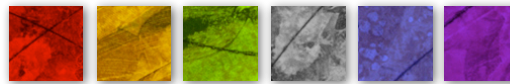


He calls the stars by name

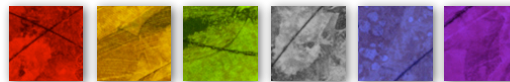
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“He counts the number of the stars;  
He calls them all by name.”

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Psalm 147:4



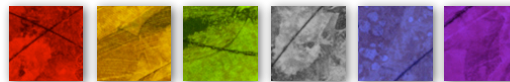
Let's begin with a reflection on Psalm 147:4: READ.



“Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades?  
Can you loose the cords of Orion?  
Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons  
or lead out the Bear with its cubs?  
Do you know the laws of the heavens?”

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Job 38.31–33

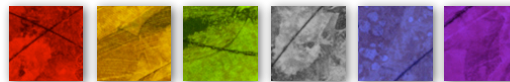


The greatness of God has always been evident in the stars. (READ)

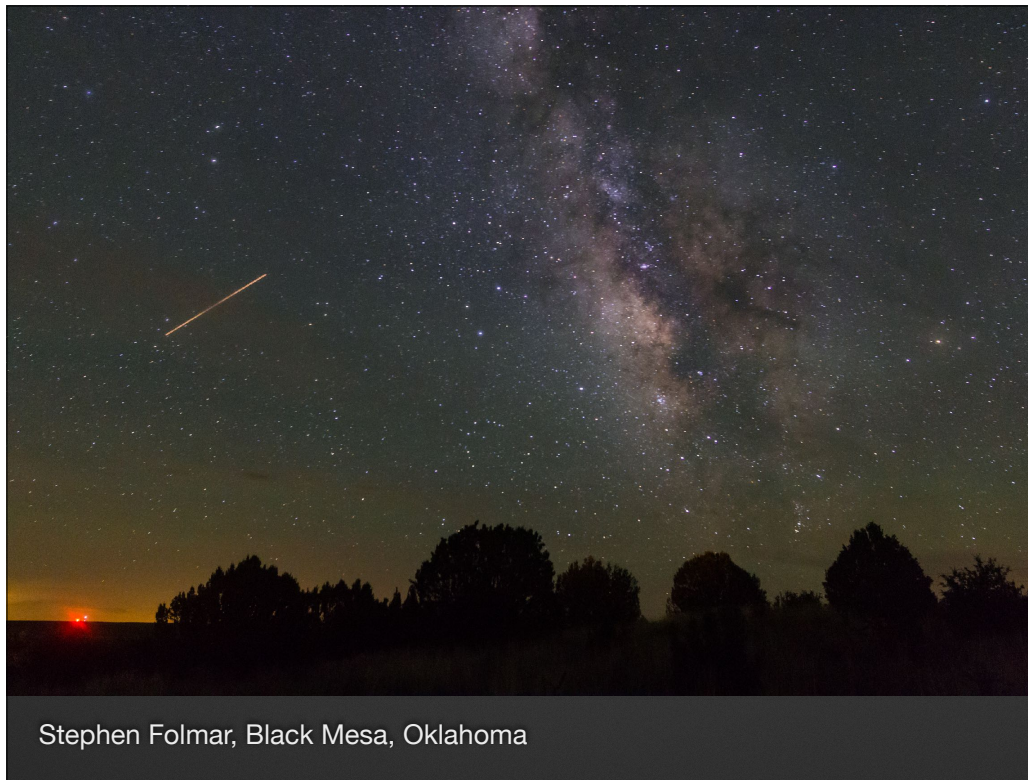
“When I consider Your heavens,  
the work of Your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which You have set in place,  
What is man that You are mindful of him,  
the son of man that You care for him?”

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Psalm 8.3–4



READ



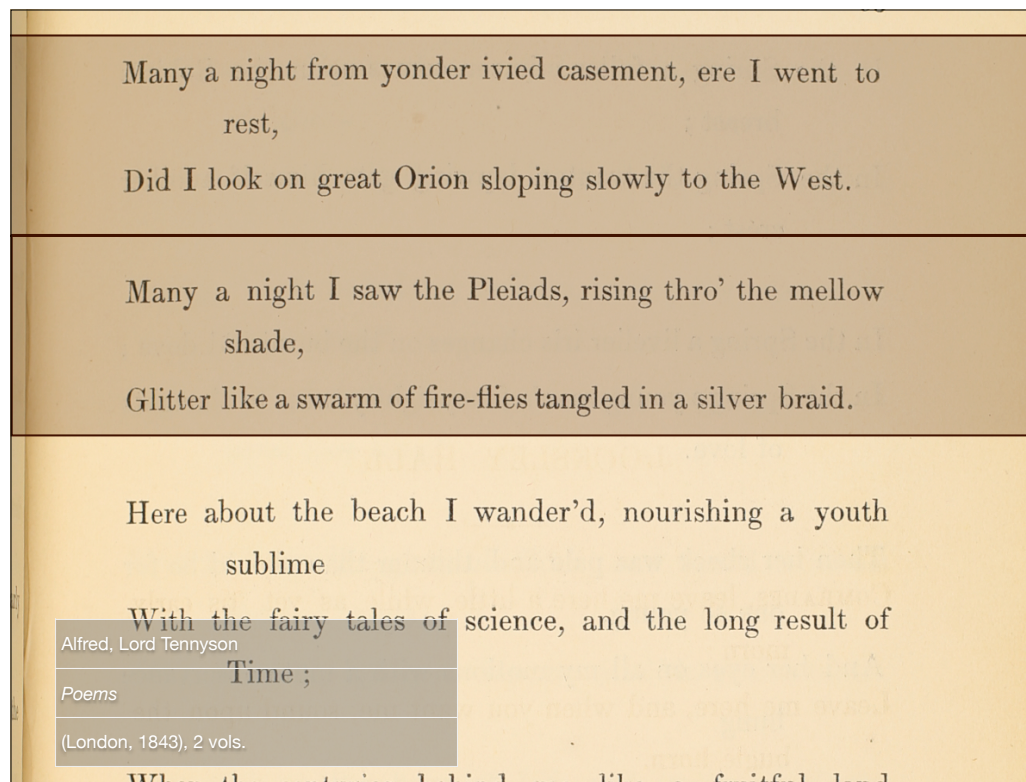
Stephen Folmar, Black Mesa, Oklahoma

Think back to a time when you were outside at night and the stars were bright. Can you remember? Do you have a special memory of the starry sky? (Ask for 2 or 3 responses)



Vincent Van Gogh wrote, “I don’t know anything with certainty, but seeing the stars makes me dream.”

