to leave their non-liturgical and “modern” churches for Anglicanism and like traditions.

As the Anglican Church of North America moves out of its infancy and are focused on parish church planting, we should consider the founding of other timeless church institutions, like cathedrals, that can better embody this spiritual life many people are seeking. Whether an inherited old cathedral, an elevated parish church, or a temporary pro-cathedral designation, simply having a dignified title and fancy chair does not do justice to the purpose of cathedrals in the life of the Church. Nor does a gorgeous edifice and professional choir prevent a place from being legalistic, fussy, and spiritually dead. Nonetheless, the Lord has used cathedrals to carry out the Great Commission all over the world for over 2000 years and will continue to do so as long as they seek to glorify Him. As you enter this new and exciting season, I pray the Lord will use Redeemer for his Glory and to bless Greensboro, the Diocese, and the whole Church.

CANON WES JAGOE has studied cathedrals for many years, visiting dozens in the U.S. and abroad. He previously was Canon for Worship at Saint Peter’s Cathedral in Tallahassee and his father was a canon at an Episcopal Cathedral. Canon Wes lives in Greenville, South Carolina, and currently serves as Canon and Chaplain to Archbishop Foley Beach. For more information about the history and role of Cathedrals and Collegiate Churches, please visit <https://thecloisterblog.com/resources>





# THE MODERN CATHEDRAL

*rootedness*

*belonging*

*truth*

by Reverend Dr. Les Fairfield

I remember an aerial photograph of Cologne in Germany, taken in the summer of 1945 after Allied bombing raids had flattened the city. Most of what we see in the picture is simply rubble: flat, hopeless and depressing. But in the middle of the photo stands Cologne Cathedral, deliberately left standing by the Allied bombers. The cathedral is stark, almost grotesque amidst the ruins, and seems strikingly symbolic of something. Defiance? Endurance? It certainly stands out and grabs one's attention.

Cathedrals are a bit like that today amidst Protestant America. Please don't hear me equating all American Protestant churches with rubble! Instead, I'm proposing that Protestant Christianity in this country is profoundly individualistic and the cathedral doesn't fit into that picture. I want to put forth for consideration the case that cathedrals in America – Anglican and Roman – embody three crucial values that most American Protestant communities are missing.

## HISTORY

At the most obvious and superficial level, cathedrals represent history. When – or perhaps if – most Americans think of cathedrals, most likely the picture that comes to mind is a big, strange-looking stone building that is very old. Even if they have seen cathedrals only in movies, like the *Harry Potter* scenes in Gloucester Cathedral, people associate cathedrals with history. Except maybe on the Fourth of July, most Americans don't spend much time thinking

about history. Everything in the Information Age shrieks against the past. Late-modern capitalism loves "creative destruction": Tear it down and build something new, and temporary. The news cycle keeps repeating, "Now this!" When my children were teenagers, the ultimate put-down was "That's so five minutes ago!" Our culture is amnesiac.

The problem with forgetting our history is that it makes us rootless, and often clueless. We're apt to be blown about by "every wind of doctrine," every "NEW!" fad that (briefly) catches our attention on social media. One recent study found that the average American adult has an attention span of eight seconds. That's just below goldfish, at nine. So we forget things. We forget – for example – that war kills people. That's partly the human condition, to forget. And then to pay in blood for our forgetfulness. Young soldiers in the French Army in 1913 had never experienced warfare. One of them cried, "Give me combat!" Then the Guns of August roared and killed the entire class of 1914 from St. Cyr, the French national military academy. I think of this when I hear people call for violence in America today. "The country is rotten to the core!" they scream. "It can't be fixed!" If only we would remember that our last Civil War killed three quarters of a million soldiers...

At the very least, the cathedral stands for memory. Like Cologne Cathedral in 1945, it stands – alone, if necessary – and cries, "Remember your past! Consider your history! Learn from your roots!"



## COMMUNITY

The Cathedral also stands for community. I don't mean just the local community: the school district, the Chamber of Commerce, or the volunteer fire department (although Robert Putnam's books, like *Bowling Alone*, remind us that even these are withering from our failure to participate). I'm thinking more of the wide-area community that facilitates belonging with people one wouldn't normally see every day.

Aggressive individualism is hard-wired in the DNA of most Americans (to mix several metaphors). The default setting of most Americans was and is individualism--"I am the basic building block of reality"--and Protestant churches have failed to overcome this pathology entirely. For most of Protestant Christians in America, "the Church" means the local congregation -- at most, because I can move to another church in a heartbeat if the one I (temporarily) attend doesn't "meet my needs." The absolutely sovereign "I" has a right to happiness, and that may mean migrating to louder music and better entertainment.

Contrarily, an Anglican cathedral reminds us of a stubborn reality beyond the "I" and the local congregation. It stands out like Cologne Cathedral amidst the rubble of Individualism. It says, "you belong to something bigger than yourself. Even bigger than your local mega-church. You belong to a community that you seldom if ever see. You belong to a family filled with people who aren't like you. You are not alone."

When I was a little boy, I sang in the children's choir at Grace Church in Amherst, MA in the diocese of Western Massachusetts. Once a year, all the junior choirs in the diocese gathered at Christ Church Cathedral in Springfield. We all dressed up in our cassocks and cottas, lined up by parishes outside the cathedral, and processed in. The biggest boy in each choir got to carry the parish banner. It was like a football crowd at Amherst College. It reminded me that I belonged to something really big, and loud. I loved it.

Cathedrals can bring big crowds together if we work at it. I served in the Anglican Diocese of New England after I retired from Trinity School for Ministry. Diocesan Synod at the pro-Cathedral in Amesbury, MA meant that we got to see people from the half-dozen East African congregations from our diocese in the crowd. We all saw that we belonged to people with relatives in Nairobi and Kampala and Dar Es Salaam. Though Anglicans might be sparse on the ground in spiritually stony New England, it was a hopeful reminder that we are part of a big family with brothers and sisters all over the world.

## AUTHORITY

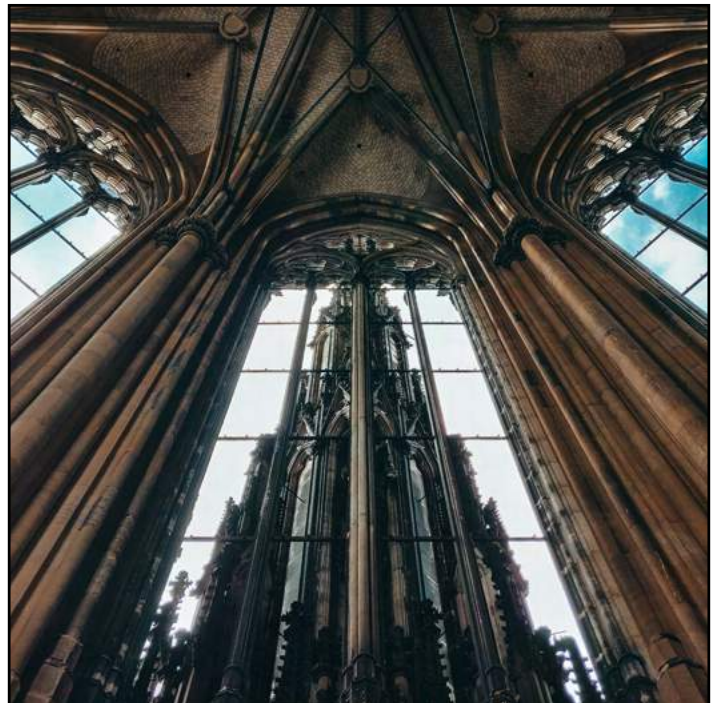
If history and community are out of fashion in America today, the third meaning of the cathedral is even more unpopular. That's authority -- and specifically authority outside of the self. I'm reminded of a scene from the movie *The Last of the Mohicans*, when the frontiersman Nathaniel Poe was listening to a British Army recruiter. "I appeal to you," the sergeant cried, "as loyal subjects of His Majesty, the King of England!" Poe muttered, "I don't consider myself subject to much."

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy famously claimed (in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 1992) that at "the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." That's New Age bloviation, not the Christian Story, which tells of one God of the Universe who revealed truth to the world through Jesus of Nazareth. Every individual has the freedom (thanks to the grace of the Holy Spirit) to affirm that story--or indeed to deny it, at our peril--but not to invent it.

Early on in Christian History--within three generations of Jesus' resurrection--communities of Christians in the Roman world found it useful and proper to elect a bishop in each city. Bishop Ignatius of Antioch argued powerfully around 110 AD that the bishop was charged to uphold and maintain the authentic Christian Story. In the swirling chaos of competing religions at the time, this principle of authority was crucial in preserving the faith once committed to the saints. Eventually, Christians were able to build churches instead of meeting in private homes. In the 300s AD, the bishop got a big church with a *cathedra* where he sat and taught his flock. The *cathedra* symbolized his authority to teach, keeping his flock headed in the same direction, and amazingly, it tended to work.

We must acknowledge unequivocally that there have been bad bishops. Sexually abusive bishops. Bishops who have made a career of tearing down the Christian Faith they had sworn to uphold. Bishops in the apostolic succession of Judas. But let's not permit the abuse of the bishop's office to undercut its proper use.

