



COSMIC ADVENT



CONTEMPLATIVE CELEBRATIONS OF THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST

Reflect on where you were this time last year. What was troubling you? What were you questioning? What were you celebrating?

Where are you this year in comparison? Try not to assign a “value” (better/worse, etc)

Advent invites us to journey into the heart of the divine mystery, which transcends time and space. On this sacred pilgrimage, we encounter not only the familiar stories surrounding Jesus of Nazareth but the Cosmic Christ. The Cosmic Christ plunges us into the deeper dimensions of experiencing the divine presence beyond the confines of historical narratives and our limited understanding.

As we light the first candle of Advent, we wade into this mystery where the Cosmic Christ pervades the entire universe, expanding our horizons and reminding us that the divine can never be bound by religious dogma and theological frameworks. The Cosmic Christ is not only about a singular historical moment but is woven into the very fabric of reality as an eternal presence of compassion and peace. During Advent, we are called to attune ourselves to the rhythms of this presence in stillness and celebration as we discover the Cosmic Christ within and around us. Contemplative practices throughout this season are passageways to awareness, inviting us to quiet our minds and open our hearts to the unfolding of the divine mystery.

In this, we are drawn into a sense of awe and reverence for the sacred interconnectedness of all life. The incarnation, far from being a one-time event, becomes a continuous process in which the divine takes on flesh in every moment of our lives. So, the Cosmic Christ is not merely a concept but an intimately present reality, enfolding us in compassion and justice as we navigate the suffering and complexities of a hurting world.

Here, we are invited to move beyond tidy theological strictures by embracing a spirituality that holds space for doubt, suffering, injustice, and mystery. We see Christ embedded in all of creation, the tears of a mother, the beating heart of the Earth, the expansion of the universe. Advent is a time of awakening to the Cosmic Christ that is uniting all of creation in her love and grace.

Let us immerse ourselves in the mystery this Advent season, allowing the power of darkness and unknowing to reshape our understandings of God, self, neighbor, and enemy. Like the Magi, may we follow the light that leads us to the heart of divine love, where the boundaries between heaven and earth dissolve and there is peace for all.

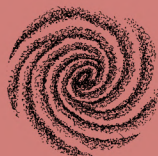
-Ryan Pryor

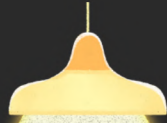




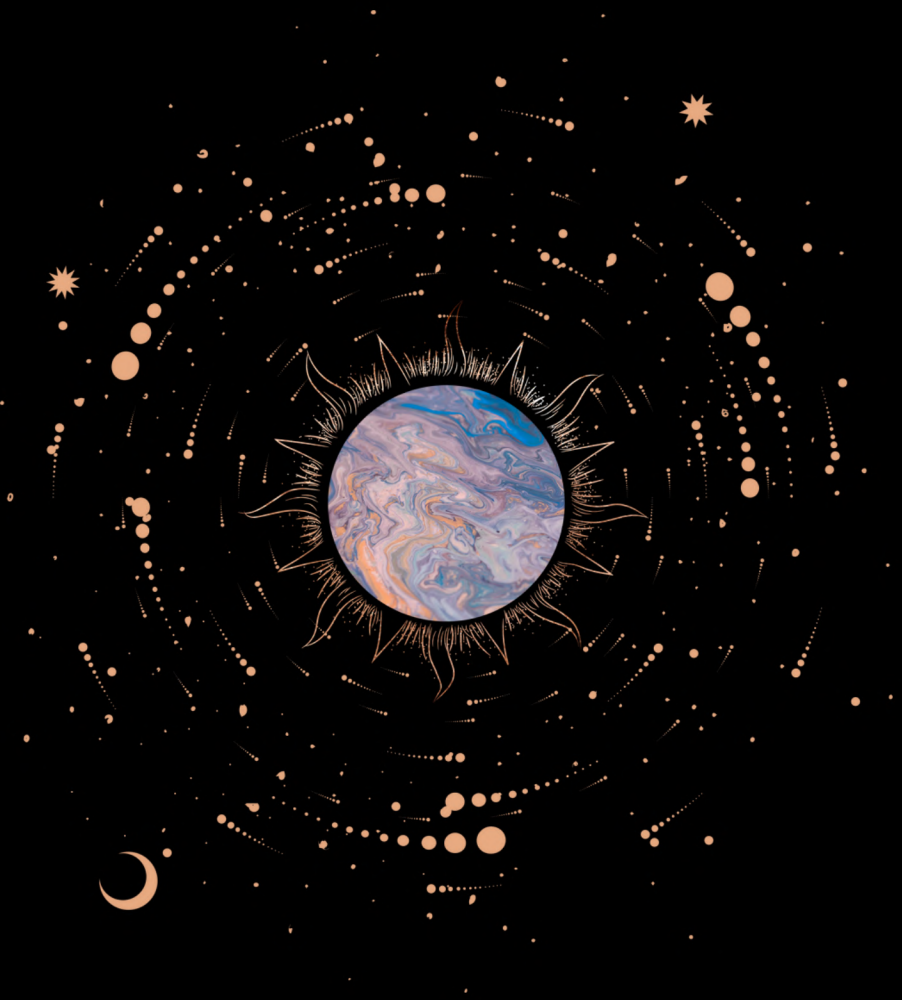
Laura wright Pittman | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

