

The British Lutheran

ISSUE 66.2

AUTUMN 2026

‘A Time for Everything’

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From the Chairman

*Rev. Tapani Simojoki
Chairman of the ELCE*

The Eternal Gospel in Our Time

“Something old,
Something new,
Something borrowed,
Something blue.”

When I moved to the United Kingdom almost exactly 31 years ago, little did I know how much I had to learn about local culture and traditions. One that was both new and puzzling to me was this rhyme, setting out a

tradition of what a bride should wear on her wedding day. Years later, I have come to think that this little rhyme has something important to teach the church about her life. On the one hand, the gospel by which the church has her life is eternal (Rev. 14:6). On the other hand, this gospel is to be proclaimed to “all nations” (Luke 24:47). This command of Jesus refers not only to nations in all places but nations in all times. In technical language, the church is catholic (universal, undivided) not only *synchronically*

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(at any given time) but also *diachronically* (through time).

This means, amongst other things, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England is not only part of the same church as, say, Gutnius ('Good News') Lutheran Church in Papua Guinea, but also the church in Wittenberg in 1530, in Milan in the 8th century, or the church of Antioch in the time of the apostles. All the while, it remains the ELCE in 2026.

When the church has a healthy understanding of this unity of the church in time and across time, across space and in space, it also becomes visible and audible in the church's life.

In short, the Church, on account of her unity, wears something old and something new. The liturgy of our services anchors us to the reality that this is essentially how Christians have always worshipped. Likewise, we sing hymns that are predominantly not from our own time but have been inherited from earlier generations of Christians. They have been sifted and moulded in the Church's use, and they continue to bless us as they blessed earlier generations. And by retaining them, we confess that we are inheritors of the same faith, and heirs of the same Church, with a duty to retain and pass on to future generations that which we have received. It is not only our church, but that of past and future generations. Something old.

Nevertheless, we worship the unchanging God as people of the twenty-first century. Our dress, our instruments, and some of our liturgy and hymns, for example, are from

our own time, because it is also our church. Old festivals sometimes fall out of use and new ones are brought in. Something new.

Moreover, we cannot help being influenced by our time. Even though the Church has her own culture, that culture is not isolated from the surrounding culture. Sixteenth-century hymns sound like renaissance music, regardless of whether they are German, British or Scandinavian. Likewise twentieth- and twenty-first-century ones. Church architecture, the details of vestments and paraments, sermon illustrations, technology: all these are necessarily a product of our time as well as the Church's own heritage. Something borrowed.

What about something blue? Perhaps this helps us to think of the local character of each Church body, and, to a lesser extent, each local congregation. The ELCE uses the LSB, but we are not in America or Canada. The ELCE is on the shores of the North Sea, but we don't have the history, culture or language of Belgium, France or Denmark. And so we wear with gratitude the local character of the Church as it has emerged here, in the context which the eternal gospel for all nations has been preached and administered in preaching and the administration of the sacraments.

Thanks be to God for preserving His word in the ELCE for the past 130 years, for joining us to the life of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, sustaining us in our time, and working among us and through us His spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). May He continue to preserve His church among us and for future generations.



Editorial

Hanna Mitchell
Editor of *The British Lutheran*

A Time for Everything

In *Winters in the World*, the subject of this issue's book review, the historian, Eleanor Parker, writes of the Anglo Saxons, one of the early Christian peoples in Britain:

'In their eyes, the structure of the year reflected profound truths about the nature of the universe, planned and created by God, which found expression in every detail of the calendar. Time was part of God's creation; to study it was to learn something about the mind of its divine creator.' (p.13)

It is beautiful to think of time as reflecting something of God's mind, communicating profound truths and inspiring devotion to our creator. Taken at a poetic distance, it is easy to enjoy the beauty of changing seasons, and the rhythms of the liturgical year, as we cycle through the conception, birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Step a little closer, however, into the mundane reality of everyday life, and our perspective can easily become something quite different.

Time, we often feel, is not on our side. As the year turns from summer into autumn, we might be taken aback by how quickly it seems to be hurrying by. Next thing we know, someone is telling us how many Fridays are left before Christmas, and it feels like the year is practically already over. We have a very loose grip on the passing of time, and no matter how we might try and cling to a particular season of life, it slips away from us all the same.

One of the great unfathomable mysteries for us humans to ponder, is the seeming fickleness of time's passing, and the fragmentary inconsistency of our memory. Weeks and months go by where we barely remember what happened from one day to the next, and yet each of us has days or even whole periods of our life which retain a clear and luminous quality that remains undiminished through the passing years: particular youthful experiences, perhaps, or wedding days, the births of children, and other extraordinary and precious times which stand out for the joy they have brought us.

However, memory is not always so kind. Dark and difficult days which refuse to disappear into forgetfulness follow us too, persisting in troubling us even in happier times. Precious times that we wish to cling to speed by too fast, and harder times drag on slower than we'd like. And at the same time, all of creation changes ceaselessly, as the seasons slip by, and our years pass on and on.

Yet time is also the structure which God has given to His creation, both for order and for mercy. It is not only linear, but also cyclical. The summer which passes away into autumn will return again. And our bodies, which God first created out of the clay of the earth, will return to it as they fail. As the year repeats itself, we are reminded of God's faithfulness in giving us a time for everything.

As this issue's book review explores on p.16, Eleanor Parker's *Winters in the World*, with its focus on the connection between the seasons of the year, the seasons of the liturgical cycle, and the seasons of human life, is an aid in meditating on the beauty and the difficulty of living through time and

seasons.

We may feel that life is fleeting and unpredictable – how much more so 1000 years ago! In this part of the world, we are mercifully insulated from the worst that the seasons might bring us - storms, famines, freezing cold and (albeit less so in recent times) burning heat. We live in comfortable, insulated houses, enabled by the toil of others to purchase a vast array of foods which appear on supermarket shelves. When we are sick, we have doctors to help us. When we are cold, we turn on the heating.

Most people have not lived like this. Most people at most times, including many people still in these times, have starved when crops fail, frozen in harsh winters, and died of ailments which to us seem minor. Such was life on this island for many generations of Christians. Yet amidst this precariousness of life, great faith and devotion could be found, as ordinary people lived lives which were interwoven with the patterns and rhythms of the church year.

