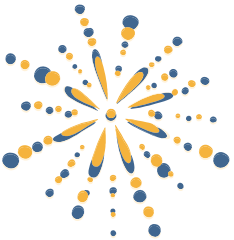
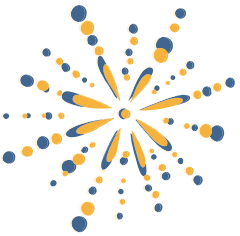


Starry Nights

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
FULL OF LIGHT AND WONDER



How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for God is gracious,
and a song of praise is fitting.
God heals the broken-hearted,
and binds up their wounds.
God determines the number of the stars;
and gives to all of them their names.
+ PSALM 147: 1-4



Introduction

Advent is a season of waiting, watching, and wonder. Not like "waiting in line," but rather like waiting for a concert to begin, a love letter to arrive, or the stars to come out on a cold, clear night. A time of anticipation, expectation, and excitement. A time of renewing our hope, peace, joy, and love, getting ready for the marvel on the way.

The word itself is from the Latin *adventus* ("arrival") – and of course the wondrous One who's arriving is Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Over the next four weeks, we'll read scripture, pray, sing, and light candles to remind us of the growing light of God's presence, even and especially in the shadows of despair, conflict, sorrow, and hate.

Indeed, Advent arrives as the nights grow long and deep and dark (at least in the Northern Hemisphere!). Around December 21st, the winter solstice marks the longest night of the year – and though we sometimes think of "night" as a metaphor for difficulty, this year let's lean into a different kind of poetry, the poetry of the stars.

Dark skies are perfect for stargazing, for seeking out the Light of the World among the deep indigos, bottomless blues, and inky blacks of God's night sky. Just as the shepherds and Magi looked up to the heavens and faithfully followed the stars, we'll spend the next four weeks training our eyes to wait, and to watch, and to wonder at all God has done – and will do – for the love of this broken, beautiful world.

WEEK ONE



Light

A candle of hope

Read Luke 21:25-36

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves…Then they will see "the Child of Humanity coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. + Luke 21:25-27

Imagine

When Jesus talked about "signs in the stars," many of his listeners were feeling hopeless, suffering under the mighty Roman Empire who had taken their land, their freedom, and their hope for the future. They longed for liberation – and so Jesus encouraged them to look up to the heavens for glimmers of hope, signs that God's creative power outshines even the most fearsome oppressor on Earth.

In a similar way, hundreds of years later, enslaved people of African American and Native American descent endured terrible suffering and injustice – and when they escaped, they often traveled by night, guided by the stars. Just as Jesus' followers looked to the heavens for hope, these freedom fighters found solace and direction in the night sky



After escaping enslavement, Frederick Douglass created an anti-slavery newspaper called "The North Star." Harriet Tubman was said to follow the North Star "to liberty," and in Henry Bibb's story of his own escape from slavery, he put it this way: "I walked with bold courage, trusting in the arm of Omnipotence; guided by the unchangeable North Star by night, and inspired by an elevated thought that I was fleeing from a land of slavery and oppression…"

above them, using the North Star to navigate toward a brighter future. In journalism, music, and folk wisdom, the stars became symbols of deliverance, reminding God's people that even in the darkest nights – indeed, especially then! – there are paths to freedom and redemption.

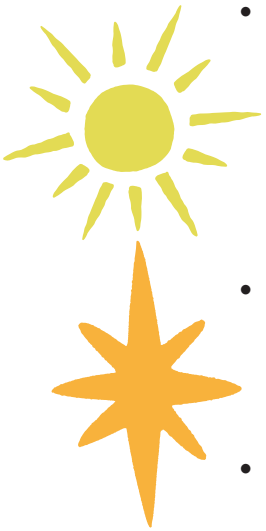
Pray

God of light and freedom, show us the way. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, lift our eyes to the heavens, and help us to see signs of your creative care, glimmers that can lead us from bondage to liberty, from despair to courage, from hopelessness to hope. Come, Jesus, come! Amen.

