



Christmas Mass: 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light.”**

The conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, the closest in about 400 years, has generated great interest in Astronomy this past week. The two planets are so close together that they appear as one bright light to the naked eye. Some astronomers have theorized that this conjunction of the two planets could be what the three “wise men from the East” saw in the sky and followed. In fact, the event has been called the “Christmas Star”.

The Head of the Vatican Observatory (which has two research sites in Castel Gandolfo and Tucson, Arizona) is a Jesuit, Bro. Guy Consolmagno SJ and he said: “no one knows for sure what the star was, and until we have a time-machine where we can go back and interview (St) Matthew with a video recorder, no one ever will know for sure”. He was referring to the section in the Gospel that is read on the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January, when we celebrate the arrival of the Magi at Bethlehem. What they actually saw we are not sure, he said, though there would have been such a conjunction around the time of the Birth of Jesus. So it is, and will remain a point of speculation.

What we do know is that this event, at this time of the year, fits in with the time, when darkness recedes and light grows, the Winter Solstice. The sun begins its slow but sure return to the northern hemisphere.

Father Ernest Ferlita in his commentary points out that the actual date of Our Lord’s Birth is not recorded in the Gospel of St Luke. What Luke tells us is: “it was the time when Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken...while Quirinius was governor of Syria...so Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem....to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child...While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn”. Then Luke goes on to tell us that the shepherds in the field close by saw an Angel “and the glory of the Lord shone round them” and they were told where they would find the baby. And Luke writes “suddenly with the Angel there was a throng of the heavenly host praising God and singing: “Glory to God is the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour”. The whole focus of the Gospels is on the Christ Child. As Isaiah the Prophet 700 years earlier says in the Mass on Christmas night “The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light.” The estimated date of the Birth of Jesus, 25<sup>th</sup> December, is close to the time when light is born again, the days get longer. What better time to celebrate the one who is the “light of the world”, the infant in the manger.

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese

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Father Pollard in his Homily for the Mass of Christmas night says to his parishioners: “much of the story of Christmas is a story of light in darkness...A bright light appears in the sky. And the angels light up the night sky with the glory of God that surrounds them as they sing their hosannas”. He continues: “when I wish you a happy Christmas, what does that mean? The Russian novelist Dostoevsky wrote: ‘while we are on earth, we grope...as though in the dark...But for the precious image of Christ before us, we would lose our way...’ Cardinal Newman wrote: ‘lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on’. Dylan Thomas wrote: ‘light breaks where no sun shines’. ...to wish you a happy Christmas is to wish that Christ be born in the Bethlehem of your heart”.

When I visited the Holy Land, years ago now, I visited Bethlehem of course and it was a special experience, as was going to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. But, in a strange way, it was in the Home of the Little Sisters of Jesus, the Community inspired by St Charles Eugène de Foucauld, when I knelt before the image of the Child Jesus, the one who came for us as a child in poverty and simplicity, that I met anew the One I wanted to follow, the One who reaches out to us whoever and wherever we are this Christmas to lighten the darkness and engender love.

I pray you find that light and love this Christmas and always.

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