



EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

HOLY EUCHARIST, RITE II

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER 28, 2025 8:00 AND 10:30 A.M.

917 Pond Road, Loudon, TN 37774
865.986.2390

www.episcopalloudon.com



GLORIFYING GOD BY
REFRESHING SOULS | BRIDGING COMMUNITIES | ENGAGING PEOPLE IN SERVICE

Good morning! We're so glad you chose to be here at Resurrection today. Whether you're here for the first time, or are a life-long member, Resurrection is a hopeful, healing, transformation-minded kind of place, a place where everyone is welcome and can grow their relationship with God and with one another.

If you are here for the *first time* (or if you just haven't gotten around to it yet), please fill out a pew card and put it in the offering plate to let us know you were here. To receive our weekly email bulletin, be sure to include your email address. And let us know if you would like to connect with our parish life and ministries; we're happy to help you find your spot!

Our services follow *The Book of Common Prayer*, the red book in your pew rack. If you'd like to use the book to follow the service, instead of this order of service booklet, we begin on page 355. Unless otherwise marked, our hymns are from the blue *Hymnal 1982*. A hymn noted "S-xxx" is part of the service music, found at the front of the hymnal, appearing before the regular congregational hymns begin. For example, S-280 (*The Gloria*) is found before hymn 1.

To learn more about Resurrection, check out www.episcopalloudon.com, email us at office@episcopalloudon.com, or find us on Facebook or Instagram.

Fill out a visitor card or email office@episcopalloudon.com to subscribe to our weekly church email, the *Parish Tidings*, for all the latest information from Resurrection.

If you can't make it here in person, join us at 10:30, live on Facebook: facebook.com/episcopalloudon.

Holy Eucharist, Rite II

The Word of God

Prelude

Entrance Hymn (10:30 only)
The great Creator of the worlds

Please stand as able.
Hymnal 489

Opening Acclamation

BCP 355

Celebrant Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
People And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Collect for Purity

All Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Gloria (*spoken at 8:00, sung at 10:30*)

Hymnal 280

**Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.**

**Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Collect of the Day

Celebrant The Lord be with you.

People **And also with you.**

Celebrant Let us pray.

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lessons

The First Lesson: Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Lector A reading from the Book of Isaiah.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the LORD God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Lector The Word of the Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 147: 1-12 *Laudate Dominum*

BCP 804

Lector We will read the Psalm responsively. (*Congregation reads the bold lines.*)

1 Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God! *

how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

2 The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem; *

he gathers the exiles of Israel.

3 He heals the brokenhearted *

and binds up their wounds.

4 He counts the number of the stars *
and calls them all by their names.
5 Great is our LORD and mighty in power; *
there is no limit to his wisdom.
6 The LORD lifts up the lowly, *
but casts the wicked to the ground.
7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; *
make music to our God upon the harp.
8 He covers the heavens with clouds *
and prepares rain for the earth;
9 He makes grass to grow upon the mountains *
and green plants to serve mankind.
10 He provides food for flocks and herds *
and for the young ravens when they cry.
11 He is not impressed by the might of a horse; *
he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;
12 But the LORD has pleasure in those who fear him, *
in those who await his gracious favor.

Lector and People

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.**

The Second Lesson: Galatians 3: 23-25; 4: 4-7

Lector A reading from the Letter to the Galatians.

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Lector The Word of the Lord.
People **Thanks be to God.**

Sequence Hymn

Please stand as able.

Word of God, come down on earth (verses 1 & 2)

Hymnal 633

The Gospel: John 1: 1-18

Celebrant The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Celebrant The Gospel of the Lord.
People **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

Sequence Hymn

Word of God, come down on earth (verses 3 & 4)

Hymnal 633

Sermon

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bridges

The Nicene Creed

BCP 358

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

Common Worship, Prayers for Christmas

Please assume a posture of prayer, whether standing, kneeling, or sitting as able.

