

(instrumental music) (uplifting instrumental music) (choir music) (instruments drowning out singers voice)

- Let the congregation stand and join together in reading from this alter number 609. Bless it be the Lord the God of Israel.

- For he has his people.

- And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us.

- For his house and his servant Jacob.

- As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets,

- Which affects his word again.

- That we should be saved from our enemies.

- And with it all that is evil.

- To perform the mercy promise to our forefathers.

- And to remember his holy covenant.

- To perform the oath which he swear to our forefather Abraham.

- That he will give us.

- That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies. (audience speak indistinctly)

- In holiness and righteousness before him. (audience speak indistinctly)

- Thou child shall be called the prophet of the highest. (audience speak indistinctly)

- To give knowledge of salvation onto his people.

- For the salvation of their sins.

- Through the tender mercy of our God.

- Whereby the last grain upon high anticipates.

- To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

- And their feet to where there is peace.

- Amen. (uplifting instrumental music) (uplifting choir music)

- I Love it we are all quite aware of the fact that an outbreak of flu has more than decimated the ranks of those who worship God in church on this Sunday throughout our land. However, we do plan to have the service of Christmas in word and music here in the University Chapel at eight o'clock today. Those of you who are worshipping here in chapel and who are worshipping with us by radio are cordially invited to come for what I am sure will be a very inspiring and beautiful rendition of Christmas. President Douglas Knight of the university had planned to be in the service this morning to bring greetings and welcome to Bishop William R. Keenan of the Raleigh area of the United Methodist church on his first visit here as preacher to the university service of worship in Duke Chapel. He has asked me to represent him in his inability to be here this morning. We do extend the Bishop Keenan a hearty welcome to this university and to this service of worship and to many others to follow we trust. He will deliver the sermon at the appointed time this morning. We are particularly grateful to him for coming this morning in view of the fact that he has just made his initial appearance out of the bed following a long siege of flu this week. And we are grateful to him for being here to preach for us this morning. And now let us give attention to the reading of the word of God as it pertains to the prophecy of Christmas and to the realization of it. First reading from Isaiah chapter 62, verses 10 through 12. Go through, go through the gates prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an in sign over the peoples. Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth, say to the daughter of Zion, behold your salvation comes. Behold his reward is with him and his recompense before him. And they shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord. And you shall be called sought out a city not forsaken. And then from the gospel, according to Luke chapter three beginning with verse one. In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Traconitis. In the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zachariah in the wilderness and he went into all the region about the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. As it is written in the book of the works of Isaiah the prophet, a voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill shall be brought low and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways shall be made smooth and all flesh shall see the salvation of God, amen. (uplifting music)

- The Lord be with you? (audience speak indistinctly) Let us pray. Oh God, our father who has brought us again to the glad season when we commemorate the birth of thy son Jesus Christ, grant that his spirit may be born anew in our hearts these days, that we made joyfully welcome him to reign over us. Open our ears that we may hear again the angelic chorus of old, open our lips that we too may sing with uplifted hearts. And we besiege thee to overcome our darkness with his light, our selfishness with his love, our indolence

and cowardice with his steadfast devotion that we may live ever as in by presence and perform faithfully our appointed tasks and finally coming to everlasting life through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Now let us pray together the prayer for the kingdom of God, from the pen of Walter Rauschenbusch, Christ now has bidden us pray for the coming of thy father's kingdom in which his righteousness shall be done on earth, we have treasured thy words but we have forgotten their meaning and thy great hope has grown dim in thy church. We blessed thee for the inspired souls of all angel ages, who saw far the shining city of God and by faith left the profit of the present to follow their vision. We rejoice today that the hope of these lonely hearts is becoming the clear faith of millions. Help us oh Lord in the courage of faith to seize what has now come so near that the glad day of God in Christ may dawn at last. As we have mastered nature that we might gain wealth, help us now to master the social relations of mankind that we may gain justice and the world of brothers for what shall it profit our nation if it gained numbers and riches and lose the sense of the living God and the joy of human brotherhood. Make us determined to live by truth and not by lies to found our common life on the eternal foundations of righteousness and love and no longer to prop the tottering house of wrong by legalized unrighteousness. Help us to make the welfare of all the supreme law of our hearts and of our land that so our Commonwealth may be built strong and secure in the love and competence of all its citizens. Cast down the throne of wrong and the greed, which ever grinds the life of men and set up thy throne oh Christ for thou it's dire that men might live. Show that airing children at last the way from the city of destruction to the city of love and fulfill the longings of the profits of all humanity. Our master once more we make thy faith, our prayer, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. And now let us pray that prayer as our savior has taught us. Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.