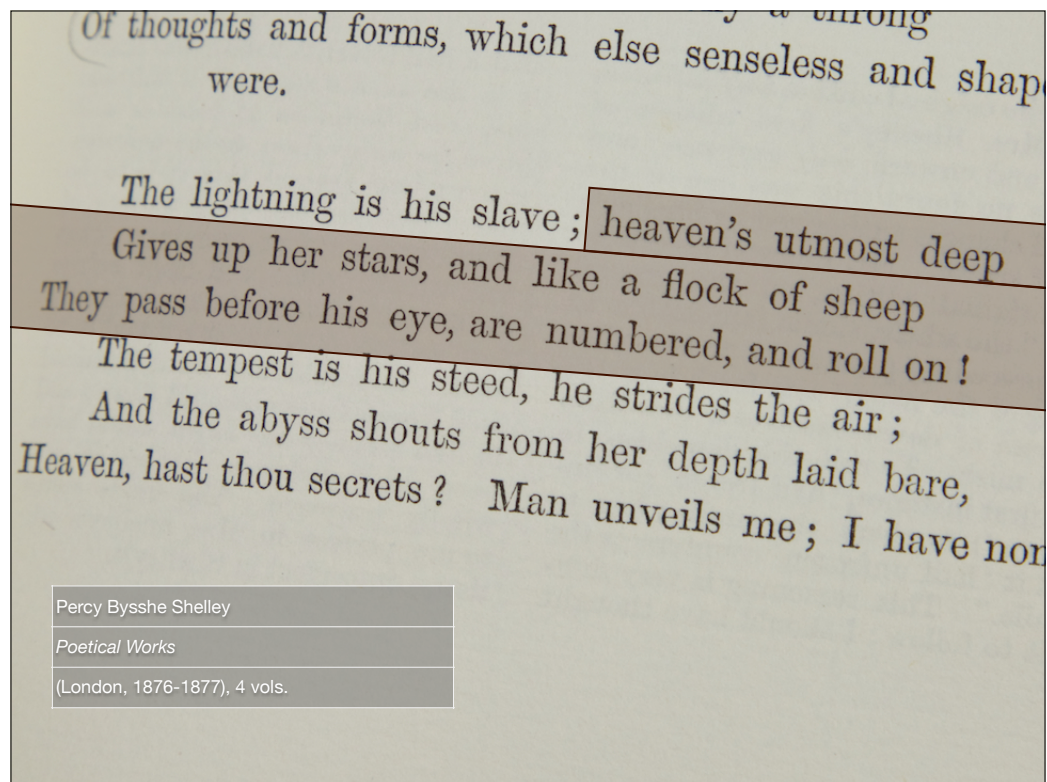




When visiting the home of his childhood, Tennyson remembered:

- “Many a night from yonder ivied casement, ere I went to rest, | Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the West.
- Many a night I saw the Pleiades rising through the mellow shade, | Glitter like a swarm of fireflies tangled in a silver braid.”
- Could you see the stars from your childhood home? Or maybe on a childhood trip to a special place?

<http://lynx-open-ed.org/node/531>



We may say, with the 19th century poet, Shelley:

(Candace)

“heaven’s utmost deep | Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep | They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on!”

<http://lynx-open-ed.org/node/533>



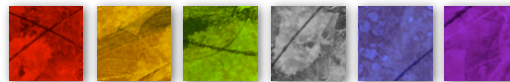
“He counts the number of the stars;  
He calls them each by name.” (Psalm 147:4)

But there is only One who can count all the stars, and he calls them each by name.

“‘To whom will you compare me?  
Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One.  
Lift your eyes and look to the heavens;  
Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one,  
and calls them each by name.  
Because of His great power and mighty strength,  
not one of them is missing.”

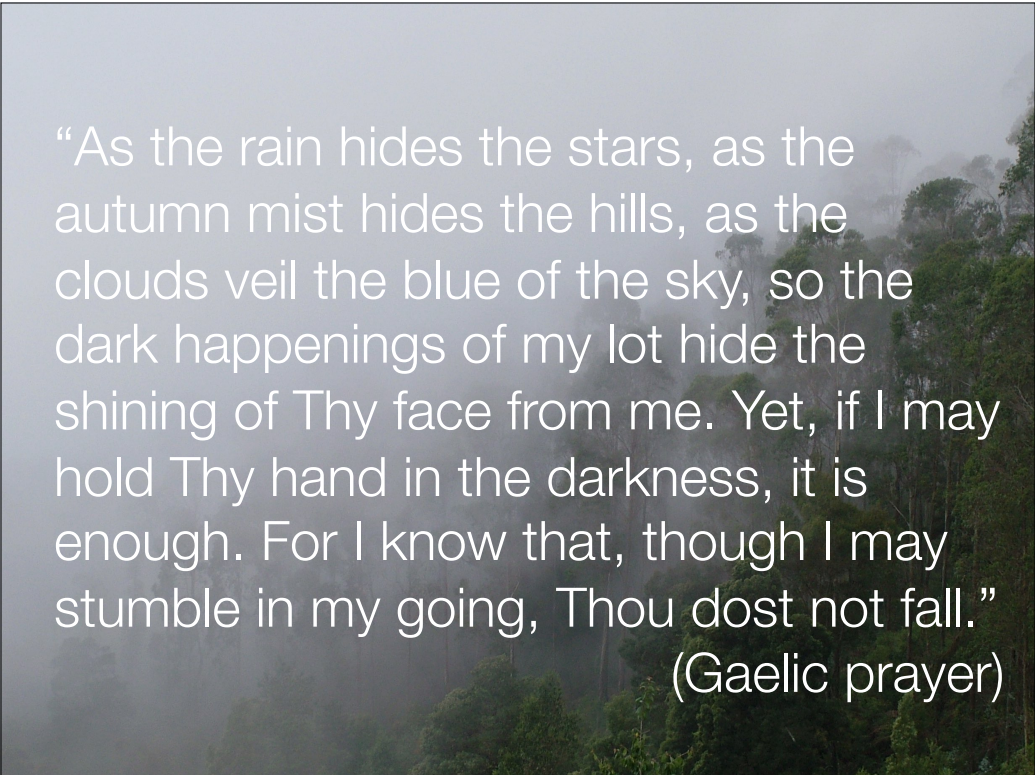
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Isaiah 40.25–26



**READ.** God knows all the stars by name. Could it be true that this mighty One also knows and cares for you?



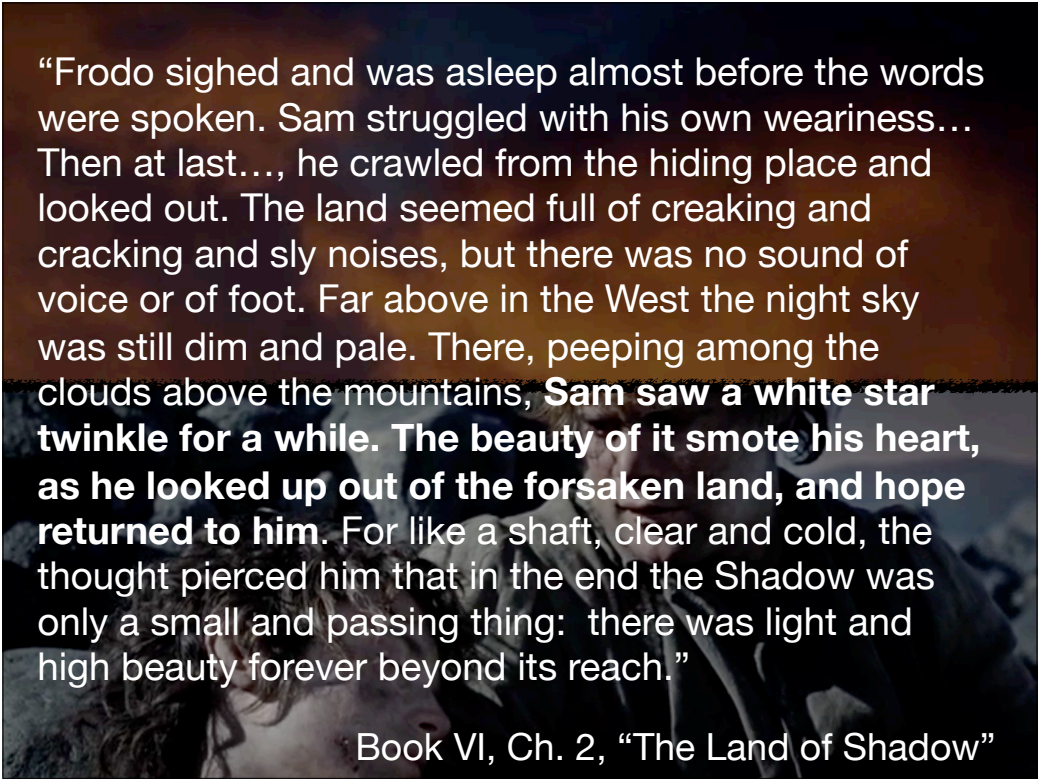


“As the rain hides the stars, as the  
autumn mist hides the hills, as the  
clouds veil the blue of the sky, so the  
dark happenings of my lot hide the  
shining of Thy face from me. Yet, if I may  
hold Thy hand in the darkness, it is  
enough. For I know that, though I may  
stumble in my going, Thou dost not fall.”  
(Gaelic prayer)

Often it seems God is far from us, as remote as the stars. I've shared this Gaelic prayer before, because it's dear to my heart. (READ)



Remember Sam and Frodo in Mordor, from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*? When weary in Mordor, Sam saw a single star break through the clouds. The sight of it kindled a transcendent hope from beyond the bounds of the world. Perhaps you recall the scene.



