

Christmas Eve 2018

50 years ago today, three astronauts orbited the moon for the first time. Their mission was to explore the surface of the moon to prepare for a future landing but more memorable for most people was the picture that they took of the earth. They lifted us up out of the assassinations, riots and war that marred that year, and as one telegraph sent to the astronauts” “Thanks, you saved 1968.”

Jesus did more than save year he saved every age and all people. Tonight we celebrate the birth of our salvation! Without the birth Jesus, the light of all nations on this night, we would still be captives to the darkness of sin with him alone we are able to live in the light of our salvation.

When the ancient peoples looked up to the heavens they saw God in his heaven, the angels below God, singing joyfully his praises, and us poor humans, here, struggling on the earth, and animals and all creation below us. *Now, look what happens with Jesus' birth*, God jumps over the Angels to become one of us! Jesus turns the long established order of the Universe around! All creation is renewed! The power of sin and death loses the tight grip it once held over us!

Now, look at the angels. Do they become jealous and rebel against God because they have lost their seemingly place of superiority over us? No! Quite the contrary. They do what they have always done; they come to announce the unexpected works of God's love and mercy, just like they did with Abraham and Sarah to announce the birth of Isaac, and with Zachariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist and with Mary to announce that she was to be the Mother of God. Here they are again, breaking through the barrier of heaven and earth and this time to announce that the barrier is gone! Their greatness is their

humility and they are full of joy to “jump over” the powerful, and bring the news to the poor shepherds.

Now, look at the shepherds. The closest thing to a shepherd today would be a homeless person. They were poor and dirty. If something went missing people often blamed the shepherds. The religious officials didn't like them because they rarely made it to the temple. Yet, in the eyes of God, they had dignity. They were the ones who provided the temple with the perfect, unblemished lamb of sacrifice, so the angels came to them to let them know of the birth of the Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world.

A few weeks after Pope Francis was elected as pope, he instructed priests that they must take on the smell of the sheep to remind us to be with the poor and the suffering. We receive the sweet-smelling chrism oil at baptism so that we may share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Jesus Christ, to take the sweet smell of the love of Christ to those who most need it. That is what it means to be humble, to allow God to make all things new. That is the message of Christmas.