

The cold weather this week has made it feel like we're getting ready for Christmas, not Easter. Appropriately, one of our members says her extended family has had such a hard time scheduling their Christmas gathering, that they are putting the tree up this weekend.

Easter is early this year. It's always the Sunday following the first full moon of spring. This year, spring began just a few days ago, and its first full moon is today. This year, Good Friday falls on March 25.

March 25 is usually one of the most important days on the Catholic calendar, the annunciation. Exactly nine months before Christmas we remember that the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would become the mother of Jesus. But because Good Friday takes precedence, it bumps our observance of the annunciation to April 4 this year. When Jesus is born on December 25, he will be a few days premature.

Every 40 years or so, Good Friday lands on March 25. Some people in the early church believed March 25 was the actual date of Jesus' death. An old tradition held that great people died on their birthday, and to show the extraordinary greatness of Jesus, a tradition developed that he died on the day he was conceived. The bible says nothing about the time of year Jesus was born, but that he died around Passover. December 25 may have been chosen as Jesus' birthday because people thought that March 25, the day of his death, was also the day he was conceived.

400 years ago, when Good Friday fell on March 25, John Donne wrote a poem about it. He wrote, "All this, and all between, this day hath shown, Th'abridgement of Christ's story, which makes one – As in plain maps, the furthest west is east – Of th'angel's Ave, and *Consummatum est*." On one day, you see the whole story of Jesus. The angel says, "Hail, Mary," and Jesus says, "It is finished." Donne says if you look at a flat world map, the farthest point west is the farthest point east. It's all one.

It all seems one in the book of Isaiah as well. Today's passage, written hundreds of years before the Passion, says, "It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed." To God past, present and future are one.

So too in our lives, west often meets east. A child is born when another family member dies. A wedding happens while one relative is away at war. At school you take one exam while another course is just beginning. You break off one relationship as you fall in love with someone else. We deal with extremes and juxtapositions all the time.

The extremes in life are hard to endure, but they always bring new insight. They open our minds to the complexity of creation and the immense plan of God, which includes birth and death, life and resurrection.