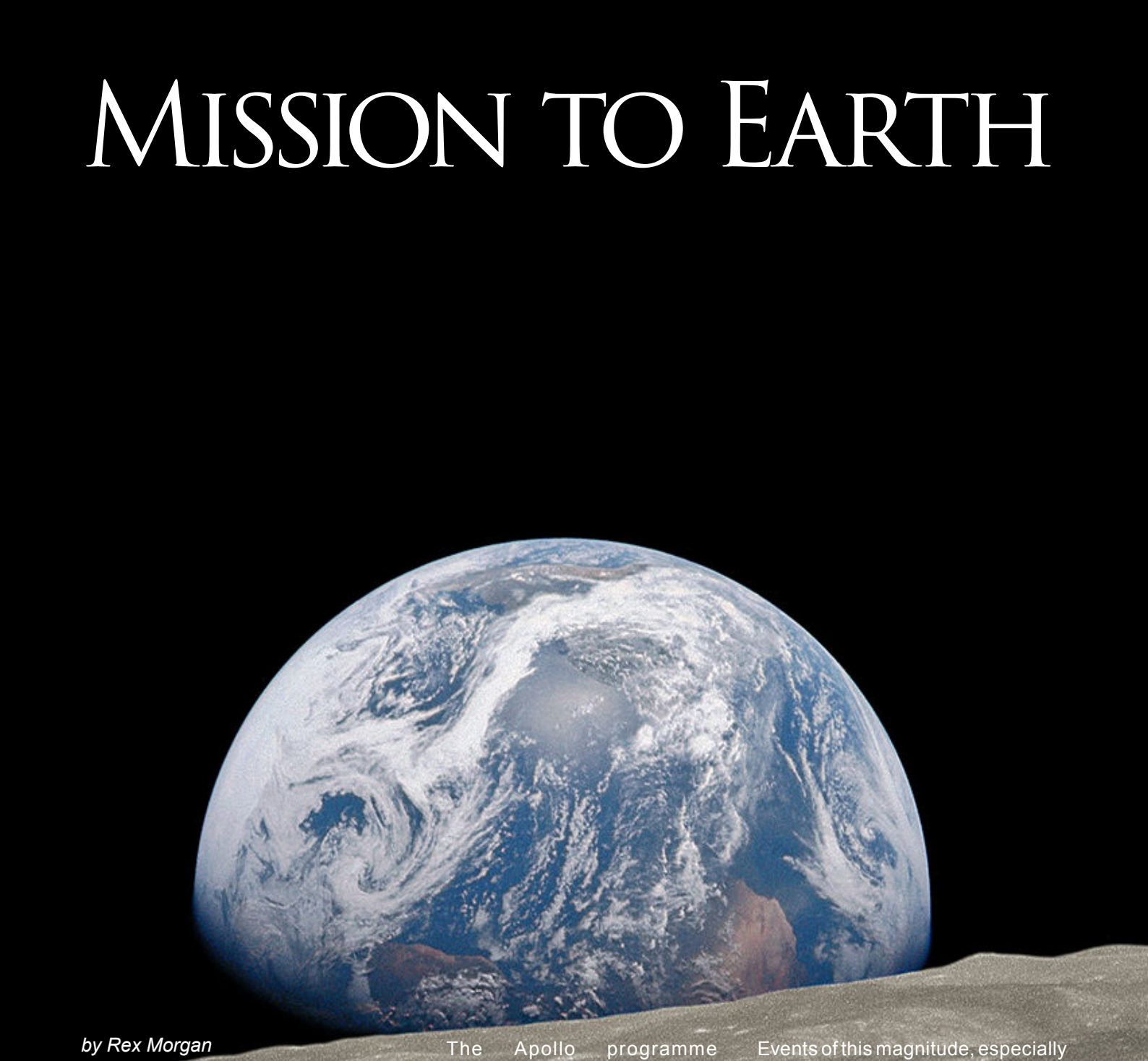
Mission to Earth



by Rex Morgan

This past July the world celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. What a milestone event this was in humanity's history!

'Apollo 11 is the only event in the 20th century that stands a chance of being widely remembered in the 30th century', pronounced US Vice President Mike Pence.

'It was the most complex and technically advanced feat in human history', noted Rocket Lab founder Peter Beck.

The Apollo programme employed 400 000 people at its peak, all of them working towards a common goal. This was teamwork, vision, collaboration and sheer tenacity on a new scale, and that's what inspired me most.

