

- Good morning, we'd like to welcome you to this first Sunday of Advent and Duke Chapel. Like to call your attention to the Advent wreath which reminds us of God's eternal, never ending presence with us. You'll notice that there are four candles, one of which will be lit for each week of Advent, reminding us of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, which we receive a new this Advent season. The reeds on either side of the front entrance of the chapel, the Advent wreath and the red poinsettias had been made possible by the Elizabeth Luciana girl from Memorial endowment established by Dr. and Mrs. James H. Siemens. We are grateful to them for their contributions to our Advent season. Like to also call to your attention that The Messiah will be performed this coming weekend on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and we hope that you will be able to attend that joyous occasion. Would you please stand as we continue our worship with the greeting. I hear what the Lord God has to say. (congregation speaking) Peace for all people and for God's friends. (congregation speaking) Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord. (congregation speaking) (religious orchestral music)

- Let us pray if you will turn to your hymn notes 89. Let us confess together. Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you into word and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Have mercy on us and forgive us. That we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of Your name. Amen. Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you of all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness and by all power of the Holy Spirit, keep you in eternal life, Amen. You may be seated.

- Let us pray together the prayer for illumination. 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 be prepared for your Advent among us, Amen. The reading from the Old Testament is taken from the 64th chapter of the book of Isaiah, verses one through nine. Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake at your presence, as when fire kindles brushwood. And the fire causes water to boil, to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence. When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down the mountains quaked at your presence. from ages past, no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways, but you were angry and we sinned, because you hid yourself, we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name or attempts to take hold of you. For you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, You are our Father, we are the clay, and you are our Potter. We are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider we are all your people. This is the word of the Lord. (congregation speaking) This reading is from the Gospel according to St. Mark, chapter 13, beginning with the 24th verse. But in those days after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon

will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of heaven. From the fig leaf learn its lesson. As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his own work and commands the door keeper to be on watch. Therefore, keep awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come in the evening or at midnight, or at cock crow or at dawn. Or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all, keep awake. This is the Word of the Lord.

- Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The first day of the Christian year, the Christian New Year. It is an important day in the Christian calendar, yet it has lost much of its significance for us. We are here today still slightly stuffed from thanksgiving and our eyes have already turned toward Christmas. How could they not? The malls have had Christmas decorations up since the second week in November. The day after thanksgiving is the biggest shopping day of the year and everything was marked down for the big Christmas sale. Empty lots of been transformed into Christmas tree markets. The decorations are up downtown and the annual Christmas parade was held the weekend before thanksgiving. Christmas music is playing on the radio, and it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Given the commercialization of Christmas and the importance it has assumed in our culture as a time for family renewal, it is no surprise that the season of Advent should be overlooked and downplayed. So what is Advent? Is it simply a prelude to Christmas? Is it one more minor tradition to get us ready for the main event on Christmas Eve? It is true that it is one purpose of Advent to prepare us for Christmas. But not the sentimental Christmas of babies and mangers or the commercial Christmas of gifts and feasts. But the Christmas that speaks of a Savior who was born in order that he might suffer, be crucified and resurrected to bring our salvation. Advent means coming. And it reminds us that the incarnate God has come in Jesus the Christ. But it also proclaims that God's work in Christ is incomplete. And that as God has come in Christ, so Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. Now, you may have come to chapel this morning, hoping to hear a festive sermon to get you in the mood for the Christmas season. But our lectionary scriptures call us to attend to a different reality, a different season. They urge us not to skip over the Advent season, but to spend time exploring its riches and insights. Our Advent text from Isaiah is a lament. And the Gospel passage from Mark has been called, "The Little Apocalypse." Why should we begin the Christian year talking about crisis and lament, the Parousia or second coming of Christ and the final judgment? Don't we get enough bad news every day? You can't turn on television or radio without being inundated with tragedy. Someone has been murdered or raped, someone is at war, someone's home has been destroyed by flood or fire. We're overwhelmed by bad news every day. So why should we start the Christian year with a lament and an apocalyptic mourning? Isn't the overwhelming bad news the very point of Advent? We wouldn't need the Advent, the coming of God, if the world that we lived in was one of peace and goodwill toward all. But the reality is that isn't the world you and I live in. Think about the images of war and destruction you have seen just this year, Somalia, Los