The passing of time, the changing of days and seasons and years, are an opportunity also to turn our attention to the manifold expressions of God's loving faithfulness to his creation, and most especially his chosen people, the Church. The cycle of the liturgical year, which begins, in the darkest time of the year, with anticipation of Christ's coming as the light which the darkness cannot comprehend, and his birth into the very midst of this uncomprehending darkness, does not only lend spiritual meaning to the natural cycles of this world. Rather, it shows us the meaning with which God has imbued our lives, and the life of his creation, through the incomprehensible mysteries of His Son.

In this part of the year, between Christ's ascension and his coming again, we are drawn to see how this particular season reflects the greater autumn of the world. We Christians live suspended in the time between Christ's ascension to the right hand of the Father, a truth we repeat each and every week, and his second coming to judge both the living and the dead. As we enjoy the golden leaves of autumn, we cannot help but be aware that their beauty is a product of their fleetingness. Soon the leaves will have fallen, and the trees will be bare, and we will know that, at least this Advent, Christ is coming soon.

We, like the trees and the years, have our seasons. Some of us are in the spring of our lives, some in the winter; some in the light of joy, others in the darkness of sorrow. This earth, this time, is not for us to have forever. But here too, creation shows us the mercy of God's design. When our winters in the world are over, we will be raised to an eternal spring. From the darkness of the grave bursts forth undying light.

In each season, God provides for us. His church has gifts for the young and the old alike, and this issue aims to reflect on this truth, by highlighting the various events and occasions which provide spiritual nourishment across the whole church body. This focus on seasons continues with reflections also on the significance of Michaelmas within the church year, and the benefits of taking the opportunities to celebrate and worship our Lord which the liturgical year gives us.

I pray that in whichever season of life this issue finds you, you would nonetheless know the blessing of our faithful and unchanging Father.

Finding God's Strength in a Shaking World

Mairi Cowie
St Columba, East Kilbride



“Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.” Ps. 46:10

There is something reassuring about standing on a Scottish hillside, looking across a landscape stretching towards the horizon. Whether it is the rugged coastline of the Highlands, the quiet waters of a Loch, or the rolling hills of West Lothian that I call home, we can experience a peace that is difficult to find amid everyday demands.

Yet even the most beautiful landscape can change with the weather. A calm loch becomes restless, mist conceals the mountains, and familiar paths become difficult to follow.

Life can feel much the same.

There are seasons when everything seems secure, and others when a medical diagnosis, bereavement, financial worry, or family difficulty changes our sense of stability.

Psalm 46 does not promise a life without difficulties. Instead, it reminds us that God is present in the midst of trouble. That is a truth we can return to when our circumstances seem beyond our control.

A Refuge, Not an Escape from Reality

A refuge is somewhere we turn for protection when circumstances become difficult. The Bible repeatedly describes God as a refuge for His people. We all still have responsibilities. We can plan carefully, make sensible decisions, seek medical advice, and support our families. But none of these things can guarantee that life will unfold as we expect.

As Christians we must look beyond our own resources towards God's faithfulness.

As Lutherans, our confidence rests in God's grace revealed through Jesus Christ. We do not earn God's favour through our achievements or the strength of our faith. We are saved by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. This is especially reassuring when our faith feels weak.

Some days we pray confidently; on other days, our prayers may be hesitant or distracted. Yet our salvation does not depend upon perfect emotions or an unshakeable sense of certainty.

Our security rests in Christ, not in the strength of our feelings. The Saviour who forgives our sins also sustains us in our weakness.

Psalm 46 describes a world in turmoil. The imagery is dramatic. Mountains move, waters roar, and nations are disturbed. We may not experience such events literally, but we understand what it means to feel that the foundations of life are shaking.

Current news reports, family concerns, uncertainty about the future, and personal difficulties can all affect our peace.

The psalm invites us to consider where our confidence rests when circumstances change.

We cannot control every event, nor can we foresee every difficulty. But we can bring

our concerns before God, seeking His wisdom and trusting His promises.

The Lord remains faithful when our circumstances change.

The words of verse 10 are familiar to many Christians: "Be still, and know that I am God." We might naturally think of a quiet place, a peaceful walk, or a few moments away from the noise of everyday life. Such moments can be helpful, but we should also pay attention to God's authority and sovereignty.

Being still does not mean abandoning our responsibilities or ignoring injustice. Christians are called to love their neighbours, act with compassion, and do what is right.

It does, however, remind us that we are not in control of everything.

How often do we carry burdens as though the outcome depends entirely upon us? We worry about our families, replay conversations, and anticipate problems that may never occur.

We can pray honestly, acknowledge our limitations, and ask God for the wisdom to take the next faithful step. The world does not depend upon our ability to manage everything. God remains God, and we can trust Him.

Jesus entered a world marked by suffering, sin, and death. He took upon Himself the burden of our sin and gave His life on the cross for our salvation. Through His resurrection, He revealed His victory over death.

As Lutherans, we confess that we are justified by grace through faith, for Christ's

sake. Our standing is not earned through our achievements but received through His gracious promise.

When life is going well, we can give thanks without believing that our success makes us worthy of God's love. When life is difficult, we can turn to Christ knowing that our weakness does not place us beyond His mercy.

Perhaps today you are facing a situation you cannot resolve. Perhaps someone in your family needs encouragement, or you are looking ahead with uncertainty.

Psalm 46 does not promise that every problem will disappear. It reminds us that God is our refuge. Take a moment today to place one particular concern before Him.

***The Saviour who
forgives our sins also
sustains us in our
weakness.***

Pray honestly. Ask for wisdom, patience, and courage. Where action is needed, take the next

faithful step. Where circumstances are beyond your control, remember that you do not have to carry them as though you were God.

Wherever you live, you may find a moment of stillness beside the sea, on a country path, or looking across a familiar landscape. Let that moment remind you of the Creator who remains faithful.

Here in Scotland, our mountains may be covered by mist. The sea often becomes restless. Our circumstances often change. But God does not cease to be our refuge.