Sing

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"
"Go Down, Moses"

STAR STUFF: The North Star



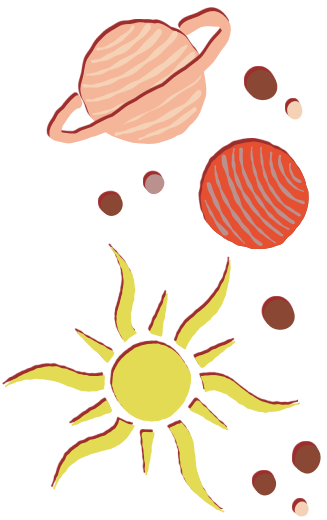
- The North Star, also known as Polaris, is located at the far end of the "handle" of the Little Dipper (part of the constellation Ursa Minor). You can also find it by imagining a line connecting the two stars on the front edge of the "scoop" of the Big Dipper (in Ursa Major); that line "points upward" toward Polaris.
- Polaris is about 430 light-years away from Earth. That means the light you see from it today actually left the star around 430 years ago – which coincidentally is just about the time when slavery began in the Americas.
- Due to the Earth's slow wobble, different stars have been the "North Star" throughout history. And in about 12,000 years, a different star will take its place.

DEEP DIVE: Liberation

One of the greatest stories ever told is the story of the Israelites' exodus from enslavement in Egypt, a movement from bondage to freedom. Jesus himself, and the Gospel writers who wrote about him, framed his ministry by referring to that old story – and so it makes sense to look for that theme in the stories of Christmas, too.

Think of it: a poor family in a backwater town, suffering under imperial occupation. A violent king sending out his assassins to try to kill the child, a story reminiscent of the birth of Moses – suggesting that we should understand Jesus as a New Moses, born for the sake of a new kind of exodus. And above it all, a sign in the heavens, a Christmas star fit not so much for sentimental holiday cards, but rather for a dramatic story of liberation, a cosmic sign of hope.

As we approach the manger over the weeks ahead, we do well to ask: What captivities are there in our lives – personally and communally – from which we need to be set free?



Practices

- Go stargazing! During the long nights of Advent, constellations, planets, and even galaxies become more visible. Use a star map or a stargazing app to find the Big and Little Dippers, and then look for the North Star!
- Search for a "dark sky map" online, find a dark sky near you (an area where there's relatively little light pollution), and plan a field trip. A lack of light pollution makes a tremendous difference: on a typical clear night in Manhattan, you can see about 15 stars – and on the same night away from cities and towns, you can see 1500!



- Since Advent is four weeks long, it's the perfect time to track an entire cycle of the Moon. Create a little "Moon flipbook" with daily illustrations of its different phases.
- Make some star ornaments by gluing popsicle sticks into star shapes and painting or decorating them. Add a loop of pretty ribbon for hanging on your tree.



- This year, consider trying a Reverse Advent Calendar. Instead of receiving something each day, give something: a compliment, a thank-you note, a luxury, a necessity. For example, put an item in a box each day of the season (such as non-perishable food or travel-sized personal hygiene items) and donate the box to a local food bank or domestic violence shelter. How can your gifts help others feel hope and gain strength for their journey into freedom?

Conversation Starters

Try these conversation starters over a meal, dessert, or a cup of hot chocolate.

- If you could name a new star, what would you call it – and why?
- What's something small that happened recently that made you feel more hopeful?
- What journeys from bondage to freedom do you notice (or long for) in your life, in your neighborhood, and in the wider world?
- Who's someone you admire for their ability to stay hopeful in tough times? What can we learn from them?
- What's one thing we can do this week to help others feel more hopeful?

WEEK TWO

Light

Two candles: for hope and peace



Read: Jeremiah 33:10-16

"'In those days and at that time
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.
In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.
This is the name by which it will be called:
The Lord Our Righteous Savior.'