Angeles, Bosnia, the Midwest, we've learned to tune out the suffering to filter the horror. To numb ourselves to the reality of violence and injustice and devastation. We prefer to focus to look at accentuate the positive in life, especially when we aren't immediately touched by the tragedies that we see around us. But like it or not deny it or not, we are affected collectively by almost insurmountable problems. Ozone depletion, polluted air and water and land, the threat of nuclear disaster, widespread hunger and poverty and increasing number of regional conflicts, just when we thought peace was in our grasp. As one writer put it, "The situation in the world is not just dangerous, "not just threatening, "it is catastrophic." Or as Walter Brueggemann expresses it, "Humankind has reached the end of its collective rope. "All our schemes for self improvement, "for extricating ourselves from traps "that we have set for ourselves have calmed in nothing." We have now realized at the very deepest level of our being, that we can't save ourselves and that apart from intervention by God, we are totally and irretrievably lost. The lament from Isaiah takes the anxiety and the suffering that are facts of human reality seriously. It is a passionate cry for God's help in the face of desperate circumstances. The Israelites had returned to Jerusalem after the destruction of the temple to find total desolation. Their homes, their sanctuary, all they held most dear had been destroyed. Their cry for God's intervention sounds out with hurt rending resonance to anyone who has ever faced tragedy. Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake at your presence. How we long for signs of God's presence and power, especially in time of need. This lament take seriously our longing for God's Advent, in the midst of pain and tragedy. Advent is a season of longing for God to come down and save us because we know we cannot save ourselves, our world, our families. It is also a season of waiting and hoping even when our cries aren't answered. Isaiah's lament understands that we don't always get what we ask for, what we pray for. Sometimes God doesn't act as we desire. We prayed for the water to stop, but our houses and farms and businesses were washed away. We prayed for healing, but the cancer spread. We prayed for reconciliation, but the marriage failed. We prayed for acceptance of our homosexuality but our families rejected us instead. We prayed for safety but we couldn't stop the rape. We pray for peace but millions died. Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake at your presence. How often we have cried out to God to act on our behalf, or on behalf of someone that we love. What do we do about those times that we cry out and God is silent? This is perhaps the greatest challenge to faith. What do we do when God is silent? Hidden? How does faith respond to such a challenge? Isaiah understood that in times when God is hidden, we have to fall back upon the faith experiences of the past. We have to remember the times when God has intervened to accomplish awesome deeds we did not expect. This lament recalls the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the covenant at Mount Sinai. Those were times in Israel's history when God had acted decisively on her behalf. Advent also recalls Jesus's coming, the dramatic incarnation of God in a child and the subsequent death and resurrection of that child to bring about our salvation. These were times in human history when God tore open the heavens to come down among us and the mountains trembled and human reality was forever changed. Advent wait expectantly for God's intervention on our behalf again, trusting that ours is a God who has acted decisively for us in the past, and who can be counted on us to act in the future, even though God may appear to be silent and hidden in the present. We proclaim this mystery of faith every time we come to the communion table, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. God has acted in the past, God is acting in the present, God will act in the future. Maybe that's key to understanding God's silence. We don't choose or command the ways that God acts. But God does act unexpectedly and decisively for those who wait. Advent is a time of waiting and longing for God to act in surprising new ways to bring justice, reconciliation and

