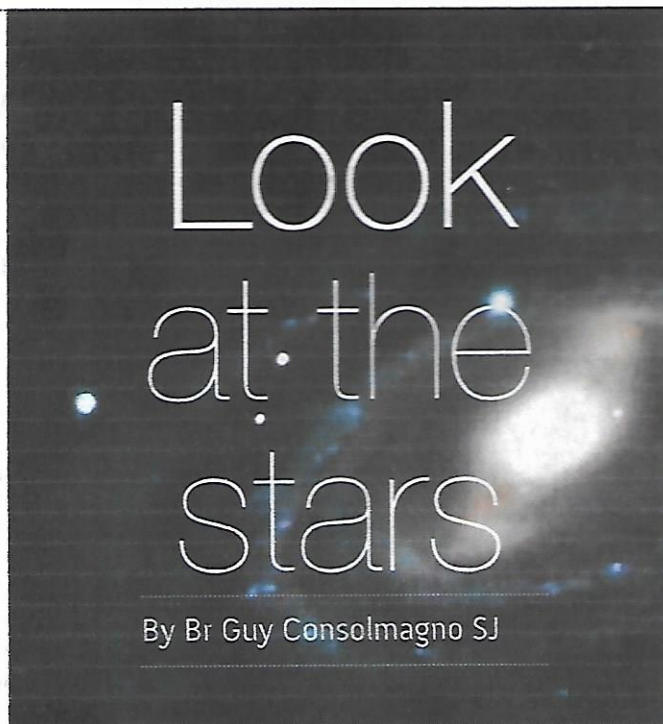


SUNDAY PLUS

Look for answers

The stars are physical reminders that creation is so much larger than our day-to-day worries. Look up towards the stars, though, and you'll see things in a larger perspective. They are the same stars that Galileo saw, that Shakespeare saw, that Christ saw overhead. They were there when we were children. They'll still be there, tomorrow.

The stars remind us that the entire universe is beautiful. There is beauty everywhere we look if we but take the time to seek it. When God created the universe, he saw that it was good. And we are a part of that good universe. No matter how hard we try to mess things up, nothing that we human beings can do will change that! Indeed, Christ came precisely because God so loved the universe that he sent his Son to redeem it, to redeem us.



Like the stars, God is always with us. But we need dark skies to see the stars. Advent is the time of year when we recall a universe before Christ's coming, a world that was both dark but filled with the whispers of a promise that the darkness would not last forever. Only in that darkness can we savour the light. Only in that anticipation can we embrace the joy of Christmas morning. Every child looking forward to opening presents knows that feeling: it is a sweet taste that we should recall from our childhoods and never forget.

Advent is about looking at the stars and finding, not darkness, but the Light of the world.

Br Guy Consolmagno SJ is the Director of the Vatican Observatory.

Image: © Vatican Observatory

John says: "The Lord is near. What shall we do?" Let us give an example: let us think of a dear one who is coming to visit us. We joyfully and impatiently await them. To properly welcome them, we will clean the house, we will prepare the best dinner possible, perhaps a gift... In short, there are things we will do... But God elevates this question to a higher level: what should I do with my life? What am I called to? What will fulfil me?

Pope Francis

Questions and answers

By Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

What have been some of your biggest decisions in life? After-school career? Life partner? Where to set up home? Children's names and schools? The list can seem endless.

It was probably tough for John the Baptist. Was his cousin really the long-awaited Messiah or must he still live in hope, preparing the way for someone – he didn't know whom? When Jesus

went into the wilderness following his baptism, he also had some tough choices. The way ahead would be full of challenges and people who did not want to hear his father's message of love. Where should he begin?

Life is not easy if it is to be worth living. If we don't confront its challenges, we won't grow, reach our potential or meet some of the most beautiful people who will ever cross our path. Questions don't always have easy answers but sometimes the most difficult questions have amazing answers which make all the difference.

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

The carol which changed everything

It's 1818. You are the parish priest in a small Austrian town. The church organ, damaged by recent floods, is unplayable. It's Christmas Eve and the organ repairman cannot fix the instrument in time for Midnight Mass. You'd wanted your second Christmas in the parish to be a very special occasion. What can you do?

Young Fr Joseph Mohr sought the help of the schoolmaster and organist, Franz Gruber. Mohr had written a Christmas poem two years earlier. In the space of a couple of hours, could Gruber compose a tune and guitar accompaniment for the Christmas celebrations? It was a big ask!

Yet that is how the much-loved carol "Silent Night" changed a potential sadness into immeasurable joy.

Since 1818, the carol has been sung countless times and has been translated from the original German into about 140 languages. It's been played millions of times and appreciated by Christians and non-Christians alike.

When God and people work together, miracles happen!

Loving Lord, be my guiding star.
Light up my path towards you.

 Amen.

Today:
Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Monday:
Jeremiah 23:5-8
Matthew 1:18-24

Tuesday:
Judges 13:2-7, 24-25
Luke 1:5-25

Wednesday:
Isaiah 7:10-14
Luke 1:26-38

Thursday:
Song of Songs 2:8-14
Luke 1:39-45

Friday:
1 Samuel 1:24-28
Luke 1:46-56

Saturday:
Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24
Luke 1:57-66

Next Sunday:
2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38