

## Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Last week we completed our series on the Revelation of John of Patmos. You may recall that there is a connection between the Revelation and the creation story in Genesis. The Bible starts with Genesis and ends with Revelation.

Some of you may recall that John's visions of monsters were modelled on creation stories even older than those in Genesis. Many scholars have pointed out that the opening chapters of Genesis were written considerably later than many other biblical writings - probably about *four hundred years* later than the chapters that follow Genesis, and later than some of the psalms. Yet, whoever wrote the opening of Genesis probably *knew* the ancient dragon story, for Genesis says that even before God created the world, he began not with *nothing*, as Jewish and Christian theologians and philosophers later claimed, but with a formless void, chaos, wind, and "deep waters."

The creation story can be traced to ancient Babylonia, where priests inscribed it in cuneiform on clay tablets more than 2,500 years ago, a story probably told for hundreds, perhaps even thousands of years before that. The story tells how, "in the beginning" or even *before* the beginning of time, God fought against a great sea monster, the dragon of chaos, to create the world. The Babylonian version tells how the sun god Marduk fought his mother the great female dragon Tiamat, and her army of monsters, who dwelled in the ocean depths, the dangerous

power of chaos. When Tiamat opened her huge jaws to devour him, Marduk drove the four winds into her mouth, distending her body, then split her in two “like a shrimp” to create from her the earth and sky, and placed them under his own dominion.

Nearly three thousand years ago, Israel’s poets and storytellers familiar with such ancient stories, began to tell how Israel’s God, like Marduk, fought against a many-headed dragon, a sea monster whom they called by such names as Leviathan and Rahab. Some said that only after crushing and killing such monsters could God, like Marduk, establish the world and deliver it from the powers of chaos.

“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was *a formless void [or chaos] and darkness covered the surface of the deep waters*, while a wind from God swept over the waters.

Some people thought that this ancient story implied that God’s power is limited, since it suggests that God, like Marduk, had to contend with a supernatural antagonist *before* he could create the world. Israel’s storytellers, perhaps to reassure their hearers that God’s power is uncontested, morphed the sea monster Tiamat into *tehom*, the Hebrew term for the depths,” the primordial sea over which they say that “wind from God” moved “in the beginning.” Then, to show that no sea monsters lurked in those primordial waters, the Genesis account says that Israel’s God actually created the great sea monsters” - and did so only *after* he

created all the other sea creatures, on the *fifth* day of creation.

“When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was wild and a waste, utter darkness covered the deep, and the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light!’ And there was light.” This is a story not so much about creation-out-of-nothing, but about creation out of a world that is wild and a waste, formless and void.

While the Babylonian story pictures the great sea monster as *female*, the “mother of all monsters” and of all gods, Hebrew storytellers often speak of Leviathan as male. Others suggest that when God created the sea monsters on the fifth day of creation, he made them, like all other animals, in pairs: Leviathan, a female monster from the sea, and Behemoth, a male monster from the land - apparently a version of the story that John of Patmos adapted to tell, in his Revelation, how the dragon’s two allies emerged, first the “beast from the sea” and then the “beast from the land.”

Our creation story does not describe the world of ancient Near Eastern creation myths, where the gods have to defeat the sea or the sea dragon in order to create the earth. There is only one God in Genesis, and that God is the Creator of everything, including the sea monsters themselves. There is no chaos-monster that must be defeated. Nevertheless, there is “the deep,” the watery abyss. These primordial waters are the symbol

of chaos in many ancient Near Eastern stories, including some biblical accounts.

Now the “fathers” of the church, especially Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, read the Bible as if it were one continuous book written presumably by God. That is why they called the bible “the Word of God.” They had no understanding, as we have come to learn in the last two hundred years, of the relationship between various parts of the biblical story to history or to one another. The book of Genesis with which the Bible opens, is, as we now know, the composite of at least four Jewish sources written over a period of up to six hundred years. It is not a single story in which one event followed another in sequential order. For example, the story of creation in seven days that forms the bulk of the first chapter of Genesis comes from the pen or pens of the priestly writers, who expanded the Hebrew scriptures dramatically during the Babylonian exile of the late sixth century BCE, basing the seven-day story on the Babylonian myth of creation.

In this late-developing creation story, two things are of particular note. First, creation, in this depiction, was the act of God, and therefore all created things including human life, were perfect and complete. Second, God created the world *ex nihilo*, so that not only was creation good, but the material out of which creation was forged was also good. In the dramatic Genesis poem, God first looked out on all that God had made and pronounced it good. Then God completed the creation and declared

the Sabbath day to be a day of rest. The world had been made. Creation was complete, and God had called it good.

The verses in the second chapter of Genesis that continue where we left off today, tell the story of the creation of Adam and Eve, and the Garden of Eden - a story written probably in the middle years of the tenth century BCE, or some four hundred-plus years before the creation story or the first chapter of Genesis. It obviously did not follow on from the first chapter. Augustine, who assumed that Genesis 1 was chapter 1 in a book that contained the literal words of God, and that Genesis 2 was the second chapter in the same book, put the two chapters together and read the latter as a sequel. So almost inevitably the Christian scriptures from the fourth century on were interpreted against the background of this complete misunderstanding.

The primary trouble with this theory was that by the fourth century of the Common Era there were no Jews to speak of left in the Christian movement, and therefore the only readers and interpreters of the ancient Hebrew myths were Gentiles, who had no idea what these stories originally meant. The great majority of the world's Christians no longer understood or cared about the original Jewish world view, in which these Genesis stories had been created. They were Greek-speaking Gentiles, not Hebrew-speaking mythmakers. As Greeks, they saw the world not as a unity but as a duality, which greatly influenced the interpretation of the Garden of Eden story. Good was separate from evil. God was

separate from the world. Bodies and souls were antithetical or opposite concepts. Flesh and spirit were in dualistic war waged within each one of us. That became the matrix in which, what we now call “traditional Christianity”, came to be understood.

