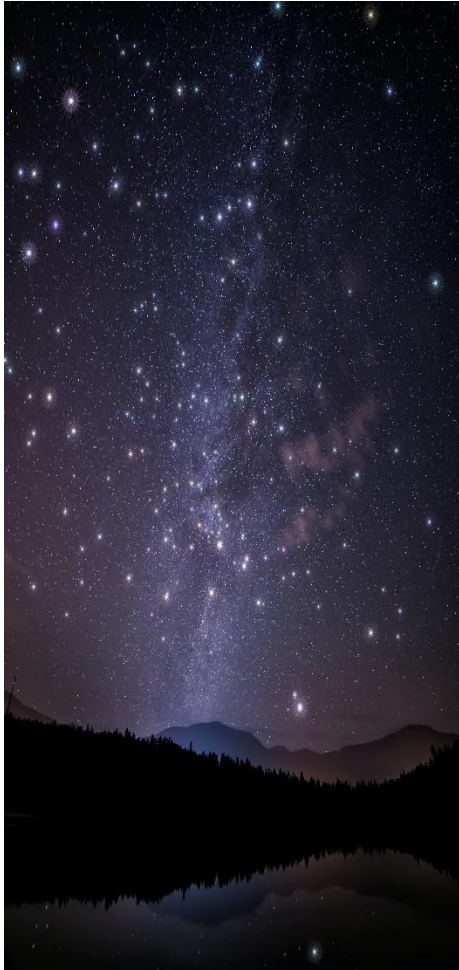


# Advent and the Cosmos:

## The ever-present season of the coming of Christ

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In the Christian tradition, Advent has been understood as that brief, but intensely meaningful season, which functions in the liturgical calendar as a bridge between “ordinary time” and the “Christmas season.” For those of us who live in Earth’s northern hemisphere, the Advent wreath’s beautiful candle lighting ritual draws our consciousness toward our planet’s deepening darkness. It is here, amid the lengthening shadows that herald the winter equinox that senses, other than sight, awaken. These senses function to guide us through the subtle, but grace-filled movement that is the Advent journey.

Advent scriptures stir our hearts as they narrate our ancestors’ hope in the long-awaited fulfillment of God’s promises. Advent anticipation rises in us; we wait with expectant longing for the coming of the Christ and the justice, peace, and joy that accompany Christ’s arrival. During the Advent season, we remove our stables from storage, then set about sequencing the placement of figurines that recreate the unfolding tableau of Christ’s Bethlehem birth— hay, sheep, cows, shepherds, crèche, Mary, Joseph, angel, baby Jesus, and star. Culturally, we mark the calendar days between Advent and Christmas in many, varied, and often-contrasting ways. Some bake, some shop for gifts or seasonal sales, some send cards of season’s greeting, some open the tiny portals of advent calendars where words of encouragement or rewards of chocolate offer sustenance for a hectic time of year.

While these traditional, as well as culturally popular understandings and misunderstandings about Advent continue, new understandings about Advent are beginning to emerge. These new understandings, in part, are outcomes of what we are discovering about how the universe, as well as how our planet, came to birth. Only recently made available to us through the research and technologies of science, the story of life’s origins is multi layered. The universe story not only reveals scientific truths about the origins and continued unfolding of the universe, but it also provides new insights about who God is, where God is, and how God acts. Modern science, through its technologically supported research, casts new light on the Biblical narratives of creation, and we see that the Genesis story does not adequately describe the beauty, complexity, and revelatory nature of life’s origins, and the universe’s generative processes.

The life and consciousness we experience today, did not suddenly appear in the course of seven days. Rather, life as we know it today, evolved over the course of almost 14 billion years. At a moment inelegantly described as the “Big Bang,” the universe exploded into life, casting the seeds of future forms of life across an unfathomably expanse of space-time. While the story of the universe’s origins is scientific, it also has a mystical character to it. In other words, the new story of the universe’s origins has not only provided *science* with new understandings; it has provided *theology* and faith with new understandings as well. As theologians reflect on the meaning of God in the context of an evolving and emerging universe, new insights about God are also beginning to evolve and emerge. Similarly, these insights are awakening us to new perspectives about many aspects of our faith, rituals, and aspects of our long-standing traditions, including Advent. New questions are signaling new faith consciousness. In the context of an evolving, and ever-emerging universe, who is God? How does God act? Where is God?

Within this scientific as well as theological story of life’s origins, we ask if Advent, a season of expectant hope, is only a once-in-a-calendar-year observance and experience? In the context of an ever evolving, emerging universe, how do we understand Advent’s promise of the coming of God?

Theologians today are reflecting on these and other critical questions in light of revelation contained in the story of the universe. In terms of the incarnation of Jesus, which the traditional Advent season heralds, some suggest that the *first incarnation* was the moment described in the Biblical creation narrative, “when God joined in unity with the physical universe and became the *light* inside of everything.”<sup>i</sup> Thus, the incarnation, is not only that which occurred at a moment in time when Jesus came into being, but the incarnation of God is found when the *universe* came into being.

In a similar reading of incarnation from the perspective of the Universe Story, other theologians reflect that “the incarnation of God in Jesus the Christ, can be understood as a radical or ‘deep’ incarnation, that is, an incarnation into the very tissue of biological existence, and the system of nature.”<sup>ii</sup> This understanding of the incarnation of God challenges us to contemplate and embrace God’s incarnated presence manifested in all life on earth. At a time when we witness and participate in the wanton destruction of earth’s ecology, we are challenged by the perspective of ‘deep incarnation,’ to see how our actions not only affect creation’s integrity, but also desecrate the divine presence in the life of creation.

Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Teilhard de Chardin, Jesuit priest, mystic, and scientist who studied and contemplated the origins of creation, wrote these words: “Christ’s presence in the form of love is the energy that moves creation forward.” He saw this forward moving energy of God’s love” as a process that has not yet come to its complete fulfillment because the process of evolution and the expansion of the universe continue.”<sup>iii</sup> As Advent summons us to ponder the gift of God’s abiding love with us, we are summoned by the universe story to rediscover the meaning and function of hope in our lives. Teilhard urges us embrace hope in light of the all-pervasive nature of God’s love—a love that is not

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only empowering the evolutionary journey of the universe, but a love that is with us all our lives. God's love is ubiquitous. Likewise, hope is that which always and everywhere abides with us.

As you consider the unfolding and evolving meaning that Advent holds for you, you might find one or more of these questions helpful.

**For your reflection and conversation:**

How is the Universe Story deepening and expanding my understanding of incarnation, "God-with-us?"

Where do I experience the love and hope that Advent heralds? How am I abiding in it?

What rituals and practices will help me enter more deeply and expansively into Advent's meaning?

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<sup>i</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ* (New York: Convergent Books, 2019), 13.

<sup>ii</sup> Niels Gregson, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40 (2001): 205.

<sup>iii</sup> Susan Rakoczy, [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Prophet of Cosmic Hope](#) 2020.

See Cosmic Advent Wreath Below.



To download the Cosmic Advent Wreath designed by Gen Cassani, SSND, [click here](#) . To access the candle lighting prayers [click here](#)