“Frodo sighed and was asleep almost before the words were spoken. Sam struggled with his own weariness... Then at last..., he crawled from the hiding place and looked out. The land seemed full of creaking and cracking and sly noises, but there was no sound of voice or of foot. Far above in the West the night sky was still dim and pale. There, peeping among the clouds above the mountains, **Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him.** For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach.”

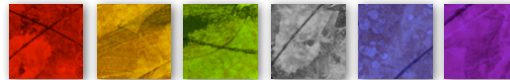
Book VI, Ch. 2, “The Land of Shadow”

(Read) Do you feel like this — where all around you seems dark and hopeless, when God seems to be hidden from sight, yet hope stirs that you are not alone?

“But now, this is what the LORD says—  
He who **created** you, Jacob,  
He who formed you, Israel:  
‘Do not fear, for I have **redeemed** you;  
I have called you by name; you are mine.’”

---

Isaiah 43:1



Know this, says the prophet Isaiah: READ. Regardless of how we feel, the Creator is not remote from us. Rather, the heavens reveal the majesty and power of our Redeemer. He calls you by name. The same majesty and power of the Creator is true of the Redeemer, because they are one and the same. If we see the creation in light of our Savior and Redeemer, then the heavens proclaim the Triune God’s personal attention to the very least aspects of our lives.

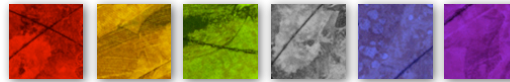


“He counts the number of the stars;  
He calls them each by name.” (Psalm 147:4)

There is only One who can count all the stars, and he calls them each by name. You are worth more than many stars. He cares for you. His power is not in doubt.

He calls the stars by name

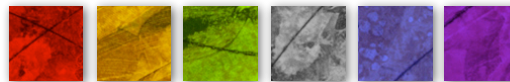
*Psalm 147:4*



So that's the sermon on Ps 147:4. Oh, wait, there's bonus:

He calls the stars by name

Psalm 147:4  
Earth and Moon

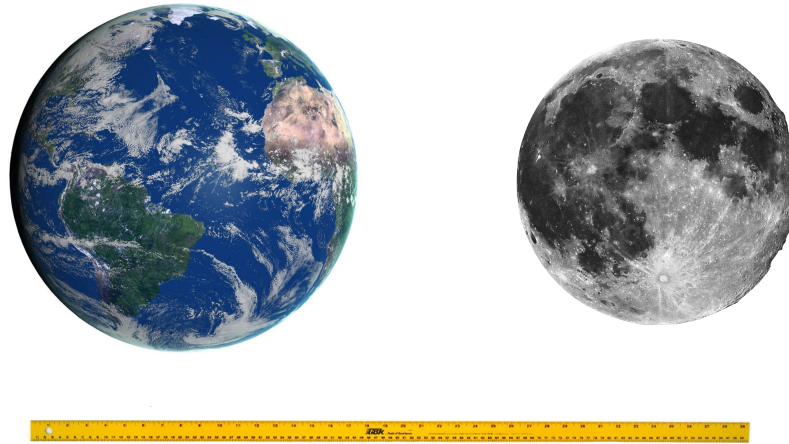


Let's look at the Earth and Moon, and I need a volunteer!



## Earth and Moon

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We may not know the names of all the stars, but we are familiar with the Earth and the Moon.

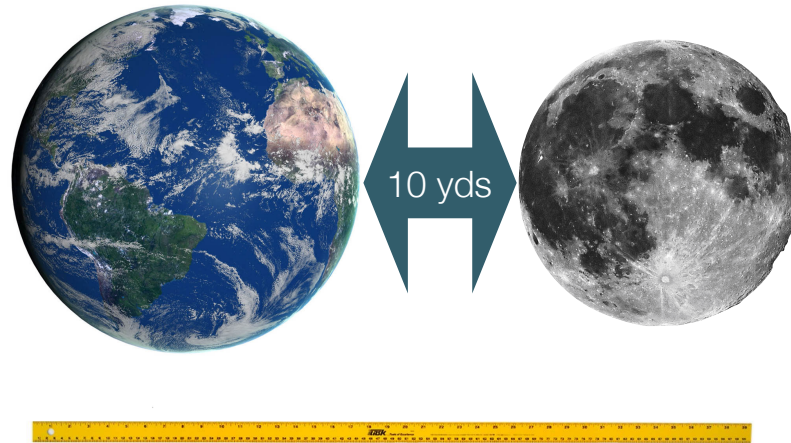
May I have a volunteer?

If the Earth is a 12-inch globe, then modern astronomy tells us that the Moon is roughly the size of a softball. How far will the softball be from the globe?



## Earth and Moon

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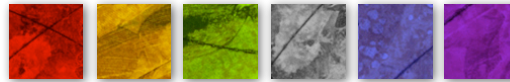


The universe is huge! What would it have been like to be on board the Apollo spacecraft traveling to the Moon? A grain of sand would represent Oklahoma City; the Apollo spacecraft would be even smaller.

The Creator, with majesty and power, is the same as our Redeemer. The One who counts the stars in the heavens also numbers the hairs on your head. You are worth more than many stars. He cares for you. His power is not in doubt.

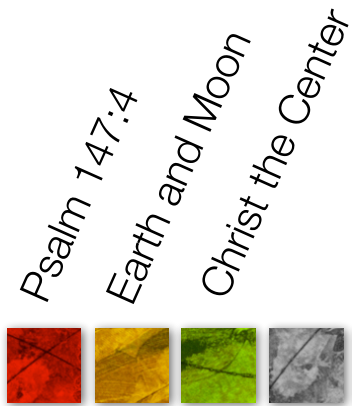
He calls the stars by name

*Psalm 147:4*  
*Earth and Moon*



So that's Earth and Moon.

He calls the stars by name

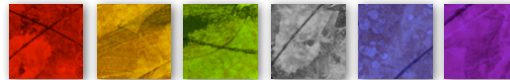


Next is Christ the Center.

“For this is what the **high** and exalted One says—  
He who lives forever, whose name is holy:  
‘I live in a **high** and holy place,  
but also with the one who is contrite  
and **lowly** in spirit,  
to revive the spirit of the **lowly**  
and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

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Isaiah 57:15



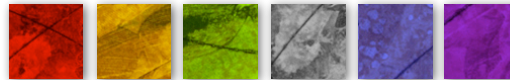
#### READ

For Isaiah, the one who is high is the one who comes down to the lowly. Our Creator and Redeemer go together; they are one and the same.

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn over all creation**. For in Him all things were **created**: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been **created** through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. [Creation]

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Colossians 1:15–20

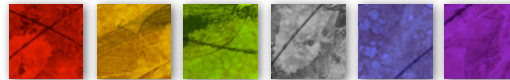


Similarly, Paul held Creation and Redemption together. Colossians 1:15–20 begins with Christ as the center of creation: READ.

