

- Good morning and welcome to Duke Chapel. There are several announcements I'd like call to your attention. This morning Dr. Dale Martin from Duke's Department of Religion began a four week series entitled: Looking at Jesus Today. The second lecture in this series will begin next Sunday in Room 211 in the Divinity School at 9:45 a.m. This coming Tuesday, Yehezkel Landau, the director of the Religious Zionist Peace Movement in Israel, will be speaking in Duke Chapel about solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian dilemma. The informal discussion will be held in the Chapel basement from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. Ongoing worship opportunities in the coming week include daily noon prayer in Memorial Chapel, Taize evening prayer and meditation at 5:15 on Tuesdays in Memorial Chapel and choral vespers on Thursday at 5:15 also in Memorial Chapel. Next Sunday we'll begin a monthly collection of food for the Durham Urban Ministries Center. We'll collect canned and packaged foods on the first Sunday of each month and there will be a collection box in the narthex for those of you who are able to help. Let us continue now with our worship. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- The splendor of Christ shines upon us.

Congregation: Praise the Lord. (organ music) (congregation singing a hymn)

- Bring your doubts and fears, your grief and pain to these moments of prayer as we seek forgiveness and healing. Turn to page 890 as we pray together the prayer of confession.

Congregation: Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, 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 all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ. Strengthen you in all goodness. And by the 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 O God by the power of your Holy Spirit so that as the word spread and proclaimed we might hear with joy what you say to us this day. Amen. This reading from the Old Testament comes from the Book of Nehemiah the eighth chapter starting with the first verse. When the seventh month came the people of Israel being settled in their towns all the people gathered together into the square before the water gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of

the seventh month. He read from it facing the square before the water gate from early morning until midday. In the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people. And when he opened it all the people stood up then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God and all the people answered Amen, Amen lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. So they read from the book from the law of God with interpretation. They gave the sense so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah who was the governor and Ezra the priest and scribe and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people: This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them: Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine. And send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God. (organ music) (choir singing a hymn)

- Now we are going to do something strange. We're going to do something weird, something potentially subversive, counter-cultural. Trouble is you've seen me do it so often it no longer impresses you as strange. We're going to read from a very ancient book, the Bible and then I'm going to preach. Here you see modeled a very different epistemology, a different way of knowing from that of the world. Hear the word. He came to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And he went to the synagogue as his custom was on the sabbath. He stood up to read. And there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it is written, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He's anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down and all eyes were fixed upon him. And he said to them: Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. All spoke well of him and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. Truly I say to you, he said, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. In truth I tell you there were many widows in Israel during the days of Elijah when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months and there came a great famine over the land. Elijah was set to none of them but to the widow at Zerephath in the land of Sidon, a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elijah. None of them was cleansed, healed but only Naaman the Syrian. When he heard this all in the synagogue were filled with wrath and they rose up and they put him out of the city. This is the word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

- Want you to think about this story that we just read. Jesus returns to his home town synagogue in Nazareth. What do they do? They do not say: Jesus, tell it how it has been for you up at rabbinic school in Jerusalem. They do not say: Jesus share with us from some of your racial, gender, cultural experiences. They do not say: Jesus say something to us that will pump up our self-esteem for the week. These are Jews. They hand him the book. They unwrap the scroll, they say: Read it. And he reads. These are Jews. How

appropriate for our choir to sing in Hebrew, let the words of my mouth, the meditations of my heart. These are Jews, people of the word. And so he reads those beautiful words from the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he's anointed me to preach good news to the captives. There's an excited stirring that morning when Jesus says: Today these words are fulfilled in your hearing. For we are captives under the heel of Rome. At last God has heard our prayers, at last God is coming for his people, us. Run the Romans out and set us up in Judea. But then the trouble starts when the preacher starts to preach. Speaking of our book, as I remember there were a lot of hungry women in Israel during the days of the prophet Elijah, during the great famine. Isn't it interesting that God's prophet, the one who speaks God's word, fed none of those good women but went over and fed a widow over in Zeretan, an outsider of a different race? The congregation started to get quiet. Yes and I believe that there were a lot of sick people in Israel during the days of the prophet Elijah. Isn't it interesting that God's prophet healed none of them but healed Naaman the Syrian, the Syrian Army officer? And the once adoring congregation was turned into an angry mob and they wanted to kill the preacher. 'Cause it wasn't pleasant to be assaulted by our own book. We had come that morning to hear a word for us. Only to be surprised that this book speaks of a God who is alive and large and big working the other side of the street along with ours. It was an intrusive word. That's why we had as we do on Sunday morning we had Tom Espy bring in the Bible. Did you notice it coming in the processional? It intrudes among us. It was an intrusive word. I tell you don't come here on Sunday morning unless you have the courage to risk linguistic assault, the intrusive word. It wasn't pleasant that day in Nazareth. And we hated the book for it. Well, the first lesson today is from Nehemiah. Nehemiah 8. We have been on exile in Babel and everything is in ruin. We're finally back home in Jerusalem. And what do we do to build things back? The first thing we'll build back is the temple. The first thing we build back is the temple, the great building, center of national prestige. Just like Mr. Duke said when he built the West Campus. First thing I want you to work on is the chapel. Put it right in the center. We put the temple up first. The temple, the house of God. It has to be a big building, big enough to contain God, big enough to show that we're a people worthy of the presence of God. After we got the temple built next thing we worked on was the wall, the Wall of Jerusalem. The wall is what we use to keep out the outsiders to protect them from the insiders. The wall is how we separate them from us. The wall is how we protect what we've got. How we hold on to what we've accumulated. So, we started work now on the wall. During the building of the wall, this is where today's scripture takes up. In the foundation of the ruins of the old wall a scroll is found, it is a Torah scroll. It is a scroll of the law and the prophets. It had been hidden there during days of turmoil. It had been lost there for years. And there at the water gate the scroll is unrolled and they start to read. They read the words of the law, the book. Nehemiah 8 says that the people wept when they heard the law. They just wept. The question for this Sunday in Epiphany: Did they weep tears of joy? Or did they weep tears of sadness and terror? That's the question. Maybe they wept for joy. Maybe they wept for joy at being reminded, we're Jews, we are people of the word. This book is holding us together. We're being reformed again around this word. Maybe they wept for joy. Finding out again who they were and whose they were. On the other hand, that day in Nazareth nobody wept for joy they wept but they were tears of rage, angry at the young preacher. We had all come to synagogue that morning all in our seats, all to be reminded of the eternal verities only to be shocked by our very own book. We were in rage. Were they tears of joy or tears of rage? I bet you have shed some of those tears on a Sunday morning here. Intrusive word, linguistic assault. George Lindbeck of Yale notes that the Church defeated Rome in less than 400 years using none of the conventional Gentile ways of ordering society: The military, family, race, culture. In less than 400 years the Church had defeated the