What do you notice first?





YOU
ARE THE
LIGHT OF THE
WORLD



What kind of relationship do you have with the cosmos? Do you make time to see the world at night when the sky reveals the stars?

One of the queerest spots on earth – I hope – is the patch of the planet where, according to tradition, a cave once stabled animals, and where Mary gave birth to a son whose later preaching – scholars of every stripe agree, with varying enthusiasm – caused the occupying Romans to crucify him. Generations of Christians have churched over the traditional Bethlehem spot to the highest degree. Centuries of additions have made the architecture peculiar, but no one can see the church anyway, because many monasteries clamp onto it in clusters like barnacles. The Greek Orthodox Church owns the grotto site now, in the form of the Church of the Nativity.

There, in the Church of the Nativity, I took worn stone stairways to descend to levels of dark rooms, chapels, and dungeonlike corridors where hushed people passed. The floors were black stone or cracked marble. Dense brocades hung down old stone walls. Oil lamps hung in layers. Each polished silver or brass lamp seemed to absorb more light than its orange flame emitted, so the more lamps shone, the darker the space.

Distant music sounded deep, as if from within my ribs. The music was, in fact, people from all over the world in the upper chamber, singing harmonies in their various tongues. The music threaded the vaults.

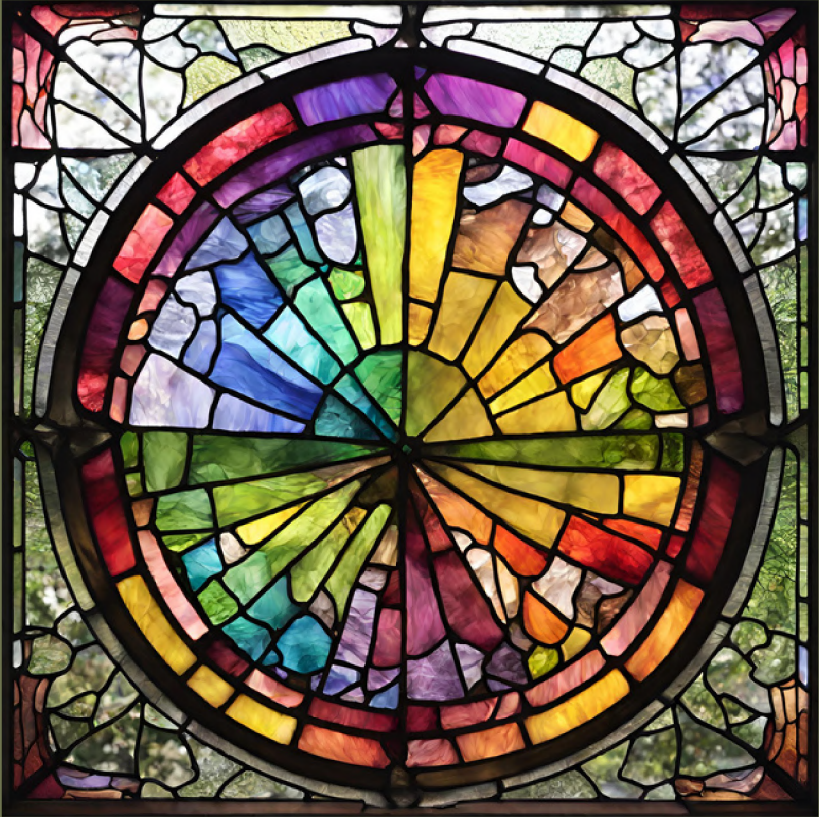
Now I climbed down innumerable dark stone stairs to the main part, the deepest basement: The Grotto of the Nativity. The grotto was down yet another smoky stairway, at the back of a stone cave far beneath street level. This was the place. It smelled of wet sand. It was a narrow cave about ten feet wide; cracked marble-paved it. Bunched tapers, bending grotesque in the heat, lighted a corner of the floor. People had to kneel, one by one, under arches of brocade hangings, and stretch into a crouch down among dozens of gaudy hanging lamps, to see it. A fourteen-pointed silver star, two feet in diameter, covered a raised bit of marble floor at the cave wall. This silver star was the X that marked the spot: Here, just here, the infant got born. Two thousand years of Christianity began here, where God emptied himself into man.

In the center of the silver star was a circular hole. That was the bull's eye, God's quondam target.

Crouching people leaned forward to wipe their fingers across the hole's flat bottom. When it was my turn, I knelt, bent under a fringed satin drape, reached across half the silver star, and touched its hole. I could feel some sort of soft wax in it. The hole was a quarter-inch deep and six inches across, like a wide petri dish. I have never read any theologian who claims that God is particularly interested in religion, anyway.

