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Weekly Readings 23/12/2012

An excerpt from Fr Laurence's Christmas message to all members of the Weekly Internet Meditation Group, December, 1997.

As we have no birth certificate for Jesus, what is the reason for celebrating his birthday at this time of the year as Christians have done since at least the fourth century? Almost certainly it is linked to the pagan feast of the re-birth of the Sun.

On December 21st we experience the shortest day of the year, a vivid reminder, in the northern hemisphere anyway, of the brevity of life. It is the last gasp of the old sun. But birth follows death as it always does, because life is not defeated by death or even negated by it. Life is the sum total of all the cycles of birth and death through which we as individuals and we as the cosmos pass through until the end of time.

All this became very vivid for me a few days ago when I was visiting New Grange, north of Dublin, which is a five thousand year-old Neolithic burial mound constructed a millennium before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees for the promised land. It has many beauties and mysteries. Perhaps the secret to its meaning is the little aperture above the door which lets in the first rays of the reborn sun on December 21st to penetrate into the inner burial chamber. Dark for the rest of the year, it is filled with the new light for about seventeen minutes. While I was standing in the chamber (wishing it was December 21st) someone turned off the low electric light and we remained in the deepest darkness I can remember. I was surprised by the atmosphere, neither cold nor spooky, but filled with a womb-like peace and content. Whoever built it and lay their dead there knew about resurrection.

As we celebrate Christmas and Fr John's anniversary so close to each other, these are the thoughts or symbols in my mind. The light of Christmas is the first light of the Resurrection. It catches all in its radiance, the living and the dead, joy and grief, those near and those far away. Each time we meditate we are united in this light, which now shines not just cyclically but continuously in our deepest centre.

After meditation: Pseudo-Macarius, Fifteenth Homily, 38, noted in THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM, by Olivier Clement (London: New City Press, 1995), p. 268.

As countless candles are lighted from a single flame, so the bodies of all Christ?s members will be what Christ is. . .Our human nature is transformed into the fullness of God; it becomes wholly fire and light.

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