Intercessor In peace let us pray to the Lord. Father, one holy night your Son our Saviour was born in human flesh. Renew your Church as the Body of Christ.
Holy God,
All **hear our prayer.**

Intercessor On that holy night, there was no room for your Son in the inn. Protect with your love those who have no home and all who live in poverty. Holy God,
All **hear our prayer.**

Intercessor Mary, in the pain of labour, brought your Son to birth. Hold in your hand Kathleen, Ruth & Frank, Lee R., the Scott family, the McAfee family, Ginny, Diane & Cal, Jim, Tom, Marshall S., Brenda B., Jackie C., and David H., and all who are in pain or distress. Holy God,
All hear our prayer.

Intercessor Christ came as a light shining in the darkness. Bring comfort to all who suffer the effects of war, gun violence, oppression, and natural disasters, and all who suffer in the sadness of our world. Holy God,
All hear our prayer.

Intercessor The angels sang, 'Peace to God's people on earth.' Strengthen those who work for peace and justice in our country and throughout the world. Holy God,
All hear our prayer.

Intercessor Shepherds in the field heard good tidings of joy. Give us grace to preach the gospel of Christ's redemption. Holy God,
All hear our prayer.

Intercessor Strangers found the Holy Family, and saw the baby lying in the manger. Bless all those who have no home or safe shelter. Bless our homes and all whom we love. Holy God,
All hear our prayer.

Intercessor Through Christ, heaven is come down to earth, and earth is raised to heaven. Hold in your hand all those who have passed through death in the hope of your coming kingdom. Holy God,
All hear our prayer.

Intercessor Christians the world over celebrate Christ's birth. Open our hearts that he may be born in us today. Holy God,
All hear our prayer.

Intercessor Holy God, angels and shepherds worshipped at the manger throne. Receive the worship we offer in fellowship with Mary, Joseph and the saints through him who is your Word made flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
All Amen.

Celebrant Merciful God, as your blessed Son Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost; so may he come again to find in us the completion of his redeeming work; for he is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Season of Christmas Kyrie Confession

Common Worship

Continuing in a posture of prayer, we will hold a moment of silence for individual, silent confessions before the priest leads us into the words of corporate confession.

Celebrant Christ the light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts. Let us turn to the light and confess our sins.

Celebrant God our Father, you sent your Son full of grace and truth:
People **forgive our failure to receive him.**

Celebrant Lord, have mercy.
People **Lord, have mercy.**

Celebrant Jesus our Saviour, you were born in poverty and laid in a manger:
People **forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.**

Celebrant Christ, have mercy.
People **Christ, have mercy.**

Celebrant Spirit of Love, your servant Mary responded joyfully to your call:
People **forgive the hardness of our hearts.**

Celebrant Lord, have mercy.
People **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution of Sin

Celebrant May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw you to himself and cleanse you from all your sins, that you may behold the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Peace

Please stand as able.

Celebrant May the peace of Christ be always with you.
People **And also with you.**

Celebrant Let us show one another a sign of God's peace.

The Holy Communion

Celebrant Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. *Ephesians 5:2a*

Offertory music

O come, all ye faithful

Hymnal 83

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise him all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Celebrant For all things come from you, O Lord;
People **and of your own have we given you.**

The Great Thanksgiving

Eucharistic Prayer D

BCP 372

Sursum Corda (Lift Up Your Hearts)

Spoken at 8:30. Sung at 10:00.

Celebrant The Lord be with you,
People **And also with you.**
Celebrant Lift up your hearts.
People **We lift them to the Lord.**
Celebrant Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Celebrant It is truly right to glorify you, Father, and to give you thanks; for you alone are God, living and true, dwelling in light inaccessible from before time and for ever. Fountain of life and source of all goodness, you made all things and fill them with your blessing; you created them to rejoice in the splendor of your radiance.

Countless throngs of angels stand before you to serve you night and day; and, beholding the glory of your presence, they offer you unceasing praise. Joining with them, and giving voice to every creature under heaven, we acclaim you, and glorify your Name, as we sing,

Sanctus (*Spoken at 8:00. Sung at 10:30.*)

Hymnal S-124

**Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

The people stand or kneel.

Celebrant We acclaim you, holy Lord, glorious in power. Your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love. You formed us in your own image, giving the whole world into our care, so that, in obedience to you, our Creator, we might rule and serve all your creatures. When our disobedience took us far from you, you did not abandon us to the power of death.

