

The Canticle

December 2019
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Voice of
The Community
of St. Francis,
Province of
The Americas



Our community Christmas card this year features St. Francis embracing his city of San Francisco. It is a city of tall buildings, wealth and splendor as well as homeless families. The Inns are full.

The problem with homelessness in our city is tremendous. For years, city governments have measured homelessness by sending out volunteers on a single night to count, as best they could, the number of homeless people they found on the streets or in shelters. By this method San Francisco this year reported 8,011 homeless people, a 17% increase over 2017, the last time a count was conducted.

But San Francisco has another more comprehensive way of measuring homelessness from a city database of homeless people who receive health care and other services. Over the course of a full year, the city counted twice as many homeless people — 17,595 people, a 30% jump from the previous year. This huge number is still an undercount because people who chose not to access services were not included.

Our Franciscan charism compels us to pay attention to this horrendous number and, more specifically, to the real people these numbers represent. Sr. Maggie's Sunday congregation is Open Cathedral, an outdoor Mass in the Tenderloin District (skid row) sponsored by the San Francisco Night Ministry. The congregation is an eclectic mix of homeless, formerly homeless, poor and marginalized people from the neighborhood. Maggie greatly appreciates the lack of pretense and the gritty reality of their lives that the people bring to Sunday community.

Srs. Jean and Pamela Clare have been involved with Holy Innocents Church's offering of dinner at the Open

Cathedral Eucharist on Thursday evenings in the Mission District. Sr. Pamela provides massages through the Care Through Touch Institute, which works with people at drop-in centers, shelters, health clinics, various service providers and people on the streets. One of the programs at which Pamela works is the Gubbio Project at St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church which provides space for "sacred sleep" on mats on the nave floor between 6 am and 2 pm. She also provides massage at the Tom Waddell Urban Health Clinic in a pain management program designed to help people find alternatives to their use of opioids in this time of the opioid crisis. Another program where she works is Martin de Porres House of Hospitality (aka Martins). The CSF Sisters have had strong connections with this Catholic Worker soup kitchen at Martins since the 1970s.

We also invite others to share in our work and concern for the homeless and hungry poor in San Francisco through our Companions in Franciscan Spirituality program for women over 21.

2020 Schedule for our Residential Immersions:

April 12-22 Focus on Holy Week and Easter. Opportunity to be trained and participate in Care Through Touch's foot massage event in the Tenderloin on Maundy Thursday.

July 3-13 Focus on Care for Creation and Care for our Neighbor. Opportunity to volunteer at Martins.

Sept. 27-Oct 7 Focus on St. Francis. Opportunity to volunteer at Martins.



We traditionally celebrate the 12 Days of Christmas, the Feast of the Incarnation, starting December 25th. However, if we consider the Incarnation as something that started, not on December 25 (or any other day) in the year 3 B.C.E., but rather as beginning some 13.8 billion years ago when God first created energy/matter, then we get

The 12 Days of Cosmic Incarnation

Day 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

And then, out of the dark and pregnant silence within Godself, God reached down deep inside and brought out a handful and began shaping the divine dark silence; squeezing and kneading it until it formed an intensely compressed energetic particle of infinite density and hotness, incomprehensibly heavy with possibilities. And then ... God let go!

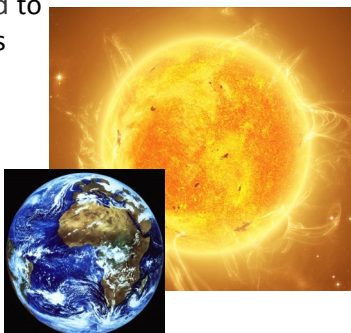
Modern science tells us that the universe was born 13.8 billion years ago from “nothing”, a state of “placelessness and timelessness,” and a single intensely compressed particle which exploded in what we call the Big Bang. All the energy and all the matter of the universe, all that has ever or will ever exist, burst out...and space and time came into being.