In conclusion, though ingrained individualism rebels at the idea, authoritative teaching is still needed in the Anglican Church today, as are history and community. The *cathedra* can serve as a powerful reminder of these needed things, but also has the opportunity to actually be the place to find and receive these gifts of rootedness, belonging, and truth.



THE REV. DR. LES FAIRFIELD IS PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF CHURCH HISTORY at Trinity School for Ministry in Amherst, PA. He has led thirty study tours in the British Isles and elsewhere, visiting familiar cathedrals like Canterbury and less well-known ruins like the one at Speitla in Tunisia.

# Hope



“The Darkling Thrush”  
by Thomas Hardy

I leant upon a coppice gate  
When Frost was spectre-grey,  
And Winter's dregs made desolate  
The weakening eye of day.  
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky  
Like strings of broken lyres,  
And all mankind that haunted nigh  
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be  
The Century's corpse outleant,  
His crypt the cloudy canopy,  
The wind his death-lament.  
The ancient pulse of germ and birth  
Was shrunken hard and dry,  
And every spirit upon earth  
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among  
The bleak twigs overhead  
In a full-hearted evensong  
Of joy illimited;  
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,  
In blast-beruffled plume,  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings  
Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
Afar or nigh around,  
That I could think there trembled through  
His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.



# ALL SAINTS' CATHEDRAL NAIROBI

There are 13 million Anglicans in the Anglican Church of Kenya but the Church is currently under-sourced in the ability to train leaders in and for their nation. Generation Z is unique in that its experience and identification is shared worldwide. With the impact this generation is having and will have on the future, All Saints' has recognized the importance of reaching this generation and chosen to adopt an expansive focus on training leaders of youth and children. With a vision to become the African hub for this type of training, All Saint's Cathedral in Nairobi embarked on a capital campaign that raised 10 million dollars for the work. Led by the Right Reverend Canon Dr. Sammy Wainaina, their vision is to be "A Christ-centered Cathedral" that "transforms people through the word of God."

In the season of Advent, we remember and rehearse the story of redemption--Jesus, the Light of the world, broke through the darkness and continues to do so in the lingering brokenness of this world. At the Farm, we get to rehearse this truth often. In seeds breaking through soil and buds opening into the light, we see God bringing new life through creation, giving us a foretaste of what is to come. We see this in the plants and creatures at the Farm, and we also see this in the people who come to volunteer with us. God is bringing about His Kingdom in and through His people as we gather together at this sacred place.

Jesus came to earth to bring about a Kingdom that is vastly different from this world that is wrought with division, sin, prejudice, and obstacles to intimate relationship. It seems there are few spaces where people of differing backgrounds, abilities, and ideologies can come together and find belonging. At times, it feels like so much is against us and our flourishing. But in Christ, we have been given a new life of abundance and hope. Jesus has invited us into a completely counter-cultural way of life. Instead of division, the love of Christ compels us to be people of reconciliation and love, to be unified, holding out our hands to one another and sharing our lives and what we have been given.

# KING DOM COME

Hopeful Community at the Farm

By Madison Miller



At the Farm, the counter-cultural Kingdom of God is evident in the cultivation of a space where unlikely groups of people come together to work, form friendship, and be the family of God. Each week, we are privileged to have volunteers who join us in tending to the land. As I work alongside people at the Farm, I witness wondrous things. I see people step away from isolation and into belonging. I see people find meaning in seasons of unemployment through their regular service at the Farm, grateful to get their hands dirty and make friends. I see young adults with disabilities cracking jokes that have us laughing as we plant flowers together. I see anxiety laid aside as we focus our attention on cultivating the life of a plant, or as we behold beauty. I see people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds working together, the boundary lines of this fallen world erased as we join hands in work and prayer. We share our reflections during morning prayer; we listen together; and we connect with one another despite the differences between the paths that brought us to this place. Together, we represent the Body of Christ. Jesus made this possible in His coming, and we live with great expectation and hope for the day He will finish the work He started. This is the end to which we are hoping: the people of God joined together in unity with no more obstacles or dividing lines between us. We will dwell with God and one another in peace.

There's a practice in agriculture, called companion planting, in which we sow different plants next to each other for optimal growth. Certain combinations of plants grown together make them more productive because of complementary characteristics or pest-repelling abilities. For example, we often plant tomatoes and basil next to each other, not because of the tasty combination (though that's a great bonus), but because they do better growing next to each other than on their own. The basil wards off flies and other pests that may harm the tomatoes. This is a mirror for our formation as the people of God. I see the community at the Farm as God's way of giving us companions for this journey, helping us overcome the sin and temptations that harm us, and planting us next to one another to help us thrive. When I am working alongside Bryce, I feel protected from taking myself too seriously, and I grow in humor and levity. When I am washing produce next to Marsha, the pests of cynicism can't reach me. Praying with Scotty, I am encouraged to see the goodness and generosity of God throughout the rest of my day. I could name many other volunteers and friends at the Farm that have aided my growth as a child of God, but the point is this: God loves His children. He is delighted when His people come together, and He uses our relationships with one another to grow us into His likeness. Each of us carry His image and He uses our unique stories and gifts to sharpen one another. I believe God is at work at the Farm, forming a community that looks different from this world, but flourishes because of our common faith in and love for God.

Our community at the Farm is not immune to challenges. Sometimes we lose patience with one another. Other times, we get too caught up in tasks and forget to pay attention to the people next to us. We sometimes miss opportunities to really see one another. We do not always get it right, and we are reminded that apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5). But we never lose hope that God will fulfill His promises and bring full restoration to our relationships, our community, and to the world. As we depend on Christ and continue to be open to one another, God forms us into a community that looks different from this world. We continue to

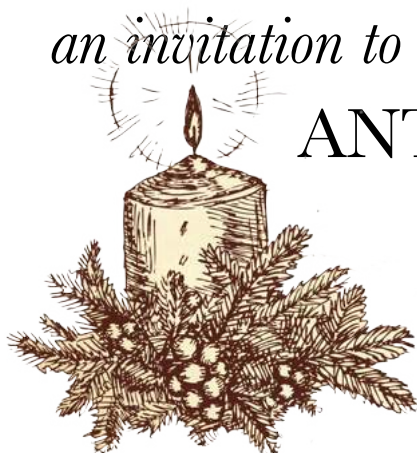
rehearse the story of redemption and are filled with hope when we collectively remember that God is making all things new. The Kingdom of God is coming to earth, on the sunshine days and the rainy ones. On our small piece of land, we are joining God in this work. We know this is the reality towards which we are heading: when the Kingdom will be fully realized. And until then, we practice hope in the garden, alongside our companions on this journey.



# ADVENT

## *an invitation to* HOPE & ANTICIPATION

by Father Jeff Weber



As Anglicans, we “tell time” differently. So much so, in fact, that we can find ourselves out of step with the rhythms of the world around us. This recalibration of time comes from the conviction that Jesus has changed everything—even the lens from which we see our world. So, beginning late November, we turn our clocks back once again and relive the incarnation—participating in a pilgrimage of hope that not only marks the beginning of our church year, but invites us into a season of anticipation and preparation for the one who is to become flesh and dwell among us. In the words of Saint Augustine, “Man’s maker was made man that He, Ruler of the stars, might nurse at His mother’s breast.” It is in this season that we find ourselves enriched as we relive this birth narrative, reminded anew of the sheer power of God’s redemptive presence in the midst of a culture longing for a home they cannot identify.

More than 2000 years have passed since the advent of Jesus, yet the profound implications of this historical event continue to guide our waking moments and, with similar assurance, give us peace in our rest. It is in the midst of such reflection that our own calling as individuals and as a church community, are challenged and renewed. This season’s invitation stretches beyond the mere reflection of an event to a calling to follow in the steps of Jesus by becoming the incarnational presence of God’s kingdom here on earth—an expression of God’s very presence in our world. What does that actually look like in our city in 2021? I invite you to take a few moments and reflect on that question—to consider the implications of this incarnational mystery in our current season of ministry at Church of the Redeemer.

Even a casual observation of our local context (Greensboro and the broader Piedmont Triad) reminds us that we are living in an unprecedented time in the history of our world. Today, we find ourselves in a city with an explosive international population that includes over 120 languages, representing 142 people groups. We are part of a larger kingdom story—the story of a God stirring the nations around the world—a divine disruption in the making. And what may appear at first glance as chaotic and unstable is ultimately recognized as the Gospel’s opportunity when seen through the lens of God’s sovereign design. God has never stirred the nations without a divine intent to reconstitute our globe in order that the Gospel might be more readily accessible. No tribe, nation, or tongue is excepted from this cosmic design. So, as we enter into this season of Advent we can be encouraged that ours is the privilege of joining with God in the extension of His wondrous grace to the nations.