Any patch of ground anywhere smacks more of God's presence on earth, to me, than did this marble grotto. The ugliness of the blunt and bumpy silver star impressed me. The bathetic pomp of the heavy, tasseled brocades, the marble, the censers hanging from chains, the embroidered antependium, the aspergillum, the crosiers, the ornate lamps – some human's idea of elegance – bespoke grand comedy, too, that God put up with it. And why should he not? Things here on earth get a whole lot worse than bad taste. "Every day," said Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, "the glory is ready to emerge from its debasement."

Bethlehem by Annie Dillard



What newness are you welcoming
in this season?

What is revealing itself to you in this time?



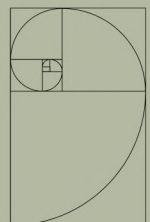
“AI generated - “Cosmic Black Christ”

Does it help having a personified image of Christ like this?
How does this change the image you have?



RIKI YARBROUGH

What characteristics of the Divine are most important to you?



Dearest Human Being of The Earth

I wish for us all to
have all that we need.
My heart aches
every time I hear
something
that I cannot fully understand.

I think it is best for us
to stand together
so I try to find
every possible way
to make the world
a better place
and in the same time
remembering
that we are all
so much more
than we believe.

We are so much more
and I want us to
remember that
every
day.

V:R

A world moved by hope toward healing and justice while also being torn apart daily by violence, war, injustice, illness, and financial exploitation is the Advent we live in today. We recognize that our reality is not what it should be or can become. During this Advent season, we are genuinely a weary world rejoicing. We are weary of our efforts for justice being threatened by those with big pockets and rejoicing in our victories proclaiming life-to-the-fullest for those on the underside of power. Our Advent text this week in the Hebrew Scriptures is Isaiah 35:1-10. In this text, Isaiah tells us a promise of God's vision of creation as a desert bursting into life with flowers and celebration. The author writes, "Blind eyes will be opened, deaf ears unstopped, lame men and women will leap like deer, and the voiceless break into song." The Advent season is about us retaining a defiant hope that our world of marginalization, financial inequality, broken criminal justice systems, racism, and military occupation is not humanity's future and not the world we are capable of building.