Day 3

And God said, “let there be lights in the dome of the sky.” (Gen. 1:14)

13,000 million years ago stars were forming at a very rapid rate, and creating the first dwarf galaxies, whose mergers gave rise to the more massive present-day galaxies, including our own Milky Way Galaxy. In an outer spiral arm of our galaxy 4.6 billion years ago, our Solar System came into being from the gravitational collapse of a giant interstellar molecular cloud — the Sun and everything bound to it by gravity — the planets Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune, dwarf planets such as Pluto, dozens of moons and millions of asteroids, comets and meteoroids.



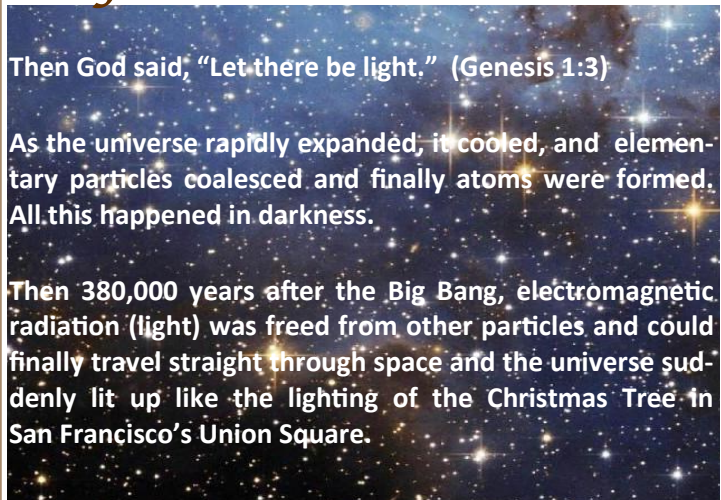
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Day 2

Then God said, “Let there be light.” (Genesis 1:3)

As the universe rapidly expanded, it cooled, and elementary particles coalesced and finally atoms were formed. All this happened in darkness.

Then 380,000 years after the Big Bang, electromagnetic radiation (light) was freed from other particles and could finally travel straight through space and the universe suddenly lit up like the lighting of the Christmas Tree in San Francisco’s Union Square.



Day 4

Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation.” (Gen. 1:11)

Modern cosmology tells us that the Universe isn't simply a place or a vast mechanism. Nor is it aimless and random. It's an event, a sacred story billions of years ago, and one that continues to unfold and reach greater depths of beauty and complexity. And this complexification appears to be slanted so that the emergence of life and intelligence was inevitable.

Life started about 4 billion years ago with single-celled micro-organisms such as bacteria and blue-green algae which fed off the early Earth’s chemically rich compounds. However, about 3.9 billion years ago, the planet faced a crisis when the generation of these compounds was slowing just at a time when the population of bacteria and algae was expanding exponentially.



Instead of a major die-off from starvation, some single celled organisms learned to capture photons from the Sun and convert them into food.

Thus photosynthesis was born out of crisis.

Day 5

And God said, "let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures." (Gen. 1:20)

Like plant life, animal life began in the sea, and there it remained for 600 million years. However, once photosynthesis had raised atmospheric oxygen levels high enough, the ozone layer formed, which protected the earth from lethal levels of UV radiation. It was then possible for living things to venture onto the land.

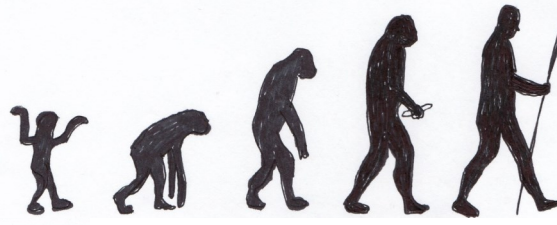
Communities of living things exploded as they moved onto the land. Estimates are that there are currently 2.2 million species in the sea and 6.5 million on land.