*Heavenly Father, Thank You that You are our
refuge and strength. Give us wisdom to act
faithfully, courage to face difficulties, and peace
to rest in Your care. Amen.*

Sacraments and Service: Interview with Elder John

*Rev. Didzis Stilve
St Andrews, Ruislip*



We recently welcomed John into the office of Elder at St. Andrew's. His spiritual journey has seen him cross the waters from a Baptist heritage into the Lutheran confession. That transition was marked quite literally by water, as he and his wife presented their two daughters for Holy Baptism shortly after joining. We now discuss theology and his journey to the Lutheran faith.

Let us start at the beginning of this theological journey – how did you first encounter Lutheran theology?

My wife had started watching a YouTube series called “Fighting for the Faith” first, and I had listened in. She had come from a Pentecostal background, and had come across Pastor Rosebrough's videos by chance. After listening to the podcast, she was really encouraged at how biblical his discernment was of the things that were happening in charismatic circles. It resonated with her own doubts and worries about the direction that charismatic theology had taken in wider evangelicalism, as well as in her own life.

As you began to dig deeper, what were some of the things that started to unsettle your previous convictions?

There were discrepancies between what the Bible says and what I'd grown to believe. It's impossible to list all the elements here, but we started to be challenged regarding not just spiritual gifts in church, but also a wider understanding of law and gospel, and what salvation actually is, and how it is brought about.

Can you describe what your understanding of salvation looked like before? What did you believe it rested on?

We had come from a very experiential understanding in which we could somehow “decide” to be saved by having committed our lives to Jesus and experienced “something”. But often that “decision” would be called into question in preaching: Are you really saved if you struggle with this particular sin? Did you really commit or did you really believe, if...? In this context, there is no real certainty of salvation, it always depends on your current performance, level of commitment to ministry, purity of life, things like that.

So Pastor Rosebrough's teaching helped you see these problems – but did it also show you a way forward?

Pastor Rosebrough's videos also showed us proper Biblical exegesis: the importance of a passage's place in the wider narrative and how to apply it. It was great to finally see God's Word as something that you can really logically understand, rather than “what do you feel God is telling you through this passage”? We started off with these two questions:

Is salvation my decision or God's? Can a person who is dead make himself alive? Of course not! Only God does it. There is no boasting about personal experience, depth of faith or commitment, yet equally there needn't be any doubt if any of these things are less than perfect.

How does God speak to us? Is His Word enough or do we need another kind of revelation, some special voice in our hearts? Of course – it's Sola Scriptura. It is so simple yet profound. Especially for my wife, who had just come to realise that what she has for years taken to be God's voice in her heart, was literally a product of imagination and clever manipulation that often took place in the charismatic circles she went through.

And this eventually brought you to our door at St. Andrew's. Did you have reservations about visiting a Lutheran church?

At first we hesitated to visit, as we were aware of the different directions Lutheranism has gone around the world and we weren't quite sure which one we might find at St. Andrew's. But one day my wife decided to just "risk it". She came back elated.

Once you arrived, what was the next major theological question you had to wrestle with?

There is no reason why faith, also being God's gift, would be less available to children than it is to adults.

The next big question for us was that about Baptism: Is Baptism our "work" to confirm our "decision" to be born again and live for God? Or is it God's work – the washing of regeneration as taught by Apostle Peter? Naturally, we had to accept the apostolic teaching, which we had never somehow come across before.

How did this new understanding of Baptism change the way you thought about your daughters and their standing before God?

Before, we believed that, since people are saved by "making a decision" for Christ, children are not fully capable of this, and so need to wait until they are more intellectually mature to "have faith". When that point

comes and what happens to them in the meantime was never clear to us. People naturally worry as parents: what if my child dies before they make that decision? Are they condemned? In evangelicalism this question is uncomfortable.

Over time people started to talk about "age of innocence" or "age of accountability", a concept in which children will not be made accountable for their sins and would therefore be saved in such situation. But there is no actual New Testament teaching on this and it is unclear what this age should be. So worried parents take their babies and "dedicate" them to God in their infancy just to be on the safe side!

But if God gives us a washing of regeneration in baptism, this means God saves us through baptism. It's His decision, not ours! There is

no reason why faith, also being God's gift, would be less available to children than it is to adults, just as is no less available to an intellectually impaired

person. We looked at all the instances in the Gospels where Jesus affirms children and sometimes even puts their faith as superior to others. And we realised that, in baptising children, the Church through most of its history was doing it right, not wrong.

You've moved from a tradition that often emphasises spontaneity to the Divine Service, which follows a set liturgy and lectionary. How did you adjust?

I was hesitant about liturgy at first. However, for me it makes sense for several reasons. It builds a large amount of the Bible, and of the twin principles of Law and Gospel, into every service. This ensures that, whatever sermon is preached on the day, God's word is

always guaranteed to be heard clearly. Also, it ensures that in a short amount of time, the congregation has learnt a considerable number of key passages.

Similarly, the hymns that we sing are full of Bible passages. They rarely feature our response ("I will do so and so..."), but instead they speak of what God has already done, in sending His Son Jesus Christ to be our ransom from sin and death.

Is there a particular aspect of Lutheran theology that ties everything together for you – a kind of "key" that unlocks the rest?

The idea of looking at the Bible through the lens of Law and Gospel allows one to see very clearly the "scarlet thread" that runs through its books. In both Testaments, we see the futility of human efforts to atone for sin, and the undeserved salvation that God freely gives – from the bronze serpent being lifted

We know that God works through ordinary people and ordinary means to spread his Word.

up in the desert, all the way to Christ being lifted up on the cross.

Confessional Lutherans in Britain are a very small number. Yet here you are, accepting a call to serve as a new Elder. How do you hold together the smallness of our numbers and the confidence needed to serve?

When invited to be an Elder, my natural inclination was to be reluctant – to think that

I'm "not good enough".

However, we know that God works through ordinary people and ordinary means to spread his Word. Because of this, I

can trust Him to bless my work as Elder, and avoid being tempted to think, "Ah, God can't use someone like me."

We give thanks to God for John's service and ask the readers of British Lutheran to keep him, his wife, and their daughters in their prayers as he continues this office at St. Andrew's.