greatest empire the world had ever known on the basis of nothing more substantial than the word, book. Just the word, the word assaulted and dismantled the empire. As my friend Will Campbell says: The word is our first offense and our very last defense. All we've got is the word. Don't come down here on a Sunday morning if you're not willing to be exposed to the word. The sabbath Sunday fun always begins when we bring in the book and we open it up and we read and then we talk about it. This disruptive fun of the word. Do you remember where you were this time last year, earlier in the month? Remember what you were getting ready to do this time last year? On January the 6th I was down at a big Methodist Church in Atlanta. January the 6th last year. Remember what we were all getting ready to do on January the 6th, making preparations for? Well, I went to church. And during the service in this big Methodist church the preacher indulged in a practice not dear to my heart called a children's sermon. You know, the minister gathers here all the little boys come and he squats down on the steps and he talks to the children. He said: Boys and girls who can tell me what today is? Who knows what today is? And some little boy said: January the 6th. He said: Yes, January the 6th. But it's more than January the 6th. Today in the Church is Epiphany. Can you say Epiphany, boys and girls? It's a big day in the Church. It falls on January the 6th which means that most of the time it doesn't fall on a Sunday but we're real excited 'cause today it's on a Sunday. And this is Epiphany. We Methodists did not know about it 'til a few years ago. The Episcopalians told us. And so, today is Epiphany. And the word epiphany means manifestation, it means revelation in Greek, it means opening up. And if you never heard of epiphany boys and girls I know you've heard of a favorite Epiphany story. The story of the Three Wise Men who came to worship the baby Jesus at Bethlehem. You've heard that story. Well, that's an Epiphany story. They were led by the star. It was manifested to them, it was revealed to them who the baby Jesus was. Hate to tell you boys and girls the Bible doesn't say that they were Three Wise Men. It says they brought three kinds of gifts. It doesn't say how many there were. They bought gold, frankincense and myrrh but we don't know how many of 'em there were. Another thing I hate to tell you, the Bible doesn't call them Wise Men. It doesn't call 'em Three Kings of Orient are. It calls them Magi, that's the word in the Bible, they're called Magi. It's where we get our English word magic, magi. They were, they were magicians. They were these stargazing, horoscope reading magicians. That's probably how they saw the star. And that gold, frankincense and myrrh some people feel may have been the tricks of their magic trade that they brought and laid at the manger. Matthew says that the people who knew the story missed it, and these Magi came over from the East and they were the first to see the baby Jesus. And Epiphany is when we get together and remember them. Now, the question for today boys and girls is: Where did the Magi come from? Who knows where they came from? Someone said, the East. He said well all right, the East but where in the East, what country do you think they came from? Well, some little girl said: Persia. He said: Good, Persia, we think they came from Persia. That was a Bible way of saying, they came from Persia they came from the East. Persia was to the east. Where is Persia today on the map boys and girls? Who can find Persia on the map? It's not there anymore, there are countries. What are some countries that are part of what used to be Persia? Can somebody name? Somebody said: Iran. He said: Good, Iran that used to be part of Persia. But it wasn't only Persia. There were other countries in Persia. What are some other countries that are part of Persia? And finally someone said: Iraq, Iraq. He said: Yes, that's good Iraq. In fact, Baghdad was sort of the capital of Persia. They had these ziggurat, still have them in Baghdad where they looked at the stars. Maybe that's how they saw the star at Bethlehem. Yes, I think they probably came from Baghdad. And Epiphany is the day that the Church gets together and says thank you God for sending these Iraqis to show us the baby Jesus. And now we can go back to our seats boys and girls, it's the end of the sermon. I noticed as they went