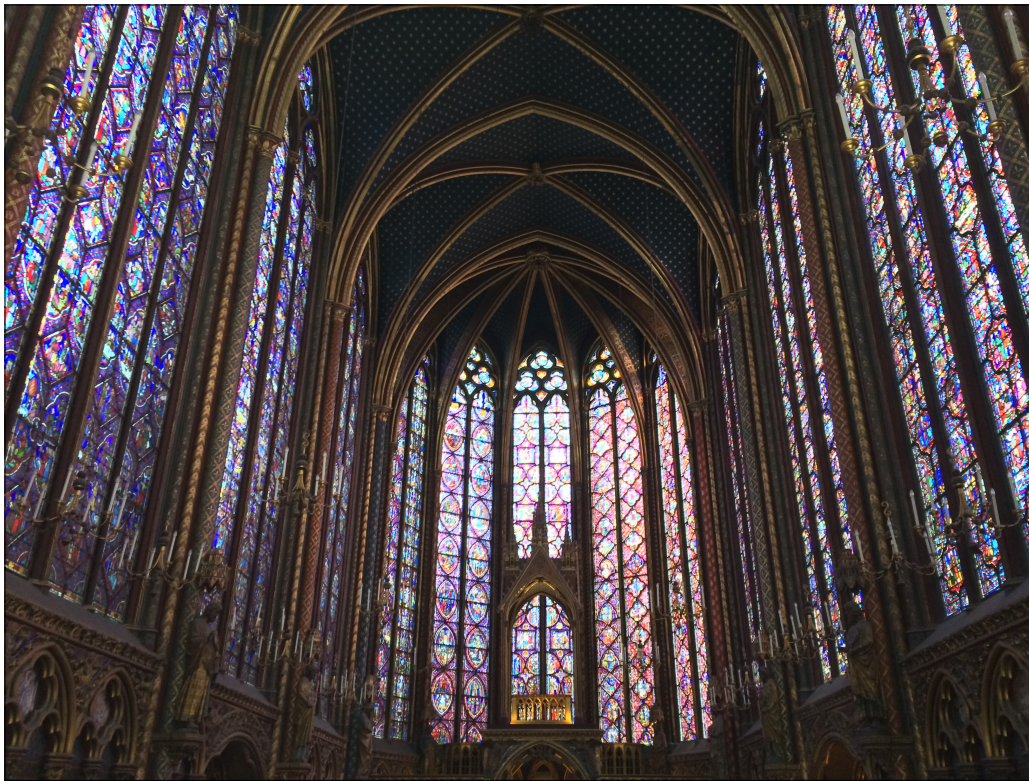
And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the **firstborn from among the dead**, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to **reconcile** to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by **making peace** through His blood, shed on the **cross**.” [Redemption]

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Colossians 1:15–20



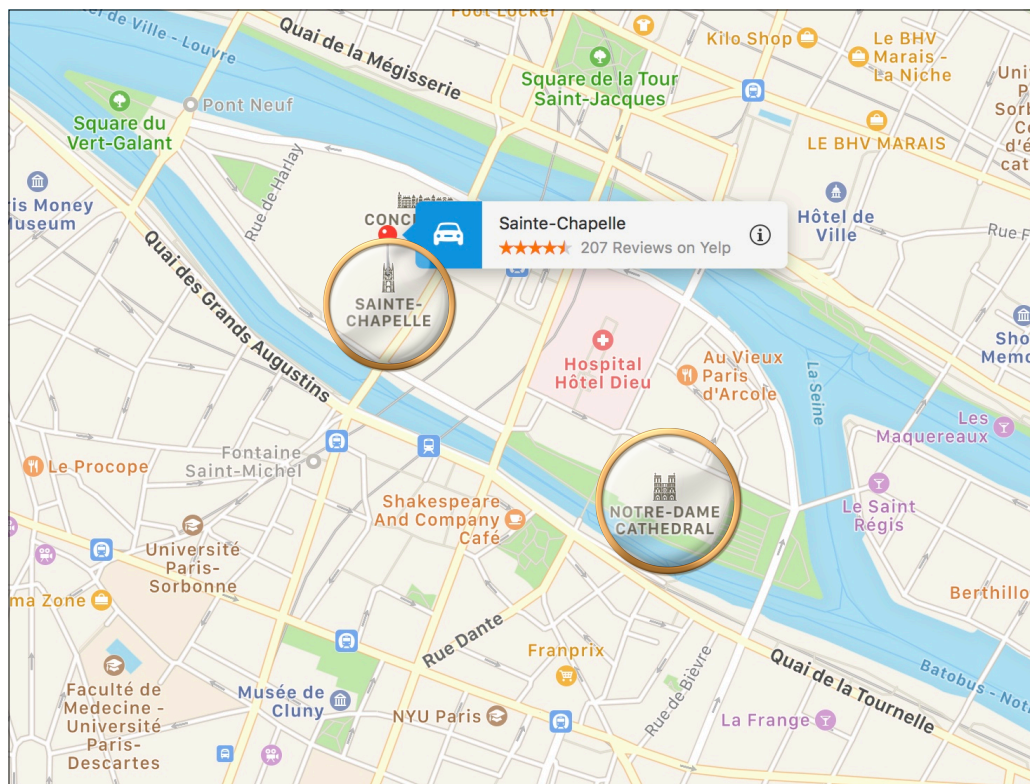
And then Paul immediately goes on to describe Christ as the center of Redemption: READ. Christ is the center, the key to both the cosmos and to salvation. We don't begin with Creation in our thinking. There's no Christian view of creation without Christ. The creation only makes sense in light of Christ's saving work in our place and on our behalf on the cross.



It's like a cathedral. Have you been inside a cathedral?

Do you recognize this one?





It's Sainte Chapelle, the Crown of Thorns cathedral, on the left. It is located on the same island in the Seine River, in Paris, as Notre Dame Cathedral, on the right.





Saint Chapelle cathedral, Paris  
Photo by Stephen Folmar

In many cultures, holy places represent the cosmos, and that is true of medieval cathedrals. If we were to stand inside this cathedral, we would feel ourselves in the center of immensities, in a cosmos filled with majesty, beauty and light. This is how they felt outside at night looking up under the starry sky.

What is the floorplan of a cathedral?



This is Notre Dame. The roofline makes the floorpan clear: it's a cross. Redemption is built into the architecture of a cathedral.

### Colossians 1:15–20

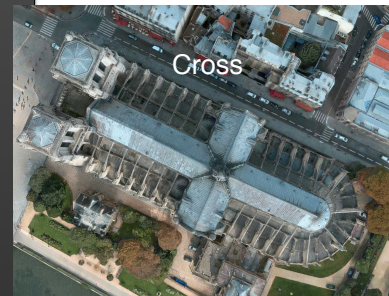
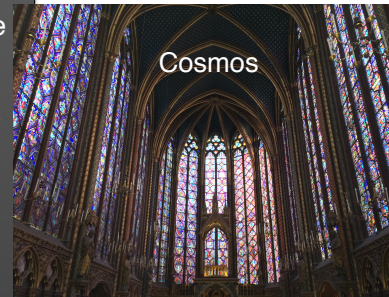
#### Creation

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn over all creation**. For in Him all things were **created**: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been **created** through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

#### Redemption

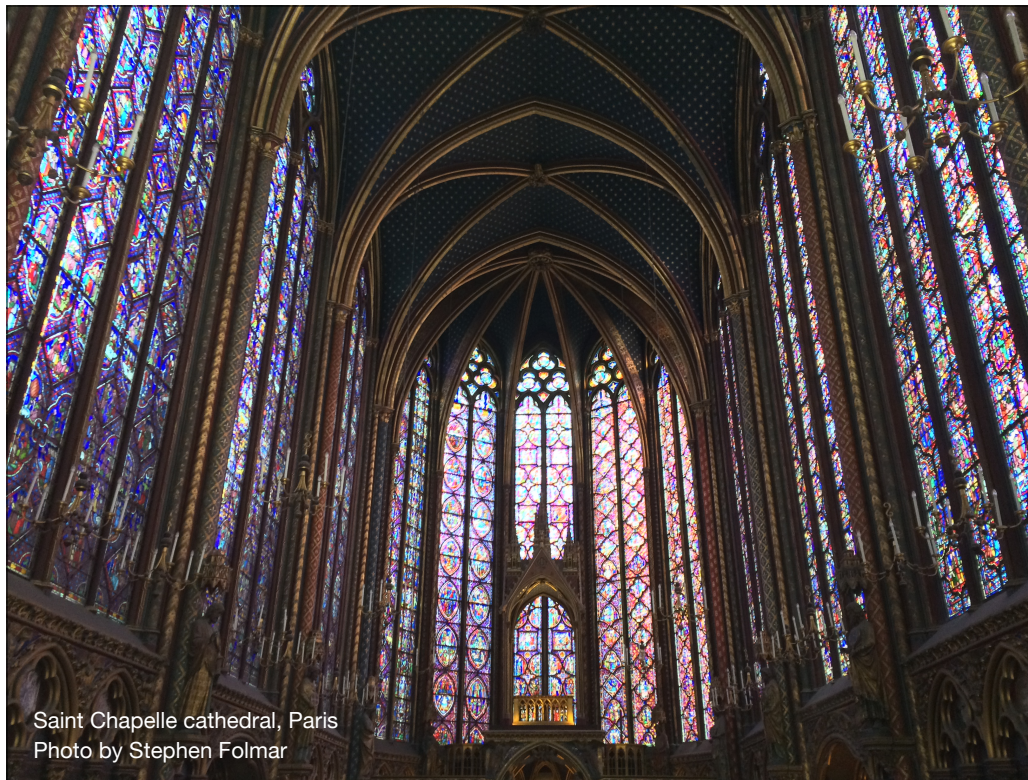
And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the **firstborn from among the dead**, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to **reconcile** to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by **making peace** through His blood, shed on the cross.”

