

(singing in foreign language) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (trumpets blaring) (traditional Catholic singing) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ (traditional Catholic singing) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (traditional Catholic singing) (traditional Gospel singing) (soft music)

- Grace and peace to you from the Lord Jesus Christ. We welcome you to this service of worship at Duke University Chapel on this first Sunday of Advent. I'd invite you to join us again in the very near future. We are pleased to welcome the Broughtin Carolina Spirit Choral Ensemble from Broughtin High School in Raleigh, North Carolina to this service of worship today. This is their fifth year to participate in services here at the chapel, and we are very grateful for their lively contribution to our service. I would draw your attention to the other announcements as they are printed in the bulletin. And now hear these words of scripture as we prepare for worship. It is full time now for you to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone. The day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. Amen. (soft music) (traditional Catholic singing) When we examine our lives and are honest with ourselves, we come face to face with our many shortcomings and become aware of how far we have fallen short of God's righteousness. With humble and penitent hearts, let us make our confession before Almighty God and one another. Be seated. Oh Almighty God, who has taught us that the night is far spent and the day is at hand, we humbly confess that we have not loved thee with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. And that we have not loved one another as Christ has loved us. Thy life is within our souls. But our selfishness hath hindered thee. We have not lived by faith. We have resisted thy Spirit. We have neglected thine inspirations. Forgive what we have been. Help us to amend what we are. And in thy Spirit, direct what we shall be, that thou mayest come into the full glory of thy creation in us and in all people. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. Hear the good news. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That as God's own proof of His love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

- Thank Jesus Christ.

- Let us pray. Open our hearts and minds, oh God by the power of your Holy Spirit, so that as the word is read and proclaimed, we might hear with joy what you say to us this day. Amen. The first lesson this morning is taken from the book of Jeremiah. Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring forth for David. And he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called. The Lord is our righteousness. Here ends the reading of the first lesson.

- Our psalter lesson this morning is taken from Psalm 25. Will you please stand and join me in this reading. To thee oh Lord, I lift up my soul. (congregation reading out loud) Make me to know thy ways oh Lord. Teach me thy paths. (congregation reading out loud) Be mindful of thy mercy oh Lord, of thy steadfast law. For

they have been from of old. (congregation reading out loud) The Lord leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. (soft music) (traditional Catholic singing)

- The second lesson is taken from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. For what thanksgiving can we render to God for you? For all the joy which we feel for your sake before God, praying earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father, Himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you so that he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. Here ends the reading of the second lesson. ♪ Lord we give thanks to thee ♪ ♪ We give thanks to thee for these, thy servants ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah amen ♪ ♪ Hallelujah amen ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah amen ♪ (traditional Catholic singing) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ (traditional Catholic singing) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ (traditional Catholic singing) ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Lord we give thanks to thee ♪ ♪ We give thanks to thee for these, thy servants ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah amen ♪ ♪ Hallelujah amen ♪ ♪ Hallelujah, hallelujah ♪ ♪ Hallelujah ♪ Amen ♪ A reading from the Gospel according to Saint Luke. And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth, distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves. Man, fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the son of man coming in a cloud with power and glory. Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near. And he told them a parable. Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life. And that day come upon you suddenly, like a snare. For it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. But watch at all times. Praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the son of man. Here ends the reading of the lesson. With the possible exception of the weather, it seems there are few topics of more general interest than time. People worry about it. Legislators argue about it. Total strangers converse about it. I have a good friend who swears he met his wife by asking her what time it was. I was recently accosted on one of my rare forays to the fabric shop by a woman who was desperate to express her anxieties about time. Can you believe it's that time of year again already? Why it just seems like yesterday that we took that Christmas tree down. I don't know how I'll ever get it all done. Things used to be less complicated, but they just get worse every year. If misery loves company, she certainly must have been comforted after this outburst, for her anxiety was infectious. By the time I had left the store, I along with a clerk and at least two other shoppers were convinced, practically, that there was no hope left in this season of hope. Under very different circumstances, I entered into another conversation about time and that was with my 13 year old nephew. Can you believe I'm going to be 14 next week, he said. His enthusiasm caught me off guard. Having reached the point where I celebrate birthdays a little less exuberantly, I had to ponder his question for a moment. Yes, I can believe you'll be 14 next week. As a matter of fact, I remember the day you were born. So

