

## **Moon landing... Earth landing**

*“Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is courage to continue that counts.” — Anon.*

In July this year we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first manned landing on the moon. The Apollo programme behind this achievement exemplifies the relevance of the quotation above. It had its successes, notably the Apollo 8 first journey round the moon a year earlier. Among its failures was the disastrous fire in a ground test on Apollo 1, which killed its three astronauts. Courage to continue was the key to its ultimate success.

The courage came in different forms: engineers striving against the clock to fulfil Kennedy’s promise to land on the moon before the end of the decade; NASA leaders having to make incredibly hard and dangerous decisions; the wives of the astronauts living with the risks their husbands were taking—fifty/fifty is the chance of your husband returning, Neil Armstrong’s wife was told; and above all the astronauts. There was no Plan B once they left earth orbit. Armstrong and Aldrin in their descent to the moon faced unknown situations almost by the minute, including the planned landing area turning out to be too rocky and Armstrong having to take control manually and stretch the fuel resources to the limit before landing.

Neil Armstrong’s brief transmission “Houston, Tranquility Base here, The Eagle has landed,” was heard by billions around the world and marked a high-water mark of human ingenuity and courage.

Just under 2,000 years earlier another landing took place. God came to Earth in the person of Jesus Christ. This was almost unnoticed at the time. Some shepherds heard a message from an angel and hurried to the stable. Wise men travelled hundreds of miles to see the new king which the special star indicated. King Herod was left panicking at their news that a rival king had been born.

We will never know how hard it must have been for Jesus to step down from His throne in heaven into the limitations of a human body, but certainly it took courage to persevere in His ministry against all the opposition and setbacks that He continually faced. His struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane shows what a supreme act of courage it took for Him to go willingly to His hideous death on the cross, and all for us as He paid the price for our sins.

Most of the Apollo astronauts have now died and we still have not returned to the moon. Many youngsters are barely aware of their achievements. Jesus Christ continues on the other hand to inspire and strengthen millions. The moon landings are history, but Jesus Christ is current, ready to help all who look to Him to walk confidently into the ups and downs of this New Year.

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