healing. Advent is also a time when the Christian church focuses on repentance and renewal of our relationship to God. Isaiah believed that one of the reasons that Israel was estranged from God and hadn't experienced God and felt God is hidden was because they had sinned and become alienated from God. This lament takes seriously the reality of human sinfulness and its consequences. It knows what it is like to be in the grip of sin. The literal translation is melted into the hand of our iniquity. It knows what it is like to be powerless to change, to have lost control over life so that we no longer control sin, but are controlled by it. Sin is more than individual acts of disobedience, but the fundamental distortion in human reality. When we are in the grip of sin, we lose our right relatedness to God, to self, to others and to the whole creation. Our personal relationships, our institutions, our culture, our politics, everything becomes infected by the disease of sin. We are as one unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. When we're in the grip of sin, we are powerless to change because sin permeates everything that we are and everything that we do. Advent, take seriously the pervasiveness of human sin that touches every part of human reality, every part of the creation, and longs for the coming of a God who can free us from the grip of our iniquities. As sinful people, Isaiah knows that they have no right to make claims upon God or to petition God to act in their behalf. Yet his lament does presume to make such claims, because God has been revealed to them as Father. God as father is one who is related to them in a fundamental way. They presume to ask the God who is father to put aside his anger and forgive them for their iniquity, reminding him that he is the potter and they are as clay. He is the Creator with the power to mold them in new ways. This is the God whose hand can free them from the grip of iniquity and mold them into new people. Jesus also spoke of the kingdom of God being like a father who welcomes home the prodigal son with celebration, that one who was lost has been found. It is a fundamental hope of Advent, that God has come to save the lost, and God continues to welcome us home. The Scripture from Isaiah speaks of an Advent hope, characterized by a God who acts decisively to save us from despair and sin in the midst of hopelessness. It yearns for God to come down and mold us as a new people restored to God's family. The Scripture from Mark speaks to an Advent hope, from a little different perspective. It speaks as one who knows the reality of the transformative power of God in Jesus the Christ, saving us, redeeming us, molding us as the people of God. In the Gospel of Mark the Savior has come, the Community of Faith has been formed, and they are left with the promise that Christ will come again. This Scripture reminds us that Advent is a time of watching and waiting for the day when the Son of Man will come in power and glory, and all things will be judged in Christ. The Parousia, or the second coming, has sometimes been a difficult doctrine for the Christian church. Fundamentalist churches have often focused on the second coming as a scare tactic for conversion. And some groups have been preoccupied with predicting when it will happen. We witnessed a dramatic and tragic example of this in the Branch Davidian sect. David Koresh predicted that the end was near and prepared his followers for the end, perhaps even forcing the end upon them when the cult complex was stormed. In our attempts in the mainstream church to shun association with any such as these, we have sometimes lost or denied the reality of the parousia in our own tradition. But the Gospel of Mark invites us to look squarely at what we believe to be true about the end times. What is ultimately true? The doctrine of the Second Coming proclaims that in the end, all time all history, all judgment, all hope, all life belong to God. It speaks powerfully of the Christian belief that Christ will come in final victory and the end belongs to God no matter what the present reality may be. This Advent hope has ultimate confidence in God, and without it, I would suggest that we don't have much to offer to an age as dangerous and catastrophic as the one we live in. This Advent hope takes seriously the reality of sin and tragedy and death in our world, and points to a future

when the whole creation will be redeemed in Jesus Christ. It is not enough to say that we have been saved through Christ our Lord. It is not enough to say that we are the church. It is God's will that all of creation, participate in the salvation and that the whole world be transformed by God's Advent in the parousia. One of the dangers of this doctrine has been an other worldly thinking that is passive believing that since the future belongs to God, we should leave the future to God. But lest we fall into the trap of thinking that hope in Christ future relieves us of responsibility for our present. This text reminds us that we have been entrusted with the Master's house and given duties for which we are accountable until the end. We are accountable to God now, for the way we carry out our responsibilities as teachers, accountants, students, researchers, administrators, parents, lawyers, because Christ has come. We have been entrusted with responsibilities in the kingdom, because Christ will come again, we are accountable for how we fulfill those duties. Advent calls us to a watchful expectancy ever ready for the Master's return. Advent calls us to active waiting. Active in fulfilling our role in the kingdom, knowing that the final outcome of our efforts and of all life are in God's hands. This, I think, is a concept in Christian light that can bring us great hope. Sometimes we are involved in efforts and we don't see the immediate results of our work. But this assures us that in the end, God makes all things right. That we are called to be faithful and to leave the consequences and the outcome to God. The Scriptures call us to remember and celebrate the season of Advent. It is a season that is rich and hope and promise. Advent offers us a hope that can stand in the face of despair. Because ours is a God who knows and overcomes the reality of death, Christ has died. It gives us hope that has confidence in God's power to redeem us and mold us a new through Christ our Lord. Christ is risen. It offers a hope which empowers us to act faithfully in God's kingdom, because it knows that the final victory belongs to God. Christ will come again. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. This is the mystery of faith. This is the hope of Advent. Let us celebrate that hope as we feast together today at the Lord's table.