Imagine

The Book of Jeremiah is an ancient text written in a time of war, distress, and upheaval, describing before and after the ancient Israelites had been forcibly taken from their homes and exiled to Babylon. Imagine God's people, so far from home, lying down and weeping beside the rivers of Babylon, looking up to the heavens for answers – and when night fell, beholding the splendid arc of the Milky Way, its glorious band of stars, planets, nebulae, and cosmic glitter reflecting the beauty and presence of God in their lives.

THE GIANT'S SHOULDER

One of the most recognizable stars in the sky is also one of the largest we can see with the naked eye: Betelgeuse (pronounced, "BEET-el-joos"), a red supergiant star in the constellation Orion – the hunter's uppermost shoulder, on the left as we view it. The star's name comes from Arabic for "the giant's shoulder" or "the central figure's hand," and it is jaw-droppingly massive: if our Sun were the size of a billiard ball, Betelgeuse would be the size of an apartment building! We see it as a pinprick of rose-colored light only because it's hundreds of light-years away. In fact, Betelgeuse is arguably the largest single object we can see with the naked eye!

Imagine the awe, the reassurance, the sense of peace, even in the midst of war and exile. If God could create such an astonishing pathway of stars – called in China "the Silver River"; in India, "the Ganges of the heavens"; and in the Kalahari desert, "the Backbone of the Night" – then surely God would also help them find their way home from exile. In the poetic words of the prophet: surely God will bring them peace, replacing their garments of sorrow with robes of beauty, and gracing them with diadems of glittering glory.

STAR STUFF: The Milky Way



- Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is a colossal disc of stars arranged in a grand spiral around a black hole at its center. Picture a cosmic frisbee – and the reason we see a a noticeable band of light stretching across the night sky is that we're located inside that frisbee looking out "into" or "through" it. All that milkiness is diffuse starlight, sent from hundreds and thousands of light-years away.
- It takes light about 125,000 years (more or less!) to travel from one side of the Milky Way to the other. And it takes light about two million years to travel from Andromeda, one of our nearest galactic neighbors, to us here on Earth.
- If the Milky Way were the size of the United States, our solar system (the Sun and all the planets) would fit on a coin balanced on a fingertip. And that coin would be located about midway between the center of the frisbee and its outer edge – say, in Denver, Colorado. And virtually all the stars we see at night with the naked eye (including Betelgeuse) are located in that same corner of the galaxy, as if we're looking up into Denver's city lights.
- Just 100 years ago, humanity's leading astronomers thought the universe was made up of one galaxy: the Milky Way. But then Edwin Hubble, using Henrietta Swan Leavitt's technique for measuring cosmic distances, discovered that the "Andromeda Nebula" (thought to be a cloud of dust within the Milky Way) is actually the Andromeda galaxy far outside the Milky Way. Today we know there are many, many, many galaxies in creation; the best estimates number in the trillions!

Pray

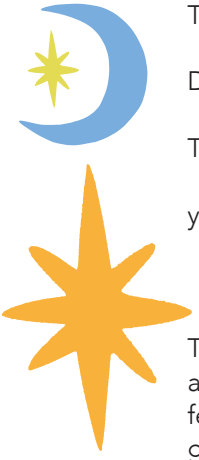
God of peace, show us the way. When we feel far from home, caught up in conflict, or weighed down by worry, give us your peace. Remind us of your presence every time we encounter the serene beauty of creation. Fill us with that serenity, and make us peacemakers, instruments of your peace. Come, Jesus, come! Amen.

Sing

"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"
"I've Got Peace Like a River"

DEEP DIVE: Creation

For thousands of years, one of humanity's major sources of wonder and praise is to contemplate the grandeur of creation. The Psalmist sings of the silent eloquence of the stars:



The heavens proclaim the glory of God,
and the sky proclaims God's handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth
and their words to the end of the world.
+ Psalm 19:1-4

To the ancient imagination, creation was already amazing – but in our time, even in just the last few decades, think of the new knowledge we've gained, and the new cause for wonder: not a few thousand stars, but hundreds of billions in the Milky Way alone. Not one galaxy, but trillions! The starry nights of Advent are the perfect time to renew our wonder at the world God has made, a world that indeed is "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Practices