Exploring the Church Year: Michaelmas

The feast day of St Michael and All Angels (Michaelmas) is today perhaps best known for giving its name to the first term of many British universities. Celebrated on the September 29th, it has long been a major moment in the European calendar, and still marks the beginning of the final quarter of the judicial year. In the Lutheran calendar, Michaelmas is one of the principal feasts of Christ, which occur throughout the church year, alongside the Nativity (Christmas), the Transfiguration and All Saints'.

As the full name suggests, Michaelmas does not only celebrate St Michael the Archangel,

but is also the day on which all the angels are commemorated and are given thanks to God for. Specifically, we give thanks to God for the victory of St Michael and the whole angel host against Satan the dragon, as well as for the protection of all Christians from the cunning and wiles of the evil one. St Michael himself features first in the book of Daniel, where he appears in chapters 10 and 12 as a glorious and terrifying protector. However, his coming also brings the prophet peace, for "as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep" (Daniel 10:9). Later in the book, Michael is named as the "great

Daniel Simojoki
Our Saviour, Fareham



prince who has charge of [God's] people" (Daniel 12:1). What a great comfort for we baptised Christians that God ordains his angel to be such a good and mighty protector, powerful enough to defeat the dragon and his whole army (Revelation 12:7-8). Hence, the liturgical and theological themes of the observation of Michaelmas tend to focus on ideas of light against darkness, good against evil, and triumphant victory, the latter of which connects excellently with the final major feast of the church year: the feast day of Christ the King.

From its inception, Michaelmas has been associated with the final gathering of the harvest and the preparation of animals for winter. In the warmer climes of Anglo-Saxon England, which Bede in 731AD described as ideal for vineyards even into central England, harvest time would have stretched later than it does in the present day. For a society rooted in agriculture, we can imagine how the abundance of creation, and protection from storms and the elements, was linked to the angels, sent to us for our protection. Indeed, medieval thought held that the presence of thunder indicated the presence of demons, the very beings against whom angels defend us. While to us, thunderstorms are mostly harmless, the idea of lightning striking a wooden barn full of grain, a field becoming waterlogged or a river bursting its banks were issues not only of livelihood but of life and death. With the unpredictable weather of autumn approaching, remembering the angels was both reassuring and worthwhile.

Traditionally, goose is eaten on Michaelmas

day. This practice likely began in the fifteenth century, perhaps stemming from a legend about an Irish king whom Saint Patrick brought back to life after he choked on a goose bone. The Michaelmas goose was easily fattened on the stubble of recently harvested fields, which provides a practical reason for the tradition. In Britain, folk tradition states that Michaelmas day is the last day on which blackberries should be picked. According to folk tale, when Saint Michael expelled Satan from heaven, he fell

on a blackberry bush and spat on the berries, them unfit for eating.

While the season may be ending, one imagines that some blackberries are probably still good for eating on September 30th!

Fundamentally, the Church has set aside this great feast day for us Christians to celebrate and give thanks to God for Saint Michael and all the angels, through whom the devil was thrown down

from heaven. We all enjoy the protection of the angels in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes, I personally find it encouraging to imagine the whole angel host armed for war, just as Elisha saw in the Second Book of Kings, chapter six.

Collect for St Michael and All Angels:

Everlasting God, you have wonderfully established the ministries of angels and mortals. Mercifully grant that as Michael and the angels contend against the cosmic forces of evil, so by your direction they may help and defend us here on earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



*St Michael defeating the dragon.
Trinity College Cambridge
Chapel Altarpiece*

Events throughout the ELCE

Youth Rally



After many games of pool, 'Dobble' and 'Irish Snap', a refreshing walk through the Herefordshire countryside, group devotions and Bible studies, and a day trip to Wells, the annual Summer Youth Rally drew to a close — much to everyone's dismay! Over the course of the weekend - which was spent in the historic Treago Castle - the ELCE youth came together to have fun, make friends and discuss important questions about God and faith. This year, the theme focused on the Lord's prayer: 'Lord, teach me to pray'. The teaching was led by Pastor Tapani Simojoki and Luke Williams, who also led us in Matins each morning, as well as compline in the evening.



Over the course of four days, we read the seven petitions of the Lord's prayer, discussing and breaking down their meaning (including what Luther writes about them in the Small Catechism). We went on to read bible passages which we could link to the petitions, before sharing how the prayer relates to our own lives. Recognising that it can be hard to know how to pray, we were taught both the importance

of frequent prayer, and how we can pray to God when we are by ourselves. Between bible studies, we had the chance to explore the castle, swim, play games, make music together and get to know one another. Various outings and an evening bonfire were also great opportunities to make new friends, and we all thoroughly enjoyed roasting marshmallows and running around in the woods at dusk.



On Sunday - after two days at the castle - we travelled to Wells for a joint service with members of the ELCE. There, our learning continued with a bible study and church service. We also helped to wash up after a delicious shared lunch, and had the opportunity to meet members from different churches across the ELCE. The day was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone!

Overall, the weekend was a huge success, and - although we left tired - the shared memories were proof of a time well spent. Each youth rally is a hugely memorable and valuable experience: coming together with other Christian young people is both encouraging and exciting. They are an amazing way to build strong connections and friendships that extend beyond the four days spent at Treago castle, and are packed with enjoyment, learning and a shared faith. We all wait with anticipation for the next time we get to come together for a Youth Rally!

*Isabella Simons
Oxford Lutheran Mission*



In order to make Youth Rallies accessible to all young members of the ELCE, the Board for Youth subsidises the cost to a significant degree. For this, the Board depends on donations from congregations and individual ELCE members.

To support the work of the Board for Youth, donations can be made via the ELCE website, or directly through CAF Donate:

<https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/1547>

Wells Summer Celebration

The August bank holiday weekend was once again set aside for the summer youth rally held at Treago Castle near Hereford. 18 young people aged 11 to 18 attended, with Luke Williams and Rev Tapani Simojoki teaching the Bible studies and leading morning matins and evening compline services. We also had the support of five young adult leaders. I was tasked with catering for the group and although I was daunted at first (what and how much do 18 teenagers with varying tastes and appetites eat??!!) it was a joy to have them eat (almost!) everything and always coming back to say thank you! I am also humbled by the kind generosity of the Treago family for selflessly opening their home to us. Though I was definitely more Martha than Mary, the times when I could join Bible studies and services were precious, as was every interaction with our lovely young people who are the future of the ELCE.



