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The Dean of Salisbury, Nick Papadopoulos

Preparations have long been underway for Salisbury Cathedral's three Advent celebrations, From Darkness to Light. The preparations are necessary because they are mammoth events: in 2018 they were attended by nearly 5,000 worshippers; they were illuminated by more than 4,000 candles; and they involved (on each night) more than 150 staff and volunteers.

From Darkness to Light is a processional service. It is never static. From its beginning to its end the choirs and the clergy are on the move. We begin in the darkness of the western cathedral, where one tiny candle-flame is kindled, and finish in the blazing light of the east end as the liturgy reaches its triumphant and hope-filled conclusion.

It's the annual service that has become Salisbury's signature - and it's appropriate that, among all the worship we offer, this one should have done so. For among the medieval cathedrals of England our distinctive story is that we are the cathedral that moved. From the windswept hilltop of Old Sarum to the fertile plain below, where five rivers meet, our Cathedral moved and was re-founded in 1220.

We will mark the 800th anniversary of that move in 2020, with city-wide festivities throughout the year that celebrate "A City On the Move". We will recall that the ambition of our forebears was threefold: to escape the intrusive oversight of the royal garrison; to cultivate and inhabit a gentler and milder environment; and to raise up a glorious building dedicated solely to the worship of God. Liberty; creativity; eternity: these were the goals of the move 800 years ago, and we are determined that these should remain the goals of the Cathedral's common life today.

In its recent history Salisbury has known great adversity. The move of 800 years ago, and what that the move set out to achieve will fill our hearts and minds as we gather in the darkness this Advent. That is our encouragement, our inspiration, and our ambition, as we move together into a new year and into God's bright future.