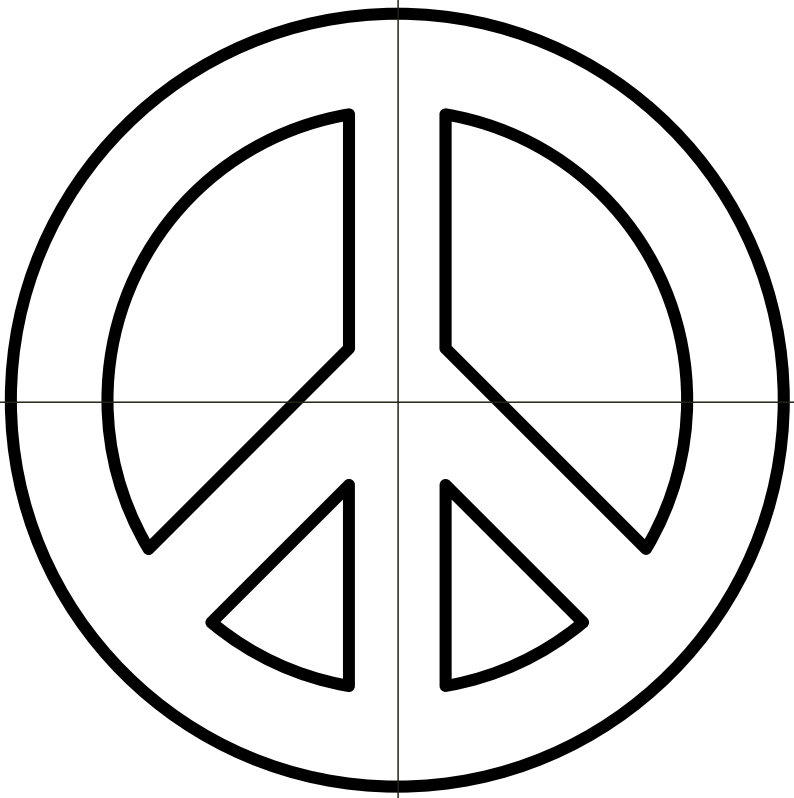
- Send a hand-written note to someone you've had some tension with (either currently or in the past), and let them know something you appreciate about them. Bring a little peace into the world, one postage stamp at a time!
- On clear nights this week, pick out a bright star, and say a prayer for more peace in the world (don't be afraid to share your prayer out loud). And then imagine people all over the world, each looking up at a different star, praying and hoping and longing for peace.
- Choose a peaceful spot in your home, backyard, or a local park. Bring a notebook and some colored pencils or crayons. Spend 5 to 10 minutes sitting quietly and observing your surroundings – watch the trees sway, enjoy how dust dances in sunlight, notice the noises around you, feel the cold on your cheeks. Afterward, write or draw what you experienced and share your observations with someone you love, discussing how spending time in nature brings peace.
- Make a flashlight "Milky Way Projector." Poke small holes in black paper to create a band of stars. Shine a flashlight through the paper in a dark room to project the "Milky Way" onto a wall or ceiling. Sing your favorite Christmas carol into God's starry night!
- This Christmas, consider giving "Gift of Time" Coupons instead of physical gifts. These coupons could be redeemed for things like cooking a meal, running errands, helping with chores, or volunteering together at a local organization serving your community.

Conversation Starters



Try these conversation starters over a meal, gingerbread cookies, or a cozy cup of mulled cider.

- If you could take three things with you to outer space, what would you take?
- What is peace? What does it look like, sound like, feel like, smell like, taste like?
- Conflict is part of life. What have you found to be some of the best ways to deal with it?
- What's one thing we can do to help make the world more peaceful?
- What's the bravest thing you've ever done? What's the bravest thing you've seen someone else do?



CREATE PEACE

Get out your markers, crayons, or colored pencils, and assign each person a "section" (or two!) of the peace sign. Have each person color, decorate, or write down some actions that help create "peace." Once it's completely filled in, put the peace sign up on your fridge – and share a picture of your masterpiece on social media.

