

Program for the time of Advent 2015
Deepen our understanding of the reality of Christmas and the Incarnation
In the context of the New History of the Universe



*Read the Word of God
with eyes open on the new cosmological vision
leads us to Christ
"in whom are united in depth the human being, God and the cosmos"
(Jean Proulx).*

Creation began 13.8 billion years ago. The expanding universe contains billions of galaxies. We and all creation are renewed each moment and we are intrinsically interconnected.

We no longer live in a world with God "above." This requires a re-thinking of the Christmas story! The Incarnation is a Mystery that a lifetime of contemplation could not exhaust. More and more theologians, and other authors, are writing about the transitions needed that this supposes for our understanding of the Incarnation in the context of the emerging vision of the world.

"In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: "All things have been created through him and for him" (Col 1:16).

The prologue of St John's Gospel (1:1-18) reveals Christ's creative work as the Divine Word (Logos). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word "became flesh" (Jn 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross.

From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the Incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy." (Laudato si N° 99)

Adapted from the text of Terri MacKenzie, SHCJ

**First Week
New consciousness,
New Christian understanding**



Meditate with Mary... She said "Yes". Then, at this very moment she breathed for two! Perhaps she prayed Psalm 80 in a different way, awaiting the birth of her child: **"Breathe life into our lungs, so we can shout your name!"**

We share the air we breathe with all creation on the Earth, for and with all creation! We are becoming aware that we share our breathing with all creation.

Pause for prayer in silence or for a time of sharing.

"A mistake in one's understanding of Creation will necessarily cause a mistake in one's understanding of God." (Thomas Aquinas)

Scientific discoveries expand our concepts of time, space and the place of human beings within creation: *"We humans are in the process of shifting our perception from a worldview in which everything is solid fixed and permanent . . . to a universe in constant change . . . expanding, and . . . in the process of evolving . . . We are no longer the separate, autonomous beings we once thought we were." (Elaine Prevallet, S.L.)*

Science calls us to a new awareness that all life is interconnected and evolving. No person exists separate from the rest. That's new! Unlike earlier stages of evolution, this evolution of consciousness requires cooperation with the creation process through free choice: learning, sharing and grappling with difficulties, trusting in God's help to move with evolution into a new understanding of the Holy Mystery and of ourselves in Creation.

"The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships... Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity." (Laudato Si – N°240)



Sharing: *What sentence above calls you to prayerful pondering? How has your understanding of creation changed since your childhood? What is your "growing-to-awareness" story?*

Week two The cosmos prepares for new life

Is. 40: 1-5, 9-11; Ps 85, 11: Sprouts green from the ground ... pours down from the skies
Ps 85, 11-14; 2 Pierre 3: 8, 13: With God one day is like a thousand years...

Peter calls our attention to time: before the Lord, *one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day*. No one in Sacred Scripture could have imagined billions of years – nor could they have guessed that our universe began 13.8 billion years ago with the Flaring Forth of energy that evolved into everything we know. They could not have guessed that our own planet’s cosmic story began then, continued through generations of stars, and, some 4.5 billion years ago, one star’s death resulted in our solar system including our planet, rotating around a star in a galaxy in one of billions of galaxies.

“The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.” (Pope Francis – Laudato Si – N° 233)

Who could have imagined how these inanimate things long for God, a longing that will only find its fulfilment at the end of time? Every inanimate thing can tell us something about the evolutionary history which draws all that exists towards God, which draws all that exists towards Christ, the conclusion of evolution.

“We could take a stone, a flower in our hand, and what could we do with that, well first of all one can put in this flower, in this stone, the divine presence”... God everywhere, not only the divine presence, but the presence, the divine action that keeps the creature in what it is. There's not a flower, there is not a leaf that is not the object of attention, of a divine solicitude... (Father Lev Gillet)

“All creation, including human beings, continually evolves. At every moment a portion of the body’s atoms is returning to the world outside, 98% of them are replaced each year.” (cf. David S. Toolan). These facts invite us to think again about our understanding of who we are, who God is, who Jesus is and how we relate to one another and to all creation.



“The Spirit that Jesus received at his baptism has been His Source of Life during his entire life. Yes, the personal characteristics of the Spirit were named for the first time by Jesus and most clearly manifest in the person of Jesus, but the Spirit was present in the universe from time immemorial”. (John C Haughey)

At each moment, the Spirit of God anoints us and all creation on Earth and in the cosmos.

Pause for prayer in silence or a time of sharing.

