

CONSCIOUSNESS *of the* COSMOS

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests readings and activities to raise our consciousness of Earth and the cosmos during the Season of Creation.

The month of September is now the Season of Creation, an annual celebration of prayer and action to protect creation. It begins on 1 September with a day of Prayer for Creation and concludes on 4 October, the feast of Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology in many Christian traditions. Here I focus on *Cosmos Sunday* in the *Season of Creation* and reflect on the three biblical texts for the day.

Proverbs 8:22-31

God created me at the beginning of God's work, the first of God's acts of long ago.

- 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
- 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.
- 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—
- 26 when God had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.
- 27 When God established the heavens, I was there, when God drew a circle on the face of the deep,
- 28 when God made firm the skies above, when God established the fountains of the deep,
- 29 when God assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress God's command, when God marked out the foundations of the earth,
- 30 then I was beside God, like a master worker; and I was daily God's delight, rejoicing before God always,
- 31 rejoicing in God's inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

In Proverbs we hear Divine Wisdom or *Sophia* singing of her place in the universe. She claims that place as "the first of God's acts of long ago . . . before the beginning of the Earth". Her song of the Universe names the depths, the mountains, the heavens, the sea. In Prov 8:29 she claims her place "beside God" as craftswoman and ends singing of her relationship

with God, the "inhabited world" and the "human race". This song catches us up into the communion of divinity, humanity and the cosmos and invites us to create songs of Cosmic Wisdom for our time.

Colossians 1:15-20

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to God's self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

The author of the Letter to the Colossians, whether Paul or someone influenced by Pauline theology, reflects on the risen Jesus through cosmic lenses. The language and the imagery fall over one another, as it were, as the writer draws readers and listeners into engagement with the Risen One. This author speaks of the risen Jesus, not Wisdom, as the "first born of all creation" and "image of the invisible God". Christ is linked to the creation of all things or, as we might say today, the emergence of all things. As with the song from Proverbs, Colossians places us in the communion of creation and invites us to explore the death, the resurrection and the cosmic dimensions of Jesus Christ.

John 6:41-51

6:41 Then the Jews began to complain about Jesus because he said: "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They were saying: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say: 'I have come down from heaven?'" 43 Jesus answered them:

"Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Johannine author like the Colossian writer uses the language of "heaven" to evoke the cosmic dimension of Jesus—he is the "bread that came down from heaven". But his language is misunderstood. His listeners hear his claim to be the "bread that came down from heaven" as a denial of his human birth and relationships. But Jesus does not allow his discourse to be limited by his audience. Rather, he invites his listeners into new perspectives: being drawn to Jesus by the "Father" and being raised. Humanity and divinity coalesce in Jesus's claim to be "living bread" which is given for the life of the cosmos (Jn 6:51).

Now more than ever we need to consider our home in the widest, most expansive sense—our home Earth as a planet in the cosmos. These readings call us to develop an increasing awareness of gratitude, wonder, appreciation and new consciousness of the evolving cosmos. They call us to sacrifice and care to protect our planet. Today, with Earth in peril, this call is urgent.

I suggest two simple activities to engage with the cosmos. First, walk out at night and look up to the sky awash with stars and planets. At the same time be aware of our feet firmly planted on Earth.

And the second is to watch a film

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**Home of Compassion
2 Rhine St, Wellington
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3 November (9.30–4.00pm), 2019**



Geoffrey (Monty) Williams, S.J.
B.A.; M.A.; M.Div.; Ph.D. Professor of Ignatian Spirituality from Regis College, University of Toronto, Canada, will lead this retreat.

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or TV series, such as Brian Cox's *The Planets*, to expand our understanding and consciousness of the cosmos. 🌿

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Elaine Wainwright is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.