Consider what he is doing around us. Already in our midst, He is establishing the church of East Africa as part of our parish and raising up a witness to the Arabic speaking community in the Triad through the birthing of a new parish congregation comprised of our friends from Sudan—all part of the larger family of Church of the Redeemer. And that is just the beginning. Recently, God has raised up potential new works in Urdu and Spanish as well as opening the doors to the people of Afghanistan who speak Dari and Pashto. God is using this worshipping community to become an incarnational, redemptive presence to our world as the peoples of the world assemble in our neighborhoods and within reach of our church campus. So why is God stirring the nations? Why has he set Redeemer at the intersection of so many nations? Why are you a part of this particular community of believers at this point in time? At least in part so that you might have the joy of joining in the very purposes of God in this world. Anticipating a second advent of king Jesus, the writer of Revelations envisions that purpose this way:

*“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).*



To that end, let's join together this Advent season in following the example of Jesus who made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. May this time of anticipation and preparation encourage and strengthen us as together, we reflect again on the mystery of God with us.

### **A Collect for the Nations Gathering in Our City**

HEAVENLY FATHER, from whom every family on earth derives its name, have mercy on all those who sojourn in this world. As you sheltered your Son Jesus who fled from the tyranny of Herod, so now provide new homes for all those who flee the violence of this age that they may know the peace of Christ. Grace your people with hearts of welcome and lives of courage through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*



# PEACE

A lush, mossy forest path with a waterfall in the background. The path is covered in fallen leaves and moss, leading towards a waterfall in the distance. The trees are thick and green, creating a dense canopy. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

“The Peace of Wild Things”  
by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.





# SAINT PETER'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL TALLAHASSEE

The gift of Saint Peter's Anglican Cathedral in Tallahassee, FL, is that of classical Anglican worship. Their focus on elegant artistic expression, particularly showcased through music, is part of a long and rich history in the Anglican tradition. Recordings of their Cathedral Choir can be found at [stpetersfl.com/choir](http://stpetersfl.com/choir). They embody the excellence of historical Anglican worship. Their stunning facility was built in 2017, and they are a destination for training in the tactile beauty of this worshiping tradition. The Dean of Saint Peter's is Father Marcus Kaiser and the cathedral's mission is "to reach Tallahassee and the world with the transforming love of Jesus Christ."

# MONASTICISM & PLACE MAKING

by Lena Van Wyk

I have a confession to make. I have a reality TV addiction. Not all reality TV, but one particular series of shows produced by the BBC that reenacts historical farming communities: Edwardian Farm, Victorian Farm, and (my favorite) Tudor Monastery Farm. These shows got me through the first month of my baby's life. Sleep deprived with an inconsolable baby, I spent hours rocking and feeding her while losing myself in the details of how to build a coppiced, woven fence for keeping sheep in 16th century style.

Tudor Monastery Farm is amazing fodder for an Anglican community trying to recreate ancient ways of being a land-centered parish that farms together and builds community rooted in place. The show demonstrates how British monasteries, before the Reformation, established sustainable agrarian communities by regulating how common space was used and shared. The church owned all the land and its parishioners farmed it, but not in a privatized way like we now think of farming. The community farmed together and church leaders stewarded wild spaces (woodlands, streams, fisheries, pastures) together so that no individual took more from the land than it could sustain over generations. The monasteries were not perfect or without corruption, but on the whole, historians agree that they preserved a stable way of rural life for many centuries.

This deep tie to place in British Christianity began in the first centuries of the church on the British Isles, in the 5th and 6th centuries, where evangelist monks often lived very close to the land in hermitages and monasteries in wild places, like the Isle of Iona off of the coast of Scotland in the case of St. Columba, or on rocky coastal cliffs in England in the case of St. Morwenna. Many of these saints were said to have miraculous interactions with animals and the rest of creation. One of the best books I read this summer, *Seven Holy Women: Conversations with Saints and Friends*, recounts how St. Morwenna was one of the first evangelists to Cornwall. As a way of establishing a church there, she lived on a seaside cliff in a hut. Every morning, she would travel down a treacherous path to the sea where she gathered rocks, which she put on her head and carried back up to the top of the cliff, where she built a church stone by stone--by herself! Now that's a dedicated woman of God. One day, when she stopped to rest halfway up the path, a new spring gushed forth: a miraculous sign of God's living water refreshing her and anointing the place!

As Michael Northcott chronicles in his book *Place Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities*, Celtic Christianity was deeply tied to the creation of sacred space from the very beginning: "For the Celts, as for the desert fathers, this work was not primarily for mortification of the flesh but a post-Edenic recreation of a paradisaical state in the wild lands where they created self-sufficient dwellings. [...] As Harold Massingham puts it, the Celtic churches of Britain took up a 'sanctification of the entire world of nature,' which provided as true an echo of the rural Christ of the gospels as could be found anywhere in Christendom."<sup>2</sup>

For almost ten centuries, the lands of the British Isles were shaped and formed by church-based communities. Monks and lay people worked together to develop farming techniques, care for local coppiced woodlands (a method of harvesting wood without killing the tree), and tending to pastures, waterways and fisheries. The church calendar and the agricultural calendar were deeply intertwined, with feast days connecting the biblical story and saint days to the rhythms of the agricultural year.

Though the birth of Anglicanism and other reformational expressions of the Church during the 16th century brought needed new life to the church, the political ramifications for the British Isles were not a wholly blessed thing. King Henry VIII resented the power that monasteries held, as they owned a third of the land in his kingdom, so he had them destroyed. Though there was corruption that indeed needed correcting, the utter destruction of this ancient system of religious and community life was unwise. As Northcott argues, "The Dissolution of the Monasteries, begun in England by Henry VIII and his chancellor Lord Wolsey between 1536 and 1541, was the seminal event in the breaks between nature and religion, food growing and urban living, town and countryside, that are implicated in the modern ecological crisis."

Essentially, after the crown took much of England's and Scotland's arable land away from the monasteries, it transferred it into the hands of aristocratic families, who converted it from small-scale farms that supported many families to vast estates for sheep grazing to make profitable wool. Thousands of rural people had to move off the land and into cities. This effect continued for centuries, referred to as "The Enclosures," and precipitated great migration into urban areas (fueling the industrial revolution) and to the Americas. This shift in agriculture also caused great ecological degradation due to deforestation and overgrazing, converting much of the United Kingdom into what ecologists call a "wet desert" devoid of much biodiversity.

As modern-day Anglicans at Church of the Redeemer, we have a chance to glean wisdom from the ancient roots of the Celtic Christianity that so shaped Anglicanism. We have an opportunity to form our own expression of church-based place making. As we become a pro-cathedral of our diocese, we have an opportunity to learn from our ancestors and practice the art of creating sacred space in a way that fosters ecological life and agricultural abundance.



1 Laura S. Jansson, et al. *Seven Holy Women: Conversations with Saints and Friends* (Munster, IN: Ancient Faith, 2020).

2 Michael S. Northcott. *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015) 30-31.

# EYES TO SEE

by Leah Wall

It would have been easy on that busy, normal day at Temple to miss them: a young family with their only child. A common sight: I'm sure they weren't the only ones. In the past 40 days, Mary had given birth to her first child. She and Joseph had packed up their belongings and traveled the dusty road to Jerusalem. Somewhere, they had found new lodgings, and hopefully a friend or two, while navigating the busy tax season in the big city. They must have traveled soon after the birth because they had come to the temple exactly 8 days after their son's birth. They were coming to fulfill the law and also to worship, presenting their child for circumcision and bestowing on him the name that had been commanded by the angel: Jesus. Understandably, at this time, they had arrived at the temple without much. Newborn life is hard. Traveling with a child is exhausting. And can you even imagine how they could have spoken together of the visit from the shepherds just a few weeks earlier?

The temple was a stunning place to worship. For over 1,000 years it had stood as a visible sign of God's faithfulness to His people. It was law and custom for a woman who had given birth to present herself there. Chapter 12 of Leviticus tells us what is required at this time: "And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtle-doves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering" (see Exodus 13 and Numbers 18). While this ceremony was mostly for the re-integration of the mother into the community, it was also a time of worship. It was a reminder that the children of the faithful belong to God. In a special way, the Jewish people dedicated their first-born. Mary and Joseph, likely anxious and weary, took what they had to offer to the place God had commanded them to gather. They could not afford a lamb. They wrapped up their son and carried him to the temple with their two-bird offering.

Mary proceeded through the purification rites and then, something surprising happened. What was a common event was made luminous with revelation. In the presence of the Christ child, a light began to shine in Simeon, the priest's eyes – a light he had never seen. Sometime before, God had promised that he would see It and when he does--this very special day--he chants or sings out: "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

A brief song of true peace! Luke 2 verse 27 tells us that it was the Holy Spirit that brought Simeon there at that moment. And by keeping in step with the Spirit of God, Simeon sees His light in the face of this child. So much of what happened in the temple--the prophecies, sacrifices, rituals, promises, even the architecture, all the works of God--pointed to the day that the Messiah would come. Simeon sees the fulfillment of it!



disappointing in some ways, when we read the story of this significant revelation! It seems as though barely anything happened at that moment. Yes – Simeon sees and rejoices! A prophetess, Anna, who is usually praying and fasting, comes up to them at this time as well. She is also enlightened by a mere glimpse of this child and the light of God turns to strength in her. It overflows into a proclamation of the truth of God in thanksgiving. Blessing! Peace! Light! Revelation! Redemption! Anna sees and gives thanks! Simeon has also seen, but where is the crowd? Why are there not many others seeing the light and being moved to rejoice in it?

