

In the name of

Spectacular is Toby's favourite word - Toby is nearly 4
Awesome is one of the girls' favourites- they're 10 and 8
Both of these words came to mind many times as I watched "Eight Days - To the Moon and Back" on TV about ten days ago.

Where were you in July 1969 when Man landed on moon?

What were your feelings?

How much do you remember?

For me – very little I realised when I watched that programme. I did remember:

1) the names: Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin who both walked on the Moon but not Michael Collins who remained in the mothership Columbia.

2) that the distance from here to the Moon is nearly 239,000 miles.

I don't know whether you have seen any coverage on the moon landing in the last two weeks? Let me tell you something about the programme I saw.

"Eight Days - To the Moon and Back" was a brilliant, spectacular, awesome celebration of that first human mission to the moon. And most wonderfully there were many mystical, spiritual aspects to the presentation of programme.

For instance did you know that the first meal on the moon was the Eucharist: consecrated bread and wine, brought from his home church by Buzz Aldrin? And I was delighted (and rather surprised) that the commentary from the time was very reverent.

Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin had completed the final stage of their momentous journey in the Apollo 11 space capsule which was to make them the first human beings to walk on the Moon. 20 July was a Sunday in 1969. The lunar module had landed. *The Eagle has landed*. Before the two astronauts went down the steps to the Moon's surface, Aldrin took out the consecrated communion bread and wine that he had been given; he placed the containers on a small shelf and contacted ground control in Houston inviting all those listening there to keep a moment of silence and contemplate the wonder of what was happening. He read the words of Jesus in John 15:15 *I am the Vine, you are the branches; whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, for you can do nothing without me*. Then he poured the wine into a chalice and, very prayerfully, he ate the bread and drank the wine. And this was at very much the same time as the people would have been celebrating communion in his home church.

Almost all of us know Neil Armstrong's words: *One small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind*. He was of course the first man to set foot on the Moon, about 20 minutes earlier than Aldrin. But I wonder if you had remembered the John 15 verse quoted by Aldrin?

Now I want to remind you of some of the bible verses used in connection with this historic event, quoted by Christian writers, describing these first steps on the Moon.

Psalms 8:1,3-6

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;
⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God^l and crowned them with glory and honour.

⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

Psalm 139: 1, 7-10

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Also you may well recall that just seven months earlier on Christmas Eve 1968 these words were read to the world from Apollo 8 by the astronauts who were the first to orbit the moon:

Genesis 1:1-10

In the beginning when God created^[a] the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God^[b] swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so.

⁸ God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Back to Apollo 11. Angela Ashwin, a writer on spirituality, wrote last week in the Church Times about Buzz Aldrin taking communion very soon after the lunar landing. *Because the gravity on the Moon is significantly less than on Earth the wine swirled and curled its way gracefully up the sides of the cup. In other words as these men looked at our planet Earth suspended in space, like and exquisite jewel, the wine danced!*

This image of Communion wine moving mysteriously in the chalice has become, for me, a symbol of Christ's love always flowing towards us.

She published a book around this theme in 1997, entitled "The Wine Danced – Meditations on Eucharistic Themes" (published by Eagle)* and wrote in the epilogue: *The wine still dances. you can't keep Jesus down!*

Let me quote a couple of verses which occur later in Genesis 1:

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and **have dominion over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God gives us responsibility for his creation including care of nature eg animals, trees, how to prevent further climate change.

And now in 2019 Ashwin writes this, reminding us of the beauty of the earth and our responsibility for it.

And now years later it seems to me that Jesus is reaching to us all the more urgently and saying: Gaze at your planet Earth; look at it in all its fragile beauty, as it appeared to the astronauts from the Moon on that day. And look after it, for life's sake, for love's sake, for heaven's sake.

Amen.

*Now out of print.

Copies and more information available from: www.angelaashwin.com