

The Cosmic Calendar

Mary, Mother of God
January 1, 2026 (Vigil Mass)
Fr. Tony Davis

Many Christians were startled whenever science discovered that the universe is much older than we once thought, like by a lot! Christians estimated from the Book of Genesis that the world was about 6,000 years old, whereas science was now saying 13.8 billion years old. This contradiction can be concerning to those of us who believe in the Bible.

In the late 1970s, aware of recent scientific developments, Carl Sagan popularized what he called 'The Cosmic Calendar.' The Cosmic Calendar was a way for us to better comprehend the proportionality of the universe according to science by comparing it to one calendar year. The Cosmic Calendar states that if January 1 represented the beginning of the universe, the first signs of life didn't come until late August, the dinosaurs around December 22, mammals and birds around December 24, primates around December 30, and most eye opening of all, human beings on December 31 at 11:57 pm. Compared to 2025, we humans haven't even arrived on the scene yet.

In his 1998 encyclical 'Faith and Reason,' Pope John Paul II beautifully taught, "faith and reason are like two wings on which

the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.” (1) In other words, we do not need to be afraid of reason, science, or even the Cosmic Calendar. That is because whereas science asks the questions of ‘how,’ faith asks the questions of ‘why.’ We need both to discover the truth.

We gather this evening on an important date on the Cosmic Calendar, December 31. It is our day as humans, but also a reminder of the other 364 days, 23 hours, and 57 minutes that took place without us. Knowing how small and insignificant we are as human beings can be frightening, but also, I suggest, a huge relief. We tend to put so much pressure on ourselves as if the weight of the world were on our shoulders. We live as if everything depends upon us. This is not the whole picture. The invitation of this New Years Eve is to trust that the Holy Spirit, who hovered over the chaos in the Book of Genesis, is the one who has sustained and continues to sustain the entire universe. Maybe if we understood this truth from both faith and science, we wouldn’t struggle so much with anxiety or ambition. Instead, we would be filled with wonder and awe. As the verses of the popular children’s song properly say,

- He’s got the whole world in his hands
- He’s got the wind and rain in his hands
- He’s got the little tiny baby in his hands
- He’s got you and me brother in his hands
- He’s got you and me sister in his hands

- He's got everybody here in his hands
- He's got the whole world in his hands.

The Cosmic Calendar teaches us that God is much bigger than we ever imagined.

What insights from science have actually helped me in my spiritual life? How can I trust more fully in the Holy Spirit in the year ahead?

As we continue with this mass, let us step back from our narrow lives and see the larger universe. May the end of the calendar year, December 31, and the start of the new year, January 1, teach us that God is much greater than our lives, our troubles, our species, our Church, and even our human history, like by a lot.