In the face of these parents and their young child, Simeon and Anna had eyes to see the promise and hope of the ages. They saw the hope of the world. And, yet, in that Holy place of worship, even where all things pointed to the coming Messiah, only a few had eyes to see. My own experiences in parenthood remind me of this. With faithful looking, we can see the supernatural in the faces of those whom God has made, and with prayerful awareness, glimpse the fulfillment of God's promises in the lives of children as Simeon and Anna did in the Christ child: A thing of innocence and vulnerability, yet bursting with God's light.

How was the presence of God-in-flesh known only to two of the faithful people in the temple that day? It seems so obvious to us as we read the passage in our time, but if present in that moment, would we have counted ourselves among those who

had eyes to see the Christ child? Isaiah 11:6 says that a little child will lead us. This is a poignant reminder not only for Christmas-time. Jesus' own treatment of and words about children echo this same prophetic word. They will show you the way to the kingdom of God, he teaches in Luke 18, along with a sober warning about dismissing the child's perspective. What are we missing when we close our eyes or turn our faces from the small, the poor, the unexpected, the young? The wise leadership and incalculable value of such would be easy to miss.

How, like Simeon, can I be at truest peace, following the lead of the Spirit of God more closely? How, like Anna, can my hope and openness to the presence of God grow through the years? How, like Mary and Joseph, can I continue in faithfulness even when I am exhausted and have little to offer? Where do my own expectations of where to find God's presence or promises actually keep me from seeing the face of God? What can I do to prepare my mind and my sight so that I do not miss the light of God when it is shining right before me?



# Joy

“Joy”

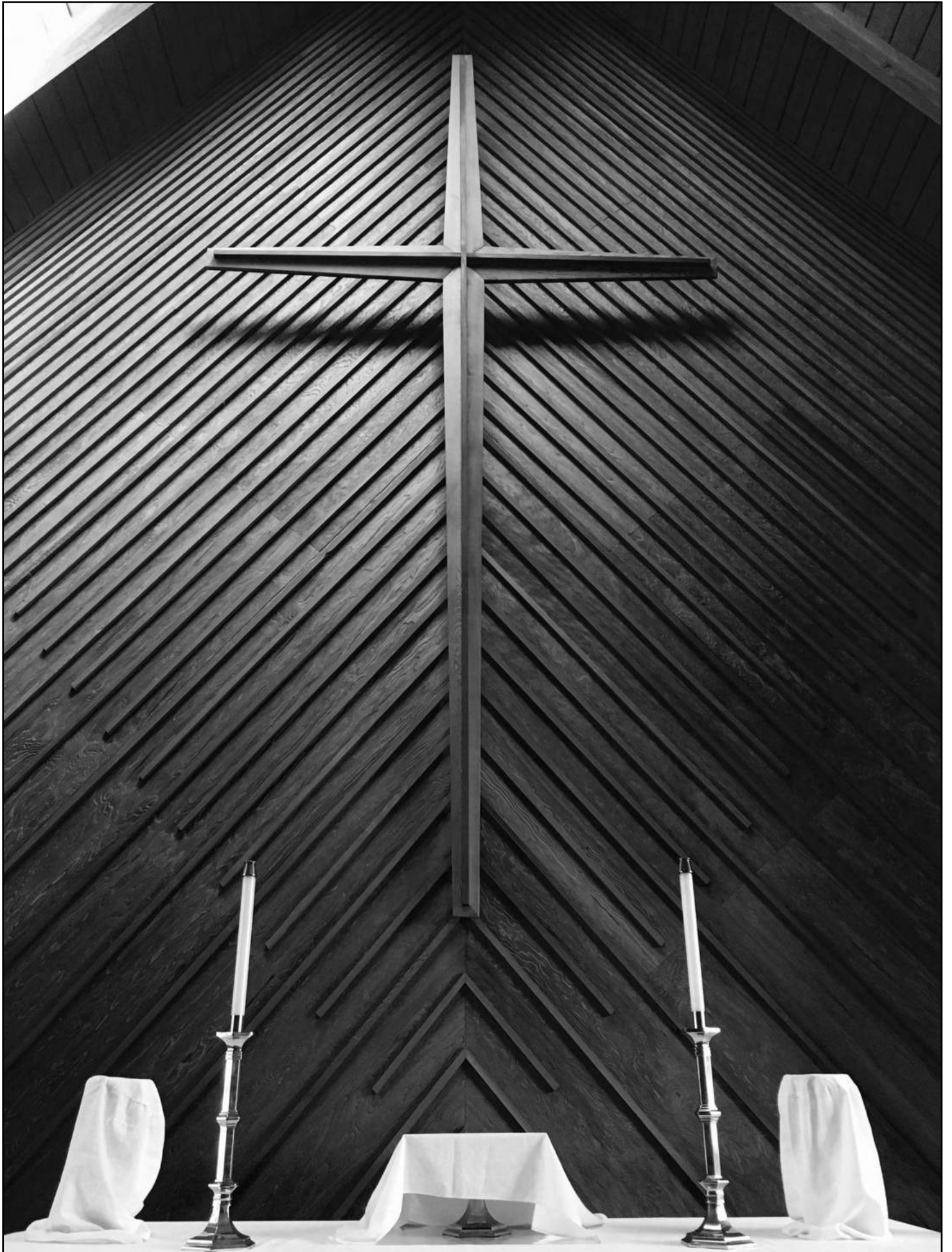
by Malcolm Guite

How does she come, my joy, when she comes walking  
Over the wasteland and the empty waves?  
She comes unbidden between sleep and waking,  
She comes like winter jasmine on cold graves,  
She comes like some swift wind, she fills my sails,  
And on we surge, cresting the wine-dark sea,  
The fine prow lifting, as my vessel heels,  
The tiller tugs and quivers, and I'm free  
Of all the land's long cares. As that brisk breeze  
Sings in the thrill and tremor of taut stays,  
So my heart's rigging, tuned and taut as these,  
Sings with the wind that freshens into praise.  
For when Joy comes, however brief her stay,  
She parts my lips, and I know how to pray.



# SAINT ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL SINGAPORE

Nestled in the heart of the city, Saint Andrew's Cathedral ministers to its vibrant and diverse city with five Sunday services--English, Hokkien, Indonesian, Mandarin, and Myanmar. This hugely multi ethnic community has a strong missional focus, serving as base for the church planting movement in Asia. To date they have established four new deaneries: One of these missional structures is in Nepal, formerly hostile to Christianity, where thousands of people have been baptized into the faith, and the others are in Cambodia, Thailand, and China. The Right Reverend Dr. Titus Chung was recently appointed dean of Saint Andrew's, and the Reverend Lewis Lew serves as Vicar.



# WE WILL FEAST IN THE HOUSE OF ZION:

## *A Culture of Thanksgiving Feasts at Redeemer*

by Jared Wensyel

**D**id you know that every Sunday is a holiday? From the earliest days of the church, Sunday has been sacred as the day of the resurrection. While we come together to celebrate Easter once a year, every Sunday is a kind of mini-Easter where we feast in the Eucharist: a word that derives from the Greek *eucharistia*, meaning “thanksgiving.” In this sacrament, we practice gratitude for what Christ has done, experience Christ in the present, and anticipate the day when we will feast with the Lord for eternity.

How would it change our perspective if we treated every Sunday as a celebration and not just as a day off from work? What kind of culture would we have if we saw church on Sunday not as something to do, but instead as a joyous feast of the Lord with our family, the Church? As with the holiday Thanksgiving, we may work together to make the feast happen, but at the end of the day, it is not cooking the food, prepping the table, playing football, or washing dishes after the meal which define the day. Instead, those acts of labor become part of the holy joy of the oneness we experience coming to a single table together.

On Sunday when we celebrate the Eucharist, we say the Mystery of the Faith together: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” There in our feast of thanksgiving exists all aspects of what we are doing: celebrating what Christ has done, is doing in our midst, and will do when he returns. Normally, the priest invites the church to the feast table with the words “The gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.” However, during certain seasons of the year, like Advent and Lent, we use an alternative invitation: “Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Every communion service is a thanksgiving feast of the family of God. And when we come together to do this, we are anticipating something greater:

“We will feast in the house of Zion  
We will sing with our hearts restored  
He has done great things, we will say together  
We will feast and weep no more”<sup>1</sup>

From the earliest days of the church, Sundays were not the only feast days. The church began to develop a calendar that extended the Sunday feast to other days of the year in which they would commemorate special moments in the life of Christ’s church. These included special moments from the Bible where they would celebrate the work of Christ in the life of biblical figures as well as special moments from the life of Christ himself which the church thought needed to be highlighted. As the history of the church developed, special figures from church history through whom Christ had done great works were added to this feasting calendar. And so, the church formed a calendar meant to cultivate a culture of thanksgiving as it celebrates what Christ has done in the lives of the great cloud of witnesses that came before us, is doing in our lives now, and will do when we are one day reunited with all the saints before the throne of God.

As this calendar developed, a culture of saints began to permeate the church which went beyond the original desire to commemorate the great cloud of witnesses and became a full system of prayer and intercession to the saints. In many ways, people felt closer to their preferred saints than to Christ as their Great High Priest.

