

**PRAY** Loving God, wake us up to how important Jesus' birth is to who we are and will become. Wake us up to your presence in our lives and in creation. Give us grateful hearts and the strength to do your work on this earth. Amen

1st Sunday of Advent

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# SPiRIT



isbeck photo Christine Glade

By Rosalie Maggio

**Time was running out. Each day the sky became fractionally pinker, and today Ariel had an annoying little cough that left her short of breath.** She could still see the planets closest to Sanura, but many others, which she had watched through her window at night ever since she was small, had disappeared one by one over the last few months.

Passing quickly through the electronic door of their unit, Ariel called, "Mother? Mother, where are you?"

Barely glancing up from her sewing machine, Ariel's mother muttered through a mouthful of tiny grommets, "Hello, darling. You're just in time. I can't decide between the aquamarine and the royal blue."

Scientists had recently discovered how to add an astonishing array of colors to the metallic threads used for clothing on Sanura, and Ariel's mother had been obsessed with her new wardrobe ever since. Ariel clenched her hands. How could their scientists have been preoccupied with something so trivial when disaster was about to overtake them all? And how could her mother devote every waking moment to making clothes she might never live to wear?

"Mother, please listen to me," said Ariel, trying to keep her voice even. "We must prepare to leave for the Azami."

"Oh, Ariel, are you still harping on that? Darling, you are such a sober little thing. Can't you lighten up a bit?"

**"Mother!" Ariel laid her hands over her mother's to stop their persistent activity. "Haven't you been following the information bulletins? The noxious gas cloud will begin affecting life on Sanura any day now.** Already people are feeling its effects. The only way to survive is to take refuge in the Azami, where the thick jungle growth will filter out the worst gases."

**“THE EARTH CHARTER** asked us to leave behind a period of self-destruction and make a new start, Here, I would echo that courageous challenge: ‘As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning...Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the **joyful celebration of life.**”

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* #207

Gently removing her hands from Ariel’s grasp and eyeing her with all the caution due an escaped gorilla, Ariel’s mother coughed lightly and said, “You may be right, dear. Why don’t you speak to your father about it this evening?”

Ariel spoke through gritted teeth. “Daddy is even worse than you, which is pretty incredible actually. All he cares about is what’s under his microscope. No, I had this same talk with Daddy last night.” She sighed. “With about the same results.”

Her mother began making small pleats in the metallic material. Ariel said tersely, “Mother, I don’t want to leave you and Daddy here to die. And I’m afraid to go alone. Please come with me.”

Looking up blankly, her mother said, “Mmmm, yes, of course, dear. We’ll talk about this later.”

**Walking slowly toward her sleep chamber, Ariel knew that only two choices stood before her. She could remain with her parents... and die with them. Or she could leave.**

But not alone. She needed someone to go with her—perhaps her best friend, Domini. Or maybe Aunt Kai and the cousins. Or some of the neighbors. Unfortunately Aleser Danya, the science teacher who explained to his students the frightening dimensions of the coming disaster, had left with his family days before.

Ariel remembered the bored looks on her classmates’ faces as their teacher talked. Only Nelek had listened with that curious intensity of his. But then he had always been concerned about the

same things that preoccupied Ariel: the lack of leadership on the planet, the astronomical planetary deficit, non-arable farmlands, and unequal opportunities for the majority of Sanurians. As Ariel packed for the long trek ahead, she thought sadly that now she would never have the chance to get to know Nelek better—handsome, laughing-eyed, solemn-mouthed Nelek, Nelek of the quick mind and flashing insights into her own thoughts.

**Domini lived only two quadrants away from Ariel, so in minutes Ariel was punching out her code on the doorminder.** As

usual, Domini was working out, sweat pouring from her face and neck. But before Ariel had said half a dozen sentences, she knew talking to Domini was a lost cause.

“Look, Ariel, be reasonable,” said Domini. “I promise I’ll go with you after the planetary championship. Ariel?”

Back on the walkway Ariel headed for Aunt Kai’s. She searched other people’s faces for evidence of haste, anxiety, or fear but found none. What she did notice, however, was that nobody met her eyes. Had this always been true? Most of the people she saw were wearing headsets, enclosed in their own little worlds, learning languages, listening to music, lectures,

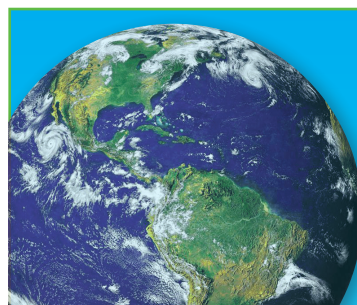
or game shows. Although the sky seemed shockingly pink to Ariel, the others seem oblivious to the color—to it, to Ariel, and to each other.

