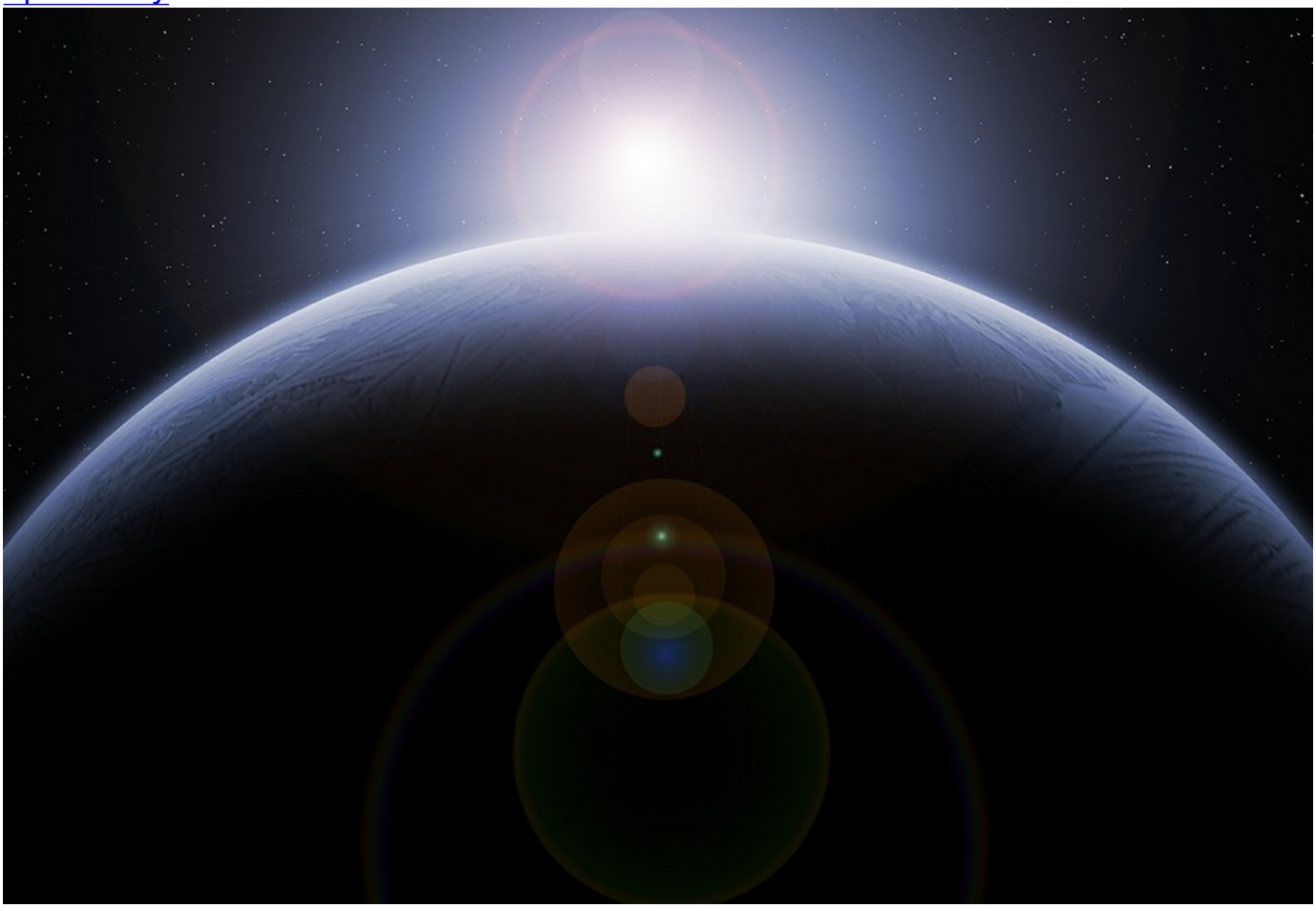
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



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I have always loved this word: *Incarnation*! It captures the glorious mystery of God becoming human in the person of Jesus! Incarnation was a sacred word, bringing a sense of awe to a grade school child who waited in joyful anticipation for the greatest moment of the year — the wonder of Christmas! Of course, it also meant the lights and decorations in our homes and towns that turned dark winter days into glittering, glowing wonderlands.

