

Christmas message from out of this world

The recent death of astronaut Neil Armstrong left a sad note in 2012, but brought back many fond memories of the late 1960s. For those of us who lived during this time, most agree it was an era of great discovery. While Armstrong is most famous for his 1969 first step on the moon, he made earlier headlines with his Dec. 24, 1968 Christmas greeting he read with his fellow rocketeers above the lunar orbit during the Apollo 8 mission.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day,' and the darkness he called 'night.' And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day. And God said, 'Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.' So God made the vault and separated the



Neil Roberts
The Sky's the Limit

water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault 'sky.' And there was evening, and there was morning — the second day. And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so. God called the dry ground 'land,' and the gathered waters he called 'seas.' And God saw that it was good. And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night; good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you, all of you on the good Earth!"

These men were truly transformed when they ventured into the cosmos. Has the universe made you think deeply about its origin? These astronauts had the world captivated and could have told them anything. Yet they specifically chose scripture to witness

to the whole world what they believed the origin of everything was. Christmas is an excellent time to reflect on that while celebrating the season. I personally urge you to take this message to heart.

Sky watch

The crescent moon will rise with Venus and Mercury on Tuesday, Dec. 11 at about 7 a.m. in the southeast. Venus will pull the thin crescent moon with Mercury at its side. Saturn already beat them up, and you'll see it just more than 10 degrees higher, a bit further east.

The Christmas Morning Planet Bonanza takes place just before sunrise on Dec. 25 in the southeast, and there will be Mercury on the horizon, Saturn south and Venus south-southeast (the bright one). You might need binoculars to see Mercury.

We will have two mild Geminid and Ursid Meteor Showers this month. Geminid peaks Thursday, Dec. 13 just after midnight on a moonless night and Ursid on Saturday, Dec. 22 after sundown when the Earth moves through the centre of the dust trail left behind by

the comet. For more on all meteor showers, check out the International Meteor Organization at www.imo.net/calendar/2013.

The winter solstice arrives on Thursday, Dec. 21. The shortest day of the occurs when the sun reaches its most southerly declination of -23.5 degrees and likewise the North Pole is tilted 23.5 degrees away from the sun. On the winter solstice, all places above a latitude of 66.5 degrees north are now in darkness, while locations below a latitude of 66.5 degrees south receive 24 hours of daylight.

Public events

Monthly Public Stargazing at the Trek Station takes place Friday, Dec. 14 starting at 7:30 p.m. It's the last stargazing session for the year, so check us out if you haven't already. A short indoor presentation will be followed by stargazing through the 11-inch Celestron Telescope. Treats and refreshments are provided free of charge and everyone is welcome. For more information, contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994 or visit www.vulcan-tourism.com.