



## **Celebrating Chinese – Lunar New Year**

14 February 2022

I am very pleased to be celebrating Chinese – Lunar New Year for the first time in a Service of Prayer and Benediction. It strikes me that you are fortunate because you normally have two opportunities to mark the New Year: one on First January and another in February, so having two Feasts. Gradually in the UK the host community is taking Chinese New Year on board, being an excuse for another Food Feast too!

Some people might wonder how the Church can sit alongside Festivities that have some mysterious elements that are pre-Christian; the answer is it has always done so because it transforms them. How many people remember the god Janus who gave his name to the first month of the calendar year, a pagan Roman god with two Faces: one looks back and the other forward.

The moon has a significant part to play in our Christian Liturgical Year already: the most important is the date of Easter when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. As you know, it is a moveable Feast, which comes on the Sunday after the full moon after 21 March. Since Our Lord died and rose again at the time of the Jewish Passover, the Church has kept the Jewish method of reckoning, so far as Easter is concerned.

The Lunar New Year, as you know, is very much associated with the beginning of Spring; it seems to me it would have been nice to see our new Christian Day of Prayer for Creation on the occasion of the Lunar New Year. As it is, it is on 1 September and focusses on the Ecumenical Season of Creation, ending on 4 October, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. We understand why the Feast of St. Francis plays an important part in the celebration of creation of course because of his love of creation, and his famous prayer “Canticle of Creation” which leads us into prayer and thanksgiving to God for all creation including with these words:

“O Most High, all powerful, good Lord God,  
To you belong praise, glory, honour and blessing.  
Be praised, my Lord, for sister Moon,  
And for the stars which you have set shining and lovely in the heavens.”

Like me, some of you may be old enough to remember the famous journey ending with the first man on the moon; I remember one of the astronauts quoting the Book of Genesis, as we do today, a beautiful thanksgiving to God for the awesome view of the earth from space. In Psalm 8 we look at the creation, the moon and

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the stars, and we conclude “The Lord, our Lord, how great is your name through all the earth.”

We are conscious too of the special creation of man and woman, and the greatness of our calling to rule over and care for creation.

In the letter to the Ephesians, we heard St. Paul praise God for the highest gift we have in the person of Jesus Christ in whom “he has let us know the mystery of His purpose ... that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth.”

The Church has had a long history of interaction with science in appreciation and study of creation. As a student in Rome I remember well the satisfaction we had to live in summer across the lake for the Pope’s summer house where the Vatican Observatory is based. We never envisaged conflict between science and belief in the God of Creation. The poetic and spiritual words of Scripture convey the sense of God as the ultimate creator and Lord of all.

The same God has called us to share in the new creation coming to fulfilment through Jesus who speaks of Himself as the Bread of Life in the Gospel of St. John today. In other words he is the one who gives us life, new life in His Spirit, a life that is complete in the Kingdom of Heaven. Elsewhere we speak of Jesus as the “living water” as in the Hymn we will sing later.

United with the Lord Jesus in this Service where we have Scripture, Song, Adoration and Thanksgiving, we give thanks for all that is good in our lives, and we pray for God’s Blessing, which I will impart on you with Benediction, God’s Blessing for the New Year.



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