In your mercy you came to our help, so that in seeking you we might find you. Again and again you called us into covenant with you, and through the prophets you taught us to hope for salvation.

Father, you loved the world so much that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, he lived as one of us, yet without sin. To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation; to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy. To fulfill your purpose he gave himself up to death; and, rising from the grave, destroyed death, and made the whole creation new.

And, that we might live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us, he sent the Holy Spirit, his own first gift for those believe, to complete his work in the world, and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.

When the hour had come for him to be glorified by you, his heavenly Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end; at supper with them he took bread, and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, “Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, “Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me.”

Father, we now celebrate this memorial of our redemption. Recalling Christ’s death and his descent among the dead, proclaiming his resurrection and ascension to your right hand, awaiting his coming in glory; and offering to you, from the gifts you have given us, this bread and this cup, we praise you and we bless you.

Celebrant and People

**We praise you, we bless you,
we give thanks to you,
and we pray to you, Lord, our God.**

Celebrant Lord, we pray that in your goodness and mercy your Holy Spirit may descend upon us, and upon these gifts, sanctifying them and showing them to be

holy gifts for your holy people, the bread of life and the cup of salvation, the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that all who share this bread and cup may become one body and one spirit, a living sacrifice in Christ, to the praise of your Name.

Remember, Lord, your one holy catholic and apostolic Church, redeemed by the blood of your Christ. Reveal its unity, guard its faith, and preserve it in peace.

Remember all your people, and those who seek your truth. Remember all who have died in the peace of Christ, and those whose faith is known to you alone; bring them into the place of eternal joy and light.

And grant that we may find our inheritance with the Blessed Virgin Mary, with patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and all the saints who have found favor with you in ages past. We praise you in union with them and give you glory through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, all honor and glory are yours, Almighty God and Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

AMEN. *(spoken at 8:00, sung at 10:30)*

Hymnal S-146

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

**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,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Breaking of the Bread

The Celebrant breaks the consecrated bread and a period of silence is kept.

Celebrant Alleluia, Christ, our Passover is sacrificed for us;
People **Therefore, let us keep the feast. Alleluia.**

Fraction Hymn (*spoken at 8:00, sung at 10:30*)

Hymnal S-161

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: Grant us peace.

Celebrant The Gifts of God for the People of God.

Communion Hymn *Of the Father's love begotten*

Hymnal 82

We encourage you to come forward to receive Holy Communion as you feel comfortable.

Remain seated, until the usher directs you forward to the communion rail. After receiving communion, return to your seat by the side aisle, so that traffic flows one way. If you would prefer communion be brought to you at your seat, please let an usher know and, as always, we will be happy to do so. If you prefer not to receive communion, you may come forward to the altar rail along with those receiving communion. Please cross your arms over your chest to indicate that you prefer a blessing

Season of Christmas Post-Communion Prayer

Common Worship

Celebrant Let us pray.

All **God our Father, in this night you have made known to us again
the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:
confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him
until the day dawns and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts.
To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.**

The Blessing

Celebrant May God the Father keep you in all your days.
May God the Son shield you in all your ways.
May God the Spirit bring you healing and peace.
May God the Holy Trinity drive all darkness from you
and pour upon you blessing and light.
And may the blessing of God be with you now and for evermore. Amen.

Recessional Hymn

Joy to the world! the Lord is come

Hymnal 100

The Dismissal

Celebrant God sent his angels from glory to bring to shepherds the good news of Jesus' birth. May God fill you with joy to bring this good news to others today. Alleluia, alleluia.

People **Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.**

Postlude

Parish Announcements, Prayers & Thanksgivings

A Christmas Message from Bishop Brian

Dear East Tennessee Friends, Greetings!

God is with us. The Incarnation is God's greatest gift to humanity and to all things created by God. With Mary's consent, the Holy Spirit moved through her life to bring Jesus into this broken and beautiful world. In Jesus, we see the human face of God. In Jesus, we see God's promise to be with us and remain with us always.

From now on, there is no Godforsaken place. Because God chose to enter the world through Jesus, everywhere you and I go is a place where God is present, too.

