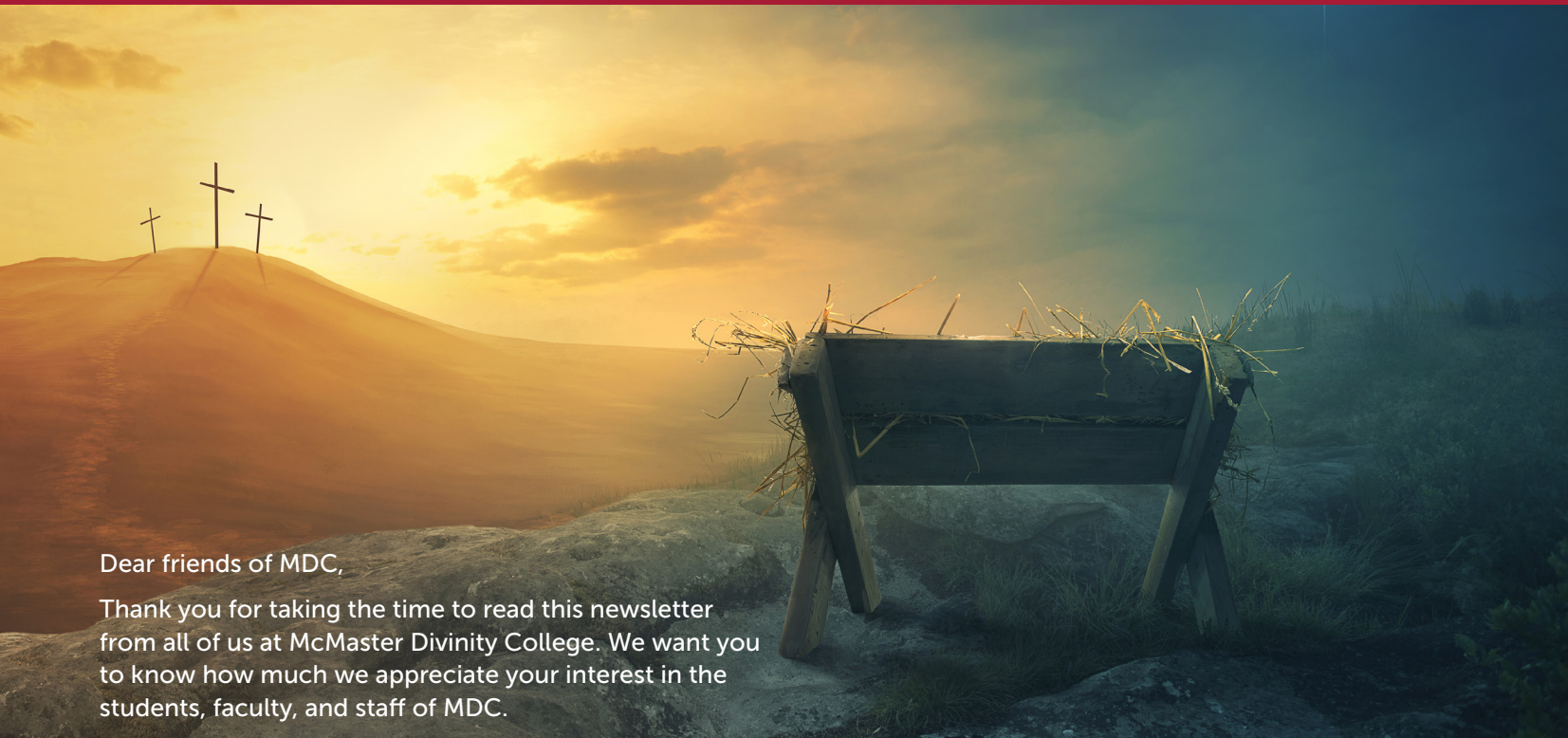




McMaster Divinity College

WINTER 2022



Dear friends of MDC,

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter from all of us at McMaster Divinity College. We want you to know how much we appreciate your interest in the students, faculty, and staff of MDC.

The Christmas season is a very busy time for everyone. Despite all the hustle and bustle, I would encourage you to take time to stop and reflect on how important Christmas is for us as Christians. Without Christmas, there could be no Easter. And without God's great gift to us of His Son, we would have nothing of lasting value to celebrate at this time of year. I hope that you have the opportunity this Christmas to thank God for all His goodness to each one of us.