- It's my pleasure to be here this Sunday morning and to preach the first sermon that I will have preached in this chapel since moving to Raleigh. And may I take this opportunity to wish for you every one of you, a joyous and full Christmas, and may the new year be filled with satisfaction as you seek to do the will of God. Here the reading of a further passage from the New Testament, my soul doth magnify the Lord and my heart hath to rejoice in God my savior. But he has regarded the lowest state of his handmaiden and behold from henceforth all generation shall call me blessed. That he that is mighty has done for me great thing and holy is his name. He has gathered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their seat and then exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel according to his mercy, as he promised to our forefather Abraham and to his seed forever. The advent of Jesus Christ and the life in history was not good news to everyone who heard it when it took place. There were those no doubt who looked on it as the worst piece of bad news that they had ever heard or ever expected to hear in their lives. It came to them with the suddenness of an earthquake and the disaster of it lingered on their mind like some terrible records it comes from a cyclone. They were afraid of Jesus. And Mary gives voice to their complaint. When by prophecy she says, he will put down the mighty from their seat, the rich he will send empty away. Rare is the man who voluntarily relinquishes honor and responsibility who gives up power of his own free will. And rare still is the person who when he is being impoverished thanks his robbers for relieving him of the care which material goods imposes upon all of us. The reaction of king Herod to the birth of Jesus was not the same as

the reaction of the shepherd. And when we stop and consider seriously, this issue, we wonder why should have been the same. After all the shepherds had nothing, they worked hard their life was filled from toil from sun up to sun down. Even at night frequently, they spent that time on the hillside. They looked after their sheep in the light of the star. These were dispossessed people. They were people living in a land overrun by the farmer. They had been reduced to servitude, to the role of slaves on their own property. There was nothing that they might expect under their present state. So any change for them would have been welcome. Such people were born revolutionary, to bring about the revolution, they thought at least a better way of life than any they had known up to that time. But the situation with king Herod was quite different. He ruled onto the Romans to be sure, but they had given him everything that his heart might crave. He made such a good impression on Augusta Caesar that Caesar said about him, he's too big a man, but so small a kingdom. But this man did not qualify according to Jewish law. His reign was illegitimate. Therefore the coming of the Christ would put an end to his regime. He did not want to change. Revolution meant disaster. His life was a contradiction of everything represented in Jewish law. His way was the way of evil and the way of the transgressor is hard. So it depends really on what people wanted and on their status in life as to what they might expect from the advent of Jesus. And I think we make a mistake when is we read the Christmas lesson. We hear only the glory of the angels, only the lighthearted music of response as they sing in the sky and the shepherds looking to them for help. Only the adoration of the made high. And for that matter only God then asked him if he would give to us in the birth of his own dear son. There's the other side of Christmas as well. There is the inhospitality then innkeeper. There is the murderous conniving of King Herod. There is the terrible slaughter of the innocent along the streets of Bethlehem. There is Jesus exposure so that he had to flee for his life with his parents into Egypt. There is the indifference of the people. Well the majority of both in Jerusalem and Bethlehem were totally unaware of what was happening. They were all together indifferent to the birth of their savior. This strange for boarding in this Christmas story and as we celebrate this last Sunday on campus before you go home for your Christmas holidays, we all have to try to feel the import of the lesson. The impact of its meaning upon our life and upon our future. But one thing we see in Christmas, exactly what was to characterize the entire career of Jesus on earth. You see almost in miniature the full picture of our Lord's life and ministry here at Bethlehem. He was to be loved and despised. He was to be befriended and rejected. He was to be heard and disregarded. He was to be believed and mistrusted. He was to be worshiped as a God and then crucified as a criminal. That's what's been happening throughout all the sanctuaries of Christian history. The church as an institution representative of the life and teachings to Jesus. At least the church in her best hours purports to speak for him. More than that she tries to for him. But her mission of service should be the extension of his. Her corporate life, the continuation of his personal life. Her institutional existence, the perpetuation in time of the incarnation. But the church is not received and all from the church does not live up to her own idea. And she disregards frequently the purpose for which she was created to serve. We accept Jesus, we reject Jesus. And so society either looks to him for deliverance or society tries to kill him and to erase his name and fame from the records of mankind. It's not difficult to see why this is the case. You see it portrayed even in that first instance. Although he was born in a manger, though his first companions where the cattle in the stable, though all he knew was the heartache and deprivation of the poor, still that child was born a king. I guess artists get closer to the truth than the rest of us, artists see beyond the mere appearance of things, to the essence of meaning. And when they picked that little baby and show him in such crude and harsh surround, still they always paint a bright halo about his head as if to say, do not mistake the masquerade of earth, this