Day 6

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image." (Gen. 1:26)

Two million years ago our genus appeared on the earth, Homo, and 100,000 years ago our species: sapiens. The human represents a major milestone on the evolutionary journey. We are a species that reflects on the Universe consciously and on our own role in it. As such, we are a species who can consciously choose what kind of world we want. Our participation gives value and meaning to our lives. Our species is capable of awareness



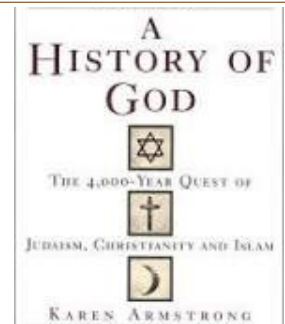
God saw everything that he had made, and it was very good. (Gen. 1:31)

Day 7

And God said to Abraham...

The human species is not only aware of the spiritual, but capable of relating to God. Some 4,000 years ago the children of Abraham began developing monotheistic theology focused on their covenant with the one God. This has formed the basis and foundation for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

And God said to Moses... "I am who I am." (Exodus 3:14)



Day 8

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel... O come, Desire of nations, come....

Through their years of hardship and exile, the descendants of Abraham yearned for the coming of the Messiah, the one to be sent from God to restore all things.

This longing for wholeness and healing, justice and compassion, right relationship among all peoples, between us humans and the earth, and between us and God... This is a deep and ancient longing which we tap into each Advent.



The one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old...shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. (Micah 5:2-4)

Day 9

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman... (Galatians 4:4)



About 3 B.C.E. Jesus, son of Mary of Nazareth, was born in a small town in Roman-occupied Palestine. His coming is felt by many to be the pivot point of human history. There may or may not have been angels singing to shepherds of the coming of the long sought Messiah, but most all agree that things are different now. Even our calculation of time is affected. What used to be called BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, Year of the Lord) has been changed to B.C.E (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era), but the slightly miscalculated date of his birth still remains the perceived point of change.

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The Canticle—digital version

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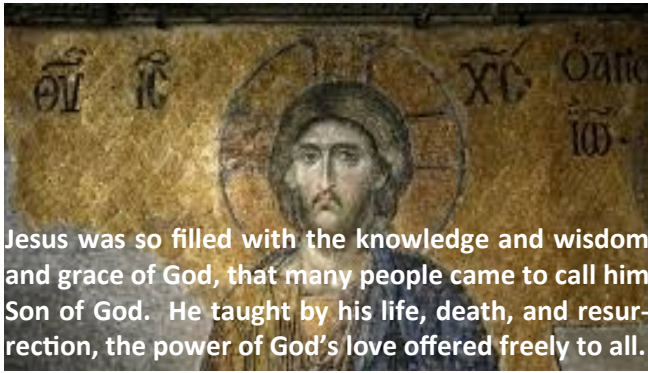
The Canticle
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Community of St.
Francis, a religious
order for women in the
Franciscan tradition in the
Episcopal Church.



Christmas Blessings 2019

Day 10

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things... (Colossians 1:19)



Jesus was so filled with the knowledge and wisdom and grace of God, that many people came to call him Son of God. He taught by his life, death, and resurrection, the power of God's love offered freely to all.

Day 11

The Cosmic Christ

Jesus was the Incarnate Human Being who came to a particular place at a particular time in history. The Christ is Eternal, from before time (see Day 1) and forever. Scientist/Theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin found Christ present in the entire cosmos, from the least particle of matter to the convergent human community.

Richard Rohr says "This Christ is much bigger and older than either Jesus of Nazareth or the Christian religion, because the Christ is whenever the material and the divine co-exist—which is always and everywhere."

Day 12

Continuing Incarnation

Richard Rohr writes "When we prepare for Advent or Christmas, we are not talking about waiting for a little baby to be born. We are, in fact, welcoming the universal, cosmic Christ--the Christ that is forever being born in the human soul and in history....Incarnation is the ultimate character of all reality, including each one of us in community as the ongoing Body of Christ." There are important implications of the perpetual presence of the Incarnation. The world [cosmos] is pregnant with God, in the words of 13th c. Franciscan Third Order mystic Angela di Foligno. God did not come only at the birth of Jesus (with the promises to come again at the end of time), but rather, God is always with us, continuously coming, ready to emerge from within our humanity in the fullness of time...to emerge within us.