

(muffled choral music) ♪ Lord God of nations ♪ ♪ Son of God and ♪ ♪ Son of man ♪ ♪ Lord (muffled speech) ♪  
♪ Praise God adoration ♪ ♪ Now and forever more ♪ ♪ (muffled speech) ♪ ♪ Now and forever more ♪ ♪ The  
Light ♪ (organ music) (muffled choral music)

Preacher: Let us confess our sin before God and one another. Be seated. Let us pray. Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, but what we have done and 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. For it is the Heavens are high above the Earth, so great is His steadfast love towards those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. Amen. We welcome you to this baccalaureate service at Duke University's 135th commencement. At the conclusion of this service, we would ask the congregation please remain in place until all of the graduates have recessed out of the chapel. Our lector for today's service replaces president Brodie who is meeting with the trustees at this time. Our lector is University Marshall and Distinguished Service Professor, Dr. Pelham Wilder. Our preacher for this baccalaureate is no stranger to Duke Chapel; he is a master preacher and a gifted writer. He is Dr. David H.C. Read, Senior Minister of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York. We welcome him back to the chapel and to this great service.

Pelham: Let us pray. Open our hearts and minds, o, 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 is from Proverbs. "Three things are too wonderful for me, "four, I do not understand. "The way of an eagle in the sky, "the way of a serpent on a rock, "the way of a ship on the high seas "and the way of a man with a maiden." Here ends the reading of the first lesson. (organ music) (muffled choral music) The congregation will please rise for the reading of the Gospel. The Gospel for the morning is from St. Matthew. "Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain "and when he sat down, his disciples came to him "and he opened his mouth and taught them saying, "blessed are the poor in spirit, "for there's is the Kingdom of Heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, "for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall attain mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, "for they shall be called the sons of God." The Gospel of our Lord, Amen. (organ music) (muffled choral music) Please be seated. The Epistle is from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. "So that we may no longer be children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind "of doctrine by the cunning of man "and by their craftiness and deceitful wiles, "rather speaking the truth and love, "we are to grow up in every way into him, "who is the head into Christ from whom the whole body, "joined and knit together by every joint "by which it is supplied, "when each part is working properly makes bodily growth "and upbuilds itself in love. "Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord; "that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do. "In the futility of their minds, "they have darkened in their understanding, "alienated from the life of God

"because of the ignorance that is in them "due to their hardness of heart. "They have become calloused and have given themselves "up to licentiousness, "greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. "You did not so learn Christ. "Assuming that you have heard about him "and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus." Here ends the reading of the epistle lesson.

David: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O, Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. It is a special joy for me to be back on this lovely campus and in particular, to share and worship in this beautiful chapel and it is my privilege to preach, particularly to those who are today graduating. My theme, as you may read is knowledge with room for wonder. And you'll be relieved to know that I'm not going to go in to a disquisition about knowledge. I'm not like the famous scholar in Balliol, Oxford who was reputed to say, "I am the master of this college. "What I don't know isn't knowledge!" I'm not I hope to be inflicting upon you what my own particular definition of what knowledge is but here you are going out from this institution with the knowledge that you have acquired over these four years and I'm sure it can't be said of Duke, as has been said of some institutions of knowledge, that the reason why a university is called a repository of knowledge and wisdom is that the freshman brings so much in and the graduate takes so much out. (audience laughter) You, rather, I think are in the position of giving thanks to God today for what you have acquired during these years and now commences the growing up with it of which we have heard. I have a text like any descent presbyterian preacher and the text comes from a rather surprising couple of verses in the Book of Proverbs which you have just heard. "Three things are too wonderful for me, "four, I do not understand; "the way of an eagle in the sky, "the way of a serpent on a rock, "the way of a ship on the high seas "and the way of a man with a maiden." Some might want to take this old writer by the hand and explain all this for him. "Too wonderful I don't understand." Of course, you lived a long, long time ago, whoever you were. You never heard of aerodynamics or biological mutations or astrophysics or chromosomes and genes. Everything was mystery to you, old man. It was wonderful? Of course, you couldn't understand. But now that we know all about it, now that we, as the theologians used to tell us 20 years go, have come of age, although I don't see many signs out in our world, wouldn't you like, we would say to this man, "Wouldn't you like to have me explain to you "these questions which are to wonderful for you?" The way of an eagle in the sky, for instance, nothing wonderful about that, you know. It's all a question of air displacement, given the weight of the bird, the span of the wings, then of relatively slight lateral motion will suffice to counteract the pull of gravity while speed, elevation and direction are achieved by appropriate muscular adjustments. We know all about that. (audience laughter) But of course, as a primitive, heavier-than-air machine, the eagle has long been outclassed, my dear man, long outclassed by speed and efficiency by human artifacts such as the rocket or the jet plane which I don't understand anymore than you do but somebody does and there's no mystery about it anymore! (audience laughter) Well, while the author of the Proverbs was recovering from this, you could go on. The way of the serpent of the rock, oh yes, I see your difficulty, no legs, no wings. How does he move? Well, we can explain that to you, you know. I found it in the encyclopedia. Locomotion is effected by the passage of a series of waves from the fore backwards, each wave in its progress pressing against the surrounding medium and forcing the animal forward, you see? No, history, if you still don't understand, you can add the scales of the lower surface are enlarged to form transverse, overlapping plates, whose free edges directed backwards and to each of these plates is attached a pair of moveable ribs, it's true! Got it? Microscopes, you see, have show us a lot that you didn't know anything about. I could go on to tell you about the serpent, you might say, more than you ever