is the child of heaven. Do not see in this little one merely the signs of weakness and empathy, those tiny hands help the passion creation and this little one who's protected by his power is the protector of all life and all that is. Jesus was to preach a theme, the king is God and God rules absolutely and God expects of us perfect obedience to his will. We are his, we are his people, we are the sheep of his pastures. We should enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. But that's not the way man behave on earth. We don't look on life as an opportunity to run the service to our maker. We don't look at everything that comes to us as a chance to please God and to serve the neighbor. Rather we say, what opportunity is there in it for me? What advantage can I find? What will it lead towards my success? And we measure our success in terms of the jobs we hold and the salaries we receive. I remember some friends of mine, one Christmas, many years ago, invited me into their home and they had two small boys. The younger child was not even school-age at that time. And I brought him a present and we were talking about Christmas. And then I said, what are you gonna give to the poor children for Christmas? The Lord said it's more blessed to give than to receive. And that little child, not even school age, nonetheless knew what I meant because he started crying. And I said, well, what's wrong with you? He said, "Uncle Bill that may be all right for little baby Jesus," but he said "I want something out of Christmas. I want people to give presents to me. I don't care whether I give anything to anybody else or not." A little child shall lead them and the simplicity and honesty of childhood too frequently depict the attitude and the mood of all of us. This world is to be have. This world is an opportunity for us to make something out of it. This world gives us advantages that we want to take. And we don't care what disadvantage may fall to other people. Mary in her response to God in this beautiful song should represent what's typical of all Christians at Christmas. I can understand the place that Mary has in the devotional life of Roman Catholic. Mariology is a part of theology for the Roman Catholic. There are sometimes it looks more like Marioloque, but not when you really understand it. But this woman to them is precious because she was the mother of their savior. And Mary ought to be precious to us as well. For through her, God came us in time, out of her life comes the divine life to us. She is the symbol of heaven then front stir of the divine reaching the Hebrews. Now this song that Mary sang looks to us like a piano praise and so it is but we see it in the after light of history, we don't understand that as it actually happened in the course of her earthly career. Here was a young Jewish maiden, she purposed to marry and to have children of her own. She wanted to build a house and make out of that house a home. And then the angel of the Lord came to her and the glory of the Lord shone round about her and the angel said she would be the vehicle of God son's birth. She would be the means of God entering into the life of mankind. I don't imagine she was pleased with that news at first, she saw the wreckage of her own home. She saw the loss of her own dream. She saw the shattering of her hopes, but Mary was obedient. She knew that the divine purpose transcends any may human design and that to do the work of God is the highest advantage of man. So be it on me, Mary answered, behold the handmaid of the Lord. Not just Jesus advent in the history, but the way we receive his coming is important in the life of the Christian. The glory of advent and the beauty of Christmas lies much in our response as anything else. How are we to show our love of God and in showing that love of God, how are we to respond properly to our neighbor? I remember when I spent a sabbatical year in England, I came down with a British type of flu and I tell you it lasts much longer, worked harder on you than any American ran, I must've been sick a month, the cold weather, the dampness, that dark dreary days in winter time are terrible, you never see the sun. And I had three people that turned out to mean more to me than anybody else that I'd met that year. They were students at the university where I was trying to teach. One of them was from the Belgian Congo. He said he liked me, I was from the deep south in the

United States and he said, "I just started to feel a kinship with you." Another was a man studying to be a medical missionary. But he had been on Knox's storm trooper in the Jew. Follower of Hitler, he believed in what Hitler represented, but his whole life had been changed. And those two people together with a British nurse who never had a formal education, but she had learned the art of kindness, in a manner it was exquisite. Those people helped nurse me back to health and they became three of my best friends. And as I got well, just about this season of the year, the season of advent, I said to them, they had taught me as much about Christmas as I could ever possibly have learned. So they show, they knew how to receive the season. Say shall we yield him in costly devotion, all those of Eden made offerings divine, gems from the mountain and pearls from the ocean, mare from the forest and gold from the mine. Vainly we offer each ample ablation, vainly with gifts we yield his favors secure, rich are by far is the hearts adoration, there are the God, all the prayer for the poor. Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ we thank thee that thou has come to us and thou does bear the father's love and all the express image of his person. Bless us this holy season, we've besiege thee, and give us thy grace that we may respond to thy coming, and then in love and charity and service, we may represent thee always to our families where we pray in thy name and to thy savior, amen. (uplifting instrumental music) (choir music) (uplifting music) (uplifting instrumental music)

- Oh God, who through Christ became poor that we through his humiliation might become rich. We give thee hearty thanks for the abundance of the gift of Christ at Christmas time. And here we offer up to thee Lord, some small measure of gratitude and thanksgiving. Use these gifts oh God to the furtherance of the kingdom of Christ in the world. Amen. The love of God, the fellowship and communion of the holy spirit and the peace of Christ go with you and abide with you at this Christmas time, amen. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