

Christmas Eve

“What child is this who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.”

What Child is This? vs. 1, by William C. Dix

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.” Luke 2:6-20 (NIV)

Shouts of joy, hugs and excitement filled the halls of the space observatory in Arizona when the Rosetta space ship landed on the rugged surface of a comet this past November. Humans are enchanted by each new milestone in outer space exploration. I still remember the moment when astronaut Neal Armstrong walked off the space ship and placed the first human footprints on the dusty surface of the moon. Yet that initial moon landing pales next to the most exciting of all landings: when God visited our planet in the form of a little baby born in a humble manger in Bethlehem. Although the birth of the Son of God was imbued with humility, it was also accompanied with majesty. Angels filled the skies of Bethlehem with bright lights and celestial music as they

announced to shepherds the news of the arrival of Emanuel on Earth. Bright objects in space led some wise men from the east to the landing site of the new born king.

While the landing on the Rosetta and the landing on the moon entered the annals of history, the excitement abated soon after the landings. But the landing of Jesus continues to bring shouts of joy and celebration into the hearts of millions of believers around the world. That initial landing of the son of God on Earth so many centuries ago still offers just as much hope, forgiveness, peace and joy in the hearts of those who trust in the redeemer of the world who came to us first as a baby in a manger in Bethlehem.

Regrettably, most people around the world carry on with their lives as if the divine landing never took place. In the Middle East we see violence, injustice, wars, terrorism, hate and destruction that bring disaster and suffering into the lives of millions of people. Our task this Christmas is to remind those who are suffering and those who cause suffering that there is a way out. God landed on our planet and God is still with us eager to save, heal, restore life and bring back joy and peace.

Lord, you landed on our planet and you are still with us. Give us the eyes that are able to see you, the hearts that are willing to receive you and the feet that are willing to follow you. As we light the Christ candle, have mercy on those who live in darkness and show us how to share with them the good news of your great landing. Amen.

Rev. Alex Awad
United Methodist Missionary
In Palestine and Israel