WEEK THREE



Light

Three candles: for hope, peace, and joy

Read Luke 3:7-18

And the crowds asked him, "What, then, should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." + Luke 3:10-11

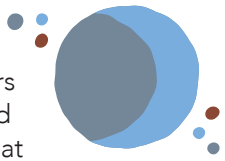
Imagine

John the Baptizer's preaching is a clear, challenging call to generosity and justice. But how should we imagine his tone? On the surface, he seems stern and direct – but if we listen closely, we can hear him calling us toward a spirit of joy.

Whenever we interpret the world as a place of blessing and abundance, we feel confident and joyful, and therefore inclined to share and to treat others fairly – thinking of their best interests as well as our own. Conversely, whenever we interpret the world as a place of scarcity, we feel fearful and harsh, and therefore inclined to hoard blessings and jockey for position – thinking of ourselves above all.

At a deep level, then, John's call to give and share and treat others with respect is a demanding invitation to see the world in terms of abundance, and therefore to act out of actual gratitude, confident love, and joyful celebration.

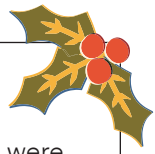
TOTAL ECLIPSE



During a total solar eclipse, when the Moon covers the Sun, the sky gets dark enough to see stars and planets in the middle of the day. It's a reminder that the stars are always with us, hidden by the daylight. Have you ever been in the path of a total eclipse? Research when the next total eclipse of the Sun will pass through your region.



That's easy when abundance is vividly clear, like a flood of jeweled stars scattered across the night sky. The challenge comes, however, during the bright heat of the day, so to speak, when the Sun's light hides the stars from view. We can't see them – but they're there. On sunny days and cloudy nights, we can still trust in God's dazzling, abundant love – and therefore still act with true generosity and fairness, living our lives as celebrations of John's radiant good news: *God is coming near! Rejoice and be glad! Be generous and just!*



STAR STUFF: Near and Far

- The closest star to Earth is, of course, the Sun. If the Sun were the size of a billiard ball, Earth would be the size of a grain of sand about 20 feet away, and it takes sunlight about eight minutes to travel to us. Imagine a snail cruising along from the billiard ball to the sand grain, traveling 20 feet in eight minutes – that's the speed of light at this scale!
- The next-closest star is Proxima Centauri, which at this "Sun-as-a-billiard ball" scale is no less than 977 miles away, about the distance from New York City to Jacksonville, Florida, more or less, a span our light-speed snail can cover in a little more than four years.
- Proxima Centauri is better viewed from the Southern Hemisphere; in the Northern Hemisphere, the closest star on view is Sirius – the brightest star in the night sky ("Sirius" means "glowing" in Greek). It's about twice as far away (8.6 light-years) as Proxima Centauri. To find Sirius, imagine a line passing through the three stars that make up the "belt" in the constellation Orion. Looking at Orion, follow this line right-to-left (diagonally "down") from the belt to a very bright star – that's Sirius!
- And the farthest stars we can see with the naked eye are in the Andromeda galaxy, some two million light-years away. On very dark, clear nights, Andromeda appears as a smudge in the sky: that's the light of about a trillion stars. And they're headed our way: Andromeda and the Milky Way will combine into one galaxy in something like 10 billion years. Mark your calendars!

DEEP DIVE: Cosmic Christ

A classic Christmas text is the opening passage of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God… All things came into being through the Word, and without the Word not one thing came into being… And the Word became flesh, and lived among us" (John 1:1-3).

Here Christ is framed as God's "Word" (the Greek word here is *Logos*, "word," "thought," "logic," "pattern") present at the very beginning, and through whom all things come to be. John borrows this idea from the even older vision of Wisdom ("Sophia" in Hebrew) being present at the creation, when God "set the heavens in place" (Proverbs 8:27).