Sunday once again proved a special day with 51 people from various congregations coming together for fellowship in Wells. This event is definitely a highlight in the ELCE calendar. Lunch was plentiful with many special treats, not least Adrian's specially commissioned pork pie, and it is always



lovely to reconnect with old acquaintances and meet new people over tasty food. The youth served by clearing tables and washing dishes – a good bonding activity! Lunch was followed by the fourth teaching session on the theme of The Lord's Prayer which the youth studied over the weekend. The treasure we have in this prayer which we can pray confidently as God's beloved and saved children is always worth reflecting upon anew.

Attending a worship service with sound preaching, celebrating Holy Communion, beautiful organ music and singing from the choir of young people, is always uplifting. My husband and I recently attended an organ concert, but left feeling a little underwhelmed, as listening passively to a series of notes does not compare with joining in with singing words of prayer, praise and adoration as we do with so many voices at Wells.

At the end of the day everyone left knowing that the generally two-hour journey was well worth taking, and not even torrential downpours on the road home will have dampened the spirits of all who came. Join us next year!

*Dorothea Sutherland
Good Shepherd, Coventry*



Events throughout the ELCE - continued

Retreat

A Joyful Weekend at Launde Abbey



Just a few days after celebrating Easter, members and friends of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England gathered at Launde Abbey from 10–12 April for our 2026 retreat. Our theme was drawn from the encouraging words of Nehemiah: “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

It was a joy simply to arrive at such a peaceful and beautiful place and to be welcomed by familiar faces from across our Lutheran family. Away from our usual routines and responsibilities, the retreat gave us time to slow down, enjoy one another’s company and turn our attention again to God’s goodness. A lovely spirit of friendship accompanied our worship, study, walks and conversations throughout the weekend.

Our days were beautifully shaped by prayer and worship, beginning and ending them together with Matins and Vespers. Singing, praying and listening together created a rhythm that was both peaceful and refreshing. Amid the busyness of everyday life, it was a blessing to enjoy this unhurried time in God’s presence. During the Bible studies led by the Revd Wade Bellesbach, we reflected on what Christian joy truly means. Our discussions reminded us that joy is more

than temporary happiness or a pleasant emotion. It is God’s gift to us in Christ. A joy grounded not in changing circumstances, but in what He has accomplished for us.

In Nehemiah, we saw how God strengthened His people through His Word. We also reflected upon Christ’s promise in John 15 that His joy would remain in His disciples. During Easter week, our study of John 20 felt particularly meaningful. Like Thomas, we may struggle with doubt and other very human emotions; nevertheless, Christ continues to come to His people through His Word and Sacraments, bringing forgiveness, peace and strengthening faith.

There was also plenty of time to enjoy the surroundings, rest and renew friendships. The wonderfully amusing evening games had everyone laughing, while peaceful afternoon walks took us among the green grass and grazing sheep. A few walks became considerably longer than expected owing to our rather creative gifts for navigation. But this only added to the fellowship and fun.



Our sincere thanks go to the Congregational Life Committee, whose shared planning and

work made the retreat possible, and to everyone who contributed in different ways to such a joyful and memorable weekend.

Our retreat concluded on Sunday with the Divine Service and Holy Communion. Gathered around Christ's gifts as one Lutheran family, we experienced the heart

Pastor's Study Week

From 30th June - 2nd July 2026 Westfield House hosted ELCE pastors for their annual study week. I was also invited to participate as a guest and pastoral candidate.

The first day included various business items including a discussion on liturgical uniformity within the ELCE's congregations. We also studied a (very short!) book together; *Justification as the Formative Power of Mission* by Georg Vicedom. This provided some stimulating discussions on how we might go about mission work within the ELCE and beyond.

For the remaining days, we attended a Westfield House conference which was also co-hosted by Concordia University Nebraska. The theme was *The Image of God in the Kingdom of Technology*. Professors Brian Brock and John Behr of the University of Aberdeen were the main speakers and provided interesting presentations. Brian Brock's presentation reflected on the technological developments of recent years and how that might influence theological education - for better or worse. John Behr took us through St. Gregory of Nyssa's theology of the Image of God, and our ultimate destination as resurrected humanity in the life of the world to come.

of all that we had considered during the weekend. We left Launde Abbey refreshed, thankful and encouraged, carrying with us the joyful assurance that our crucified and risen Lord remains our strength.

Joyce Moon
St Columba, East Kilbride



A number of shorter presentations and panel discussions were also held during the conference and addressed a variety of questions. We thought about how/whether responsible AI use is possible within ministry, the Image of God within Dietrich Bonhoeffer's works, and why it is that academics and theologians may feel threatened by AI and similar technologies and whether such fears are well-founded. As well as being provided with food for thought, we were also supplied with physical food which was well-received as always. We also punctuated each day with Matins and Vespers services, hearing sermons from Joshua in the morning and the Acts of the Apostles in the evening.

Many thanks to the pastors for allowing me to join them for this week, to Westfield House for hosting the pastors and the conference, to Concordia University of Nebraska for co-hosting the conference, and to our gracious God from whom all blessings flow.

Luke Williams
St David's, Cardiff



Book Review: Winters in the World, by Eleanor Parker

*"Winter is coldest,
Spring frostiest--it is longest cold;
Summer sun-brightest--the sun is hottest;
Harvest most glory-blessed; it brings to men the
year's fruits, which God sends them."*

Maxims II, an Anglo-Saxon poem

In his famous essay *On Fairy Stories*, J.R.R Tolkien explains the purpose of fairytales, mythology and folklore: revelation of hidden truths about the relationships of humanity, nature and God. Tolkien believed that people of the past were more attuned to spiritual realities suffusing their every-day lives.

Winters in the World reveals an enchanted time of Christian history, a time when God was thought of as the great 'Poet' (Old English *scop*) and Creator (Old English *scyppend*). The Anglo-Saxon world, permeated as it was by poetry, mythology, story-telling and deep Christian heritage, was one such spiritually-suffused age.