Advent courses through our lives to remind us that God springs forth like a flower in the desert and comes to us as a child in a cave outside a forgotten town. May we have eyes to see and ears to hear God in unexpected spaces this season.

-Ryan Pryor

Forsythia

By Jarod K. Anderson
Love Notes from the Hollow Tree, Pg. 89

As forsythia grows tall,
its branches bend beneath their own weight,
bowing to the ground in arches of yellow flowers.

Wherever they touch the earth,
the branches root again and send up new shoots,
stitching gold across the landscape.

Some new kinds of knowledge shift our center of gravity,
staggering us,
bending us low beneath the burden.

If you think of your worldview as a stone tower,
this shift is a cataclysm of splintered rock.

If your worldview is forsythia,
then every startling truth that bends you low becomes a new connection to the earth,
a new way to stand,
an invitation to grow.

We live in a time of strong wind and sudden pressure.
It is not an age for towers.

It's an age for stubborn flowers.

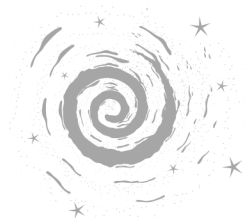


In the first 1200 years of Christianity, the most prominent feast was Easter, the celebration of Christ's resurrection. Around 1200, Francis of Assisi entered the scene, and he felt we didn't need to wait for God to love us through the cross and resurrection. He believed God loved us from the very beginning and showed this love by becoming incarnate in Jesus. He popularized what we take for granted today, the great Christian feast of Christmas. But Christmas only started being popular in the 13th century. there is a switch in theological emphasis that took place. The Franciscans realized that if God had become flesh and taken on materiality, physicality, and humanity, then the problem of our unworthiness was solved from the very beginning! God "saved" us by becoming one of us. We're called to awaken to what's already in our midst. . . . I think Advent is a coming to a new consciousness of God, you know, already loving us into something new, into something more whole, that we're not in a sense waiting for what's not there; we're in a sense to be attending to what's already there. Remember, when we speak of Advent or preparing for Christmas, we're not just talking about waiting for the little baby Jesus to be born. That already happened 2,000 years ago. In fact, we're welcoming the Universal Christ, the Cosmic Christ, the Christ that is forever being born in the human soul and into history.

And believe me, we do have to make room, because right now there is no room in the inn for such a mystery. We see things pretty much in their materiality, but we don't see the light shining through. We don't see the incarnate spirit that is hidden inside of everything material... But the other part I think is that we can think of Advent as God waiting for us to wake up.

Let's awaken to what God is doing in us and what God is seeking to become in us.

-Richard Rohr





Advent Starry Night 5
-Virginia Wieringa


What place does art hold for you in re-crafting an advent narrative that supports your understanding of faith?

Levels of Belonging

1. Planet: What are the sources of our deepest evolutionary and planetary connections, and of our profound longing for kinship?
2. Place: To what extent does crafting a deeper connection with the Earth's bioregions reinvigorate a sense of kinship with the place-based beings, systems, and communities that mutually shape one another?
3. Partners: How do relations between and among different species foster a sense of responsibility and belonging in us?
4. Persons: Which experiences expand our understanding of being human in relation to other-than-human beings?
5. Practice: What are the practical, everyday, and lifelong ways we become kin?







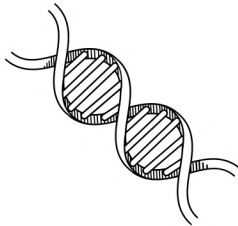
"In our own time the vitally important question
has become for us to define the links between
Christ and the universe: how they stand in relation
to one another and how they influence one another.

... By his incarnation [the Christ] inserted himself not just into our
humanity, but into the universe which supports humanity. The presence of
the incarnate word... shines at the heart of all things."