want to know, how he manages to get along on a smooth rock. That was your trouble, wasn't it? When it's got about 300 ventral shields, each of which can use any irregularity so that progress is possible over almost any surface that is not absolutely smooth. You see, we know! There's nothing wonderful about that serpent on the rock. We can explain. Next question. Ah yes, the way of a ship on the high seas. I suppose your difficulty is in understanding how the little tub ever keeps afloat in a storm and how it picks its way across the ocean to the desired harbor. I remember your colleague who wrote the Book of Psalms having a similar difficulty: "They that go down to the sea "in ships that do business in great waters, "Thee see the works of the Lord "and His wonders in their deep." But, you don't need to see any works of the Lord or wonders. Even in your day, the science of navigation could explain how your little sailing ship gets from hither to yon. And now, of course, we have the whole business under control. A floating hotel of 80,000 tons can speed through the high seas with an automatic pilot to do all the steering and radar to do all the seeing. There's no mystery anymore. You and I may not understand it all, but someone does. Now what was the last thing you mentioned? Ah yes! The way of a man with a maiden. Ah, too wonderful! You don't understand? Now really, if there's one thing where we've made great strides since your day is this business of sex. You primitive people made such a mystery about it with your rites and ceremonies, your poems and music, your romantic illusions. We have finally analyzed this man-woman relationship. We know about the biological impulses behind it. We're applying psychological methods to determine its function in society. We're on our way to rationalizing the sex act or, perhaps, doing without it all together, and are developing computers to help match the right man and the right maiden. A recent book based on an elaborate investigation on the clinical conditions on the way of a man with a maiden shows the way towards a complete understanding of human sexuality. You wouldn't need to wonder about it anymore, old man. You'll understand, you'll know all about it. Well, I know that none of you here really feel that way. You're not foolish enough to imagine that there are some things that over the centuries become completely lost. Although we've made progress, obviously, and discover lots of things used to be believed, cannot be believed. We're not naive enough to think that in questions, deepest questions of life and meaning of life, questions of ethics, that these things have steadily grown stronger and more powerful that we know so much more than the Bible writers. You have had enough study here of the Bible, I'm sure, privately or publicly to realize that the matters the bible deals with are not technical questions about how things are created in detail but the great questions, meaning, right, wrong. We have to be realistic about those things. We do know infinitely more about the physical universe than the person who wrote the Proverbs. We do know more about the nature of the universe, the transmission of life, the mastery of the elements, the functioning of the human body and psyche, the advance of human knowledge has been extraordinary since the Bible was written and evermore so than in the last 50 years and a preacher is rather foolish when he launches in to any kind of denegation of modern science. I sometimes think I new definition of a hypocrite is the preacher who composes sermon denouncing modern technology and he proposes it on an electric typewriter and he dashes off in his car to a studio to have it broadcast. (audience laughter) The liberating spirit of inquiry has brought to this universe, to mankind, a new era, a possible conquest of hunger and disease, some control over the forces of nature and that understanding has often been bought at a great price, for science has its martars as well as religion. No, my purpose in this sermon is simply to raise a huge question mark over against the idea that our scientific understanding of things is sufficient, is complete, and that therefore, we have arrived at a point in the human story where wonder and mystery, the intuitions of the mystic, the vision of the artist, the poet, the realm of the spirit can all be rolled out as icing on the cake, subjective influences. The point is not