### Christ the Center



READ Hold creation and redemption together by keeping Christ at the center. They tell the same story.





Saint Chapelle cathedral, Paris  
Photo by Stephen Folmar

So Creation and redemption are both mapped into the architecture of a cathedral. To step inside a cathedral is to see the cosmos as a place of beauty and meaning. The cathedral architecture brings the suffering of our earthly lives together with redemption on a cosmic scale. The redemptive cross of Christ is the center, of both creation and redemption. A cathedral is suffused with light like the cosmos is suffused with love. Christ is creator \*and\* redeemer, the light of the world.

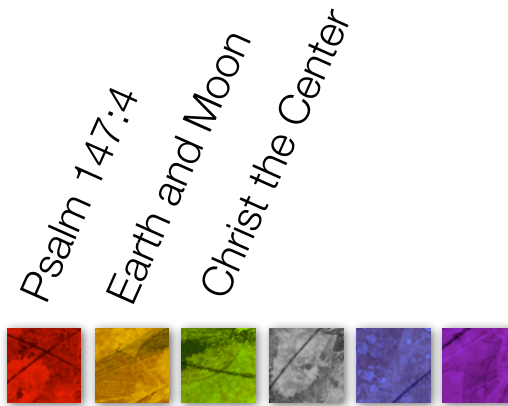
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Redemption is built into the architecture. Crown of thorns. Cosmos and Cross.



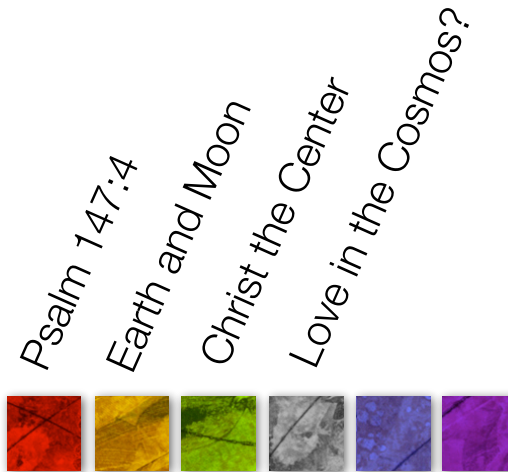
What we may call this cathedral perspective flowed into and across popular culture such as literature. This is the first edition of Dante's collected works, including Dante's *Divine Comedy*, an epic journey through the medieval universe. For Dante, the universe is animated by love, filled with meaning. It is no wonder that he pays close attention to the stars. Surprisingly, the last word of EACH of the three volumes is the same: "stars." The last line of the third volume is my favorite; Dante brings his master poem to a close with a ringing affirmation of "the love that moves the sun and other stars."

He calls the stars by name



So that's Christ the Center, center both of the cosmos and of redemption. We will keep the cosmos together with salvation in our thinking.

He calls the stars by name



Next is Love in the Cosmos? (with a question mark). Not everyone knows the One who calls the stars by name. They do not know that there is love in the cosmos. Rather, they think of God, if there is a God, as remote, silent, distant, uncaring. Sometimes we feel this way, too, when life gets overwhelming.

## Bill Nye

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“I’m insignificant.... I am just another speck of sand. And the earth really in the cosmic scheme of things is another speck. And the Sun an unremarkable star.... And the galaxy is a speck. I’m a speck on a speck orbiting a speck among other specks among still other specks in the middle of specklessness.”

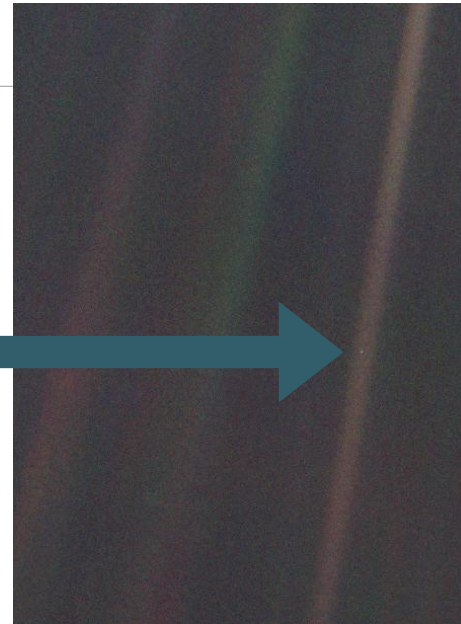
You may know Bill Nye as the Science Guy from public TV. Now he is an outspoken atheist.  
READ.

Is Bill Nye’s atheism the result of scientific discovery? Was faith possible in the age of cathedrals only because the cosmos was so small, before the modern discovery that we are just specks in the cosmos?



Carl Sagan

“pale blue dot...”



Voyager 1, February 14, 1990

Consider Carl Sagan, who wrote a book entitled Pale blue dot. • Can you see it in the photo? • That Pale blue dot is the Earth, as seen by the Voyager spacecraft from 4 billion miles away. Two Voyager spacecraft have now left our solar system behind. One of them captured this shot of the Earth in the distance.

## Carl Sagan



“Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar,' every 'supreme leader,' every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

Sagan wrote: Read.

<http://www.planetary.org/explore/space-topics/earth/pale-blue-dot.html>

## Carl Sagan



“Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of **confident religions**, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every ‘superstar,’ every ‘supreme leader,’ every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

Was faith, this confident religion of the cathedrals, possible in the middle ages simply because the cosmos seemed so small? And now faith has become impossible for us because of the modern scientific discovery that we live on what is merely a pale blue dot?

Ptolemy, *Almagest*, ca. 150 AD

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“Moreover, the Earth has, to the senses, the ratio of a point to the distance of the sphere of the so-called fixed stars.”

Simply put, no. This lesson from science is not new. On the scientific side, the greatest astronomer of the Roman empire was Claudius Ptolemy. Ptolemy asserted that the Earth is a pale blue dot, a speck in a vast universe. This is what was implied when he wrote: READ. What he meant is that, literally speaking, the Earth is merely a single point in the center of immensities. Think of it: Ancient believers knew that the city of Jerusalem, in which Christ died, is a literally but a speck on a pale blue dot.

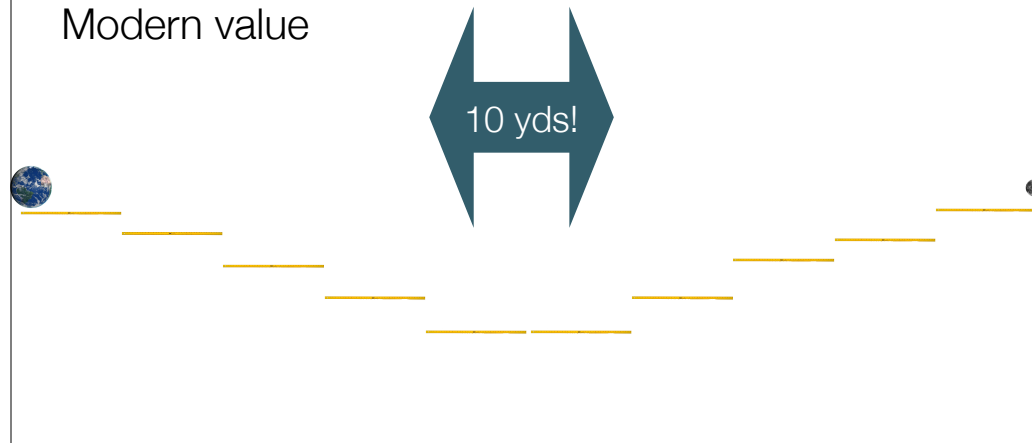
## Earth and Moon

Aristarchos (ca. 280 BC)