As the Church of England went through the Reformation, they confronted the medieval church’s culture of praying to the saints, and instead of getting rid of feasting entirely, decided to preserve a calendar in the Book of Common Prayer of what were referred to as “red-letter feast days” (because they were printed in red text). They then printed “black-letter days” with optional commemorations of other saints and important figures from church history. The idea was that parishes, especially cathedrals, would commemorate the red-letter days whether in the context of communion services or daily offices, and then could choose if they wanted to celebrate optional black-letter days with those figures from church history who were most inspiring to the local body. This tradition continues in the 2019 Book of Common Prayer, in which one can find a calendar with red-letter feast days as well as two columns of optional commemorations, either those specific to Anglican tradition or those who are “ecumenical” (meaning relevant to all Christians).

Red-letter feasts commemorate New Testament figures or moments from Christ’s life. All days which commemorate figures from outside of the New Testament are considered optional. While most Anglican parishes these days don’t celebrate all red-letter feast days, services on those days, or celebrations of the daily office in personal contexts, follow lectionary readings and collect prayers specific to that day in the church year.

As Redeemer moves towards becoming a pro-cathedral for the Diocese of Christ our Hope, we will start celebrating many red-letter feast days: Most likely as an evening communion service. This is a great opportunity to extend our culture of thanksgiving to those who have the desire to participate—in our parish and in the community at large. As our community experiences an opportunity to develop a greater culture of Thanksgiving in celebrating Feast Days, may this habit form us and fill us with joy as we look forward to celebrating the Heavenly Feast together for eternity.

At the Lamb’s high feast we sing  
praise to our victorious King,  
who has washed us in the tide  
flowing from his pierced side;  
praise we him whose love divine  
gives his sacred blood for wine,  
gives his body for the feast,  
Christ the victim, Christ the priest.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “We Will Feast in the House of Zion,” Sandra McCracken

<sup>2</sup> “At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing,” translated by R. Campbell  
from the Latin *Ad regias Agni dapes* from the 4th Century

# SAINT STEPHEN'S DAY

by Leah Wall

After the long Advent wait, Christmas is full of feasting and celebration. For our family, and many others, there are visits with loved ones and gifts shared. If the food isn't the best we can do, it is at least easy so that there's room for other festivities. Rightfully, we rejoice! There is light in the midst of darkness! God has become man! The Prince of Peace has come to rule and the government is on His shoulders! We tuck little ones in, or call someone we love to say Merry Christmas to all, and go to sleep in heavenly peace.

On the morning of December 26, if you pray the daily office, you will begin your morning with a more somber note. It is another day of feasting and Christmas celebration, to be sure! But it is punctuated with reminders of something beyond the sentimental. Something that awakens us from our cheese and wine celebration into the truth of the power of Christ's life. It is a day of remembrance for St. Stephen, the first martyr of Christ's church. And it is strange that the early church, not recording his exact day of death, chose for the remembrance of that sacrifice to be the day after Christmas. You can read the story of Stephen in the book of Acts. Stephen was a deacon of the church. He is remembered especially for his fairness towards widows (Acts 6) and his angering of those teaching in the Synagogues (Acts 7).

His apology before the Sanhedrin (Acts chapter 7) is a powerful explanation of the way of Jesus. His defense of his faith before the rabbinic court angered the audience who were Jewish, and he was taken out of the city and stoned to death. His final words, like Jesus', were a prayer of forgiveness for those who killed him.

As I considered this chapter, I began to wonder why the church would choose to recall such a somber story on this day. Surely we could recall another moment in the history of the church that is more joyful or hopeful? But can we? I realized that my own sentimental, luxurious, American celebration might be getting in the way of understanding true celebration. I am reminded of what true celebration is--a word that implies a commemoration of an event, an honoring. The Christmas lights, silver and gold, and fires in the fireplace can be a part of that celebration. But the truest celebration will be based on and swirl around the action that deserves highest honor. Stephen, as a man who beheld the face of the incarnate Christ, offers himself up to Christ completely. He follows in the sacrifice of Christ who did not consider "equality with God something to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). Stephen does not consider his own life something to be clung to but "being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (Acts 7:55-56). What greater Christmas gift is there? What higher honor?

Through Advent, we have prayed for this. With the hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," we've prayed for "wisdom from on high" and "victory over the grave." We've prayed:



*O come, O Key of David, come  
and open wide our heavenly home.  
Make safe for us the heavenward road  
and bar the way to death's abode.*

We pray and long for these things. In Jesus, but also in the life and death of Stephen, we see them. We see his hope in the truth of Jesus and his victory over the grave. We see that his way to Jesus is safe – even from the stones of the enemy. And from his death, we see a seed planted in Saul who participates in his death. Saul, who later responds to the call of God to join his brother in faithful proclamation of the Kingdom of Jesus and in death.

*O come, O King of nations, bind  
in one the hearts of all mankind.  
Bid all our sad divisions cease  
and be yourself our King of Peace.*

Saul and Stephen, who were enemies, become bound together in the life of Christ. In the Collect of the day for December 26, we pray "Grant that in all our sufferings here upon earth we may love and forgive our enemies, looking steadfastly to Jesus Christ our Lord." In the life of Jesus, we see the fulfillment of our longing, as Stephen did, and we rejoice. We see that this celebration is not only for our loved ones and family but for all the world, even our enemies. In Stephen's story we continue in our true Christmas celebration and rejoice! For Emmanuel has come to the world.



# JESUS IS NEAR

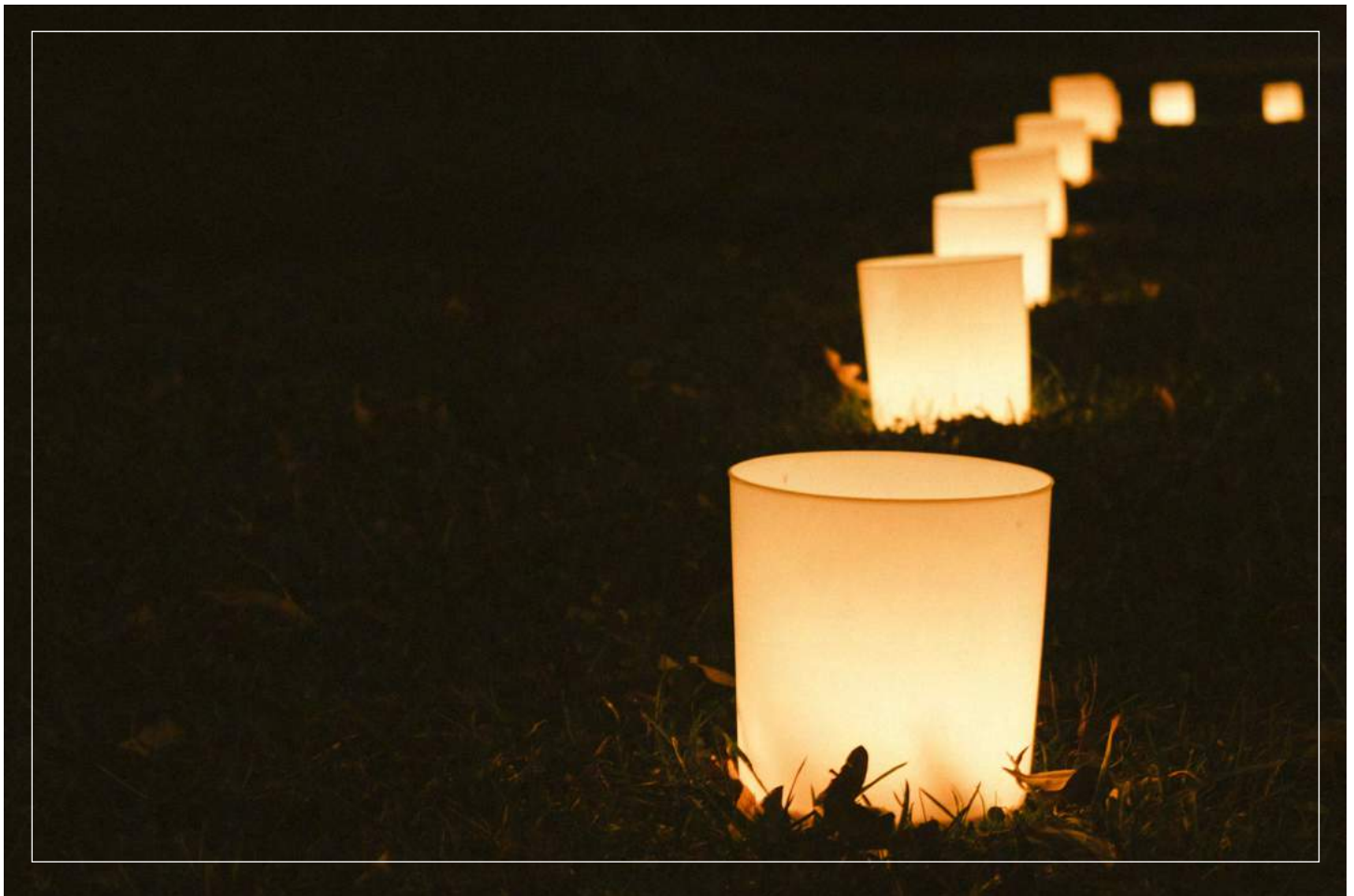
by Lisa McCowen


**M**y love of Advent goes back as far as my earliest childhood memory of worshipping at church. I've always loved the candles and special music, and the purples and blues signaling the season. Walking towards the darkest part of the year, I have felt deeply connected to the sense of longing, anticipation and preparation that mark the season. My heart offers a weekly amen to the celebration of hope, love, joy and peace found in Christ. I treasure the preparations for celebration of the Nativity of Christ, the opportunities to reflect on the Incarnation, and how Advent directs our hearts to when He will come again in glory.

