

Earth Rise

A recent TV documentary reminded us that 50 years ago this December, the crew of Apollo 8 made history by being the first human beings to leave earth orbit and visit another celestial body. They travelled to the moon, orbiting it but not landing. They were brave men. Even NASA's director reckoned their chances of returning safely as only 50%.

They broke all sorts of records in their journey, including being the first to view the moon from just seventy miles up and to see its far side. But, fascinating as that was, what took them by surprise as they came around was the sight of the Earth rising above the moon. The photograph, "Earth Rise", became one of the most iconic of the 20th century.

Frank Borman, the Commander, said afterwards that they had travelled all that way to learn more about the moon only to realise that what really mattered was this beautiful blue Earth, the only colour in a black sky.

Apollo 15 astronaut Jim Irwin was also affected by the view of the Earth from the moon. He said he could cover it with his thumb held in front of his eye and that it looked so fragile, like a delicate Christmas tree ball. "Only God can be keeping it from being crushed," he thought. It was such a spiritual experience that shortly afterwards he left NASA to become an evangelist.

Pictures of the Earth from space made Carl Sagan encourage humanity to look after this precious planet. "It's all we've got," he said. Similarly, these new views of the Earth have helped Christians to marvel even more that we have a God "who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

On Christmas Eve 1968, the Apollo 8 crew reminded us of the imperative need we have to appreciate and look after our world, and to be really thankful for a God who is deeply concerned for it. They finished their message with the words, "God bless all of you all on this good Earth."

Rev Tony Rogerson