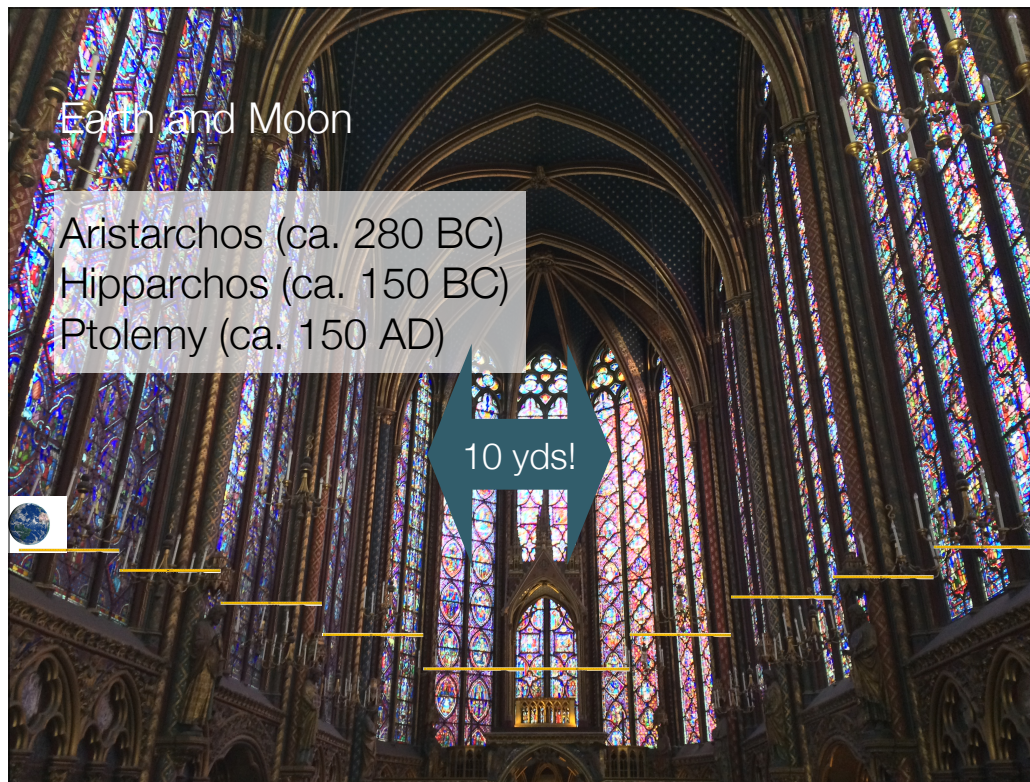
Hipparchos (ca. 150 BC)

Ptolemy (ca. 150 AD)

Modern value



And now I need to let you in on a surprise: The sizes and distances of Earth and Moon that we used earlier were known to the ancients. The scale model of Earth and Moon at 10 yards apart: that's true according to modern values, but also according to Aristarchos in the third century before Christ, Hipparchos in the second century before Christ, and Ptolemy in the second century after Christ. These values were not forgotten. They would have made the same model as we did. The science is not what's new. Back in the days of the cathedrals, believers indeed felt keenly the immensity of the cosmos.



## Earth and Moon

Aristarchos (ca. 280 BC)

Hipparchos (ca. 150 BC)

Ptolemy (ca. 150 AD)

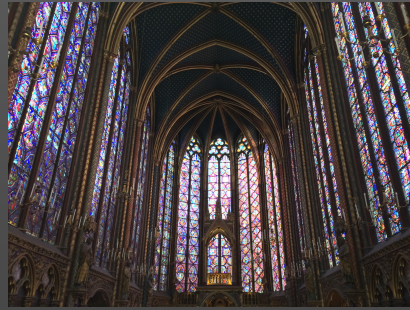
10 yds!

The smallness of the Earth is not some modern scientific discovery that contradicts the cathedral perspective; rather, the cathedral creates a vertical height \*designed\* to help us imagine how small the Earth really is. The facts were not all that different, but the filters by which Bill Nye and Carl Sagan view the facts now have changed – a lot.

Fact or Filter?



So there's a difference between facts and filters. What do we mean by a filter? Try on these funny glasses. They're pretty, and attractive, and make the world look interesting, at least for a moment. It can be exciting to try on a new way of seeing the world. But I don't recommend walking around or trying to do anything important while wearing them. Very quickly they can become dizzying, and make you feel sick. Don't try to stand up with them on — be careful.



- Is the lesson of the cosmos...
- God's distance or remoteness from us?
- Or his eye for detail and his commitment to the very least aspects of our lives?

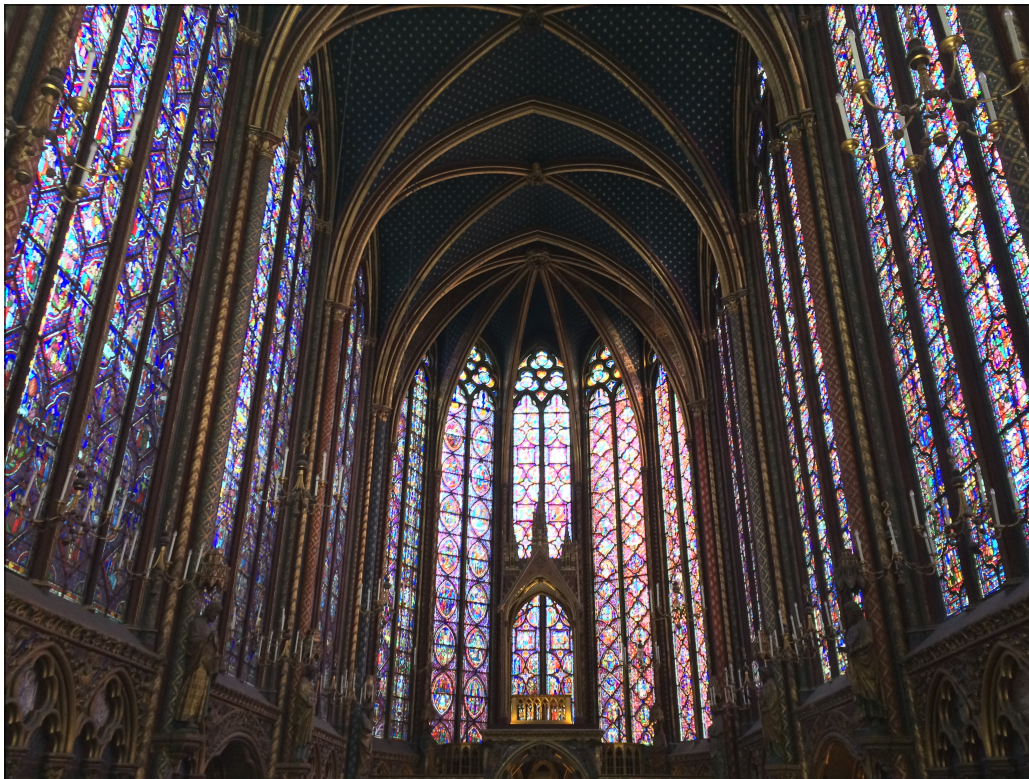
READ. How we answer these questions depends on our filters, on whether we're standing in the cathedral or wearing the funny glasses. It's not the facts so much as the filters that determine our conclusions. We have to choose, one or the other.

It's always been the message of the prophets that our God is too small. That he cares for us more than we can imagine, and his power is not in doubt. The problem is that we wear funny glasses that filter our perceptions.