Anglo-Saxon Christianity saw Christ at the centre of all parts of life, shaping the ways people experienced the seasons, the agricultural calendar, and humanity's place in nature. In our day, some Christians might think that the liturgical year is shaped by and subject to the solar calendar our modern world uses, squeezing in holy days around the 28-31 day months and the regularly charted out seasons. This wasn't true for England's early Christians--the Anglo-Saxon year was formed by, and conformed to, the liturgical year, infusing the physical labour of man's seasonal work and the natural beauty of each season with spiritual

Marie Bombaro
St James, Lafayette, IN



significance. Eleanor Parker's *Winters in the World* is an elegant, engaging portal into an age in which Christ rendered every aspect of life and the year meaningful.

Winters in the World walks the reader through the Anglo-Saxon calendrical year, season by season, beginning with winter. Each chapter offers poetry, liturgy, sermons and folk-traditions as points to pause and contemplate themes and emphases associated with the season. These themes, such as decay, ageing, mortality and man's futility associated with the winter months, reveal truths about God at the core of the calendar. The darkness of

***'Winters in the World'
was a wake-up call for
me as a Christian***

winter's themes finds fulfilling hope in the light of Christ's incarnation on Midwinter's day (Christmas day), symbolised in the Anglo-Saxon church by processing a lit candle across the church threshold, scattering the darkness within the church building, as Christ's birth dawns salvation and new life on his children, and clearing the snow-clouds to shine the spring sun on the earth.

Parker includes rich assemblages of folk-traditions and agricultural practices throughout her chapters, showing that Christ was central to the seasonal demands of life even outside of the church building and special feast days. For instance, New Years Day (celebrated on March 25th during the Anglo-Saxon period) meant the beginning of a new agricultural year, beginning with the first task of ploughing the fields. Out in the

muddy early spring fields, Anglo-Saxon farmers celebrated a liturgy to bless the prayerfully selected seed and the plough, with further entreaties for God's bountiful provision as the plough cuts its first furrow. As *Winters* progresses through the year, a complex and beautiful tapestry of seasonal work enriched by the liturgy and church calendar expressed through poetry and the words of faithful pastors emerges.

Though this book is not a devotional text, nor explicitly Christian, the author is not critical or judgemental of the deeply Christ-centred calendar of the Anglo-Saxons. Parker interprets literature and practices with respect, recognising that spirituality and a clear-sightedness to God's activity was interwoven into every aspect of life. While Parker identifies that some practices and nomenclature originated in the pagan period before Christianity became widespread in Anglo-Saxon England, we as Christian readers can see through Parker's writing how formerly pagan practices were sanctified and beautified as they were adapted for God's use.

Winters in the World is the sort of book which connects us, the modern church in England, with our beautiful and meaningful heritage. After all, "the seasons are points of connection between the familiar present and the strange and distant past" (p. 94).

*Christ is just as much
'poet' of the seasons
today as he was in the
Anglo-Saxon day*

Through the liturgically rich and Christ-defined seasons, we can clearly see that English saints of the past were devoted to the very same Christ Jesus as we are today.

Parker's inclusion of Anglo-Saxon devotional poetry, theologically rich (and very Lutheran-sounding!) sermon extracts and prayers allow readers to join with past generations of British Christians in worshipping God.

Winters was a wake-up call for me as Christian, encouraging me through the faith of our Christian predecessors to see my years – my 'winters in the world' – and the mundane aspects of life, through an enchanted lens.

Christ is just as much 'poet' of the seasons and nature today as he was in the Anglo-Saxon day. He continues to give meaning to our daily tasks and enriches the quotidian regularity of the seasons with his Word and Sacraments, preparing us spiritually and physically for the resurrection day, when our years will never end.

Winters in the World: A Journey Through the Anglo-Saxon Year is published by Reaktion (£12.99).



Reflecting on the Faith: Christmas Three Times a Year?

Luke Williams
St David's, Cardiff



Christmas in March, July, and December

Everyone loves Christmas. Almost every Christian that you can think of will celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ on the 25th December each year (or 7th January in the East). Even those who are not particularly interested in the festivals of the church year will be very happy to keep this one. We all want to take the opportunity to celebrate the birth of a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.

As Lutherans, we have seen fit largely to keep the other festivals of Christ's life throughout the liturgical year. But there are some in our calendar that don't get

celebrated as often. I want to make the case that we would benefit from celebrating the Annunciation (25th March)

and the Visitation (2nd July) each year. After all, who doesn't want more opportunities to contemplate the Incarnation throughout the year?

Wait a second...

Maybe you're worried that celebrating these feasts would be too Roman Catholic. But you needn't be!

At the Reformation, Martin Luther made it clear that there was an overabundance of saints days cluttering up the calendar. There were far too many to keep track of, and some of them rested on spurious stories that had nothing to do with Scripture.

The Lutheran reformers scaled back the

festivals of the liturgical year, but maintained the feasts that take us through the life of Christ such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, etc. And included within that list in Wittenberg was the Annunciation, precisely because it is a feast that points us to Jesus Christ the Incarnate One. The same can also be said of the Visitation.

Christ at the Centre

The focus of the Annunciation and Visitation is the Incarnation. We celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, but of course, He became a human being before this. From the moment of conception in the womb of the Virgin

Mary by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, the Son of God took on human flesh. This is clear in the Gospel for the

Annunciation, as Gabriel answers Mary's question by saying;

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God."

Although the Visitation comes later in the year, it immediately follows the Annunciation in the Gospel narrative. As Elizabeth hears the greeting of Mary, she is filled with the Holy Spirit. The unborn John the Baptist hears Mary as well, and he leaps for joy in the womb (Luke 1:41). Elizabeth acknowledges that Mary is blessed – which is why she is often referred to as the Blessed

*The Annunciation is a feast
that points us to Jesus
Christ the Incarnate One.*

Virgin. She is blessed because it has been granted her to become the mother of our Lord, as Elizabeth confesses (Luke 1:43).