This year, I see how my life is on an Advent track in a unique way. Along with a Greensboro cohort of others from our diocese, I entered a season of preparation in beginning seminary studies. Several years ago, the Lord began to direct my path toward ministry in the church. As I've served in a few capacities on staff, I've discerned a call to the diaconate and my ongoing desire for further theological equipping has only grown. With teenagers approaching college, moving or putting work on hold to pursue a degree didn't seem prudent. Holding this desire for more training before the Lord, I echoed the prayer of Hebrews 13:21--"may the

God of Peace...equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." The opportunity to begin an affordable program at a (mostly!) doable pace alongside other folks in ministry at my church and in other Anglican churches felt like a direct and specific answer to my prayer. The Lord saw my desire and made a way for me--in the middle of my mid-life vocational redirection, my work in ministry, my calling as a parent and spouse. Gratitude and joy are my response!

This season of preparation and anticipation will shape my Advent celebrations. The joy of studying God's Word and learning about His church (this fall: OT 500 - Introduction to the Old Testament and CH625 - Early Church History) will mark Gaudete Sunday. Each of the weekends our class gathers in person, I will give thanks for the incarnational presence of Jesus. The hospitality of Church of the Redeemer to host us as students, to make this opportunity possible, is a gift that will shape not only my next few Advents (Class of 2024!), but also my life and ministry in Jesus' name.





# FULLNESS OF JOY

by Bethany Lancaster

As a child, I was taught to admire art. Beauty was a way to experience God, whether in a museum, concert hall, or out in nature. On Sundays, however, beauty was considered a distraction. I grew up attending a small, non-denominational church that started in a middle school gym and later graduated to a chapel designed and built by the church body. The sanctuary was a windowless and utilitarian space, partly to keep costs down, but also to make sure focus was kept on the Scripture. I remember anytime we prayed or were encouraged to reflect, I would close my eyes tightly and try to corral my attention. Those times at church felt stifled and taxing for me, and I felt guilty that the quiet time habits developed at home didn't seem to translate to rich self-reflection at church.

During this period of spiritual stagnation, I began freelancing as a harpist. One of the first church services for which I was hired to play was Tenebrae at a small Disciples of Christ church. The sanctuary was hexagonal, with a beautiful pipe organ protruding from the wall opposite the stage. A string quartet, bassist, flutist, oboist, and myself gathered around the organ to form a small orchestra pit, while the choir stood behind us. Each wall had a stained glass pane that filled the center, stretching floor to ceiling, and every other wall of the sanctuary had a peak filled with more abstract color. The stained glass cast primary colors across the black walls, but soon that light display dimmed with the sunset.

We performed Dubois' *Seven Last Words of Christ*, and after each movement, a candle was extinguished. The audience sat surrounding the musicians, facing the stage, and with each solemn piece and dark chord, the weight in the room grew. Music bound me to the audience members, and I could feel their grief. It was my first Good Friday experience. When everyone quietly filed out at the end of the service, I had a better understanding of why Easter is so glorious. I had been taught to pray with my eyes closed, to block out the world around me and enter a spiritual space. That Tenebrae service taught me the importance of praying with my eyes open, drinking in beauty to commune with God.

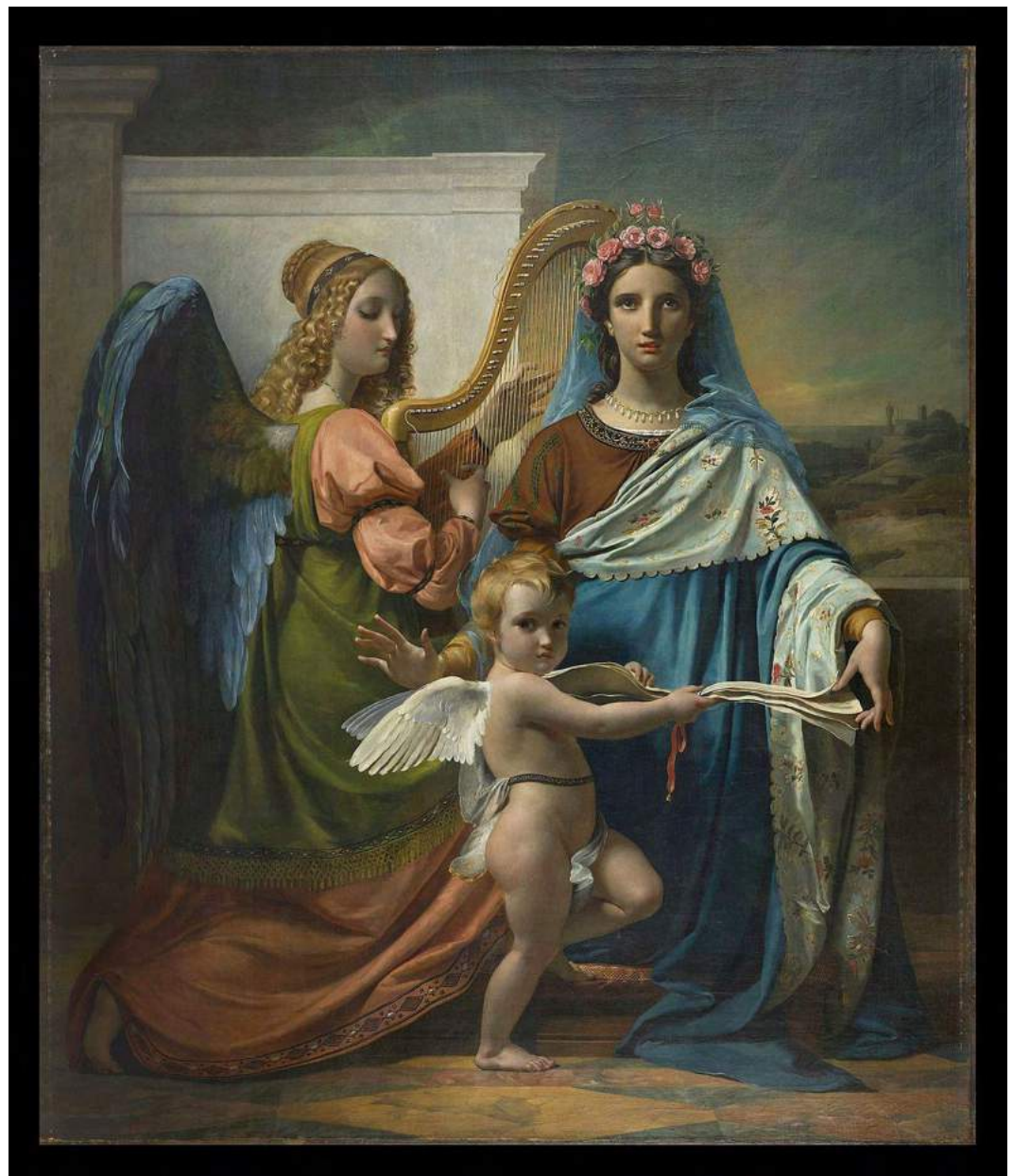
God created us to have emotions, to feel things, to be perceptive of beauty, and why should we not worship him in those things? We can fear our emotions because they can overwhelm us. We worry that we might be led astray by feelings, and so we seek to control them. While we shouldn't be ruled by our emotions, constantly trying to control them hinders our relationship with God. There is no shortage of ways to connect with God; fine art is not necessary for heartfelt worship. But, I believe art and the beauty it creates allows us to be overwhelmed by emotion, while keeping us from self-absorption. Sublime art reminds us that the omnipotent Creator wants to commune with us through every avenue; that He gives us good and beautiful things; that He invites us to create with Him.

Classical music has become devotional for me. Some of the most powerful encounters I've had with God have come through listening to and performing music. It acts upon me. The sound crashes into my ears and floods my mind. It arrests my attention, and in doing so, leaves me defenseless. In Classical music, there are often no lyrics to convey the message, or they might be in an unfamiliar language. For me, this mixture of being surrounded by beauty without a clear goal leads me into joy or into distress. In my defenseless state, I can be forced to face my fears, but God meets me there. He shows me something new in our relationship, or reminds me of His presence, and I'm led once again into joy.

One of the things I love about being Anglican is the way in which our tradition engages our minds and bodies. There's poetry in the liturgical prayers, and there's visual artistry in the different vestments, altar settings, and seasonal dossals. Anglicanism invites us to pray with our eyes open. We are called to taste and see that the Lord is good, and we can feel that goodness deeper still by allowing art to move us out of our selves into His presence.



