



Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year according to the song by Andy Williams. In year's past, you may remember (or at least recall hearing) of a Baby lying in a manger, caroling around the neighborhood, standing under mistletoe just to get a kiss, and quietly getting up before your parents to see what presents were under the tree. This Christmas, like much of the entire year, feels a lot different: unable to try on clothes in certain stores; limiting family gatherings to 10 people, covering joyful expressions with cloth masks, and even MCS cancelling its traditional Christmas party with good food, dirty Santa, Presidential awards, door prizes, and all of YOU! Regarding the latter, that was also a time when I shared a few words with you about the past year's accomplishments and hopeful expectations of the year to follow.

This year is definitely different. Instead of the song O Holy Night, "Oh, what a year this has been" is more on the minds of most. Who would have imagined 2020 being the year of:

- worsening pandemic with unprecedented numbers of those dying – around the planet (and the shattered predictions it would be over this past summer, just like the flu)
- makeshift hospitals in event centers and parking lots (once reserved for the imaginations of fantasy and Sci-Fi filmmakers)
- unemployment closer to the 1933 Great Depression than the 2008 Great Recession
- business closures around the country and world due to bans and bankruptcies
- miles of people waiting for food to feed their families in America; and the 21st century
- social unrest in which nearly-neighboring Charlottesville even made national news
- contested presidential election with an associated challenge to the transfer of power
- hurricanes whose numbers exceeded the letters of the English alphabet

Because of the shortages of hand sanitizer and toilet paper, learning new expressions such as "essential businesses" (thereby affirming the importance of all your work) and "social distancing" and finding added meaning and application to "Row Row Row Your Boat," this has been a year

not likely to be forgotten for quite some time. Yet, despite all the shadowy news of late, light always shines brightest in the darkest hours. There is even a passage of Scripture that states “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:5). Jesus, of course, is that light; the light of the world, and the reason to celebrate. Certainly others did approximately 2,000 years ago when the Wise Men followed the “Star of Bethlehem” to the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. Perhaps that divine light was the Great Convergence of Jupiter and Saturn witnessed this week for the first time 400 years. The last time these planets were this close was in 1623. Perhaps all of that, plus the arrival of Christmas and the new year to follow, along with two new vaccines being distributed, a new presidential administration, and many other shining moments will give us all reason to pause and celebrate, too.

In the meantime, Gary and I want to convey our warmest wishes to all of you that this Christmas will be especially merry and bright! Reflect on your blessings, for surely there will be many special moments you will experience. Remember to thank those who have touched your heart. Help those whom you can. Relax, enjoy, and maybe we will all be blessed with an extra soft, easy to breathe, anti- fogging, safe and stylish, mask neatly wrapped and placed under the tree.



P.S. December 21st, the day of the Great Convergence, was also the winter solstice (shortest day/longest night of the year), as well as Justin’s and Rick’s (50th) birthday. Happy Birthday to you both.

With kind regards,

ROBBIE