Let it be to me according to your word

But Mary's blessedness is on account of her son, who is the Son of God in the flesh. This blessing was conferred to her through God's Word delivered by the angel. Similarly, it is the greeting of Mary that alerts Elizabeth and her unborn son to the presence of the Saviour in their midst.

Not only are the Annunciation and Visitation feasts of Christ's Incarnation, but they are also feasts of God's Word. Perhaps we should say that *because* they are feasts of the Incarnation, they *must* be feasts of God's Word. After all, Jesus is the Word of God become flesh for us (John 1:14), and all of God's promises find their 'yes' in Him (2 Cor. 1:20). The collects appointed for these days also encourage us, like Mary, to trust in God's Word.

For the Annunciation, we pray that we would heed both Gabriel's message to Mary, and the message of the cross and resurrection – which is especially potent as this feast almost always falls during Lent. For the Visitation, we pray that we might receive God's Word in humility and faith, so that we might be united to Christ.

Celebrating today

It would be wonderful to see a revival of Divine Services celebrating these feasts in our congregations. It would be like having three Christmases each year! Even if it may not be possible to have Divine Service, Vespers would be particularly appropriate for these occasions. The fixed canticle at Vespers is the Magnificat, found in Luke 1:46-55, and embedded within the Visitation narrative.

The Annunciation and Visitation are feasts of God's Word.

If it isn't possible for your congregation to gather on these days, that doesn't need to stop you celebrating. You could eat a Christmas dinner in July for the Visitation, or break your fast during Lent for the Annunciation. For any given feast day in our house, we typically read the Gospel narrative and sing an appropriate hymn before bedtime. Our children particularly enjoy singing the Magnificat setting from Evening Prayer.

However you go about this, I would encourage you to do something. Our forefathers passed on these feasts to us that we might hold on to the Incarnate Christ and his Word in faith. In Him, God the Father has given us an indescribable gift, so let us take the opportunity to give thanks to Him for all His works undertaken for our salvation.

Other ELCE news

Resurrection Lutheran Church, Cambridge have hosted various events over the past several months, including their annual Easter breakfast, an escape room challenge against their twinned congregation, Ascension Lutheran Church in Brandon, Suffolk, a picnic to celebrate the end of the school year, and a potluck lunch to welcome new students to Westfield House at the beginning of the new term in September. They look forward to celebrating a joint service with Ascension on 25th October to celebrate Reformation Day, and their annual quiz night at the end of October.

Westfield House held a service for the opening of the academic year on Saturday 12th September. The service was conducted by Rev. Dr. Wade Bellesbach, and the chairman of the ELC, Rev. Tapani Simojoki, preached. The Principal and other members of the Faculty of Westfield House, Dr. Cynthia Lumley, and Rev. Drs. Joel Humann and Boris Gunjević, were present to play their part in opening the academic year. During the service, Luke Williams was acknowledged to have completed his theological studies, and presented with his certificate, as he prepares to begin his curacy at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Fareham. The service was followed by refreshments.



Above: Rev. Dr. Boris Gunjević presents Luke Williams with his certificate

Below: The Faculty and students of Westfield House, and Rev. Tapani Simojoki



Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Fareham, welcomed three new members on Sunday 4th October. Eve Burt and Robson Adams were confirmed, and Sanija Švarcs welcomed through profession of faith into full communing membership of the congregation.

International news

March: The chairman of the International Lutheran Council, Bishop Juhana Pohjola, was narrowly convicted of hate speech, along with Member of Finnish Parliament Dr Päivi Räsänen, for the publication of a 2004 booklet which presents a historic Christian understanding of human sexuality. Dr. Räsänen was charged as author of the work and Bishop Pohjola as publisher. In July, they filed an appeal of their conviction with the European Court of Human Rights.

April: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya voted unanimously to leave the Lutheran World Federation. Their Archbishop, Joseph Ochola Omolo stated, "we cannot remain in a communion that promotes or normalizes teachings and practices that we confess to be unscriptural and unconfessional." The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya is the largest Lutheran church body in Kenya, with approximately 100,000 members.

June: The International Lutheran Council held its 2026 World Seminaries Conference in Pretoria, South Africa. The Principal of Westfield House, Dr Cynthia Lumley, attended, and led discussions on accreditation, and education as formation. She was also elected to serve on the ILC



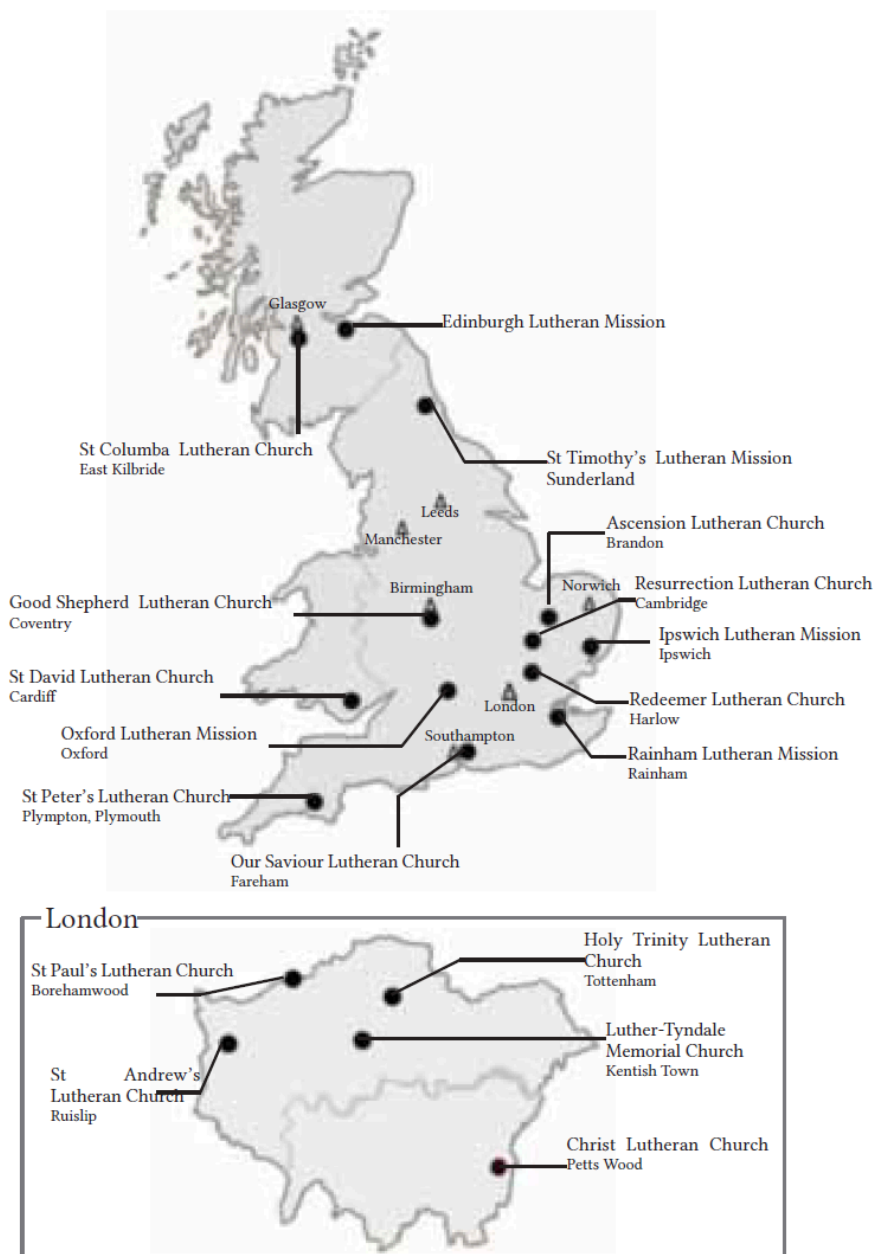
Seminaries Committee for a term of three years.

