



SAINT MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*B Christmas Eve, Luke 2
St. Mark's, Little Rock, 12-24-17
Danny Schieffler*

It was December 1972

Apollo 17 had just left the moon
And the sun was at their back.
In front of the spacecraft
was the earth
bathed in perfect sunlight.

And for the first time

humanity was able to see
the entire plane in all its beauty.
We had seen parts of the earth before
but never the big picture
--the huge ice cap of the South Pole
the green of the rainforest
the white swirls of the atmosphere
and the vast blue of the oceans.

Just seeing that photo
gave many a deeper appreciation
of the earth.

Earlier this month I was able to step back

and look at a different kind of big picture
the story of our salvation,
the story of God's dealings with humankind.

I had found a timeline of the Bible

And this one depicted many of the main characters in the Bible
and what happened to them.

And It too

in its own way.
was beautiful.
Because what I noticed

was that whenever
one of the people made a poor choice
or a mistake
or sinned
God did not respond like some might have expected
Instead God responded with help
Love, mercy and redemption.
And It seemed that everywhere on that timeline
whenever humanity messed up plan A
God always had a Plan B.
And that was a plan marked by grace and forgiveness.
At the beginning When Adam and Eve turned away from God
And even for a time hid from God,
God turned toward them
And in mercy
God sought them and found them
And later in Genesis whenever
humanity abandoned God
God would not abandon humanity
But instead raised up a new humanity
by calling Abraham and Sarah
to go to a new land.
And centuries later
when through disobedience
the people found themselves in exile
God found them still
And through prophets
delivered them
And brought them home.
Tonight is the climax of that story
The story of our redemption
The big picture
For as one person said
“On a night not unlike this one
two thousand years ago,
God took on human flesh
and was born in the person
of Jesus of Nazareth.
Indeed we are loved so completely
That God became one of us in the person of Jesus

Jesus knew our joys and our sorrows
our hopes and our fears
our life and our death
that we might know God more fully.

And what's makes this ancient night
All the more remarkable
is the kind of world to which God came
--a world of dictators, of caesars, of armies
of oppressive governments, of unjust taxes
a world tainted by greed and brokenness.

Michael Gerson writes

“ By any standard ,
this is an odd scenario for the entrance of divinity
an occupied country
a disputed parentage
and parents forced to flee as refugees.

But this form of arrival
does something important.
It dusts off and reclaims every aspect of human experience
reorients our sense of what is low and high
weak and powerful.
It is poverty that is given preference.

It is the possibility of transcendence
breaking in
on any common day.
It is the unexpected humility of God.
It is the big picture
-the view from space

But there is another picture tonight
that is just as important
at least in God's eyes
And that is the close up view
the view from earth
the view of your picture

And another story that belongs on that timeline of salvation
And that is your story
And mine.

For we all have a story
Indeed there is not person in this church tonight
who does not have one

Who has not in some way
been affected
by sin or brokenness
or disease or death
or the cruelty of economics
or the scourge of addiction.

We all have a story

And yet these stories too are on God's timeline.

which means

that the Good News of this night

Is good news for you

For wherever plan A

may have faltered in your life

or in the life of someone you love

or perhaps the lives of people you are concerned about

the poor, the lonely, the least or the lost

For us and for all people

God has plan

a plan of redemption, mercy, forgiveness and love.

For you see unto us

And unto all people

this night is born a Savior

who is Christ the Lord.

It's the view from space

it's the view for you

it's the view for all people

and it is beautiful!