As we approach Christmas, our fall term is coming to a close. There is a flurry of activity at MDC as we wrap up the term. Many of our faculty members have been involved in scholarly conferences in addition to their teaching, and students are completing their final assignments and papers ahead of exams.

We are already turning to the New Year with anticipation. We are very excited about our upcoming conference happening in April, on Secularism and the Pursuit of Transcendence. We are honoured to have as our plenary speaker, Dr. Christina Gschwandtner, a highly regarded theologian. We will also have—by virtue of recorded digital

conversations—the insights of some other well-known scholars, including Charles Taylor, Merold Westphal, and Robert Wuthnow. We have heard from many ministry leaders the importance of this topic, especially for generations to come, and so we hope that you will plan to join us.

You are a major reason that we are able to do the work that we do here at MDC. In fact, the aforementioned conference is only possible because of a generous donor like yourself who wanted to contribute to the wider church community. The approach of Christmas means the end of another calendar year, and so I want to ask you to think of the work of MDC and help us through a generous gift that will enable us to continue to educate Christian leaders for the church, academy, and society. Thank you for your support.

With Christmas blessings,

Stanley E. Porter, PhD
President and Dean

Stargazer: A Poem by D.S. Martin

Many of you will recognize this image from this year's Christmas card to donors. Featured in this card was a poem entitled, "Stargazer," written by our Poet-in-Residence, Don Martin.

Below, Don shares more about Stargazer and the story behind the writing:

It is a blessing to have known the Christmas story, as outlined in Matthew and Luke, since childhood. Even so, this familiarity of the story often presents a problem; every year, as we hear these stories, we go into our "I-already-know-this" mode—not really thinking about them in detail, because we think that we have completely processed them.

One good way to find our way afresh into such a story, is to view it from the perspective of one of the people in the story. Just imagining it from a different point of view can help us to see a well-known miracle as really being miraculous. This is what I try to do in this poem.



What might have been going through the stargazers' minds as they finally approached Bethlehem?

They didn't yet know the story as we do!

STARGAZER

From my high tower first I saw it rise
the harbinger portending divine birth
a bright horizon star in the night skies
announcing Heaven coming down to earth
Our caravan soon followed trade routes west
in search of a grand palace for this king
but over a poor town it came to rest
& local prophesies said the same thing
Would it be safe for us to see his face
or would such glory strike us to our death?
We each brought gifts with us in a jewelled case
& knelt before the door & held our breath
His mother laughed with joy when we inquired
To worship the God-child all we desired

"Stargazer" is one of three incarnation sonnets I wrote to help us re-enter the Christmas story. The first, called "Shepherd," the second "Simeon," and of course, the third is "Stargazer." I often read these poems for church services, since they were written in a familiar, traditional poetic form.

This Christmas, I invite you to revisit these often-

familiar stories and the perspectives of the characters within. Consider the possibilities that the biblical text leaves open to us when we are ready to see the Christmas story with fresh eyes and be alert with wonder.

The three incarnation sonnets first appeared in *First Things*, *Crux* (Regent College), and *Alliance Connection*, respectively.

Secularism and the Pursuit of Transcendence Conference



We live in what has been called "a secular age," but what are the implications of secularism in the pursuit of transcendence for the generations of today?

This Spring, McMaster Divinity College is holding our first Church & Culture series conference, with this year's theme being "Secularism and the Pursuit of Transcendence." We will be bringing together pastors, ministry professionals, students, and others who are interested in contemplating what is meant by transcendence, how it is experienced, and how it is expressed, both individually and in the Church, in the midst of competing secular interests.

We invite you to join us for this exciting one-day conference on Thursday, April 27, 2023. We are proud to have a variety of world-renowned speakers presenting, including plenary

speaker Christina Gschwandtner (Fordham University, New York City). Other keynote speakers include: Charles Taylor (McGill University, Montreal), Merold Westphal (Fordham University, New York City), and Robert Wuthnow (Princeton University, New Jersey).

The theme of this conference was born out of our survey of ministry professionals who shared that spiritual searching and the pursuit of transcendence in today's culture were emerging trends, especially for younger generations. We hope you will plan to join us as we discuss this important topic.



Get more information and sign up for email notifications at:

mcmasterdivinity.ca/transcendence