*Saint Cecilia, a Roman martyr who became the patroness of music and musicians. Painting by Belgian François-Joseph Navez (1787-1869)*



# Love



“Christmas Eve”  
by Christina Rossetti

Christmas hath a darkness  
Brighter than the blazing noon,  
Christmas hath a chillness  
Warmer than the heat of June,  
Christmas hath a beauty  
Lovelier than the world can show:  
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,  
Brought for us so low.  
Earth, strike up your music,  
Birds that sing and bells that ring;  
Heaven hath answering music  
For all Angels soon to sing:  
Earth, put on your whitest  
Bridal robe of spotless snow:  
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,  
Brought for us so low.



# SAINT ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL SYDNEY

A historical British Anglican cathedral, Saint Andrew's in Sydney functions as a center for evangelical ministry. Its diocese is one of the preeminent mission-oriented dioceses in the world and has planted hundreds of churches. Saint Andrew's is a key catalyst for encouraging ministries across Sydney and houses vibrant youth, children, college, and church planting programs. Anchored amidst a very cosmopolitan city, it represents a low-church expression of Anglicanism in reaching its community. Led by the Reverend Canon Christopher Allan, the vision at Saint Andrew's is to "see Christ honoured as Lord and Saviour in every community."



# THE UNCHANGING RHYTHM

by the Right Rev. Canon Alan Hawkins

As I reflect on the community of Church of Redeemer, the work beneath our hands, and the coming shifts on the horizon for this family and the vision of New Garden Park (NGP), a French proverb comes to mind: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” In January of 2022, our church here in Greensboro North Carolina will be named a pro-cathedral of the Diocese of Christ Our Hope. While the language of this may perhaps feel confusing or even daunting, be assured that the aforementioned proverb rings true for this coming change. I do not deny that there is growth ahead of us on several fronts. But in many ways, this defining move is merely an expansion of the current and familiar form our community has always taken.

Over the past 13 years, I have watched Church of the Redeemer play an integral role in the Anglican conversation outside of our particular locality. We have always actively participated in the expansion of the Kingdom of God alongside our extended family the Anglican Church of North America. Through parish members (Glenn Wise, Jeff Whitworth and Trey Miller) serving on the Diocesan Council, and former Greenboro Fellows (Buddy Hocutt and Anne Spooner) serving as staff, we have participated in the formation of the Diocese of Christ our Hope. Additionally, our Next Generation team (Drew Hill, Melissa Lewkowicz and Cherie Weber) has served faithfully for several years connecting hundreds of youth from across various dioceses of the ACNA through Camp Booyah. I have also watched as Redeemer’s pursuit of various ministries and service has naturally expanded into a role of hosting, teaching, and leading: the Abbey at New Garden Park houses Jenny Noyes and New Wineskins Global Mission Network; NGP and lead catechist Leah Wall have welcomed folks from all over the country for training in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd; our parish administrator Jessie Meriwether has formed a network of administrators to encourage communication, com-

munity, and a sharing of ideas; Father Benjamin Wall serves on the Diocesan Deanery Leadership Team; and farm director Lena Van Wyk has counseled and consulted with a number of individuals, groups, and churches on Creation Care.

Hospitality has always been a pivotal piece of Redeemer’s DNA, and receiving the gift of NGP has seen this characteristic flourish and expand. Our facilities have hosted an Always Forward church planting event, Diocesan Synods, Deanery meetings, an ACNA Executive Committee meeting, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd trainings, a leadership gathering of the Arabic-speaking congregations of our diocese, and most recently, a Bishop’s Consecration Service.

I hope this helps you to see that the work and service that will be required of Redeemer as a pro-cathedral for the Diocese of Christ our Hope is merely a continuation of the ways we’ve already been involved over the years of our life as a church family. But as the French proverb goes, though things are staying the same at a core level, there are ways that we will experience change! This change essentially means that while we have already been serving the diocese and the larger church, as a pro-cathedral, we will have an expanded vision. Our involvement is no longer optional or happenstance, but a commitment to greater service of the Diocese of Christ our Hope and the Anglican family beyond. We will find our congregation, leaders, and facilities more and more integrated in the events and the mission of the Diocese. We will experience some internal changes in titles and responsibilities of leaders, services, and work of our community. But no matter what new things arise in the days ahead, be assured by the knowledge that even this new growth is blooming from that same seed planted at the heart of Redeemer from the very beginning: the intentions, the mission, the vision, the hope and the heart of the church are simply finding greater fruition in this new iteration of our life together.

To become a Bishop or a pro-Cathedral sounds fancy and prestigious. It would seem to carry with it an heir of importance and elevation. In some ways, this is true. But not in the way that one might think. Power in the Kingdom of God does not come to those who are above others, holding authority and wealth and prestige over those beneath them. Power is found in the act of giving from the hands and heart of a servant. “But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20: 26-28). So as we take on the role and title of pro-cathedral, let us recognize that this mantle is a call to greater service and humility.

Recently, two separate vestries--one from Tennessee and one from Virginia--came to visit our church to hear about and experience the work being done at New Garden Park. Since their visit, these churches have stepped more fully into their own Kingdom-building callings. This is just one example of many opportunities we have had to serve churches, colleges, schools, and individuals, offering opportunity and inspiration towards the work of God through their own lives. The work that God has given Redeemer to do is being used to empower and inspire other work around the country, and this influence will only grow as we step into the role of pro-cathedral. This is a humbling reality, and comes with it a soberness and responsibility. But I hope it is

clear to you that we are not being called into anything for which we have not been prepared. The groundwork for the future of our community was laid long ago. We have traveled towards it one step at a time and this is just another step forward on that same path.

In this age of craziness and confusion, we hold fast to the belief that the Church--led well and operating in health and faithfulness--is a balm to the aching soul of our culture. What's the solution to our many problems? It can't be found in the political realm. It's building healthy congregations that model energy, vitality, and service. What we do now in our parish is bigger than what happens in our city or even state. There are mission stations in more than 40 other places in our diocese. Our work together is global. We are part of the big Church. I hope you are able to have an expansive vision of what God is involving you in by making you a part of this pro-cathedral in Greensboro, North Carolina. At the end of the day, we're just a simple church--one group of believers preaching the word, loving our people, reaching out to our neighbors, and enjoying communion: one part of the Body of Christ that can bring transformation to a hurting world. We are merely being asked to be faithful to the part of this work right in front of us. Even though becoming a pro-cathedral may seem a big move, all big moves are made up of the small, daily steps we take forward in ministry, and even in this new mission we are stepping into, this is a rhythm that is unchanging.



# THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

by Andrew Gilmour

**A**s I walk through our local allotments here in Oxford and see the vegetable beds being prepared for the onset of winter, my mind moves to Greensboro and the farm at Church of the Redeemer. I wonder how the autumn harvest has gone and what's still in the beds. I wonder what visions the team have for the land after the relative quiet of winter. Many months ago when my family and I lined up our trip to y'all (have I earned the right to say that?!), our hopes and expectations simply had to do with seeing the farm ministry in action. Upon arrival, it quickly became obvious that our time with you as a community was going to touch our hearts in ways that we hadn't foreseen. Being able to write this piece for *The Table* is a welcomed chance for me to express the gratitude that we as a family feel for the way you received us, and also for your encouragement to reflect back to you how we witnessed love being manifested in your church family.

After waiting an eternity for our luggage at the airport, we arrived at the Hawkins home late at night and weary from travel. Angela Kaye beckoned us in to a delicious dinner and a warm welcome. The same kindness and hospitality poured forth from the Van Wagenens, who hosted us for the remainder of our stay. Elisabeth and I hadn't anticipated being so challenged by the hospitable love being shown to us, though we knew that the experience of being taken in by these families was going to linger with us as a testimony of what it means to open your home in a spirit of generosity. Day after day during our time in Greensboro, we encountered the love of Christ in the face of the church community. From the rich conversations I had with the farm staff while we flipped garden beds to the numerous invitations we received to join in on family activities or dinners. Two tangible reminders of this love and generosity made it back with me to this side of the pond. One is a bottle of Fishers Whiskey from the Wall family after a rich





evening of tri-tip steak and Evening Prayer! The other is a pair of Duluth work trousers (sorry--"pants") that Tony Nguyen bought for me at the end of my time on the farm. When I wear them in the future to work my allotment or tend my yard, I'll be reminded that love helps knit us together into the body of Christ, even beyond individual congregations and countries.

In and of themselves, these expressions of love--whether it be an invite to dinner or a bottle of Greensboro whiskey--may not seem all that out of the ordinary. But the cumulative effect on us as a family meant that by the end of our stay, we were blown away by the intentionality and kindness with which we were received. As I said above, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude for the welcome you gave us and how you've helped to shape our lives as

we think about future ministry. It also seems like an opportunity for us as outsiders to share our experience with you in order to remind you of the love that permeates your community. I'm reminded of Paul exhorting the Corinthians to "follow the way of love" (1 Cor 14:1): what he refers to in the previous chapter as "the most excellent way." As someone who has experienced first-hand the kindness, hospitality, and generosity of your community, I simply want to shout encouragement from the sideline that you go on pursuing, with greater depth and revelation, the most excellent way. As you come to the table of Lord together, as you open God's word and as you pray with and for one another, might you be fanning into flame this Christ-like love. May this love continue to move richly through you as a church family, and also spill out so that the lives of folks in Greensboro are touched.