From this angle, Christ is truly cosmic, the underlying pattern of wisdom through which stars and galaxies, Betelgeuse and Sirius, Earth and Sun and all living creatures are created. And this cosmic *Logos*, this divine Word, is the One who comes to dwell with us on Christmas day, born in a manger. Joy to the world!

Pray

God of joy, show us the way. Open our hearts and hands in generosity and justice, so that whatever we do, wherever we are – at home, at school, at work – we act and live as your children, made in your image. Empower us to be more giving, more fair. Remind us that your abundant love is always with us, day and night, night and day.
Come, Jesus, come! Amen.

Sing

"Joy to the World"
"Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow"
"This Little Light of Mine"



Practices



- Try drawing stars with a white crayon on white paper – they'll be invisible, just like stars during the day. Then, paint over the paper with watercolors and watch as the hidden stars magically appear!
- Make a constellation model of Orion this week, using mini-marshmallows for the stars and connecting them with toothpicks (and be sure to color Betelgeuse a reddish color!). Look online to find out where Orion is located in the sky, and hold up your model in that direction. Cool fact: Orion is visible around the world!
- When you're out and about this week, spread some joy! Put some extra time on a stranger's expired parking meter, pick up some litter in a park, scatter compliments and "thank-you's" like seeds. Do something unexpectedly kind – and watch the joy bubble up!
- Here's a fun dinner table game: start with the letter A and go around the table, with each person saying something that brings them joy and starts with that letter. For example, you might say "Animals" for A and "Baking" for B. Keep going through the alphabet, letter by letter, sharing what makes you sing!

Conversation Starters

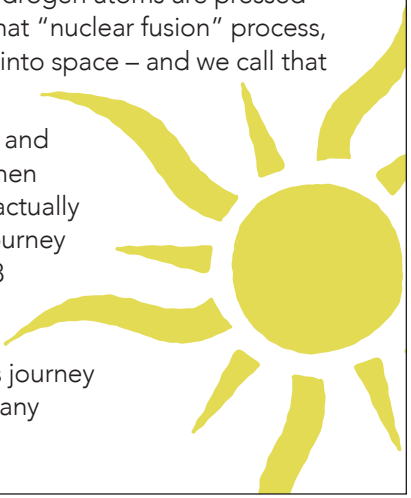
Try these conversation starters over a meal, while decorating cookies, or enjoying a slice of fruitcake.



- If you had to live in space, what three things would you miss about earth?
- What's one small thing that brought you joy recently?
- Who in your life makes you smile?
- If you could change one thing to make your life more joyful, what would it be?
- If you could change one thing to make the world more joyful, what would it be?
- What's something you're looking forward to in the next year?

OUR AMAZING SUN

- The Sun is a huge ball of hot, glowing gasses, mostly hydrogen and helium. It's so big that about 1.3 million Earths could fit inside it!
- At its surface, the Sun is about 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit (5,500 degrees Celsius); but at its core, it's around 27 million degrees Fahrenheit (15 million degrees Celsius)!
- Why so hot? In a word, pressure: the Sun is essentially a huge sphere of hydrogen, and at its core, the gravitational pressure is so great that some of those hydrogen atoms are pressed together into helium atoms. In that "nuclear fusion" process, some leftover energy is emitted into space – and we call that energy "sunlight."
- That light takes about 8 minutes and 20 seconds to reach Earth. So when you see the Sun shining, you're actually looking at light that started its journey from the Sun's surface just over 8 minutes ago – and because the Sun's internal pressures are so high, that energy likely began its journey at the core long, long ago. As many as 100,000 years ago, in fact!



Then God said, 'Let there be light';
and there was light.
And God saw that the light was good;
and God separated the light from the darkness.
God called the light Day,
and the darkness God called Night.
+ GENESIS 1: 3-5

WEEK FOUR



Light

Four candles: for hope, peace, joy, and love

Read Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies God, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant… God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. God has helped God's servant Israel, in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham [and Sarah and Hagar] and their descendants forever."
+ Luke 1:46-55

Imagine

In the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, Mary is described as "clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." It's fitting (and fun!) to imagine her like this as she sings her "Magnificat," a stirring song of love and liberation – the first Advent song of them all – in which God turns everything upside down.