- The Lord be with you. (congregation speaking) Let us pray. Oh God, creator, reminders of our creation in you, for you are the hope of all the ends of the earth. Remind us that as a people who journey, we are vessels containing wellsprings of your hope. We bow in your presence in this first day of Advent. A time when we are called to wait and hope in the beginning of your resurrection to help in your forgiveness and your reconciliation, as vessels of water and hope. Help us that in our pouring out, we might bring the power of healing and make hold the bruised world. Let the living waters of your creation encircle us that we may remember we are yours, and be thankful, Lord in your mercy. (congregation speaking) We pray for your community, the world we pray that as the world is created in your image, you would grant us grace to be fearless to contend against evil and make no peace with oppression. Help us that we may reverently use our freedom in you to help employ justice, to the glory of your name, we remember today especially your people in Haiti, and Bosnia, your people in El Salvador, and South Africa, your community here in Durham, and in the utmost part of the world, Lord in your mercy. (congregation speaking) We pray for those who are marginalized. Those who find themselves on the fringes of lives margin. People so dismayed by the burden of life, that it feels so sunken in the valley of despair, so low that they feel they can no longer hear anybody pray. But we pray that you and your love and justice would go down into those valleys of despair and anoint your children with the balm of hope, the vision of comfort. We remember specially the homeless, the hungry, the abused, the battered, wherever you people reach out for your balm of healing, Lord in your mercy. (congregation speaking) Lord, we pray for your church. Your church today is perplexed that she faces the challenges of the task before us. In this season of Advent, baptize your church your fresh in the new life

giving Spirit of Christ and help her to proclaim boldly, your kingdom of hope and promise. We remember this community here in the Duke Chapel, your church everywhere, Lord in your mercy. (congregation speaking) Now hear us and grant us your peace, For Christ's sake, Amen. Let us stand an exchange, the peace, the sign of peace. As a reconciled people, let us come together bringing our gifts offerings before the Lord. (religious orchestral music) (religious orchestral music)

- The Lord be with you. (congregation speaking) Lift up your hearts. (congregation speaking) Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. (congregation speaking) It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets who looked for that day when justice shall roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. When nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is to you who comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you and bless it as your son Jesus Christ, whom you sent in the fullness of time to be a light to the nations. You scattered the proud and the imagination of their hearts and have mercy on those who fear you from generation to generation. You put down the mighty from their thrones and exalt those of low degree, you fill the hungry with good things and the rich you send empty away. Your own Son came among us as a servant to be Emmanuel, your presence with us. He humbled Himself in obedience to your will and freely accepted death on the cross. By the baptism of his suffering, death and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit. On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, offered it to his disciples and said, "Take, eat. "This is my body which is given for you, "do this in remembrance of me." On the same night, when the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks, offered it to his disciples and said, "Drink from this, all of you "for this is the blood of the New Covenant "poured out for you and for many "for the forgiveness of sins. "Do this as often as you shall drink it "in remembrance of me." And so in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves and praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ offering for us, as we proclaim The mystery of faith. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine, make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world, the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet, through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours Almighty Father, now and forever, Amen. Let us pray together as Jesus 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. Because there is one loaf we who are many are one body, because we all partake of the one loaf. The cup over which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ. The body of Christ given for you. The blood of Christ the cup of salvation. Amen.

- The blood of Christ the cup of salvation.

- Amen. You're invited to come to the Advent feast, you may be seated. (religious ochestral music) (religious ochestral music) Let us pray. Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit to give ourselves for others. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Advent Lord, Amen. Would you please stand as we continue our worship with the closing hymn? (religious orchestral music) Go forth in hope. May the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you and keep you, Amen. (religious orchestral music)