July: the 16th annual Corpus Christi Conference for Lutheran young adults was held in Turku, Finland. Rev. Dr. Thomas Winger, President of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary (St Catharines, Ontario, Canada), spoke on the theme, *The Body Baptised*. 12 young adults from across the ELCE, and its missions in Cork and Belfast, attended.

The LCMS held its 69th Regular Convention in Phoenix, Arizona, with the theme "Christ is Risen Indeed". Rev. Tapani Simojoki attended as Chairman of the ELCE. He also participated in the International Church Relations Conference organised by LCMS Office of International Relations for sister churches of the host church.

August: The Lutheran Mission - Australia unanimously voted to recognise fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Lutheran Church-Canada, and the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Dioceses of Finland.

Map of ELCE Congregations



<i>Congregation</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Service Time</i>
Ascension Lutheran Church	Brandon Methodist Church, London Road, Brandon, Suffolk, IP27 0EL	9 am, except 5 pm on the 1st Sunday of the month
Bristol Lutheran Mission	Contact St. Peter's Lutheran Church for details	
Scottish Borders Lutheran Mission	Contact borderslutheranmission@outlook.com for details	
Cheltenham Lutheran Mission	Contact Luther-Tyndale Memorial Church for details	
Christ Lutheran Church	227 Poverest Road, Orpington, BR5 1RD	10.30 am
Edinburgh Lutheran Mission	Contact Christ Lutheran Church for details	
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church	49 Eastern Green Road, Coventry, CV5 7LG	4 pm on the 2nd & 4th Sunday of the month
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church	53 Antill Road, London, N15 4AR	11 am
Ipswich Lutheran Mission	St. Luke's Church, 78 Cliff Lane, Ipswich, IP3 0PJ	6 pm on the 3rd Sunday of the month
Luther-Tyndale Memorial Church	9 Leighton Crescent, Kentish Town	10 am
Our Saviour Lutheran Church	10th Fareham Scouts, 20B Highlands Road, Fareham, PO16 7XN	10.30 am
Oxford Lutheran Mission	Marston United Reformed Church, 352 Marston Road, Marston, Oxford, OX3 0JB	4.30 pm on the 2nd, 3rd & 4th Sunday of the month
Rainham Lutheran Mission	Contact Christ Lutheran Church for details	
Redeemer Lutheran Church	22 Tawneys Road, Harlow, CM18 6QS	11 am
Resurrection Lutheran Church	25 Westfield Lane, Cambridge, CB4 3QS	11 am
St. Andrew's Lutheran Church	Whitby Road, Ruislip, HA4 9DY	11.30 am
St. Columba Lutheran Church	151 Westwood Hill, East Kilbride, G75 8QA	11 am
St. David Lutheran Church	St. Fagans Road, Fairwater, Cardiff, CF5 3EU	11 am (except 6 pm on the last Sunday of the month)
St. Paul's Lutheran Church	St. Paul's Close, Cranes Way, Borehamwood, WD6 2DB	9.30 am
St. Peter's Lutheran Church	21 Larkham Lane, Plympton, Plymouth, PL7 4PG	11 am
St. Timothy's Lutheran Mission	Queen Alexandra Road, Sunderland, SR2 9AA	11 am on the 1st & 3rd Saturday of the month

Poetry Corner

GOD'S GRANDEUR - by Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

God's Grandeur is a 14 line sonnet, whose unconventional rhythmic patterns draw attention to the brokenness of man's relationship with God's creation. Manley Hopkins uses the language of machinery and industry - 'oil', 'trade', 'toil' - which works against the vivid and living warmth and beauty of the natural, created world. However, the 'grandeur of God' cannot be smothered, for the whole world is 'charged' with it, suffused with the unquenchable, life-giving flame of God's creative power and sustaining love. Despite the indifference or numbness of humans to this reality, the world is far from forsaken - the 'Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods', bringing to mind the image of God gathering his children as a hen gathers her chicks (Matthew 23:37). The whole of creation, the world and all its inhabitants, are watched over by their loving creator, the life-giving Spirit of God.

As we move from the warmth of the summer, through the changing world of autumn, towards the cold of winter, we can see around us the 'dearest freshness deep down things', as 'nature is never spent'. In our ever-changing world, we see how the grandeur of God will ever 'flame out' through the unwearied cycles of growth and decay, fruit and fallow, trusting that the God who sustains all of creation will in His constancy and faithfulness uplift and sustain his children, until we are raised to live in His light, which will never change nor fail.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was an English poet and Jesuit priest.