

Luke 1:68-79 Tranquility Base Here
December 5, 2021

Gazing at the moon, one will notice several places that are darker than others. These spots are called, “mares,” interestingly, not having anything to do with female horses. Rather, they refer to “any of several mostly flat dark areas of considerable extent on the surface of the Moon or Mars.

The word is derived from the same Latin root from which we get the English word, “marine,” or, “maritime,” which has to do with oceans and seas. The most famous mare on the surface of the moon is the Mare Tranquillitatis, or, the Sea of Tranquility, right beneath the “Sea of Serenity.”

Tranquility and Serenity are synonymous with, “peace,” which is the Advent word for the day. Peace means, “calmness, the absence of conflict or strife.” It is often illustrated by storms, but as an antonym. Peace is the opposite of a storm.

It was there, of course, at the Sea of Tranquility, on July 20th, 1969, where the first “manned” moon landing occurred. It was not the only flat space, uninterrupted by hills or mountains or rocky places, on the Moon, but it was the place chosen for the landing. “Houston,” Neil Armstrong said, “Tranquility Base here, the Eagle has landed.”

The earth also has places that are mostly flat and can be as safe as it is possible to land a plane or drive a

car fast, like the Bonhomme Salt Flats or, with the help of bulldozers, any airport runway. But as it turns out, life on Earth is not always peaceful, is anything but peaceful, no matter the geography. Even when it is serene, it is the possibility of conflict, or just some kind of trouble from any of a variety of sources, including our own selfishness and greed, that can create the anxiety we so often associate with having a troubled soul, or spirit, that we mean when we say we are not at peace.

One of the attractions of the Christmas season is that for a moment or two, even if it is artificial, there is serenity, tranquility, peace. One can easily imagine a cold winter’s night when the work is done for awhile and there can be a fire in the fireplace, something on the stove keeping warm, chili or stew or soup perhaps; some family around without much of anything to do or place to go, candles lit; quiet conversation; stillness.

Even though everyone knows it won’t last for long maybe only for the evening, it comes to stand for the more permanent peace we long for, the existential peace that will not only settle the storm of the inner life, but nurture peaceful relations with neighbors near and far, a circumstance when one can say with some measure of accuracy, “all’s right with the world.” The peace that surpasses understanding.

The Song of Zechariah, read for us today as a part of the lighting of the second Advent candle, was occasioned by the birth of John the Baptist. As you

know if you are familiar with the story, Zechariah was struck mute because when the messenger came from heaven to proclaim in advance the birth of a son to him, he couldn't bring himself to believe it. Only when the child was born and he said the name, "John," was he able to speak again, and out came the song.

The song itself is oriented to the historical situation of the Jewish people at the time, having been conquered by the Romans, and longing for a restoration of their kingdom. Consequently, the idea expressed most forcefully in the song, at least at the beginning of it, is the notion of having been rescued from enemies, of enemies defeated.

We are no longer really able to see other human beings generally as our enemies. We have discovered that some enemies are closer to home, and some friends are farther away. If we continue seeing the world this way, fighting against ourselves, we will surely end by self-destruction. "The one who lives by the sword will die by the sword (or the tank or ballistic missile)." Jesus said so in the garden when they came to arrest him. And he was surely right.

It may seem a little out of touch with reality to dream of Earth as Tranquility Base here, to dream of the place of the humans as the headquarters of peace, but at Advent time and for this one Sunday out of the chaos of this one year, that is what we must do. I suppose that the reason why the flat spaces on the moon were named after Peace, Serenity and Tranquility, is because somewhere deep inside all of

us that dream resides and it was out of touch with reality to think of landing people on the moon to begin with. Part of what it means to accept Jesus by faith is to accept peace in the inner self.

Anyway, here is how the Song of Zechariah ends, "And you my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation, through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercies of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven;

to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death;
and to guide our feet in the path of peace,"

Of all things.

With all that is going on in our lives, the personal stuff that can be so overwhelming that it keeps us from being able even to think of what is on the news; and then there is what is on the news; it seems crucial to stay in touch with reality, with what the realistic possibilities are, both for ourselves and the world.

That is true enough, but if we are going to lose touch even for a moment with reality, let it not be in the nightmare of destruction and loss, the feeling of being surrounded by enemies; but rather in the blessed dream we call Peace, stillness, the absence of strife, and let us pray to be led in some miraculous way down its path.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)