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**Ascending by Degrees: The Liturgical Community of Pilgrimage in
Morten Lauridsen's *I will lift up mine eyes***

Composed as the centerpiece of a musical triptych of Psalms, American composer Morten Lauridsen's unaccompanied anthem *I will lift up mine eyes* (1970) portrays the contemplation of a believer who seeks to trust the Lord in the midst of an arduous journey. Lauridsen's impeccably structured choral setting of Psalm 121—one of the “pilgrimage” Psalms—engages the listener in a quiet meditation, one that emphasizes both the inner journey of faith and the communal expression of that faith in a liturgical form.

Drawing from the work of Old Testament scholars, musicologists, and interviews with the composer himself, I will argue that Lauridsen's setting of Psalm 121 grew out of his early faith experiences at Bethel Congregational Church in Beaverton, Oregon during the 1950s. Lauridsen's choice to set Psalms for his first compositions attests to the positive influence of American religious life on the vocation of this prominent American composer.

My paper will explore the musical depiction of the faith journey in Lauridsen's anthem: the question and emphatic assertion of trust; the comfort and reassurance of scriptural wisdom; and the commitment to perseverance through the liturgical experience. Lauridsen's creative integration of medieval organum and Renaissance counterpoint results in not only a compelling inquiry about vocation, but also a refreshing American reprise of the spare, open sound found in early music. The piece ultimately underscores what a pilgrim must do to see a religious or an artistic journey through to completion—a fulfillment Lauridsen embodied when music became his calling.