



**A sermon for Choral Evensong at Wells Cathedral,
preached on Sunday 21 December 2025 by the Very
Reverend Toby Wright, Dean of Wells**

Stars are the scars of the universe

Advent 4: O Oriens

*“Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!”*

So wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins, inviting us to pause and wonder. In these final days of Advent, as we pray the great O Antiphons, today's cry is O Oriens—“O Morning Star, splendour of eternal light, sun of justice: come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”

The Bible begins with stars: “*God made the stars*” (Genesis 1). And it ends with stars: “*I am the root and descendant of David, the bright morning star*” (Revelation 22:16). From first light to final promise, stars frame the story of salvation. They are not solely decoration; they are signs, or cosmic witnesses to God's glory and grace.

Science tells us stars are nuclear furnaces, turning hydrogen into heavier elements. Jennifer Wiseman, a Christian astrophysicist, calls them “little factories” of creation. When stars die, they scatter their riches across the cosmos. Or as Carl Sagan famously said, “We are star stuff.” The iron in our blood, the calcium in our bones—all forged in the heart of stars. Even Jesus, the Word made flesh, shared that same stardust. Incarnation is not only divine mystery; it is cosmic solidarity for us all.

And yet, stars are not born without struggle. They emerge from collapse, from the scars of cosmic violence. Ricky Male's phrase is striking: “*Stars are the scars of the universe.*” Every star bears witness to a story of rupture and renewal. In that sense, they mirror our own lives. We too carry scars—of grief and failure. But in Christ, scars are not erased; they are transfigured. The risen Jesus still bears his wounds. They are no longer marks of defeat but signs of love's triumph. So too the stars: what began as chaos becomes beauty.

Hopkins saw this: “*Look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!*” He lamented that people rush by, failing to notice. Advent calls us to stop and stare. To see in the night sky a parable of grace. Stars remind us that God works slowly, patiently. A star's birth takes thousands of years. So does holiness. The O Antiphons echo

this longing: Come, O Morning Star! Shine where hope feels dim. Pierce the shadow of death with your light.

Revelation ends with the urgency of: “Come, Lord Jesus!” The bright morning star heralds a new dawn. In a world scarred by war, injustice, and fear, we need that light. Just as we need it in our own lives. And here is the wonder: the same God who flung stars into space now dwells among us. The Creator becomes creature. The Light shines in the darkness—and the darkness cannot overcome it.

So this Christmas-tide, lift your eyes. See the stars—the scars of the universe. Let them speak of promise: that your wounds, too, can become radiant. Let them summon you to pilgrimage: always moving, always changing, like constellations across the sky. And let them draw you to Christ, the Morning Star, whose coming is certain, whose light is eternal.

So, as we stand on this Advent 4, under the Advent sky, hear again Hopkins’ cry:

“Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!

O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!”

Amen.

The Very Reverend Toby Wright, Dean of Wells

21 December 2025