

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Sun Arise!

The timing of Christmas, as everyone knows, is all to do with the movement of the sun. It's always been a time of celebration, when the sun ends its southerly retreat and starts to come back to the wintry northern hemisphere. I find myself a bit confused about the Twelve Days, which lead us to Epiphany. Still, they do give us a good long feast, if we've got the stamina to rejoice for so long.

### **Solar Power – An Epiphany**

The worship of the sun is, to my mind, the most understandable of idolatries. It is our star; and all the multitudinous movements, processes, and achievements of earthly natures relate to its blazing life. Our contemplation of its relative standing in the vast spaces of the universe leads us to the most staggering of facts; the mind reels before the huge emptiness of space, and those bright voyagers, the stars, who may whirl around them planetary systems as complex as our own. Still, there is nothing petty about our experience of sunset, or of sunrise: most of us have enjoyed moments of such sublime beauty and majesty at these times, that everything else has been forgotten, as a sort of awe unites and possesses groups, even crowds of people.

### **Winter Solstice – An Epiphany**

It's a pity that British climate is so often damply oblivious of the splendid life of the sun. We regularly miss all kinds of eclipse, for instance, and the stars are ruined for us by streetlamps (a miserable swap!). So it is good that the Church still draws to our attention the ancient call to celebrate, as winter turns the corner. Somewhere above the canopy, the sun still reigns. So at this time we greet the Manifestation of Jesus Christ, whose reign on earth is dawning as history hurtles towards its terminus. It doesn't matter that (as Isaiah puts it) *night still covers the earth, and darkness the peoples*: the coming of Christ is as real, if also as hidden a reality, as the sustained shining of the sun beyond the clouds. It is equally the source of indomitable joy for all who have the penetration to be aware of it. It gives us a way of living through the darkness, and turning it to light.

### **Greeting The Dawn**

The interface between sleeping and waking is traditionally a time of decision. It's the time when we have to draw on the resolve and purpose of our life. The decision to rise, the casting-off of the

dark, is a small but very significant daily conversion. Those who do not know why they are alive, and have doubts about the purpose of it all, will often realise this on a particular morning when the natural lethargy of the half-woken simply refuses to lift. Paul reminds us that night is for sleepers; we are the children of the day; and, as an early Christian hymn says of the rooster, we have in us a seed of the sun which gets us to wake, to salute the sun. Morning prayer has a beauty and peace which feeds us like a good breakfast.

### **Wise Persons Follow Stars**

In Advent we meditated on John the Baptist, who became a prophet like the prophets of old, because he knew there was a prophet's task to be accomplished. Now the Church gives us the Wise Men, who follow their star because they know it is leading them somewhere vital. Knocking on Herod's door, they show how little they know their destination. But they are still on the way to Christ, and by perseverance they find their way to him. So we, in our clouded, uncertain vision of truth, stumble forwards, often in the dark, often feeling foolish and far from wise, but sure that God is guiding us by his light, that he will not abandon us to a fruitless wandering. And every now and again we find some sudden gleam of light which seems sent to encourage us, to assure us that we are not lost: *at which sight we grow radiant*. Fr Philip