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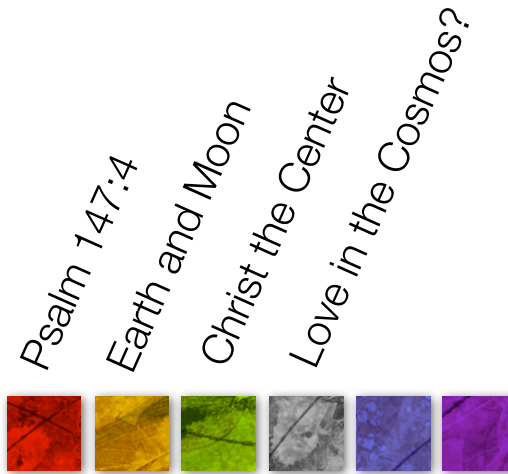
Think of cancer, extreme poverty, famine and starvation, cruel oppression, slavery and war. These things existed in the past, and believers still affirmed that God cares for us more than we can imagine, and his power is not in doubt. Relative to these ever-present realities of life on earth, adding scientific discoveries to the mix does not tilt the scale. The facts of science have not appreciably changed, on any order of magnitude that would make a difference.





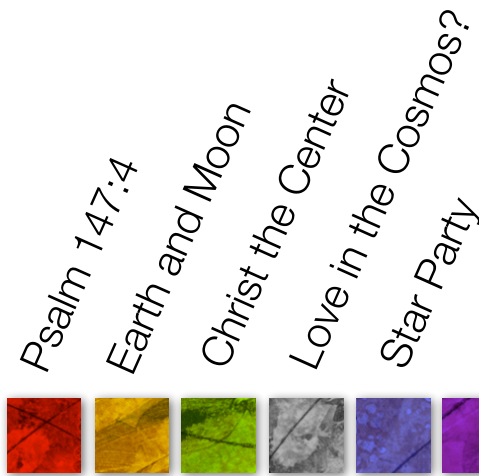
Some people don't comprehend the greatness of God. Their god is too small. We don't believe in that god either, for it's not the biblical God, the God of the cathedrals, or the Triune God the Church has proclaimed through history. The Church proclaims that Love moves the Sun and other stars. He calls your name. You are worth more than many stars. He cares for you. His power is not in doubt.

He calls the stars by name

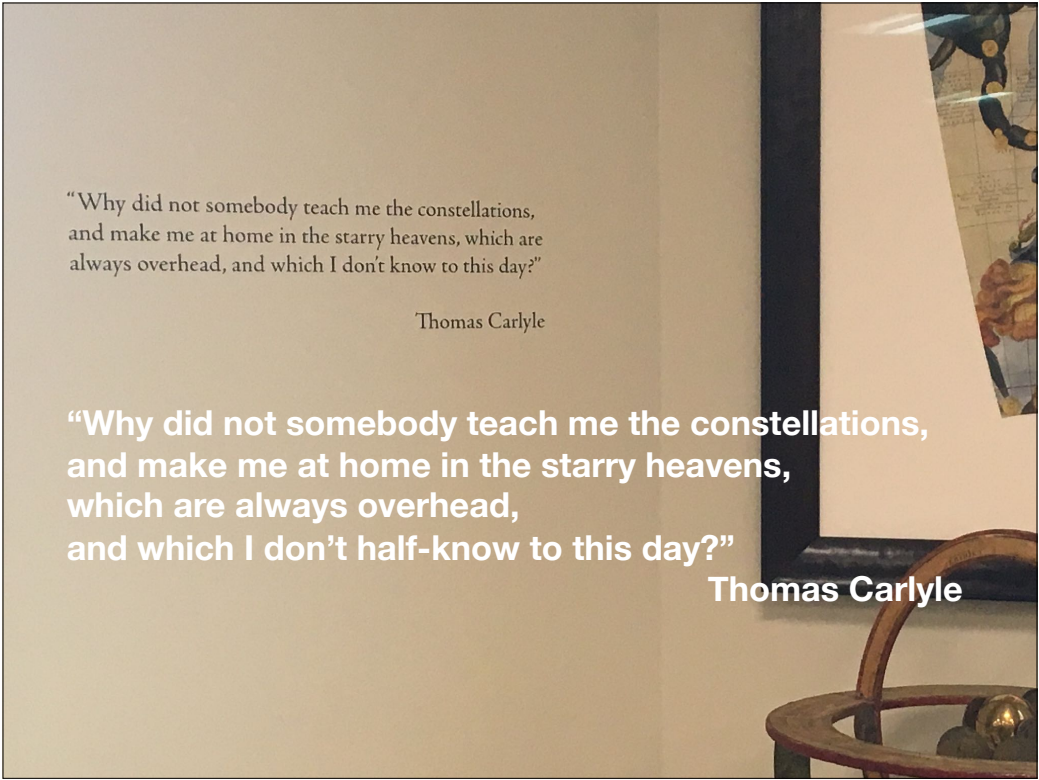


So that's Love in the Cosmos. Everything depends on whether our filter is the funny glasses or the Crown of Thorns cathedral.

He calls the stars by name



Next I'd like to talk about a Star Party.



"Why did not somebody teach me the constellations,  
and make me at home in the starry heavens, which are  
always overhead, and which I don't know to this day?"

Thomas Carlyle

**"Why did not somebody teach me the constellations,  
and make me at home in the starry heavens,  
which are always overhead,  
and which I don't half-know to this day?"**

**Thomas Carlyle**

Thomas Carlyle spoke for all of us when he lamented...

(Candace)

"Why did not somebody teach me the constellations, and make me at home in the starry heavens, which are always overhead, and which I don't half-know to this day?"





James, do you have your NASA hat today? Perhaps you all know that James subscribes to at least one astronomy magazine. Christopher, are you wearing your Star Wars shoes? (I wish I had a picture!) Many of us here love the stars. We enjoy seeing the stars at night, reading about the latest wonder of the universe, or watching the latest sci fi movie.



The sky at night can bring people together. Here's a flyer Candace and I distributed for a star party we hosted in our neighborhood last February. Telescopic skywatching was led by amateur astronomers in the area.



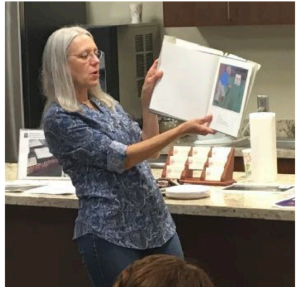
Cap off your Valentine's week celebrations with a friendly neighborhood trip to the stars!



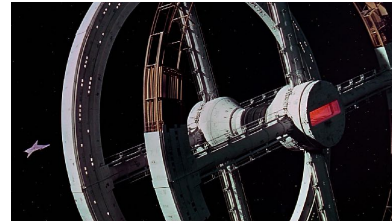
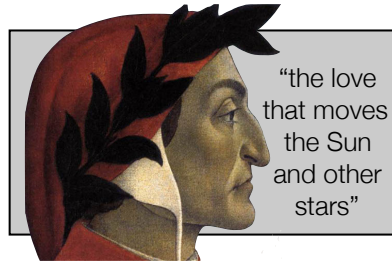
**Indoors:**

**Conversations, Cookies & Constellations**

- Cookie pot-luck! Bring a dozen cookies to share if you can. Hot chocolate, decaf coffee provided.
- Conversations with neighbors and student astronomers.
- Constellation coloring pages, celestial globe, comfy chairs, constellation game & children's picture books.



And indoors, we had constellation coloring pages, story times about the stars, constellation games, plenty of star-shaped cookies, and friendly conversations among all who came. Something for everyone; it was an event for entire families. We're planning for Crosswalk to host a star party like this for Surrey Hills sometime early next year. When people come to the star party, why not ask them if they have special memories of the stars (like those shared here earlier)?



And as opportunity arises, remember the filters. Everyone who comes to the star party will be seeing through one filter or the other: either the cathedral, the cosmos as a theater of Triune love, • or as the funny glasses, the cosmos as a place of loneliness and despair. We can talk about which filters we wear. For many people, religion and faith are not something they feel comfortable talking about with strangers, but not so when it comes to talking about the universe. Love in the cosmos is one of the few places in our culture where the big questions can be discussed.