**A NATIVE OF NORTHERN IRELAND**, Andrew now lives in Oxford, England with his wife Elisabeth and two young boys, Jesse and Gabriel. He is in his third year of training at Wycliffe Hall for ordination in the Church of England. In July 2022, the Gilmours will be moving one town over to Abingdon where Andrew will be starting as a curate at Christ Church Abingdon. Elisabeth is a lecturer in Spanish literature and cultural studies at the University of Bristol.



## ADVENT & THE ANXIOUS MILLENNIAL COWBOY

Some of my most vivid memories from childhood are of watching professional wrestling with my dad and younger brother. I remember my brother and I screaming with joy when my favorite wrestler, Sting (the “good guy”), would hit his opponent with any one of his signature moves. I also remember my brother and I sitting on our couch in our pajamas sobbing when another of our favorites, Ricky “The Dragon” Steamboat, was beaten by “bad guy” Ric Flair after Flair had cheated. My Dad’s only thought was to mock our investment by reminding us that “wrestling isn’t real,” but to borrow an often-quoted wrestling expression: “It was still real to us.”

As I grew up, wrestling became increasingly popular and would often be at the forefront of popular culture, producing stars like The Rock and Stone Cold Steve Austin, but by then I had garnered other interests. I mean, like my dad said, “it’s not even real.” So why devote time to it?

Fast forward to 2016 when I met a group of friends who were really into WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment). I went to a watch party for Wrestlemania 32 and had a blast. The wrestling itself was not terribly compelling, but there were a few characters that I latched onto and would even cosplay as for Halloween later that year. The shared experience was the thing I enjoyed the most, however. It held a balance between going to a sporting event with your friends and talking about your favorite TV show--a chord that professional wrestling can (and should) often strike.

I continued to follow the few wrestlers who were compelling to me, often through storylines that made little sense, but after all, the real payoff was getting together with cool people to laugh at the ridiculous bits and be wowed together by the sheer athleticism often on display. I was the definition of a casual fan--the equivalent of the guy who roots for a sports team but is only really into it when their team is winning. No shame, just not a die hard. But in mid-2018, something happened. Something that hadn’t happened in the pro-wrestling industry in nearly twenty years: A non-WWE wrestling event was put on by a group of wrestlers seeking to offer a different kind of product: a platform for wrestlers who valued creative expression. This event sold over 10,000 tickets and would plant the seeds of a new wrestling promotion. It proved there was an audience for a professional wrestling show that focused more

# REEL WORLD REVIEW by Mikey Fissel

on creative expression, both in and out of the ring. One that would produce engaging stories and create new wrestling stars instead of purely offering repetitive content from week to week, as WWE was known to do. This new promotion--All Elite Wrestling (AEW)--was officially announced in January of 2019.

Interest quickly increased to a point that later that year, AEW would look to crown their first ever AEW World Champion right before launching a weekly television show. This would ultimately come down to two competitors: a relatively new face, Adam “Hangman” Page, who was eager to win the belt, or the established wrestling icon Chris Jericho. Chris Jericho had been wrestling for decades and was a household name among people who followed the sport. On the other hand, Hangman was not a comical satire of a John Wayne cowboy, pretending to be a man out of time, but a young, exciting wrestler who embraced the mantra of a more modern type of cowboy. Hangman resembled a real person embracing the wild exuberance of the cowboy lifestyle with the reality that he still lived in our current world. He seemed like a regular guy who liked to laugh and have fun while also enjoying the freedom and solitude of life on a horse. In short, you would want to hang out with this guy (or run into him in an airport, like I did!), and brought an infectious intensity to the arena. It was a very exciting time--the launch of a new company along with the crowning of an inaugural champ. Who would they go with? It was certainly safer to go with the household name to establish the company, but a young, fresh wrestler could be the guy to build a company around for years to come. As might be evident, during 2019 I unconsciously shed my casual aura regarding wrestling and found myself once again well-invested.

The title match came and Jericho managed to defeat Hangman. Following this event, Hangman lost every major opportunity he either earned or was afforded over the next few months. As a result, he shifted from a cowboy swagger into mild depression. One of his friends, wrestler Kenny Omega, did come alongside him and they managed to win the tag team titles. Their matches were quite amazing, but every match slowly hinted at insecurities, either physical or mental, in Hangman. He began to show that he thought himself undeserving, even a little guilty, at the idea that the only reason he was succeeding was because his friends were allowing him to tag along.



He began to distance himself from his friends and drink a lot--played for laughs at first, it soon stopped being funny. Self-doubt crept in until it eventually wore him down. He eventually lost the tag team belts, and lashed out against his friends to the point that they abandoned him. This lack of confidence or trust in himself or anyone around him gave birth to an "Anxious Millennial Cowboy" persona.

By this point, I assume you're wondering why I have devoted so much time to explaining my pro-wrestling journey in an article dedicated to film and theology. Fair enough. The truth is, professional wrestling is no different than a movie, if done well. Culture changes over time and in films and wrestling alike, the stories we tell ourselves change as well. We no longer live in a hyper-macho, post-Cold War society that needs over-the-top good guys like Hulk Hogan or The Ultimate Warrior who are ready to "fight the foreign menace for America." The world that I, and subsequent generations, have grown up in is shaped by rapidly advancing technology, the vastness of the Internet, overwhelming amounts of entertainment and knowledge, and tragedies like 9/11 that have shaken our faith in our ideas about truth or security. The corresponding political, cultural, and ideological debates have left many people feeling discouraged, doubtful, and uncertain. It is enough to make any number of generations...well, anxious.

The season of Advent is approaching and it has become a meaningful time for me. Advent is counter-cultural: It asks us to evaluate who we truly are and remember that we are part of a greater story. Christ's story. It holds excitement about what is to come with the celebration of Christmas, but within its lingering anticipation can exist impatience and anxiety. We combat this with the practice of hope. Hope for the day when we "arrive," and all is made right with the world as it should be. This tension is often what makes the climax of our favorite stories so powerful. The greater the odds, the longer the struggle, the more we rejoice at our hero's victory. We're hardwired for it.

With this in mind, when we last checked in with Hangman, it was early 2020 and things weren't going his way. Our cowboy was friendless, aimless, and hopeless and in the world: the pandemic was exacting a very similar toll on people everywhere in the world. It became very easy to relate to this well-meaning guy who couldn't make sense of the world around him. Enter hope.

At his lowest point, Hangman was befriended by a group of misfits that called themselves "The Dark Order." Despite their name, at the time, they were a group who weren't very good on their own but had an almost childlike devotion to one an-

other that made them incredibly compelling. They opened their arms to Hangman and accepted and encouraged him, win or lose. They loved and supported him in spite of his own anxiety and self-doubt. They reminded him who he was and that his failures didn't define him. It would take a long time for Hangman to adjust the spiral that began in late 2019, but in November of 2021, at the AEW pay-per-view event *Full Gear*, after two years of struggling, Adam "Hangman" Page was finally set to have another shot at the AEW World Championship. Poetically, this time it was against his former friend and partner, Kenny Omega. Kenny had seen Hangman at his lowest point and assumed that he was weak and useless when in actuality, he was witnessing the important process of Hangman making sense of the world and his place in it.

I must admit, I was incredibly excited about *Full Gear*. I had hope that this hero would overcome. I didn't care that I was a grown man 100% emotionally invested in a fictional character. I didn't care that my dad's voice was in the back of my head trying to remind me that "it's not even real," because it *was* real to me. I had been along this journey as well, identifying with the confusion that comes with losing friends and not knowing if you've been the problem all along; or the need to be reminded of what it feels like to hope again in the midst of bad news after bad news breaking over a year of pandemic; I was with him in his struggle to find relationships and purpose in a world that always seems turned upside down yet never stops fighting--a cycle both inspiringly persistent and exhausting. There was Hangman, entering the ring to fight again for the championship, finally with all the confidence in the world that win or lose, he was doing the thing that he was made to do.

...And he won. The ensuing celebration was magnificent. His friends came to the ring to hoist him on their shoulders. Fans were jumping with joy, hugging, some even brought to tears in euphoria.

Advent literally means "the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event." A beautiful thing about Advent in the Christian calendar is that it's actually the start of the year for the Church. Much like Hangman Page's "arrival," Advent's culmination in the Christmas celebration is not the end of the story, but a new beginning.





**Church of the  
Redeemer**

New  
Garden  
Park

5572 Garden Village Way #17  
Greensboro, NC 27410



Worship † Community † Mission  
Visit us online at [www.redeemergso.org](http://www.redeemergso.org)



**Find us on Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/redeemergso](http://www.facebook.com/redeemergso)



**Follow us on Twitter:**  
[www.twitter.com/redeemergso](http://www.twitter.com/redeemergso)



**Follow us on Instagram:**  
[www.instagram.com/redeemergso](http://www.instagram.com/redeemergso)

Alan Hawkins  
Bishop  
[alan@redeemergso.org](mailto:alan@redeemergso.org)

Laura Fissel  
Managing Editor  
[laura@redeemergso.org](mailto:laura@redeemergso.org)