

Introduction: Good morning, and welcome to Chapel. My name is Kerry Kuehn; I serve in the Physics Department here at Wisconsin Lutheran College. I have been asked to make the following announcements before we begin...

Overview: The theme for today is “God is changeless.” We will be focusing our thoughts on a particular passage from Paul’s letter to the Hebrew Christians which states that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” For our liturgy, we will be using the Morning Devotion number 1 on page 19 in your white service bulletin. After the invocation and prayer, we will sing the first verses of Hymn 353.

Please rise.

God, our Father, each day is a gift of your grace.

Your mercies are new every morning.

Guide our steps by the light of your Word.

Shield us from harm and keep us from evil.

Better than life is your love.

Put joy in our hearts and praise on our lips. Alleluia!

Prayer for Grace: Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to this new day. Defend us with your mighty power, and grant that this day we neither fall into sin nor run into any kind of danger; and in all we do, direct us to what is right in your sight, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. **Amen**

You may be seated for hymn 353: *Praise the one who breaks the darkness*, verses 1-4.

Allow me to transport you, so to speak, to another time and place...a time and place very different than our own. Here, the most renowned wise men teach that the World—the universe—is eternal. “It has no beginning, and it will have no end,” they said. “It always was, and it always will be.

“It is true”, they say, “that when we look around us *here on Earth* we see birth and death, generation and corruption, change and decay. But these all happen in cycles: plants grow, wither, and decay, but in so doing, they drop seeds to the earth which grow into new plants.

“Similarly with animals and men: they are born, they age, and they die, but in so doing they mate and new animals and men are born. These cycles have been going on unending for all of recorded history.

“And when we look up to the skies we also see un-ending cycles. Every morning, the sun rises in the east, crosses the sky, and sets in the west. And every night, just after sunset, the stars and their constellations rise in the same unchanging patterns. For as long as our ancestors have cared to watch—for hundreds, even thousands of years—the stars that make up Aries and Taurus, Aquarius and Pisces have occupied the exact same configurations and positions in the Zodiac.

“Even the planets—those wandering lights that drift through the twelve constellations of the zodiac—even these pass through cycles that repeat every month, or every year, or every decade. It seems that all of the cycles of the heavens have been going on forever. There is no reason to believe that it ever was, or ever will be, different than it is now. In a sense, the heavens are like the gods: unchanging. eternal. divine. Perhaps, even, they are gods.”

What I have just described is the worldview that was maintained by many ancient thinkers for hundreds of years before the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, this ancient idea—that the universe had no beginning and it will have no end—was the dominant view among many secular thinkers, philosophers and scientists even up until the mid-twentieth century: when some of our great grandparents were alive.

I do not wish to share this world view with you merely to set up a “straw man” that is easily knocked down and refuted. Rather I want you to seriously consider this perspective. Turn it over and ponder it. Appreciate how rational and convincing it can be. Because if you never let yourself honestly entertain the perspective of the unbeliever, you will never understand how truly dire is their plight. And how different is our worldview.

And our worldview is very different. We know—from the historical records of Scripture that the universe itself is not eternal and unchanging. Rather: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth* (Gen. 1). The ancient Hebrews witnessed the exact same daily and yearly patterns of the sun and the moon and the stars that the other ancients saw. But while many took these patterns to indicate the eternity and divinity of the heavens themselves, the Hebrews took them to point to a wise and powerful God who sat outside of His creation.

It is interesting to imagine what it might have been like to be an ancient Levite—you know—the class of Hebrews who were tasked with carrying out the daily sacrifices in the tabernacle, and later, at the temple in Jerusalem. I suspect that young Levites, as part of their training were expected to study astronomy. How else would they be able to figure out exactly when to carry out the prescribed ritual sacrifices. They could not run simply down the street to Target or Walmart to pick up a printed calendar every December. Rather, they had to observe the sky above the desert each morning and each night in order to devise their own calendar based on the complex motions of the sun and moon through the constellations of the zodiac.

And every time these young Levites looked up at the sky, *by faith they understood that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.* They understood that the heavens and the Earth had a beginning, and that they will one day pass away, but that the Word of the Lord stands forever.

This contrast between the *changing nature of the world*, and the *unchanging nature of God* is one of the main themes woven throughout Paul's letter to the Hebrew Christians. In particular, God's purpose and his promises are unchanging. The Hebrews' hearts, on the other hand, were fickle and disobedient. Recall that their ancestors were forced to wander restlessly through the desert for a generation, due to their own rebellion against God's promise.

Nonetheless, God remained true to his promise to give them rest. This rest was not merely rest from their slavery to the Egyptians (though he gave them that). It was not merely rest in a promised land across the Jordan river (though he gave them that too). And it was not merely a sabbath rest once a week (this, too, God gave them). Rather, it was—and is—the everlasting rest that comes with the forgiveness of sins.

We, like the Hebrews, are tempted. And we, like the Hebrews, rebel. Jesus, on the other hand, was tempted in every way and yet He remained sinless. He was set apart, unchanging, holy. Like a pure sacrifice on a priestly altar, he was crucified for our sins. And he rose from the dead to prove his power over death. His life was indestructible.

By this single sacrifice, God forgave us all. By this single sacrifice, God made the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to all. In Christ, God fulfilled all of His promises. By Christ's blood, God gives us eternal redemption, and eternal rest. Indeed, he has made us, like Christ, perfect forever.

Let us, then, hold unswervingly to the hope we have. Because while created things—the heavens and the Earth—can be shaken—Christ's kingdom cannot. The one who is unchanging tells us that “never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.” Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever..

Please rise for prayer: Today in our prayers...

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen

Blessing: May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself. may the power of the Lord Jesus make us strong to do his will. May the peace of the Lord Jesus fill our lives. **Amen**