Yet even as a child, something way more than Santa Claus stirred in the air for me as our purple-shrouded church joined the centuries of faithful people longing for the coming of a savior. Each Advent candle that we lit reminded us to be patient, for he *would* come! Despite the natural excitement of toys and gifts, and cookies and trees, the plaintive, haunting notes of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" stirred a longing that every soul sensed at some deep level.

The silence of winter nights drew us into our longing for something to ease the darkness and sadness that lurked in the shadows of life on this earth. Young and old alike yearned for the Messiah to bring light to the weary world. Disillusioned hearts searched for something real that no amount of tinsel could promise: *incarnation* — the unimagined gift, the outrageously hopeful miracle that God would enter our human experience and take on the full gamut of this journey of ours, and for one reason — to help us know how to be human!

How many years have I welcomed that Advent season, ready to enter deeply into pondering the darkness around me — in my own little life, and in the midst of seemingly unsolvable, desperate problems encircling the world? From every corner came cries for justice, mercy, compassion and peace. Advent waiting became Advent longing and yearning and aching for a peace we could not construct ourselves. And as we grew older, the sobering realization dawned on us that only "*You* satisfy the hungry heart."

But finally, there came a time when things shifted a bit for me, and I began to realize that I, too, was *incarnated*! My soul took human form so that I could learn many great lessons on this human journey. My "incarnation" meant experiencing hunger

and physical pain — and accidents and disappointments, and heartache and failure — all *great* teachers of incalculable lessons. So too my incarnation has meant delicious feasts and the warmth of human touch, and the boundless freedom of dance and running and swimming! It has meant tender love, rich relationships, listening with compassion and touching the pain of others. It has meant a million human joys and delights … great books, breathtaking music, and ecstasies over the beauty and wonder of Earth's skies and rivers, oceans, mountains and forests!

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Incarnation opened my human mind and heart to experience the holiness of an infant's face, a child's innocent play, a bird's effortless flight, a beloved elder's familiar, worn hand, so sacred in mine. And God walks among us in all of this, showing us how to bear ecstasy as well as sorrow.

My incarnation baptized me into discipleship, set my feet on his path, and began an apprenticeship of "putting on the mind and heart of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Meditating on his life dispelled many false assumptions about who God is, what being a good person involves, and what really matters in this human journey. The incarnated Christ modeled living without ego, without duality. He embodied the amazing truth that all are one! We are *one* with God, we are one with every person of every culture and religion, and with every blade of grass, every drop of water, every plant and animal cohabitating with us. His example was so clear, his words so unequivocal it's hard to understand how anyone could miss or skew the message. If we celebrated not just his *coming* to Earth, but his *living* on Earth — how he saw things — "*You have heard that it was said … but I say to you*" (Matthew 5:21-22); how he treated people without judgment, without excluding, without anything but mercy and acceptance — the world would look vastly different. How can anyone fail to see who he was and the example he set for our human living?

This year I am longing once again for the Messiah's coming, all too aware of the weight of darkness: of the shocking gun violence in our country, of the wrenching suffering of Ukraine and other places of staggering injustice, of lies and truth-

spinning that have ignited hatred and division. And as I pray for the coming of the light, I'll also be thanking Jesus for entering our human experience and coaxing us to a new consciousness. Early on, he called us to come and follow him, telling us we could do all he did and more, inviting us to leave all the nonsense and walk on water with him. Let’s pick up *our* incarnation.

Let's expand our incarnated selves to Jesus proportions! Advent is about incarnation — his and ours!