More inspiring still is what that common goal meant to everyone on Earth, not just those involved in the programme. It unified people in a way that almost nothing else has, and it continues to today. We feel like we went to the moon—like humanity went—not just a nation.[1]

Events of this magnitude, especially when outer space is involved, can draw our attention upward from our ordinary earth-bound perspective to focus on a grand, transcendent, cosmic scale.

It's hardly surprising that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin had only been on the lunar surface for a few minutes when Aldrin enthused: 'I'd like to take the opportunity to ask every person listening in to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own way'.

Then, on the silent surface of the moon, 400 000 kilometres from home, he read a verse from the

Bible and took communion, the bread and wine representing the body and blood of Jesus, sacrificed for humankind.

'In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup', observed Aldrin. 'I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought young pilots to the Sea of Tranquillity. It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements.'

Two years later, astronaut Jim Irwin, the first man to drive the moon buggy, when standing on the moon and looking back at the Earth, was able to close one eye, hold up his thumb and cover our entire planet. Every mountain, every valley, every city, every person, every ocean on the Earth was lost behind his thumb! He said it made him feel 'terrifyingly small'.

Doesn't that help put things into perspective?

In the context of the infinite universe around us, human beings are exceedingly puny and insignificant. Looking at it from his viewpoint, the Creator God states: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool'.[2]

As Apollo 11 headed back to Earth, Aldrin read aloud an Old Testament scripture on a worldwide broadcast: 'When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of him?'[3]

The three astronauts aboard the Apollo 8 mission in 1968 were moved to read from the biblical book of Genesis on live TV as they orbited the moon. William Anders began the most watched television broadcast of the time: 'We are now approaching lunar sunrise, and for all the people back on Earth, the crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send to you. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth…"' The astronauts proceeded to recite verbatim the first 10 verses of Genesis chapter 1.

Sadly, a group of atheists responded by suing the US government for allowing this proclamation. But the suit failed.

The Apollo 8 crew were the first ones to take a photo showing our beautiful blue and white planet rising above the bleak grey lunar surface. The photo, captioned 'Earthrise', gives us ample cause to wonder at the rare and precious jewel that is our home. Could this 'Goldilocks Zone'[4] planet situated exactly the right distance from the sun and moon, and perfectly positioned to possess multiple characteristics without which life would be impossible,[5] have possibly evolved this way without the guidance of a powerful God behind the scenes?

And what about the brilliant human mind power behind the technology that carries us to the moon and beyond? Could the ability to think, to reason, to imagine, to dream of travelling to the ends of the universe really have developed in a totally physical way? Or does it bear the stamp of something intangible, even spiritual? Is a thought simply a physical thing? If so, how can we have a thousand thoughts in our minds at the same time? Thoughts don't take up any space or any time. They seem to transcend the physical, extending into the spiritual realm.

The 'Earthrise' photo inspired David Bowie's classic song 'Space Oddity', reflecting on the brilliant technology that transports us into space, along with the incongruity of why we are doing so. What is the point of conquering outer space when we clearly don't yet have control over inner space—the place in our hearts and minds that gives rise to unwelcome traits like hatred, anger, lust, and greed? Again, these are feelings, emotions, and sensations that seem in essence to be spiritual rather than physical.

The Bible has a lot to say about the 'inner' or 'inward person' that forms the central individuality of each of us. God offers to strengthen and empower us internally by coming in a spiritual way and dwelling in our innermost being and personality.[6] This is referring to a space mission in the reverse direction, with God coming down to Earth and dwelling in us!

But the most dramatic and significant space mission of all was when God came from heaven and landed on our planet in the form of Jesus Christ. He loved the world so much that he sent Jesus to live on Earth and even go through death to forgive our sins and open to us the door to eternal life.[7] Now, in the form of the Holy Spirit, he continues to live within us.

The words from the Apollo 11 space mission that ripple throughout history are Neil Armstrong's famous 'One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind'. But God's landing on Earth 2000 years ago was an even greater leap for mankind!

NOTES

1 *The Weekend Herald,* July 20, 2019.

2 Isaiah 66:1.

3 Psalm 8:3–4.

4 The Goldilocks Zone refers to the habitable zone around a star where the temperature is just right—not too hot and not too cold—for liquid water to exist on a planet.

5 Astrophysicist Dr Hugh Ross has catalogued 38 cosmic characteristics that must have values falling within narrowly defined ranges for life of any kind to exist, in his book *The Creator and the Cosmos,* Navpress, 1993.

6 Ephesians 3:16, The Amplified Bible.

7 John 3:16.