what's so great about being 14 anyway, I asked, revealing just how little I knew about his world view. Because then I'm only two years away from getting a drivers license. Of course, I mumbled. Embarrassed to have forgotten the thrill of reaching one of time's great milestones, a 16th birthday. What a remarkable contrast to the woman in the fabric shop. While my nephew could hardly wait to charge straight ahead into the future, she simply dreaded it. Clearly we are all time bound in this earthly existence of ours. And some seem to cope with it better than others. You Steven Spielberg fans will remember what a strong case he made in *Back to the Future*. For the option of going backward or forward in time at the push of a button. It was an intriguing possibility, but I for one was just as glad to walk out of the theater and know it was the year 1985. For the marking of time is important in ordering our lives and reflecting upon life's deeper meaning. Consider the effort this year alone that has gone into celebrating the 50th anniversary of Duke Chapel. The 40th anniversary at the end of World War Two, and the 300 birthdays of Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti. Especially during the upcoming holiday season, many of us will note the passing of time as memories take us back to the days when memories began. Our first Christmas stocking. The year Santa brought a real bike with training wheels. Baby's first Christmas. Christmas after the death of a loved one. It's one of the trademarks of the season. A time for remembering, and that helps us to know who we are. Likewise in the church, we mark time by the use of the liturgical calendar as a way of remembering who we are as the people of God. Today, the first Sunday of Advent, ushers in not only a new season, but a brand new liturgical year. But unlike a calendar which like a clock measures kronos, humanity's time, this new beginning in the church calendar points us towards kyros, God's time. Time beyond time. Whereas the month of December may prompt us to reflect upon past Decembers, the season of advent challenges us to look both to our past and to our future. And here in lies a common misunderstanding of this season. Advent is not all sweetness and light as we await the silent rushing of angel's wings on Christmas Eve. It is a time of prayerful, attentive watching in the darkness. Though it represents a beginning, we ponder the ending, the ending of all history. According to our gospel lesson, there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth, distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves. Man fainting with fear. And with foreboding of what is coming in the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Advent for all of its delights is therefore a time of great tension. Even as we give thanks for the gift of the infant Christ born in a manger, we patiently watch for the coming of the risen Christ on clouds descending. The streams of silent night, holy night may tempt us to look toward the past. Yet our opening hymn anchors us in the point of today's gospel reading. As it calls us to look toward the future. Every eye shall now behold Him, robed in dreadful majesty. Those who set at naught and sold Him, pierced and nailed Him to the tree, deeply wailing, deeply wailing shall the true Messiah see. It could be said that liturgically speaking, Advent is often the most unsuccessful fragment of the church year. And why should this be the case? One very good reason may be our preference for a pastoral nativity scene over depictions of the end of history. Aren't most of us set on edge by groups that claim to know the exact way and means by which the end will come? I heard of a man who was worried about whether his feet would be wafted from the earth before Jesus touched ground. We smile at such literalism. Yet the simple fact is that none of us know what to expect. What we do know is that the coming of the kingdom is creation coming to be what it was meant to be. The joy and glory of all creation, working together with the creator. It implies the redemption, not the destruction of creation. As the scripture read today, now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near. I once heard this analogy applied to the second coming. If no one on a given planet could see, the other senses would take over and everyone would get