Although current scientific facts would have been incomprehensible to Mary, nevertheless she carried within her the same energy that flared forth to produce stars, our planet and everything that exists. **She, too, was born of stardust. She, too, had the Spirit from the beginning.**

As a result, Mary and her Child – like us – shared kinship with every element in creation mentioned by Isaiah. “The Divine Child was enclosed for billions of years in the womb of the cosmos before living in Mary’s womb, and he is truly **Child of Earth and Child of the stars**” (Terry Moran).

This week we reflect on the cosmos’ preparation to receive Jesus of Nazareth and we give thanks for Him, *“who allowed the Spirit of extravagant generosity to be revealed in his life in such a way that we can recognise in him the wonder of the Spirit in human form.”* (Michael Morwood)

We are invited to deepen our acceptance “from the inside out that we belong to a reality greater than ourselves... All our thoughts, dreams and aspirations arise from this cosmic wellspring within which we live and grow, and we are empowered to realise our full potential as planetary, cosmic creatures.” (Dairmuid O’Murchu)

Pause to meditate.

Seen with the eyes of faith, *“the story of our universe and of life on our Earth, and everything that science can tell us about its evolutionary history, is part of a larger story, the story of divine self-bestowal.”* (Denis Edwards)

Within that story, Mary gave birth to Jesus of Nazareth. “The Christ” is the title we use for the cosmic, eternal Being who has bestowed life within creation from its beginning: “He exists before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1, 17). We are constantly called to be **“changed from the inside out”**, by renewing our understanding both of the human Jesus and the Eternal Christ.

With Mary and all women who have experienced birth-giving, *“may we too labour with creation to give birth to a new heaven and a new earth.”* May we *“find the Holy Child with Mary his Mother, and with his mother Earth”*. (Terry Moran).



Sharing: What sentence above calls you to prayerful meditation? How has your understanding of God’s living and acting in creation been enriched by new scientific discoveries?

Week Three

Evolving understanding of the place of humanity in creation

Matthew, chapters 1 and 2

The Gospel of Matthew begins with the words: An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. By recalling the Book of Genesis, the author brings us back to the origins of creation.



Who are we humans? Science now tells us that matter is made of waves and coalescences of stardust and light reconfiguring into cars and trees, oceans and civilisations!

- We are the cosmic evolution, happening right here and now.
- We are the living face of evolution, the eyes and hands and minds of the universe weaving itself into its next manifestations, day after day after day.
- We are the universe becoming conscious, watching itself through microscopes and telescopes, on mountaintops and through meditations, in awesome wonder and directing its pieces into greater awareness and love.

*“This shift from **seeing ourselves as separate beings placed on earth** to **seeing ourselves as an expression of Earth** is a major shift in our understanding of who we are. It is a shift at the deepest level.”*
(Michael Dowd, Connie Barlow)

Pause for silent prayer or sharing.

Like all life, humans began with what is believed to be the Flaring Forth, or “Big Bang”. With creation, humanity developed through eternities of slow change. For the first three billion years of Earth our ancestors were single cell organisms. *Homo erectus* dates back about 1,500,000 years.

“Modern” humans reached Europe about 40,000 years ago. For about the past 2,500 years Western civilisation has identified humans as did the Greeks: as different from, and superior to, everything else. In this model of creation, independence and survival of the fittest governed individual and group actions and seemed to be inherent. The first Garden account of creation corresponds to this mindset: Humans are superior to the rest of creation and charged with dominion over them.

In the past century, scholars of many disciplines – including theology – have discovered that creation is relational, interdependent, and holistic. The widely held and assumed-to-be-divinely-sanctioned hierarchical model of creation is now seen as inadequate. Genesis 2: 5-25 has a frequently forgotten creation account that supports another view. God takes earth, *adamah*, and forms humans from it. God’s breath/Spirit animates *adam*. We care for Earth because we are part of it and because God’s presence makes it sacred.

Humans are not on Earth, but **they are of Earth, they are inseparably part of it**. Further, in Genesis 2 God charges humans to cultivate and care for the Earth. The Hebrew word can be translated as “**to serve**”. This account tells us that we are here, not to dominate, but to serve the whole of creation and praise its Creator.

Pause to meditate

Because we are used to the former story, it's possible to feel that this new story of our identity negates the marvel of each human's dignity and worth. Far from it!

God's breath, active in the old story, is just as active in the new! The place of humans, once thought to be at the top of a pyramid, is now understood to be in a relational whole, but our distinct gifts and responsibilities remain with us. So, who are we? We are unique dimensions of the Universe, and each dimension reveals an aspect of God's Spirit at our time/place in the cosmic story. We reveal and enjoy God's presence and love

With everyone in the Advent/Christmas drama and everyone who has ever lived, we share and shape the evolving and distinctive gifts that distinguish us from non-human life. Not only are we intelligent beings, we are the Universe's means finally to become aware of itself and of Jesus' place in the story.