(Teilhard de Chardin)

Science enriches our understanding of the child born of Mary. “Through his DNA, Jesus took on not just Mary’s biological past, but the genetic inheritance of the Semitic peoples. . . . He inherited chemical bonds laid down in the cooling of supernovae, structures that developed in plants, muscle and tissue structure found in animals, and finally the embodied spirit unique to human creatures. In taking on this inheritance, he became connected to every being at every level of this entire cosmos.” (Neil Vaney)

Elizabeth Johnson agrees: “The Word of God’s embodied self became a creature of Earth, a complex unit of minerals and fluids, an item in the carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen cycles, a moment in the biological evolution of this planet.”



How is your relationship with your faith changing or expanding? How is it shaping the story/imprint you hope to leave behind?

“Tent City Nativity”

“Jesus was born in a makeshift shelter, too—
A place not really meant for human dwelling—
And yet it was there that he met us, in the lowliest refuge.
Two thousand years later, it’s good to remember
That Christ is still being born, here and now,
Most especially in places we’d rather not go,
Places from which we’d rather look away.

God of illumination and incarnation,
Open not only our eyes, but our hearts,
That we may open, too, our hands And make generous offerings of love,
As your holy light reflects from nylon tent flaps,
Your holy song rises from a crackling campfire,
Lit against the cold, against the night.

Amen.”

- Cameron Bellm



art by Kelly Latimore



a Shinto shrine at Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden in the heart of Tokyo
(Photo by Wayne Karatsu)

We are invited
To find peace. Respect all. Be.
Experience love.
-Wayne Karatsu

Your Peace Will Make Us One

(a rewrite by Audrey Assad)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
You are speaking truth to power, you are laying down our swords
Replanting every vineyard 'til a brand new wine is poured
Your peace will make us one

I've seen you in our home fires burning with a quiet light
You are mothering and feeding in the wee hours of the night
Your gentle love is patient, you will never fade or tire
Your peace will make us one

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Your peace will make us one

In the beauty of the lilies, you were born across the sea
With a glory in your bosom that is still transfiguring
Dismantling our empires 'til each one of us is free
Your peace will make us one

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Your peace will make us one

**What do you think of the reclaiming and
rewriting of this song? How does it connect to a
more expansive Christ-like view of the world?**



art by Kelly Latimore

"What do the stars say?

The light that meets our eyes after millions of years summons us to look beyond.

The dark that hovers over us is filled with light.

That underneath the appearance of the stable heavens is the bubbling energy of the universe.

We are forming, forming, forming and nothing can stop us.

There is a palpable power of attraction, pulling us toward we-no-not-where.

Love alone is the guide of the universe and the whole universe is in the human heart.

Tend to the heart and the power of love will name itself as God."

-Sr. Ilia Delio

BELIEF

IS JUST ONE SIDE OF THE STORY. DO YOU ALLOW YOURSELF TO SUSPEND JUDGMENT EVEN FOR A MOMENT? WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU ENJOYED THE MYSTERY OF IT ALL?



An abstract background with swirling colors of teal, blue, and purple, accented with small white stars. The overall effect is ethereal and artistic.

your life is art.

“If while washing dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not "washing the dishes to wash the dishes." What's more, we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't wash the dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus we are sucked away into the future -and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life.”

Thích Nhất Hạnh



LAUDATO SI' COSMIC advent wreath

when a vision
of the universe takes hold
in your mind, your soul becomes
vast as the cosmos . . .

