



Flooding the night sky with its blazing light, Space Shuttle Discovery leaps toward the sky from Launch Pad 39B on mission STS-116 at 8:47:35 p.m. EST on Dec. 9, 2006. This is Discovery's 33rd mission and the first night launch since 2003.

Image credit: NASA/George Shelton

BORN IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, December 10, 2006

Mark 1: 1-8: The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the

baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Last evening we witnessed the spectacular launching of Discovery, lighting up the night sky around us. It happened while I was preparing the message concerning the Biblical nativity story about another bright light, the star of Bethlehem, marking the birth of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior.

Do you know what would have happened if it had been **Three Wise Women**, instead of three Wise Men, in the Bible? They would have **asked** directions, **arrived** on time, **helped** deliver the baby, **cleaned** the stable, **made** a casserole, and, **brought** practical gifts.

At the 250th anniversary of the founding of Harvard University, the students marched in a torchlight procession. The most memorable group was the Freshman Class, one month old, which emerged with a gigantic banner reading, "**Harvard University Has Been Waiting 250 Years for Us.**"

The New Testament presents Jesus Christ and exclaims that all the ages have been waiting for His arrival that all history has been preparing for His coming.

"The birth of Jesus is the sunrise of the Bible," says Dr. Henry Van Dyke. "Towards this point the aspirations of the prophets and the poems of the psalmists were directed, as the heads of flowers are turned toward the dawn. From this point, a new day began to flow very silently over the world – a day of faith and freedom, a day of hope and love. When we remember the high meaning that Jesus Christ brought into human life, we do not wonder that mankind has learned to reckon history from the birthday of Jesus, and to date all events by the years before or after the Nativity of Christ."

The Bible tells us that Christ came in the "fullness of time." (Galatians 4:4) **Religiously**, It was indeed the fullness of time! Before Judaism all nations were worshiping a multitude of gods. Judaism firmly established the principle of monotheism. **Culturally**, Alexander the Great had spread the Greek language over most of the civilized world three centuries earlier. Greek was then established as the international language by which the gospel could be communicated. **Governmentally**, the Romans furnished a system of law which made it possible for the gospel to grow in relative stability. **Logistically**, the system of Roman roads made travel by missionaries very possible.

By the time John cried out in the wilderness his prophetic, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," it was about **just the right conditions** for the birth of Jesus. We can

truly say, "In the fullness of time, Jesus Christ was born."

However, there is another dimension to this idea of preparing the way for his coming. You see, Christians still prepare for his coming. In Advent we give attention to a God who is revealed to us and our world in the present. **He comes!** He comes to the world through ordinary people like you and me ~ in ordinary ways. **Luther said, 'Let no one give up the faith that God wants to do a deed through Jesus Christ.'** He will do a deed through you and me who lives today. If we are available to him, he will `be born in us today.'" Almost 400 years ago Silesius, a German Monk, put it this way. **"Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born, if he's not born in you, your soul is still forlorn."**

That is what we are preparing for – his birth within us. Martin Luther said that we are to be Christ to our neighbors. That is the best way in the world to prepare for Christmas. **Be Christ to a neighbor.**

This afternoon, we will hold a Memorial Service for one of our very own who embodied and illustrated the vast possibilities of **noticing** and **engaging** strangers, visitors and lonely ones and **loving** them into our Church-family. Helen Noe will **remain** a shining example and precious memory of one of us who entered into the loneliness of strangers and **brought** them into the fold for Jesus Christ.



Enter into somebody's loneliness. There is a delightful story of the poor, little orphan boy standing amidst a long line of men and women queued up in the front of a movie theater. A friend passed and asked: **"Why are you standing here? You haven't got money to get in!"** "I'm not going to the movies," the boy replied. "Then why are you standing in line?" asked the friend. **"I'm standing in line, because I'm lonely, and I like people."** Why can't you and I enter someone's loneliness this Christmas?

In high school, my favorite author was the well-known Lebanese author ~ Kahlil Gibran. Gibran observed that you give but little when you give of your possessions – it is only when you give of yourself that you truly give. The best gift that you can give to anyone is the gift of yourself. Give yourself. **Enter into someone's loneliness.** Understand that the most prized gifts are not for sale at Wal-Mart or Sears! If all of us decide, right here right now that even before Christmas 2006 we are going to do something special, something different for those crossing our path, this Church will never be the same again, and Christmas will show its real meaning in our lives. We will stand on the promises rather than sit on the premises. Give something of yourself and enter into the isolation, climb over the walls that many unhappy people build around them. Your sincere interest, understanding and love can and will make a difference to others in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Let us enter into someone's loneliness during this Advent of expectation, hope, faith and love. Go ... enter ... this may become the best festive season we ever had! You give but little when you give of your possessions – it is only when you give of yourself that you truly give.

AMEN