

Voice from the Curatage – 14th July, 2022

Hello there!

Well, I don't know about anyone else, but I've been totally blown away this past week by the stunning (and, frankly, mind-boggling) images recently beamed back to Earth by NASA's 'James Webb Space Telescope'. These pictures, which have been doing the rounds on the news and in social media, offer the most detailed glimpses of the universe that we have ever seen. The telescope – currently orbiting our Sun at a distance of 1.6 million kilometres from Earth – is intended to succeed the famous Hubble Telescope as the next great space science observatory. Of the four images made public, so far, this is perhaps my favourite – and do zoom in to see it in more detail:



Packed into this tiny sliver of the universe are thousands of galaxies, each with potentially millions of planets, stars, and suns. And, perhaps even more astoundingly, given the distance of this cluster (around 4.6 billion light-years away), this image shows us 13.1 billion years into the past. That's just 700 million years after the Big Bang. Despite having been taken only weeks ago, this picture is literally looking back in time to the very earliest years of the universe. How utterly amazing is that? That some 9.3 billion years before the Earth is even made – let alone contains life – God is so fully at work, creating with the utmost precision and atomic detail – and, above all, love – a countless host of planets, galaxies, solar systems, and worlds. How apt, indeed, are the words of the psalmist: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handywork..." (19:1). And, in the thirty-third psalm: "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth."



(The 'Cosmic Cliffs' of the Carina Nebula – a stellar nursery, showing the birth of millions of new stars and planets)

As Isaiah reminds us in his great prophecy: "Lift up your eyes on high and behold: who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing..." (40:26). Doesn't seeing these images just make those words resonate even more powerfully? How truly awesome is the Lord God!



But wait, it gets even better...

Shortly after these pictures came out, I saw a joke made by an atheist on Twitter, who wrote sarcastically: 'Christians really believe in a God who made a universe far bigger than we can imagine, far more detailed than we can comprehend, and within which humans are but the tiniest speck, only to choose to come down to Earth, become human, and die for them, because he seeks relationship with each one, individually. Really?' Well, in the words of a whole lot of Christians who replied to this guy: 'Yep, you got it'. (For an atheist, he did a remarkably good job of summing up the Christian faith!). These extraordinary pictures, which capture so beautifully and mightily the immensity and majesty of God, make the reality of the Incarnation – the humble, lowly, magnificent, and glorious Incarnation – even more gobsmacking. That he who made all of this, in the unfathomable depths of its splendour, chose freely to robe himself in *our* flesh, take upon himself *our* nature, die in *our* stead, rise again for *our* redemption, and now lives to intercede and sanctify *us*, is (at least to me) both utterly incomprehensible and wonderfully staggering. Oh, and to top it off, the James Webb telescope launched on Christmas Day 2021. I don't believe that was a coincidence...

And finally...

This is my last week as parish locum before I, too, depart for the UK next Wednesday. I will be away for just under a month, attending the Lambeth Conference as a Steward, representing the Anglican Church of Australia. This conference is a (roughly) decennial gathering of all the bishops of the Anglican Communion, for a time of prayer, discernment, and mutual counsel on matters affecting the 'Anglican world', presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury. These historic gatherings are hugely significant in the life of the Anglican Communion, and I'm so excited to be able to experience one in person!

Talking of being away... our dear organist, Stephen Baldwin, will also be overseas for a few weeks in August, to attend a family wedding in Germany. May that be a safe and happy time for him.

In the meanwhile, the parish will be in the capable hands of Fr Chris Mostert, who will be the locum until Bishop Lindsay returns in early-August. Please keep him, and those of us travelling, in your prayers.

This will also be the last 'Voice' for a few weeks, but keep an eye out for the next one, when the Bishop returns. Looking forward to seeing you all again, soon!

With love from the Curatage,
Deacon Jack



(Stephan's Quintet: a group of five galaxies in the constellation Pegasus, some 290 million light-years away from Earth).

*"For I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained.
What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" (Ps. 8:3-4)*