Imagine Mary, humble and pregnant with Jesus (the very One who, in the beginning, was with God setting the stars in the sky), decked out with sparkles and singing about God's transformative love. A love that is intimate and tender, like a parent's love for a child, but also fierce and just, lifting up the lowly and bringing the powerful down to size. It's the kind of love that changes everything, bringing light into every valley of despair.

And this kind of love is both Mary's love and God's love, at once gentle and strong, small enough to be born in a manger, and big enough to span the cosmos.

STAR STUFF: The Universe and Everything

- In the beginning, after the "Big Bang" settled down enough for atoms to form, almost all of those early atoms were hydrogen, the simplest, lightest kind of atom: one proton in the nucleus, and one electron orbiting around it.
- How were all the other elements made? You know, carbon, oxygen, iron, gold, uranium, and so on, the stuff the universe is made of? Believe it or not, nearly all of it is made by stars!
- How? Well, for example, deep inside the Sun, hydrogen atoms (one proton in the nucleus) are being compressed by the mysterious, amazing force of gravity into helium atoms (two protons in the nucleus). In fact, this nuclear fusion reaction is what makes the Sun what it is, a shining star sending out lots and lots of energy into the universe (energy left over when those helium atoms are created).
- Bigger stars create even more pressure inside them, and so can make other "heavier" elements ("heavy" meaning more protons in the nucleus). And larger stars explode at the end of their lives, sending their stuff out into space, forming large clouds of dust from which new stars form. Those explosions – some are supernovas, others are kilonovas – involve so much pressure that they can create even heavier elements, like gold and silver.
- Over time, this cycle of stars forming, exploding, and forming again has created all the elements around and within us. Every atom of oxygen in our lungs, calcium in our bones, carbon in our biceps, iron in our blood – was created inside a star long ago, before Earth, before the Sun. Every atom of gold in that ring on your finger, or that silver in your jewelry, was likely created in a kilonova, when two neutron stars collided. And get this: the most common element in your body is hydrogen – which likely goes all the way back to the Big Bang, the Beginning of all beginnings.
- The upshot is that we are indeed "star stuff," as Carl Sagan put it – and so is virtually everything else all around us. When we look up at night, then, we're not only seeing a pretty sight – we're also beholding the workshops of creation, where the elements of everything are made!

Pray

God of love, show us the way. Make us tender and strong, like Mary, able to whisper a lullaby into a baby's ear, speak truth to the powerful on behalf of the lowly, and sing an Advent song with our whole hearts, celebrating your transformative, hopeful, peaceful, joyful love. Come, Jesus, come! Amen.

Sing

"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"
"Mary Don't You Weep"



DEEP DIVE: Incarnation

One of the central ideas of Christmas is that God "becomes flesh" in a human being, Jesus, and thereby proclaims that humanity is beautiful, excellent, lovable, and capable of being an embodiment of God. It's right there in the word: the "carn" in "Incarnation" refers to flesh. God manifests "in" the "carn" (the physical body) of a newborn baby.

Thinking about this idea in light of the stars can help us expand our wonder and celebration: for what God is doing in the Incarnation is also manifesting "in" the material elements that make up a human body, the carbon, oxygen, calcium, iron, and all the rest, all those atoms made by stars. In this way, Christmas is also a proclamation that the elemental world, the material world, the cosmos itself is beautiful, excellent, lovable, and capable – exposing once and for all the lie that "spiritual" and "material" are incompatible opposites, and proclaiming yet again that creation is not just "good" but "very good," worthy of our love and care (Genesis 1:31).