Kai coughed and smiled affably when Ariel urged her to head for the Azami. “Ariel, what would we do without you to keep us on our toes? Here, taste this. Tell me if it has too much cardamom,” and she held out a steaming spoonful of cassoulet.

After ten minutes of hearing about her cousin’s upcoming wedding and the problems with the new digital receptors, Ariel wanted to scream, “Do you have any idea of what’s going on right outside your door?” But Aunt Kai would only have been hurt and bewildered, so Ariel said nothing.

Ariel’s neighbors, Cipriana and Tadzi, thanked her for her concern but gently told her she was overreacting. They pointed out that most people were going about their business as usual and government leaders were telling people not to worry.

Ariel argued that she believed the truth she read in the pink, hazy sky and in the cough she couldn’t get rid of. Cipriana hugged Ariel and said, “You’re just as bad as those people who go around saying the end of the world is coming. There have been disasters before, and we’re still here, aren’t we? You go home and think about what to wear to the Equinox Dance.”



Find out what the world would look like if everyone lived like you. Go to the [Carbon Footprint Calculator](#) at [Nature Conservancy](#) to answer questions about your lifestyle.





# SUNDAY GOSPEL

1st Sunday of Advent

## Stay awake!

- Organize a Green Team to explore how your school can 'go green.' Explore the use of solar panels, a green roof, a passive solar greenhouse, or a wind turbine.

- Keep up with energy issues and policy at [fresh-energy.org](http://fresh-energy.org). Fresh Energy's efforts focus on clean electricity, energy efficiency, transportation policy, global warming solutions and energy justice.

**JESUS 1:** Be constantly on the watch! Stay awake! You do not know when the appointed time will come. My coming will be the same as when a householder travels abroad, places servants in charge of various tasks, and orders the gatekeeper to watch with a sharp eye.

**JESUS 2:** No one knows when the head of the house will come back, whether

at dusk, at midnight, when the cock crows, or at early dawn.

**JESUS 1:** Do not let the one who has gone away come suddenly and catch you asleep.

**JESUS 2:** What I say to you, I say to all: Stay awake!

Mark 13:33-37

**QUESTIONS** 1 How is Ariel's planet like our own? 2 What are the reasons hardly anyone believes Ariel—her parents, aunt, best friend, neighbors? 3 With whom do you identify in the story—Ariel, her friend, neighbor, or family members? 4 Why do you think the author used a quotation from a nursery story as a title for her story? 5 What does it mean to 'stay awake'? 6 What are you asleep to?

**Everywhere Ariel went it was the same. She found only cheerfulness and busyness.**

People were immersed in hobbies, new purchases, decorating their units, giving parties, playing the latest electronic games, or discussing their phobias. Ariel began to wonder if she were crazy. Couldn't people see what was coming?

Once Ariel knew that she would have to travel alone, she faced an even more difficult question than her decision to leave her parents: How badly do I want to live? If I set out for the Azami, I will survive, but without friends, family or any of the comforts I now have. Is life always good? Or might death be better than a lonely, materially difficult life?

**Confused and frightened, Ariel was no longer aware of thinking through the decision, of weighing the pros and cons. In the end it was her feet that decided, automatically choosing the walkway leading to the Azami.**

*If my feet want to live so badly, who am I to stop them,* she thought. With each step, grief pulled at her heels, and tears blurred the path. But she

kept going. Hours later she watched Sanura's seven moons rise, lifting the worst of the darkness that had pressed so heavily on her.

*It's not too late to turn back,* she thought.

Behind her was all she held dear; before her, nothing but the promise of life itself. Can I finish the trip to the Azami on my own? When I get there, can I survive alone?

**The answer was clear if painful. Yes, thought Ariel. For one more minute of life, one more month, one more year, I can do just about anything.** She set her

feet, one ahead of the other, toward the Azami.

And then she saw, ahead of her, a shadowy figure on the walkway, a figure that appeared to be waiting for her. It was Nelek. As smiles go, his was not a complete success, but it was enough. For now.



