

DAY 1

A CHRISTMAS “STAR” THIS YEAR

by Jon Secaur

The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament shows his handiwork. (Psalm 19:1)

Actually, two! And planets, really, but brighter than any stars!

The Earth slips between the great planet Jupiter and the sun during Advent, so that brilliant planet brightens the sky all night long, rising in the east as the sun sets, passing overhead at midnight, and setting in the west as the sun rises. As Jupiter is a bit closer to us at this time – planet orbits are not circular, but elliptical, so distances are always changing – it will be brighter than usual, too!

But the real treat this Advent season only happens every other year or so, and that’s the arrival of the most brilliant, outstanding planet, Earth’s twin, the stunning Venus. In early June it slipped between the Earth and the Sun, and since it moves faster than we do, it zooms ahead and now appears in the southwest a bit after sunset. It will creep higher and brighter in that direction every night all through Advent, reaching its peak in the sky very nearly on Epiphany in January. Venus

will blaze its brightest in mid February – a treat for Valentine’s Day! – after which it will more quickly slip back into the Sun’s glare.

Take time this Advent to breathe in the beauty above us, and be calmed by the eternal cycles of the heavens.

DEAR GOD, ABOVE THE MESSINESS AND BUSTLE OF OUR LIVES, HELP US FIND PEACE AND COMFORT IN THE GREAT, QUIET RHYTHMS OF THE UNIVERSE.