



Off The Pews Newsletter

Winter 2020

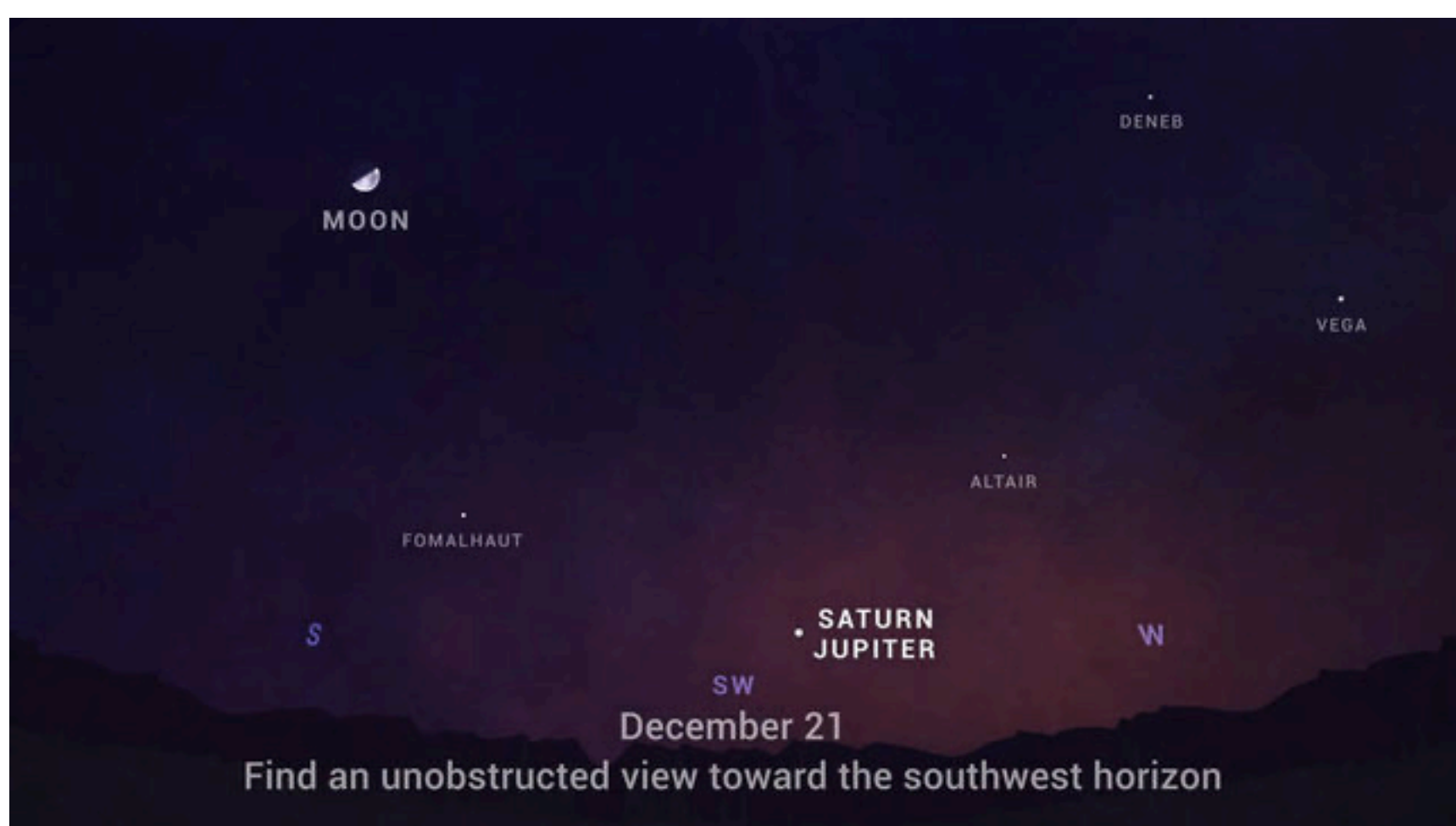


Two Ways to Support Off The Pews

If you are interested in supporting the work of Off The Pews, please make a donation.
And please forward this newsletter to someone in order to spread the word about OTP.

