

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Mystery Date

Do you know the date for Christmas? It may not be what you think.

Some astronomers have announced that Christmas should, in fact, be celebrated in June. They believe that they have accurately charted the “Christmas Star” which led the Magi to Bethlehem, and have pinpointed the birthday of Jesus as June 17.

June 17, 2 BC, to be exact. (How Jesus could be born in a year that’s technically Before Christ goes unexplained.) The astronomers used a complex computer software system to chart the exact positions of celestial bodies and map the night sky as it would have appeared over the Holy Land some 2,000 years ago.

“This is not an attempt to decry religion,” one of the astronomers said. “It’s really backing it up as it shows there really was a bright object appearing in the East at the right time.”

For centuries, people have debated the accuracy of a December nativity—and more than a few people have noted that it would have been highly unlikely for shepherds to be out in the fields at night during the dead of winter. One scholar has speculated that the date of Christ’s birth is closely linked to the date of his death. How? In the early days of the Church, it was believed that great prophets died near the date of their conception. Jesus’s crucifixion occurred in spring, during Passover, probably in March. That would have paralleled the date of his conception—celebrated March 25— so his birth would have occurred in December.

Or so it was believed.

But as we prepare to celebrate another Christmas, more than two millennia after the fact, it should be clear to all of us that the date of Christmas is, ultimately, irrelevant.

Indeed, in the early days of the Church, little attention was paid to the birth of the savior.

The first Gospel written, by Mark, makes no mention of it, and picks up Christ’s life as he begins his public ministry. What mattered to early Christians was his death and resurrection.

And so it is with us later Christians, too.

But during this dark and cold time of year, we take time to celebrate something wondrous.

We celebrate the fact that God became one of us.

We kneel in awe before the humblest and most helpless of human beings, a newborn baby, and marvel at the life he will grow up to live.

We stand in silent gratitude before a mystery, and wait “in joyful hope” for that mystery to be completed, and for Christ to come again.

And we welcome him, wherever and however we find him, as our savior, our Prince of Peace.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come.

It is a message that is sung throughout the world. And its truth transcends time.

The simple, joyous fact is that this singular event doesn’t require a specific date to live on in our hearts.

Christmas is in December. And in June. And in every month of the year. Christ comes to us when love is shared, when kindness is offered, when compassion is rendered—when these simple human gifts are exchanged, heart to heart.

They don’t need wrapping paper.

And they don’t need a date on the calendar.

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