that there are still some things science cannot explain. It would be a bold preacher to rest the case for religion on the gap in the scientific picture as that closes any book. I'm confident that science will go on exploring and investigating in every area, even those we used to think belonged only to morals and religion, but we know that it's not just for human beings to question off how we can do things. It's not just a question of something now being made possible. It's also a question for all of us, whether if a thing is possible, it should be done or not done. That's still our choice. What we have to ask is whether this kind of explanation, even if it seems to cover the sum-total of human experience, offers an answer to the ultimate questions that concern every thinking person. We don't just want to know how, we want to know why. You can explain to the very limit of my capacity the complexities of the atom, the cellular structure of life, the realm of the solar system, the sweep of the galaxy, still the infinities of time and space, but I'm left asking what does it mean, just as they asked long ago. When I consider the work of our hands, what is man, God mindful of him? Is there anything behind the process. Some say today that these questions are foolish. They are just noises that you make to indicate your disappointment. But I find them raised not only by the middle age and the old age, but particularly by a younger generation. The search for meaning lies behind all kinds of things, from demonstrations and trends in music or even the question of suicide. It's as though a generation that has had everything explained has realized that, ultimately, nothing has been explained at all on that level. There are other ways of listening to the universe. The telescope and microscope are not the only avenues into truth. There was a time when religious believers were accused of having narrow minds and there are indeed religious people who live in a very little chamber of piety from which they glare out suspiciously at the ways of the modern world and also we have to admit that churches in the past have too often obstructed the path of knowledge, science, have neglected the contribution to the arts, fostered a timid and somewhat negative attitude to life, but I suspect that we are going through a reversal just now. We may be reaching the point where it is thorough going secularist, the dogmatic rationalist, who is being revealed as narrow minded. Not long ago, a professor of English Literature wrote to The New York Times to complain about a Nobel Prize being awarded to Isaac Singer and the ground of his complaint entirely was that Singer happens to be a believer, a religious believer, and how's that for atheist fundamentalism? (audience laughter) To limit one's convictions to that which is capable of scientific explanation, to then attempt to reduce every vivid experience to mere computer fodder, to interpret religious and moral insights of the human race just in terms of subjective emotion, that is narrow minded dogmatism, a deliberate exclusion of a whole dimension of existence. I think there is a revolt against this now and that brings me back to the eagle in the sky, the serpent on the rock, the ship on the high seas and the way of a man with a maiden. So let's leave this lovely chapel for a moment and let's leave this rushing world with all that's happening in a clattering of cities like New York. Let's leave the libraries and laboratories and come away for a moment, dream ourself off, for instance on some distant mountain peak, sitting on a rock, looking over a sea of peaks covered by the glinting sun with the clouds drifting by and here comes the eagle hovering, swooping, soaring, gliding off into a distant speck on the far horizon. Do we sit there thinking about aerodynamics? Are we at that moment any wiser than the Bible writer who found the way of the eagle in the sky too wonderful for him? Is what the artist sees as he watches the curve of the flight even of a common seagull not more important to all of us, a whole mountain of statistical research? Can that moment, such a moment of wonder, not open a window for us into the dimension of mystery and of God that has more meaning than a wilderness of factual knowledge? I do not understand. Feed me all the information that's tucked away in a thousand microfilms and I still would stand there and wonder and I wonder about the serpent on the rock.