While there are no Godforsaken places, there are places where we have done great harm. From Wendell Berry's poem, "How to Be A Poet," Berry writes, "There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places/ and desecrated places."

Through the Incarnation, God chose to become involved in every place and every person. There are no insignificant people. There are no places in the middle of nowhere. Through the Incarnation, God says everything counts and matters and has value.

So, when you see fellow humans dehumanized through political speech or cruel immigration practices, when you hear neighbors spoken of as less-than-human, I would invite you to offer a Gospel no to that way.

Choose another path which reconsecrates the places in our world where the truth of the Incarnation has been marred by the times when we have mistreated each other, disfigured each other, and failed to see each other as persons worthy of dignity and respect.

In saying yes to the Incarnation, feed the hungry, house the unhoused, welcome the stranger, visit the prisoner. Go to the places where others believe God is not present.

Our parish prayer list

Kathleen, Ruth & Frank, Lee R.,
The Scott family, The McAfee family,
Ginny, Diane & Cal, Jim, Tom,
Marshall S., Brenda B., Jackie C., David H.

Continuing prayers for

Jim; Daphne; Rosemary O.; the Hentchel family;
Pat; Claire; Sandy; Rob & Sherry; Cheri; Jane;
Shannon; Jim; Mel; Wayne; Diana N.; Jack;
Ashley; Raynella; Ed & Jean; Kim E.; Joe;
Beverly; Grace; Virginia; Betty Anne; Janey;
Johnny; and Karen H.

Pray for our vestry leaders

Class of 2025: Lisa A., Donna B., Diane V.K.
Class of 2026: Alice A., Dianna S., Jenny L.
Class of 2027: Bev B., Karen B., Mark H.
Officers: Jenny L., Diane V.K., Sally L.

God is with us. In the Incarnation, God chooses to be with us here in this world. God also chooses to make us all a people together. The Incarnation disrupts our tendency towards tribalism, towards us versus them thinking. We are not simply called to love the enemy. Over time, through the grace of God, we can come to believe that the enemy becomes friend. As you gather to worship on Christmas Eve, please know how grateful I am for the preachers in our diocese, both clergy and lay, who proclaim the Good News, telling again the joy and mystery of the Incarnation. I am confident you will hear many an edifying and challenging and inspiring and renewing word from our pulpits.

**In all that you will hear, remember this:
God is with us.**

Peace,
+ Brian

For Your Calendars

THIS WEEK

Dec. 28	8:00 a.m.	10:30 a.m.		
Acolyte	Holly Pate	Mark Smith	Altar Guild	Judy Egan
Euch. Minister	Mark Hennes	Bonnie Smith		
Lector	Andrew Wilkinson	Monty Ross	Flower Guild	Bev Baumgardner
Ushers	Jerry Ploeger	Art Stewart & Drew Hawley	Accompanist	Tammy Keever
Coffee Hour	Rosemary Kitts	Ginny Tolbert	Celebrant & Preacher	Rebecca Bridges
Video	n/a	Bill Schwindt	Offering Counters	Ginny Tolbert
Chancellor	Jerry Ploeger	David Baumgardner		& Jean Cardwell

NEXT WEEK

Jan. 4	8:00 a.m.	10:30 a.m.		
Acolyte	Donna Bye	Drew Hawley	Altar Guild	Donna Bye
Euch. Minister	Andrew Wilkinson	Bonnie Smith		
Lector	Peggy Rogers	Jackie Buttinelli	Flower Guild	Rosemary Kitts
Ushers	Jerry Ploeger	Art Stewart & Keytha Graves	Accompanist	Jedediah Dahl
Coffee Hour	Erlys Ploeger	Monty Ross	Celebrant & Preacher	Rebecca Bridges
Video	n/a	Bill Schwindt	Offering Counters	Jean Cardwell
Chancellor	Peggy Rogers	Art Stewart		& Nelda Griffith

This week at Resurrection

Sunday, December 28

8:00 a.m. - Holy Eucharist, spoken

10:30 a.m. - Holy Eucharist, choral

Sunday, January 4

8:00 a.m. - Holy Eucharist, spoken

10:30 a.m. - Holy Eucharist, choral

Tuesday, January 6

10:00 a.m. Office reopens

4:00 p.m. Three Kings Epiphany Party

Three Kings Epiphany Party

Tuesday, January 6 from 4-6 p.m.

