

Bright Star of the Morning

Before our first service of the day, usually the Office of Readings, I like to go out of the back door of the Abbey and walk round outside to the chapel. In recent months, when the sky has been clear, there has been a bright object in the eastern sky, and two other fainter objects, slowly moving in an ever-changing pattern. The bright object, as many of you will know, is the planet Venus, a quick look on the internet reveals that the other two are Jupiter and Mars.

I've always been interested in astronomy, especially in winter when the stars can be viewed more conveniently. As a teenager in the 1960's I remember standing with my mother in the back garden of our house in New Brighton on the Wirral admiring the Milky Way. My brother still lives in the same house, I was rather taken aback when visiting recently to discover that because of the amount of outdoor lighting no stars at all were visible from the back garden.

People has always been fascinated by the heavens, and the assumption that there is a relationship between astronomical phenomena and events in the human world is both ancient and also flourishing. Indeed, some things seem to have come full circle. In Hemel Hempstead Old Town there is a shop called 'The Enchanted Oak'. Joss sticks burn outside, and there is a display of crystals in the window. 'For all your Pagan requirements' I read on their website. A stone's throw away, for someone who can throw a stone, is the old parish church with its tall lead-covered spire and Norman architecture. Pagans and Christians side by side, presumably not for the first time.

Back to Venus. The words 'bright star of the morning' tend to come to mind when I stand looking at it. The writer of the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, has Jesus describe himself as 'the bright star of the morning' (Revelation 22:16). The Book of Revelation is an 'apocalypse', a book rich in symbolism, some of which sounds very strange to the modern reader.

Jesus, 'the bright morning star', whose birth at Bethlehem heralds the dawn of a 'new day' for humankind. Surely this is something worth celebrating, and that is what we do both in our liturgy in the chapel, and in our daily lives, as year by year, in the depths of winter, we celebrate the birth of Mary's child, Jesus:

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley, 1707–1788

So, if you are a Pagan celebrating Yuletide, or a Christian celebrating Christmas, or a Someone just wanting to brighten up the winter darkness with a bit of Festive Cheer, we at the Abbey wish you peace, joy and many blessings this Christmas.

Sr Benedict, [Turvey Abbey](#)