Thank you!

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The Christmas Star

A planetary conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn is reaching its peak alignment tonight and is delivering to us, on the Winter Solstice, what has popularly become known as the "Christmas Star."

The universe throws a lot at us, and this year has been notable in the number of challenges. This particular event is a blessing shining down on everyone. We know the science behind it so it is somewhat less mystical and portentous than it was the last time it was visible from Earth. What has not diminished in the intervening 800 years is the miracle of our existence in the universe. Add to that miracle the convergence of a community of people with the will to achieve commonly beneficial goals, and the miracle grows exponentially.

The science is plain: The sunlight reflecting off two planets—visually aligning in the dark night sky—will appear, from the surface of Earth, to be one much brighter heavenly body. When we bring our own light into alignment with someone else's light to exist in community we are each much brighter. Nature is vast and miraculous.

To say I that am very excited to see this conjunction is a bit of an understatement, but even if I can't see it (due to light pollution, bad timing, or cloud cover) I'm still amazed by the event, just like a little kid at Christmas!

The illustration above is provided courtesy of NASA/JPL-Caltech. Here's an excerpt from their article:

The planets regularly appear to pass each other in the solar system, with the positions of Jupiter and Saturn being aligned in the sky about once every 20 years.

What makes this year's spectacle so rare, then? It's been nearly 400 years since the planets passed this close to each other in the sky, and nearly 800 years since the alignment of Saturn and Jupiter occurred at night, as it will for 2020, allowing nearly everyone around the world to witness this "great conjunction."

The closest alignment will appear just a tenth of a degree apart and last for a few days. On the 21st, they will appear so close that a pinkie finger at arm's length will easily cover both planets in the sky. The planets will be easy to see with the unaided eye by looking toward the southwest just after sunset.

Read the rest of NASA's "[The 'Great' Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn](#)", published December 15, 2020.

May all of our lights shine as brightly in community in 2021 as they have in 2020.

—Nan Mellem, Programming Committee and OTP Web Administrator

KWANZAA

Kwanzaa is the most important holiday on the African American calendar. It is the most important because this observance transcends religious, ideological, regional and class boundaries.

—Joyce Butts, Contributor
Additional citations at the link

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Program Planning for 2021

Off The Pews' programming committee is at work planning several programs for the new year. Please keep an eye out for announcements in your email as we post more information to the Off The Pews blog. And if you haven't been to the site in a while, please bookmark it so you can have a browse now and then.

Our planning committee: Rod Sawyer, Cheryl Benson, Gregory Smith, Donnell Williams, and Nan Mellem.

[Visit OffThePews.org](#)



Pictured above: Juanita Bradley, Board President

Off The Pews Board of Directors

Thank you very much to the OTP board for all of their hard work keeping the lights on and the mission moving forward! More information about our board members will soon be available on the website.

Exciting News: The board has been invited to work with *Harris Community Action* in their Fellowship Program—a 10-week program. The board met with HCA student leaders December 4th to determine the needs of OTP so HCA could make a formal proposal of deliverable goals for their team. This proposal was presented to the OTP board and approved! More details will be available in the new year.

Our Board of Directors: Juanita Bradley, Board President; Shandra Richardson; Susan Allitto; Rev Harriet Cavanah Dart, Secretary; and Joyce E. Butts, Treasurer. Rev Dr Terrill Murff is an ex-officio member. Rev Dr Vertie Powers serves as an advisor.



Did You Know?

Inoculation was introduced to America by a Slave. Few details are known about the birth of Onesimus, but it is assumed he was born in Africa in the late seventeenth century before eventually landing in Boston.

Joyce Butts, Contributor
Source: PBS Black Culture Connection

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Community Partners

We are very grateful to all of our community partners for their continued support. We encourage you to visit [OTP Community Partners page](#) to find links to their sites.

webmaster@offthepews.org

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