## THE CATHOLIC COALITION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change offers The St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor to encourage greater personal and shared engagement to respond to climate change. The five part pledge urges us to:

**PRAY + LEARN + ASSESS + ACT + ADVOCATE.**

Information, suggestions, inspirational stories, and materials for each part of the pledge are available at: [catholicclimatecovenant.org](http://catholicclimatecovenant.org).

# Stay awake/wake up

**A**dvent begins with a glimpse into the distant future when Jesus will come again, but what about now in the meantime? Jesus' parable in Sunday's gospel warns the doorkeepers to stay awake even if the estate owner returns at dusk, midnight, when the cock crows, or early dawn.

The four times to stay awake—dusk, midnight, cock crow, and dawn—outline steps in the faith journeys of Jesus' followers during his passion, which begins in the next chapter. At dusk after the last supper Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. The three fall asleep as Jesus prays.

Soldiers come to arrest Jesus later that night; his disciples scatter in fear. Peter follows Jesus to the high priest's house but denies that he even knows Jesus.

When Peter hears a cock crow, he wakes up a little. He feels regret for denying Jesus instead of standing by his friend.

At dawn, three women disciples take spices to Jesus' tomb and find it empty. They wake up to faith in Jesus' resurrection.

Dusk, midnight, when the cock crows, and dawn mark stages in the process of Jesus' friends maturing in faith. This process moves from slumber to fear and denial, to regret and waking.

The world in Advent turns toward its darkest night in the northern hemisphere and then after Jesus' birth toward the dawning of the year—a new time for waking to the mystery of Jesus' continuing presence in our lives.

Honor December 1, World AIDS Day, by learning more about this global problem. Research the progress on Sustainable Development Goal 3—good health and well being.

What does Jesus' counsel to stay awake mean today? The people of Ariel's planet seem to have fallen asleep to everything but the most trivial concerns. How are we to avoid their fate? How can we stay awake to God's presence, to people in need, to each other, and to creation?

**O**ne way is to pay attention (stay awake!) to what moves you as you go through your day. Be aware of the Holy Spirit's presence and movement. Are you feeling a gentle nudge through the words of a friend, parent, teacher, or coach; a beautiful or painful song or video; or hearing a small inner voice pointing you in a certain direction? Try spending ten minutes at the beginning or end of each day to recall these moments, open your heart to their possible deeper meaning, and give thanks for God's presence in your life. Revisit the Examen of Consciousness in *Spirit*, November 9, 2014.

Another way to stay awake is to consider when you are asleep to God's presence. How many hours of screen time do you log in each day? Include in the total time spent watching TV, playing video games, and social networking.

The splendors of creation are a gift continually flowing forth from the Creator. We are the only beings truly awake to see and appreciate, to love and care for this wondrous gift that is our planet.

**W**hen Colin Beavan (aka "No Impact Man") and his family decided to try living for a year in New York City without doing any harm to the environment (the "No Impact Experiment"), it attracted worldwide media attention. The Beavans traded their old



Consider giving friends or family members an alternative Christmas gift, such as a donation in their name to Catholic Relief Services, who assist the poor and vulnerable overseas, [crs.org](http://crs.org). Check [goodgroundpress.com](http://goodgroundpress.com) for alternative gift ideas.

istock photo: Ozgur Donmaz

habits for more environmentally-friendly ones, and figured out that doing so actually awakened them to a happier, healthier, and more abundant life. What impact do your habits of comfort or consuming make on the earth? What helps keep you awake to the glory of creation?

Advent is the time to wake up to the significance of who we are since God has come into our world in Jesus. We are unique on this world in our self-consciousness and in our ability to act in and through the power of love Jesus' life shows us.

## FAITH in ACTION

1 Stay

awake to God's call to pray. Make an Advent resolution to pray daily. Explore different types of prayer and find one that fits you and your schedule. 2 What are ways we can stay awake to family and friends? \* Make an Advent wreath and join with family or friends each day to pray. \* Make a gift to express love for a family member or friend. \* Help prepare your tree and crèche at home or the crèche at church. \* Learn the words to a Christmas carol you don't know. \* Visit an elderly neighbor, grandparents, or someone who is sick. 3 For information on putting together your own week-long "No Impact Experiment" go to [noimpactproject.org](http://noimpactproject.org).