"We must redefine the place of humans in the universe and our relationship with nature. In volume and matter, we are dust; but in terms of organisation, we are at the summit of the cosmos. Far from being foreign to the universe, we are inserted into an adventure that continues over a distance of a billion light-years. We are the children of a cosmos that gave us birth after a pregnancy of fifteen billion years. "(Hubert Reeves, space takes the shape of my eyes)

Like all creation, we are participating in the construction off the future, but we humans know that we are doing it. That is one essential difference of being human. We recognise that we are part of the Great Work Thomas Berry talked about, and we can awaken ever more to the fact that we are called to participate in it with deeper love.

"Making the Cosmos a House for every creature in harmony and jubilation, it is to this that the Gospel calls us. "Humanity must rediscover its common roots and recognise international solidarity and the vital links that unite all peoples in a single human family, and what is more, in the great family of the living. We are all in the same boat, plants, animals and humans, as at the time of Noah. To proclaim the Gospel is first and foremost an activity of creation and for biblical faith, the two pillars of the creation are righteousness and justice. "(Claude Lacaille SMEs - Biblicist)

Sharing: What sentence above calls you to prayerful meditation?

Week four Incarnation Revisited

Ps 89: 2 – Before the mountains were born, before the earth and the world came to birth, from eternity to eternity you are God.

(John Paul II's Encyclical *Redemptio Hominis* N° 1): *"God entered the history of humanity and, as a man, became an actor in that history, one of the thousands of millions of human beings, but at the same time Unique! Through the Incarnation God gave human life the dimension that he intended humans to have from their first beginning. He has granted that dimension definitively, in the way that is peculiar to him alone, in keeping with his eternal love and mercy, with the full freedom of God."*

Christians have long believed that in Christ we unite ourselves to the whole of humanity. New understandings of our unity with all creation clarify how, in the unique Incarnation we celebrate at Christmas, we unite with all of creation.

"For us Christians, the universe therefore has a close relationship with Christ, not only because of the creation, but even more by virtue of the Incarnation. It has somehow become his great crib, his home."

"Christian faith teaches this incredible thing: God's own Son became man; one of us. In doing so, he left in a way his transcendence and entered the cosmos. By his body, he is made of matter. By his humanity, he joined us in the stage of evolution, second to none, that is the advent of our species on Earth."



An unbreakable bond is also established in the history of God and the cosmos. Without ceasing to be the One through whom God created everything, the Divine Son acquires, so to speak, the status of creature. This is what the title of Mary, "Mother of God" means. (Michel Salamolard)

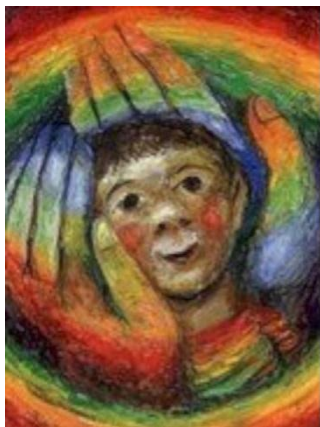
***By his Incarnation,
Christ inserted himself not just into our humanity,
But into the universe which supports humanity.
The presence of the Incarnate Word...shines at the heart of all things."
(Teilhard de Chardin)***

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)

"The humanity of Christ is from ours, and ours has been prepared by the whole cosmic evolution from which humanity comes forth. Christ exists from the beginning in God's plan. God is not a solitary being but a communion». (Eloi Leclerc).

Saint John Paul II believed that the judges who condemned Galileo's science were "incapable of dissociating faith from age-old cosmology," (of letting go of the old way of seeing) which might also influence hesitations today to see all creation as sacramental.

Pause for reflection.



The child Mary brings to birth remains God's unique Word and well-beloved Son from the womb to the cross and the Resurrection. God lives and acts in us and in our world at each moment, as we continually come to birth.

«Christ, from the moment of creation existed, he remains the universal place between all creatures and all phenomena, not only human phenomena, but the cosmic phenomena» (Father Lev Gillet)

"Respect for life and the dignity of the human person extend also to the rest of creation" (John Paul II)

"In contemplation the human spirit learns to see the presence of the divine in nature, and so recognises that the earth is a sacred place. For such a spirit the biblical bush still burns, and we take off our shoes." (Elizabeth A. Johnson)



"As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings." (Pope Francis "Laudato Si" N°220)

Sharing: How might these reflections influence your Advent and Christmas prayer? Share one word that sums up for you these Advent meetings.