

Birthdays are fun. Even our own and even when we say there's no need to make a fuss. We still recognize the anniversary of our birthday as a day of special importance no matter whether it is celebrated with cake and ice cream or whether it is celebrated deep in our hearts. The expected groan when we are older. The excitement of a child. Who do you want to come to your birthday party, we ask? Thought, a frown perhaps and then a big smile and the list of friends to be invited starts.

Or maybe it's not **yet** a birthday. We are expecting a birth. That new life is what gets us smiling and a bit anxious. Will the delivery go smoothly? We pray the mother and child will be safe and healthy. Waiting on a birth is a special type of excitement.

In the movie *The Star* the main character is a donkey named "Bo." As the movie starts, Bo is tied to a grist mill going round and round and round each day in order that the grain can be ground into flour to make bread. Bo is desperate to escape and dreams of carrying a king. Of being somebody. Bo does escape and the adventures begin. His companions are a sheep named Ruth who has lost her flock and a dove named Dave. The three work together as they face a variety of hazards and survive to see the baby Jesus in the manger. Bo then realizes that he had carried a king when Mary could walk no longer. His dream was fulfilled. Baby Jesus will carry a special place in his heart forever after.

Even the attack dogs are awed and when they say "we've always been bad. That's who we are" Bo replies: "But you don't have to be."

"But you don't have to be" is God's message to us today as we consider the birth of a baby named Jesus that we will call the Messiah, Emmanuel, The Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor and Savior.

In the miracle of a new birth, a new beginning, God reminds us that God is with us always, through thick and thin; through health and illness and in death. God, through the birth of Christ into this world, has told us again that we are beloved. We are worthy. We are loved.

Let us close with this prayer. It was shared by Astronaut Frank Borman from near the moon at Christmas, 1968, when he was commanding the Apollo 8 mission.

Give us, O God, the vision which can see Your love in the world in spite of human failure.

Give us the faith to trust Your goodness in spite of our ignorance and weakness.

Give us the knowledge that we may continue to pray with understanding hearts.

And show us what each one of us can do to set forward the coming of the day of universal peace. Amen.