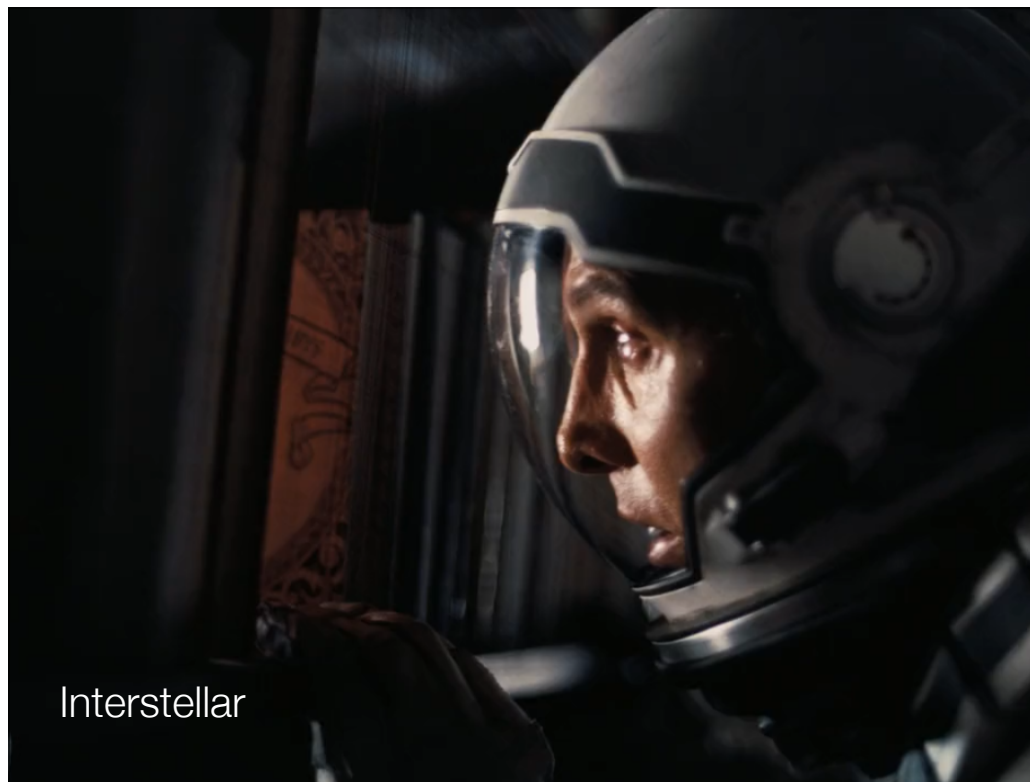


2001: A Space Odyssey

What movie is this from?

2001

Does it portray love in the cosmos?



What movie is this from?

Interstellar

Does it portray love in the cosmos?

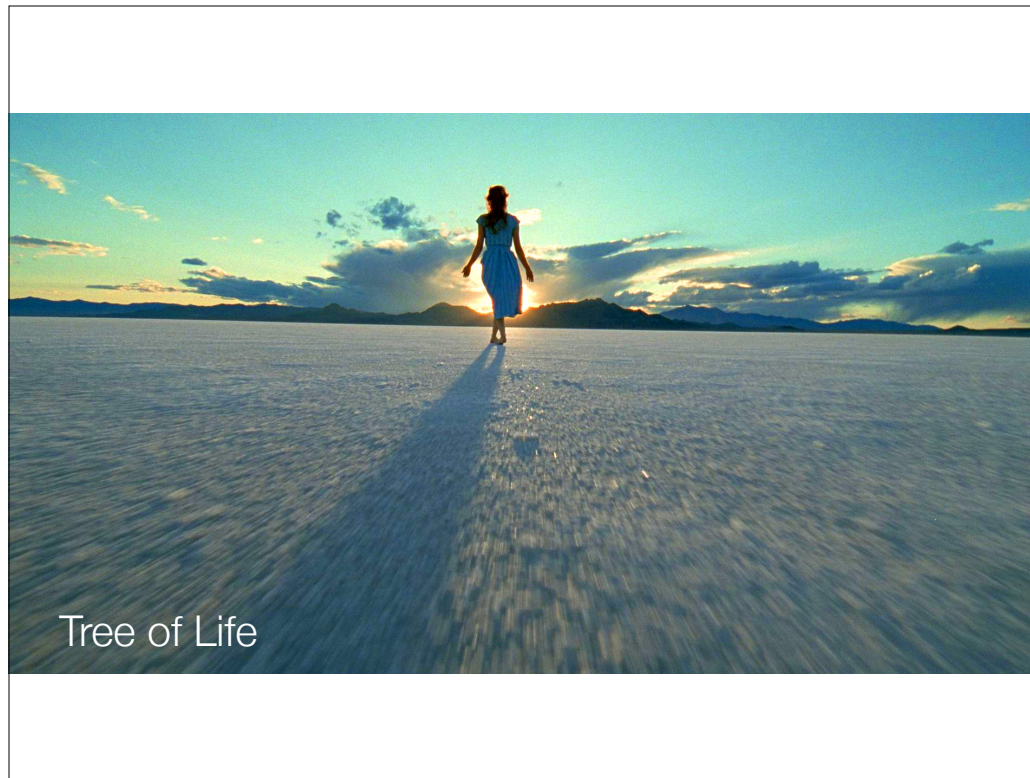


What movie is this from?

Contact

Does it portray love in the cosmos?





What movie is this from?

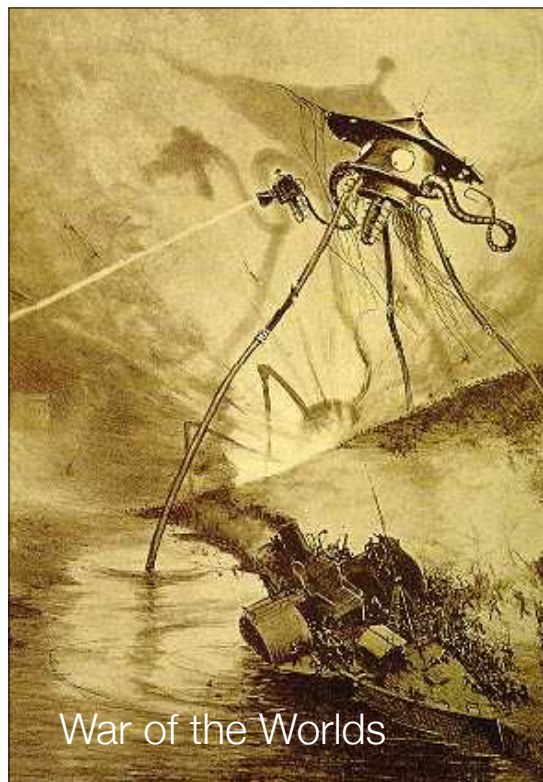
Tree of Life

Does it portray love in the cosmos?

Do modern literature, science fiction, film, art and culture invest the universe with love?

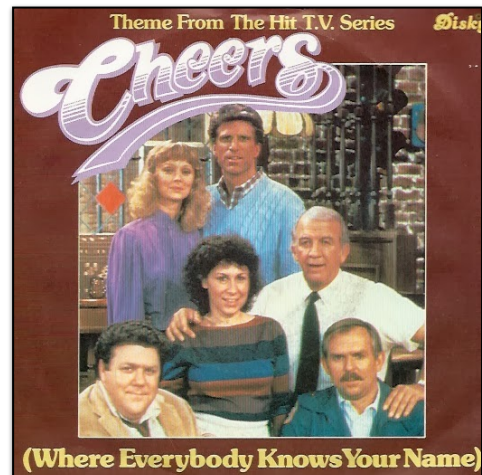
That is the fundamental question.





What sci fi do you enjoy? Does it portray love in the cosmos?

Sci Fi is one of the places where conversation about belief in God is acceptable in our culture. Ask your friends, is the cosmos a place of love?



It doesn't have to be sci fi. Think of your favorite movies and television shows. Do they portray love in the cosmos? Is the cosmos a place where the Creator Redeemer knows your name? These are conversations worth having, at a star party or wherever you gather with your friends.  
[To help you jumpstart those conversations, here's a handout that summarizes what we've discussed this morning.]



“He counts the number of the stars;  
He calls them each by name.” (Psalm 147:4)

One more time: There is only One who can count the stars, and he calls them each by name. You are worth more than many stars. He cares for you. Your name is written on his heart. His power is not in doubt.