



## Tyler County Astronomy Club views Christmas Star

by [Michael G. Maness](#)

[Tyler County Booster](#) (1-7-21), 1B.

The Tyler County Astronomy Club hosted a Christmas Star viewing Monday evening, Dec. 21, at the Chester City Park just west of Chester on Hwy. 190.

In a bit of rush, Mayor Floyd Petri, his son Chuck, and Michael Maness announced on several Facebook pages that at 5 o'clock all could come and see the stars. Maness brought his Celestron, and soon others arrived with their kids.

Looking southwest, one could not see the Christmas Star until well after sundown. A disappointing fear circulated because of cloud cover amidst the beautiful Texas sunset.

However, before sundown, the waxing half-moon was clear, and soon several arrived with children.

Maness and Petri lowered the tripod legs so the little kids could see the half-moon at around 200+ magnification, craters and all. It is best to see the moon at half or a crescent as the shadows allow greater depth to craters and hills.

More came and went, in all about 25, a real surprise. The Petris and Maness have toyed around with starting a club for over a year, and so without any formalities yet, they just tossed some crumbs out upon the water ... or in the sky. What a surprise. They will announce another star gathering next month and more on the club then, perhaps when another celestial event comes.

Something is always going on in the heavens.

Nick Taparcean showed up after dark with his Celestron, too, and so two scopes were searching the sky and admiring the half-moon.

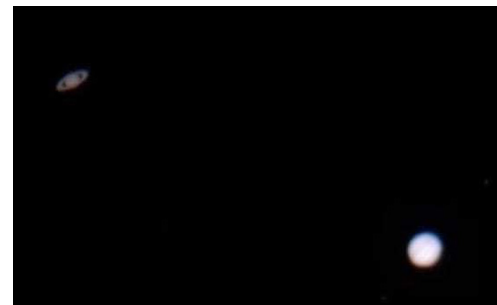
The Christmas Star, or the Great Conjunction as it is being called, is an exceedingly rare event where the orbits of Jupiter and Saturn align and appear as one—as one bright light, or “star.” From the naked eye, that is all one can see. As Dec. 21 got closer, one could watch as the two begin to merge.

With our moderate telescope at about 250 magnification, we could see that the “one” was really two, Jupiter slightly larger and brighter, and Saturn with it rings slightly tilted. They were not large enough to see the magnificent colors one sees in Hubble photos, but they were our views and fascinating. Because we were truly amateur astronomers, we were surprised at how fast we had to adjust the scope—every minute or so—because of our spinning and speeding Earth and the planets’ speedy orbits too.



↑ Alleged view of Christmas Star from Hubble Telescope (?)

View very similar to what we saw in our telescopes at Chester City Park



Some say this was the star mentioned in Matt. 2:1–2, but that is greatly doubted. For most Christians, the biblical star was just one of many miracles during that first Christmas season. Maness, who likes to study the Bible, does not believe this was “the” star mentioned in Matthew, as it really is not a star, plus, according to professional astronomers there was no conjunction in 4 B.C. when the best biblical experts believe Jesus was actually born.

Earth is about 93 million miles from the Sun, Jupiter 484m, and Saturn 891m. The huge distances make the huge planets seem very small. As they line up to us, we are almost between Jupiter and the sun, but not quite. If we were in a direct line, we—the Earth—would eclipse the light, and we would not see Jupiter as bright as a distant star; and if angle to the sun we was too great, Jupiter and Saturn would look very much like two small half-moons—like our moon shining this night. As Jupiter’s and Saturn’s orbits speed through their noble tracks, the Earth rotates and puts our sun to the side—as viewed from Earth—and the sun shines brightly on Jupiter and Saturn, making them full brilliant orbs. When the sun sets on Earth, and we are in the dark, the sun’s light is full on Jupiter and Saturn for a short time on the southwest horizon.

Earth rotates on its axis at about 1,000 miles per hour and navigates its annual track around the sun at about 67,000 miles per hour. We are cruising. Jupiter orbits the sun every 12 years and Saturn 29 years, both cruising at about 21,600 miles per hour. Only Venus is faster than Earth.

About every 20 years, Jupiter and Saturn align, but hardly ever this close to each other. The last time those on Earth saw this kind of conjunction was in 1226, and the next time will be on Dec. 25 in the year 2874, if humans survive that long, thinking of that old 1968 Zager and Evans song, well past “In the Year 2525.”

Kind of inspires one to sing, “Age of Aquarius,” and some want to call this Great Conjunction the beginning just such a new age, but there is no science to that. As tantalizing, lyrical, and dreamy as was *Hair*’s hit song in 1967, “When the Moon is in the seventh house and Jupiter aligns with Mars, then peace will guide the planets and love will steer the stars,” real astronomers denounced that as gibberish, even if some of them sang along too.

2020 has been anything but peaceful and might go down as the worst year since the Black Death of the fourteenth century, politically too.

So, if you love the stars and the infinity therein, come join the new Tyler County Astronomy Club at our next meeting in January or February. You can email [Maness3@att.net](mailto:Maness3@att.net) to get on a list. You can reach Floyd and Chuck Petri and Maness on Facebook.

[www.Facebook.com/Tyler-County-Astronomy-Club-101969935159229](http://www.Facebook.com/Tyler-County-Astronomy-Club-101969935159229)