back to their seats their mothers and fathers seemed to be fumbling for their seatbelts. You don't know how you might mess up a young child telling them a story like that. Well, you don't know how they may view the world after hearing a story like that. John Calvin said: Scripture is the lens through which we see the world correctly. Well you...the fun starts when we open up the book and just tell the story. I wanted to say to that congregation you know, I'm sorry you thought we all got dressed, came down here to look bourgeois, middle class. No, no, no, this we came down here to risk assault, dislodgement, disruption. It's the word, the word. Well, in a moment you're gonna come down here and receive the bread and the wine in the name of Jesus. Now, what could be more basic than bread? You need bread to live. You can't live without bread. And yet just before telling this story of Jesus in Nazareth Luke says that Jesus was once in the desert and was without bread for 40 days. He was starving to death. He was full of hunger. And at the very depth of his famine Satan came to him and said: You're hungry? I'll give you bread. Turn these stones into bread. Worship me. And Jesus, as hungry as he could be, said to Satan: Wait. He quoted to him the Old Testament. Hey, we don't live by bread alone. We live by the word. Amen.

- The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

- Let us pray. Lord of the word as we come together to lift our voices in praise and our hearts in prayer we pray that our words and meditations may be acceptable in thy sight. As we listen to your word give us understanding and courage to obey and to follow wherever it may lead us. Almighty God we give you thanks for your word which intrudes upon our lives sometimes building us up and sometimes tearing us down. It always comes as a surprise when you speak to us through scripture, a sermon, a hymn, a prayer, a word from a friend. When we know in the depths of our hearts that you have spoken our response like those who heard Ezra is to worship you in awe with bowed heads and faces to the ground. For your word always carries a challenge as well as a promise. Your love is both a gift and a demand upon our lives. Like those who turned from Jesus in anger we too sometimes hear your word with anger, fear, shame or sadness. Your word judges and convicts us of our sinfulness at the very same moment that it forgives us and frees us from the power of sin. Your word reveals your vision for humanity and the reality that we have helped create. The distance between the kingdom of heaven that you intend and the earthly kingdom that we have created is so great we cannot help but feel shame and failure. But the good news is that you are the God who preaches hope to the poor, wholeness to the brokenhearted, deliverance to the captive, sight to the blind, joy to the grieving and praise to the heavy spirited. And we too are the poor, the brokenhearted, the captive, the blind, the grieving, the heavy spirited. Whatever condition you find us in you do not leave us in that condition. You see and bless us in our worst distresses and can change them in a breath. You are the God who triumphs over our anger and sadness, fear and shame. Your love lifts us up and helps us see ourselves as you see us, as sinful but beloved children. Your word disciplines us so that we might grow upright and strong in faith. Your grace convicts and changes us so that we might gladly obey you and thereby know life abundant. As we come to your table this morning let us come with open hearts ready to receive the gift of your love poured out for us in such a tangible way. Help us feed upon Christ in our souls so that we might be transformed and reshaped into the people you would have us be. Amen. Since Christ has opened his heart to us let us open our hearts to one another and God will be glorified. The peace of Christ be with you. Let us stand and offer

signs of peace to one another. (congregation murmuring) You may be seated. Let us present ourselves and our gifts to the Lord in gratitude. (organ music) (choir singing hymn) (organ music) (congregation singing hymn)

- The Lord be with you.

- And also with you.

- Lift up your hearts.

- We lift them up to the Lord.

- Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Congregation: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

- Blessed are you Lord our God, our light and our salvation. Before the mountains were brought forth or you had formed the earth, you alone our God. And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn. (organ music) (congregation singing hymn) Truly holy are you Father. In the fullness of time you revealed yourself and your blessed son Jesus the light of the world. You sent a star to guide the Magi to where the Christ was born. And your signs and witnesses in every age and through all the world have led persons from far distances to him. In his table fellowship he ate with sinners and he preached good news to the poor, proclaimed release to the captives, set free the oppressed and announced the time when God would come and save your people. On the night his disciples deserted him he took bread, gave thanks to you and said take, eat, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks, gave 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 many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. His presence is continued with his people. They have been baptized into him and shared in the breaking of the bread into Jerusalem and all Judea and Sumeria and to the ends of the earth. And so in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ we offer ourselves as praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ sacrificed for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith. (organ music) (congregation singing hymn) Send the power of your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts. That in the breaking of this bread and the drinking of this wine we may know anew the presence of Christ among us. Through him, with him and the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours Almighty God now and forever. (organ music) (congregation singing hymn)

Congregation: 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, the power and the glory forever.

- Amen. When we give thanks over the cup is it not a means of sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ? Come to the Lord's table. (organ music) (choir singing hymn) (organ music) (choir singing hymn) (organ music) (choir singing hymn) Stand for the benediction. May the God of love pour out his spirit upon you, equip you for every good work as you go forth in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (choir singing hymn) (organ music) (congregation singing hymn)