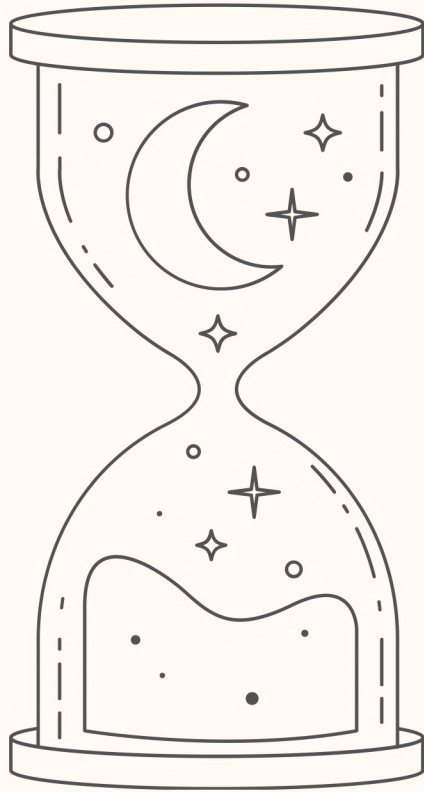
like the spiral
like the lotus
like the waves
like the trees
like the stars,

we were meant to

Unfold

Drew Dillinger

PAT BERGEN, CSJ - "MAY THE STAR OF INCLUSIVE, POURED
OUT, COMMUNING LOVE DIRECT EVERY DECISION YOU MAKE
ON YOUR JOURNEY"



WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS ONE WILD LIFE?

Self-Care Assessment

The following worksheet for assessing self-care is not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-care that are relevant for you and rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself these days. When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care? Do you tend to ignore others? Are there items on the list that hadn't even occurred to you? Listen to your internal responses and dialogue about self-care, and take note of anything you would like to prioritize moving forward.

Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing...

3 = I do this well (e.g., frequently)

2 = I do this OK (e.g., occasionally)

1 = I barely or rarely do this

0 = I never do this

? = This never occurred to me

Physical Self-Care

Eat regularly (breakfast, lunch, and dinner)

Get regular medical care for prevention

Get medical care when needed

Take time off when sick

Wear clothes I like

Do some fun physical activity

Think positive thoughts about my body

Exercise

Eat healthily

Get massages

Take vacations

Get enough sleep

Do some fun artistic activity

(Other) _____

Psychological Self-Care

Take day trips or mini-vacations

Have my own personal psychotherapy

Make time away from technology/internet

Read something unrelated to work

Notice my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings

Engage my intelligence in a new way or area

Do something at which I am not expert

Make time for self-reflection

Write in a journal

Attend to minimizing life stress

Be curious

Say no to extra responsibilities

Be okay leaving work at work

(Other) _____

Emotional Self-Care

Spend time with people whose company I enjoy

Stay in contact with important people in my life

Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies

Identify and seek out comforting activities/places

Express my outrage in social action or discussion

Love myself

Allow myself to cry

Give myself affirmation/praise

Find things that make me laugh

(Other) _____

Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for reflection
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- Identify what is meaningful to me
- Seek out reenergizing or nourishing experiences
- Contribute to causes in which I believe
- Read or listen to something inspirational
- Spend time in nature
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish my optimism and hope
- Be open to knowing
- Meditate
- Find time for prayer or praise
- Have experiences of awe
- (Other) _____

Relationship Self-Care

- Schedule regular dates with my partner
- Call, check on, or see my relatives
- Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust
- Stay in contact with faraway friends
- Make time for personal correspondence
- Allow others to do things for me
- Make time to be with friends
- Ask for help when I need it
- Communicate with my family
- Enlarge my social circle
- Spend time with animals
- (Other) _____

Workplace or Professional Self-Care

- Take time to chat with coworkers
- Identify projects/tasks that are exciting
- Balance my load so that nothing is “way too much”
- Arrange work space to be comfortable
- Get regular supervision or consultation
- Negotiate/advocate for my needs
- Make quiet time to work
- Take a break during the day
- Set limits with my boss/peers
- Have a peer support group
- Identify rewarding tasks
- (Other) _____

Overall Balance

- Strive for balance within my work-life and work day
- Strive for balance among my family, friends, and relationships
- Strive for balance between play and rest
- Strive for balance between work/service and personal time
- Strive for balance in looking forward and acknowledging the moment

Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You

- (Other) _____
- (Other) _____
- (Other) _____

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization*. Norton. Adapted by Lisa D. Butler, PhD.