along just fine. But if you try to explain the joy of seeing to a resident on that planet, it could not be done. No one could understand something so glorious, who didn't have the proper frame of reference. Multiply that gap between a blind planet and a seeing one, a billion times and we'll still be far from understanding the difference between creation now and creation in the fullness of the kingdom. Is it possible that with this kind of fulfillment to anticipate we might learn to look forward to God's final reign with joy? Not simply with dread? The second battle that advocates for advent must fight is with the overwhelming power of nostalgia. Memories that get carried away. Bill Meal who is homolytics professor at Yale Divinity School, has declared Advent a season of profound nostalgia. According to Mr. Meal, we begin to sing come thou long expected Jesus, but it sounds strangely like Jingle Bells, the way Jingle Bells used to sound when faith was easy because we had seen Santa Claus at Sears. With the best of intentions, we try to work up a mood of expectation, but find ourselves trying to remember, did it really snow every Christmas Eve when we were young? Lectionary and liturgy to the contrary notwithstanding, the prevailing mood of advent is often a memory of earlier expectations. Not a renewal of the anticipation of Christ's return, but a nostalgic attempt to replay days gone by. It was said by the likes of Augustine or Aquinas that nostalgia should be numbered among the mortal sins. Perhaps, rightly so. The recurring homesickness to which are all subject can mortgage the possibilities of the future to the emotional engagements of the past. Our memories inevitably record the sunny hours and make a hobby of invidious comparisons. No shore ahead is ever as lovely as the recollection as one left unwillingly behind. No challenges seem quite as stirring. No friends as faithful, no teachers as profound as those enshrined in the desire to go back in time. Nostalgia can turn memory against us and make yesterday the template for tomorrow. On this first, a new year, we come to the Lord's table both to remember who we are and to anticipate who we will be. Not with the sentimental glow peculiar to evergreens and soft candlelight in church. But with a conviction to work for the kingdom we so anxiously await. If we long for God's final shalom and justice, peace, righteousness, and reconciliation, the day when the wolf will lie down with the lamb and a little child shall lead them. Then let us live as if we believe it. For in remembering the babe in the manger, we recognize the kind of kingdom he first introduced and calls us to be a part of. Even as we await its consummation, we either prepare the way through our own participation in God's promise, or we obstruct it through our own obliviousness. A story was once told about a nursery school Christmas pageant by the proud father of one of the participants. As the characters began their processional onto the stage, a vague uneasiness came over me, says the father. From the wings came three virgin Mary's, prompting him to ask his wife, why are there three of them? Because they have three virgin Mary costumes of course, she said. And as the logic of nursery school pageants go, there had to be therefore three virgins. The Mary's were followed by two Josephs who took up their sullen postures near the box of straw and began to make embarrassing gestures. Next came the angels, about 20 little girls dressed in diaphanous white gowns, flaunting amidst gauze wings. They were followed by an equal number of little boys dressed in burlap sacks who clutched an assortment of makeshift crooks. About this time, just as the angels were deploying themselves with holy aplomb across the stage, it came to the attention of the shepherds that the marks on the stage, which the teacher had instructed them to stand on were being covered up by the angels. No one had foreseen that the angels, as they descended upon the stable in their long, flowing robes would cover not only their circles but the adjacent crosses meant for the shepherds to stand on. The shepherds, driven by their relentless determination to do what they had been told began frantically looking for their places on the stage. And you can well imagine, the angels were shocked by just disrespectful treatment at the hands of shepherds of all people. At last one little boy, desperate to create

order out of chaos, turned to his teacher in the wings and announced angrily, those damned angels are fouling up the whole show. They've hidden all the crosses. Needless to say, according to the teller of this tale, his mother and I were greatly embarrassed. Shall this advent be for us a time to conceal or to reveal the crosses so discretely intermingled in our world? Shall we prepare the way of the Lord or obstruct it through out participation or lack there of and the promises of God. We are indeed damned angels in the words of the shepherd boy. Possessors of gifts and insights which we turn to works of destruction. Victims of burdens and infirmities, which can become occasions for glory. With the best of intentions, we do the worst of things. And then almost by accident, perform miracles of love. Our flesh drives and afflicts us from birth to death. And we have the gall to affirm that it once sheltered the eternal. Mortal creatures that we are, we even transcend the shackles of time in those moments of selfless giving. A mere glimpse of the immortality still to be revealed in Christ's final glory. What time is it? The night is far spent and the day is at hand. Come Lord Jesus, do we dare cry? Lord Jesus, quickly come. (soft music)