Let’s talk about transformation: you can see the Cathedral is in the midst of its own and it is the explicit theme in both our reading from Isaiah, this morning, and our reading from the Gospel of John about the water being turned into wine. Transformation is at the heart of what Christianity understands by salvation. In Advent, the Church thinks through the transformation of darkness into light. In Christmas, we herald the coming of the light into the darkness in the God who is born as Jesus Christ. Here, with the incarnation, the transformation can begin, as God’s providential working for the salvation of the world enters a new stage. In Epiphany, we blow on the coals of that first flame – celebrating the glory that has entered the world in and through Christ; a glory attested not just by the Jewish people among whom He was born, but also the Gentle Magi from the East. Christ is the morning star, the harbinger of the dawn to come in which all things will be illuminated by the God who brought them into being. And here we are – being transformed and in being transformed transforming everything else around us.

So let’s think then about the God who transforms, and before turning to the Scriptures I’m going to turn to the Catholic writer who understood so much about the deeper magic of the divine in and through the material orders of creation: Tolkien.

“Then Iluvatar said to [the Ainur]: ‘Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme... I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song.’ So opens The Silmarillion, Tolkien’s great mythography in which Iluvatar is God and the Ainur the angelic host. And Creation emerges as the Great Theme developed, transposed, modulated and endlessly recapitulated.
There’s a long standing Mediaeval tradition that both Tolkien and C.S. Lewis rework: that when God created the medium through which God worked was music. God composed creation; creation is a divine orchestration. This actually ties in with something cosmologists have found in their exploration of the known Universe and their speculations as to its origin. Spacetime sings in B flat - that’s the low note resonating in the deepest and most extensive of interstellar darkesses. Since we don’t yet have access to any other Universes, and the notion of Multiverses is only just being thought through by astrophysicists, we don’t know if all Universes resonate to this note. And if they don’t, and they resonate to another note, we could then speculate as to whether creation is a composition in B flat minor or B flat major. But that need not concern us overmuch.

Our concern is with creation as a musical composition; creation as a song of praise and gratitude to the one who created. The music that plays such a fundamental role in our worship is then understood theologically as participating in some way within a cosmic liturgical order. It is both the one of the key expressions and engines of our transformation within the Cathedral; our formation in Christ as the body of Christ. The music is as vital – and I chose the word with care because it literally “gives life” – as the transformation of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ. In Mediaeval terminology: music is a ‘sacramental’. The Eucharist is a sacrament. There is a degree of difference that I am not going to go into; but the difference is a matter of degree not of kind. Both the music of worship and the Eucharistic transformation of the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ are signs that God is at work, transforming the world – a world God created. Sound, pitch and the rise and fall of rhythm are part of the fabric of the world order, in us and around us, and music patterns them, forming from their form a new form. Trans-forming. And that’s how God works in Christ – taking the elemental and allowing it to transmute; enabling it to becoming something more. Excessively more. Hold creation up to the divine light and the watermark of Christ is made visible. Look behind me at the rose window: it shows Christ the Pantocrator, the watermark of creation illuminated by the eastern light. In Him and through Him and with Him all things came to be. This is the very nature and the operation of God in salvation – so that we, even we, might be more than what we take ourselves to be: that we might see ourselves and each other, to return to Tolkien, are “kindled…with the Flame Imperishable.”

The passage we had read to us from the Gospel of St. John is very clear about the meaning of Christ turning the water into wine at the wedding feast. “This deed at Cana-
in-Galilee is the first of the signs by which Jesus revealed his glory and led his disciples to believe in him.” John doesn’t call it a miracle. It’s a sign – as if being wine is always possible for water and Jesus is realizing that possibility; a possibility in creation; a possibility even in us who are also part of that creation. It’s a sign of His glory, revealed as the natural orders around us are illuminated by the divine to make evident the watermark of Christ; the deep, melodic composition in which we live and move and have our being. In the wake of that revelation we are led into belief. Converted, if you will, but not by human words or argument, but by the presence of Christ in and among us wonderously appearing. That’s what ‘epiphany’ means: the manifestation of God; a showing forth. And when we encounter it in music or at the Eucharist, say, it brings a certain realization – expressed sometimes with a simple “yes”, “Amen”. Something is communicated. Something speaks to us. Something connects. And then we don’t just hear the song, we sing it, because it’s in us and at some very deep level it is us or has become us. That’s transformation – and it heals as much as it delights. We resonate, and the Great Theme is modulated once more, transposed once more as a “great beauty has been wakened.” And all that we thought water, about ourselves and about our circumstances, is suddenly wine, the best wine. “Drink this, in remembrance of me.”

How do you know the transformation is going in the right direction – towards the good, the wholesome, salvation? Because it feels right. That may sound very vague, but it’s not: it can be thought through. If creation is ordered by love, then there is an inner sense of a true alignment that we recognize intuitively. The Mediaevals called this ‘congruientia’ – a fittingness. Like now, here, even in this transformation within the Cathedral with the nave out of operation. It may feel awkward because it’s novel, but in fact there’s a new alignment of the choir, the ministry at the high altar, and the architecture of the sanctuary. Blessings abound when everything is divinely fitting – wellbeing is nurtured and Christ worshipped.