Bring an appetizer or charcuterie to share.

Please bring your nativity sets/creches to the Parish Hall on January 4 & 5; we will have tables set up for them to be displayed.

Save the Date: Upcoming Parish Events

Tuesday, January 6

4-6 p.m. Three Kings Epiphany Party

Sunday, January 11

Annual Parish Meeting

Monday, January 12

10 a.m., Jane Scott visitation, Parish Hall

11 a.m., Jane Scott funeral service, Nave

Holiday Office Schedule

Please note that the church office is closed from Wednesday, December 24 through Monday, January 5.

To contact our priest, the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bridges,
email rector@episcopalloudon.com
or call the church at (865) 986-2390.

Urgent pastoral needs after hours: (865) 242-9240.

TODAY'S ART

VINCENT VAN GOGH, *The Starry Night*, 1889, Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 92.1 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest (by exchange). Conservation was made possible by the Bank of America Art Conservation Project, 472.1941, Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

He counts the number of the stars and calls them all by their names. Psalm 147: 3-4

In our psalm, the exhortation to sing praises and thanksgiving to God is repeated three times (vv.1, 7, 12), creating a tripartite structure. The reasons why lauds are due (in our parlance: political, environmental, and humanitarian) are listed, connected, and expanded on throughout the text. Foremost, thanks are offered for the restoration and special care of Jerusalem and of its exiled people, able at last to live securely within strong gates, in blessed peace and prosperity. In His compassion and tenderness, God has upheld the lowly and comforted the broken-hearted, and the loving extravagance of God's unique relationship with Jerusalem is rightly noted.

Praises are due in recognition of God as the Creator of all things: His might is manifested in this world through the amazing natural wonders we observe. The well-ordered stars are the first marvel to be mentioned. Since the earliest of times, stars have been a symbol of afterlife and paradise in many cultures. Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* testifies to the powerful attraction they still hold for us: in his canvas, the stars are huge, and appear to pulse with an irresistible centripetal force that draws us up to them, and ultimately to God Himself.

Vincent van Gogh painted *Starry Night* in 1889, a year before his death, while at the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole, near Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. The scene is dominated by a dynamic vision of bright stars and planets swirling over a tranquil, moon-lit landscape. We see a village and softly-rounded mountains, with fields and trees in the background. In the left foreground, the top of an aromatic cypress gently sways in the wind, rising like incense smoke, or prayer, to the sky (cf. Psalm 140:2). The paint is thickly three-dimensional, conveying light, movement, and energy.

Much has been written about this canvas, the artist's disturbed state of mind, his religiosity, as well as the eerie correspondence between this depiction of celestial bodies and what space telescopes show us that stars and the trillions of galaxies we have observed—such as the spectacular Fireworks and Whirlpool galaxies—look like.

One fruitful way of approaching *Starry Night* is through an 1888 letter written by Vincent to his brother Theo, in which the artist talks of his dreamy fascination with stars and with 'dots on a map' (representing towns), and how, just as we take a train to visit a place, we will 'take death' to visit stars, as they are inaccessible to the living (Letter 638). The artist's religious longing for such a journey is further hinted at by the centrality of the church, with its tall steeple probing the sky. A deep contemplation of the glory of the stars—whether the dominant swirling patterns moving through the sky are read as the Milky Way or as God's 'sending out his command to the earth' (Psalm 147:15)—the painting invites the viewer to imagine how it might feel to gain admittance to this dazzling work of God (v.4).

Van Gogh, Vincent. 1888. 'Letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, c.9 July 1888', trans. by Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, ed. by Robert Harrison, #506, <http://www.webexhibits.org/vangogh/letter/18/506.htm> [6 October 2020]
Anna Gannon. 2022. 'Reach for the Sky', in *The Visual Commentary on Scripture* ed. by Ben Quash. (London: The Visual Commentary on Scripture Foundation). [Accessed 24.12.2025]
<https://thevcs.org/song-thanksgiving#reach-sky>