Now, I listen to strange voices from past that come hissing through the collective unconscious of mankind. Primeval symbol of temptation, remember? And then that healing snake that Moses raised in the wilderness, legend of the sea serpent, betrayal of the serpent through the imagery of our dreams, the poison, the illusion as the cunning, as Cleopatra, that serpent of ol' Nile. To the window opens into a strange world where there are hopes, fears, shapes of good and evil and at such a moment, God can't speak to us. If we are never transfixed by a single living creature, a serpent on a rock, an ant carrying its egg, a fly moving on a windowpane or the sheer improbability of a hippopotamus. If we are never astonished, made to wonder, then we are terribly impoverished. There are times I don't want to know the facts. I just wonder, do we really understand anymore what it all means and the man who wrote the Proverbs? Then that ship on the high seas, what was it that aroused amazement? I don't think it was the technical achievement. He probably knew quite a bit, this old poet, about rudders, sails, tides and winds. More than I do! I believe he was seized with a thought that comes to us all, why? Why does this earth-bound two-legged creature called man or woman have the desire to cut down trees and make a boat? Why entrust themselves to the dark and menacing ocean? Why do they do it? Where are they going? And why do they want to go? Same questions come to us when we watch some of our own fellow creatures blasting off into space in a capsule. For the achievement, we have the explanations if we follow them. No mystery about the calculations, the experiments, the years of research, but the mystery, the wonder, the confession that we don't understand comes with the deeper questions. What strange compulsion has led the human race, always, always through the centuries, to explore and try to master the mystery of his environment? What of anything lies behind the evolution of such a creature on this earth? So do we want, really, to become the people who claim to understand and everything, and therefore, to understand nothing? Can we still say that the mystery of man's existence, his questing spirit is too wonderful for me, I do not understand? Then, not long ago a book was published called "Human Sexual Response," and a reply came in to the effect that the reader wanted to found a society for the preservation for the sweet mystery of life and I feel sympathy for that comment. All right, have the facts, sure. There's too much ignorance and hush-hush about sex and when I was a kid, but what kind of life awaits a people for whom the way of a man with a maiden is entirely explainable in terms of glans and genes and psychological data? The Bible is plain enough about the facts of sex but the way of a man with a maiden is also seen in the dimension of wonder and mystery. Yes, there are sex laws in the Pentateuch, but thank God they are wise enough when they formed the canon of scripture to include the Song of Psalms, that glorious love poem. Into what kind of drab world are we moving if sheer explanation takes over in this field and the wonder and the poetry disappear? As a Scot, I love the verse of one of Burn's poems that goes, "O, my love is like a red, "red rose that's newly sprung in June "and my love's like the melody that sweetly played in tune." And I don't want to sing instead, "O, my love is like a chromosome "that seeks the perfect suitor!" (audience laughter) "And my love will be chosen for me by an IBM computer." (audience laughter) No, let's preserve the mystery, the revival of wonder. Recognition of a dimension in life that cannot be explained away. I'm not suggesting to any of you here that if you have doubts about the Christian faith, the sense of wonder will eliminate them altogether. No, but you'll find that if you keep open with a sense of wonder to this mystery of life, then some of the doctrines that you have heard over the years will suddenly come alive. You may have to say, "Lord, I believe but I do not understand." so that is my simple plea, that you will keep open the mind, the spirit, for what comes from the other dimension. Here, brooding over the whole campus, is this symbol of the majesty, glory and the grace of God. I hope as you who are graduating leave, you will carry with you an inner shrine where you may

experience in the years to come in a way perhaps that you haven't yet what it means to be able to say with conviction, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, "Maker of Heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, "His only Son, our Lord. "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life." May it be so. Let us pray. Thanks be to thee, O, God, for the mystery and wonder of life. Make us every to be responsive to Thy voice that comes to us and guides and directs through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (organ music) ♪ Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices ♪ ♪ Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices ♪ ♪ Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way ♪ ♪ With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today ♪ ♪ O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us ♪ ♪ With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us ♪ ♪ And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed ♪ ♪ And free us from all ills, in this world and the next ♪