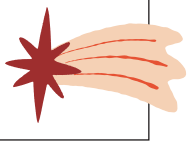
FAVORITE THINGS IN THE UNIVERSE

COLOR

SEASON



STAR/CONSTELLATION



FOOD

ANIMAL

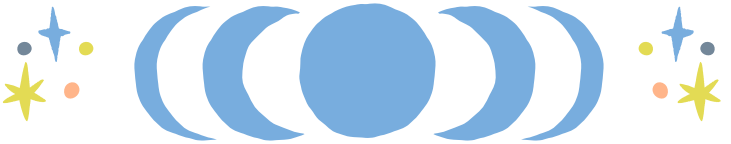
BOOK

OTHER AMAZING THINGS



Practices

- Make an "All You Need is Love" star garland to hang up in your home (or on your Christmas tree). Cut out star shapes from colorful paper and write something on each star that makes you feel truly loved. As you hang each star on the garland, discuss what each one means to you.
- Search images of "Our Lady of Guadalupe." You'll notice lots of fantastic details, including her blue cloak full of stars and the rays of the sun radiating out behind her. What do these poetic details mean to you?
- Tip with gusto this week! Whether it's for a package delivery person, server, hair stylist, or just about anyone else who provides you with a professional service, 'tis the season for tipping more than usual.
- Plan a "Cosmic Cookie Decorating" day! Bake cookies in star and planet shapes, and set up a decorating station with various toppings: sprinkles, edible glitter, colorful icing, and more. Once decorated, deliver some to neighbors, friends, and family.



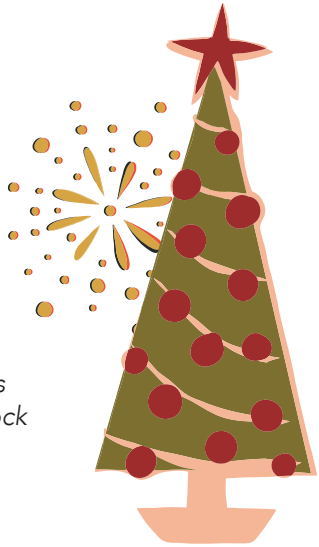
Conversation Starters

Try these conversation starters over a meal, while trimming the tree, or a cup of ginger tea.



- If you drew a picture of love, what would it look like?
- What's something that makes you feel better when you're upset?
- Would you rather volunteer in a community garden or at an animal shelter, and why?
- Who inspires you to be more caring or compassionate, and why?
- What's the best gift you've ever received? The most thoughtful gift you've ever given?

CHRISTMAS EVE



Light

Four candles + a Christ Candle:
for hope, peace, joy, love, and Jesus

Read Luke 2:1-20

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. + Luke 2:8

Imagine

The starry night of all starry nights has arrived, with colors as vivid as Vincent van Gogh's famous "Starry Night" painting; with music as sweet as the angels' "Gloria" sung to the shepherds that night in the fields; and with surprises as mysterious as Magi – ancient astronomers from the faraway East – following a newborn star, bearing gifts for a newborn king.

Stars, stars, stars. Signs of hope: for Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, and Harriet Tubman, heading north. Glimmers of peace: radiant reminders of the inspiring, reassuring, heartening beauty of creation. Cause for gladness: a heavenly host, proclaiming good news of great joy for all people. And invitations to love: to sing boldly of God's love that turns the world upside down, and to set out on a great journey following a distant star, to find and praise the God of love made flesh, dwelling among us.

Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright. The Milky Way above, and Mary's milk below. Prestigious scholars from the East, and anonymous shepherds from the nearby hills.

And there at the heart of it all, lying in a manger, is a fragile, defenseless, ordinary baby, vulnerable and beautiful. The Prince of Peace. Wonderful Counselor. The One through whom the stars are made.

✶ The Light of the World. ✶

Pray

God of hope, peace, joy, and love, show us the way. Open our minds and hearts to you, and to our neighbors. This Christmas, this starry night, make us lanterns of your light: signs of hope, makers of peace, virtuosos of joy, lovers of kindness, doers of justice. Let our lights shine! Welcome, Jesus, Welcome! Amen.

Sing

"Silent Night"
"Angels We Have Heard On High"
"Go Tell It on the Mountain"
"Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"
"We Three Kings"

