

Forum Topic October 10 - December 19:

Knowing the Unknowable God

Randall C. Zachman, Theologian-in-Residence, St. James

As Christians, we believe that we have come to know the one true God, who created heaven and earth, called Israel to be God's people, and reconciled the world to God in Jesus Christ. However, as Christians we also believe that God is and remains unknowable, a mystery beyond any comprehension, and that the more we come to know God, the deeper this mystery becomes. This is reflected in the New Testament, which states, "It is God alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). And the Gospel of John states quite clearly, "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18). In the Forum this October, November and December, we will explore the ways in which a variety of theologians and saints from the early church taught about how we come to know the unknowable God, in hopes that it might provoke and inform our own understanding and experience of what it means to know God.

The structure of the Forum will consist of a short presentation on the author of the day by Randall Zachman, followed by a plenary discussion with the Forum participants, who will be present either in person or online via Zoom.

The schedule of the Forum will be as follows:

October 10: Irenaeus of Lyons
October 17: Origen of Alexandria
October 24: Athanasius
October 31: Gregory of Nyssa and his sister Macrina
November 7: Augustine of Hippo
November 14: Pseudo-Dionysius

In Advent, we will address this question with the added theme, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord."

November 28 (Advent I): The Life of Anthony of the Desert
December 5 (Advent II): The Desert Mothers and Fathers
December 12 (Advent III): John Cassian
December 19 (Advent IV): Benedict of Nursia and the Rise of Monasticism

The Forum will be led by Randall C. Zachman, who is Professor Emeritus of Reformation Studies at the University of Notre Dame and Adjunct Instructor of Theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary. Randall has led the Mercy Seminar, a program of the Urban Well, with Fr. David Peck for the last two years, and is now the Theologian-in-Residence at St. James. He lives in Lancaster with his wife, the Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, who is the Conference Minister for the Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ. Their son Johnny Zachman lives with his wife Heidi Penix in Austin, Texas.