The problem facing the church today is that this fourth-century understanding of Christianity is dying before our eyes. It no longer translates into anything that we know or understand about life. It no longer seems relevant to our minds. Because we know no alternatives to the ancient pattern; however, we watch Christianity being split today into two mutually exclusive halves, neither of which can tolerate the other. One half insists on literalizing the ancient Hebrew stories, making them mean something they were never intended to mean, while the other half dismisses everything that its adherents see as “religious content” as so much nonsense. Sadly, neither side makes the effort to explore and understand these ancient myths and their place in the history of the world.

To our modern ears, this Genesis reading can sound fantastical. God sitting in some heavenly court making all things with an almost whimsical playfulness. “Let’s make light!” And it is so. “Let’s make land!” And it is so. “Let’s make animals.” And it was so.

Yet more than whimsy, we see that a certain order and relationship unveils over the days of creation. Light and darkness, land and sea,

vegetation and animals. Throughout this story we have the Creating God announcing, “it is good!” And by the end, after six days of making all things, this same God proclaims – perhaps with a giddy delight – “it is supremely good!”

The Creation is a story of relationship – of God the Creator to the creation, and of the various parts of creation to itself. Earth to vegetation, vegetation to animals, humanity to the animals and land it is called to care for. All of creation was made in love and goodness as an interconnected whole. We have a relationship and a responsibility to our fellow creations and to our Creator. As we read through the Bible, we’ll see that humanity, time and again, falls short of its relationships and responsibilities. By Genesis Chapter 3 we’re lying, and by Genesis Chapter 4 we’re murdering. But what happens later doesn’t negate how it all began – in goodness and in love.

Wherever we are, God is there, loving us, nurturing us, drawing us into the joy of God’s life and love. Unfortunately, there are many people in this world who really do not believe that. Traditional religion has tended to promote the idea that God is essentially estranged from us. God is “up there,” distant, remote, and unconcerned. We have to do something very, very special to get God’s attention, and even then, we may or may not succeed. That may work for some people. But that way of looking at God is not very satisfying. We don’t want a God who may come around for brief and fleeting encounters - any more than we want a spouse who

comes by for a visit once in a blue moon! We want a God who's always there for us, and that's the way the Bible depicts God for us.

The witness of Scripture is that God is with us all continuously. The Bible uses the language of the Spirit to express this conviction. It describes the Spirit of God as "hovering" or "resonating" over the world as it is being formed and ordered by God's creative Word. From the very beginning, God has been fully present to everyone and everything in this world. And God is still with us because the Spirit of God still "hovers" and "resonates" over and around and in us all.

The idea that God is constantly with us all through the Spirit's presence is one that pervades human spiritual and religious experience. We have used many names for this "presence" throughout the centuries—the ancient Chinese called it "Chi." Buddhists spoke of it as an emptiness that connects us all together! Whatever the word for it, religions of all kinds have by and large operated from the conviction that - there is a powerful spiritual life force that pervades and upholds and fills everything.

Many of these religious and spiritual traditions use breathing as a means of quieting the distractions, that compete for our attention and encountering the presence of something greater than ourselves. When the Hebrew Bible speaks of the Spirit of God hovering over all things at the beginning of creation, the word for "Spirit" is the same word as the



“breath” that is later breathed into human beings to bring them to life! In a very real sense, the various spiritual traditions in our world echo the biblical conviction that the Spirit hovers over all creation, resonating with all living beings, giving them breath, and filling them with the life-giving presence of God.

The biblical story of creation teaches us that from the very beginning, God has been right here. And God is still right here with us all. Even when we don't feel like God is anywhere near us, God is never any farther away from us than the very breath we fill our lungs with. All we have to do to become aware that God is right here with us, is to just breathe! Wherever we are, God is always here.

Goodness and love continue throughout the 50 chapters of Genesis and the 66 books of the Bible. God's goodness and love will constantly intervene in our brokenness, show us mercy and grace, and return to us again and again, even when we do our best to sever our relationship with God and fail in our holy responsibility to care for each other and for creation.

The Creation story tells us a story about God taking formlessness, emptiness, and darkness and breathing life into all the nothingness. On the surface, It's a story about God taking nothing and turning it into something. Formlessness to the formed. Emptiness to the filled. Darkness replaced with light. Nothing to something with purpose.

So why did this passage endure? The Creation story speaks to our beginnings and ultimately what's sacred, all life. It tells us about this moment in time where, as some have put it, Creation happened out of an overflow of God's love. It has endured because it tells a story about a God who has always been a God of the resurrection. God can always take nothing, formlessness, lifelessness, shapelessness and breathe meaning into it.

God is a God of goodness and love who created a world for relationship with Godself and with God's awesome creation. But most important, God is always there, over, with, and among us and his good creation.

**Amen.**

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - SEPTEMBER 7, 2025**

O Lord, our God, in the communion of your Church with one heart and one soul, we pray for your created world. You created the universe and all that lives and exists in it. The earth is filled with your creations. You make the grasses, plants, and fruit-bearing trees to grow, you feed the birds of the sky, the sea creatures and fishes of our oceans, rivers and lakes; you care for all your creatures on Earth. Out of your love you created human beings. Give us the strength to faithfully be good stewards of all we have been blessed with in your created world.

We pray for your created humanity. Grant that we may treat our fellow human beings with respect and dignity: that we may accept and welcome everyone as precious in the rich diversity of all people, that we may support and uphold the human dignity and inherent personal agency in our relationships with others. Give us a grateful and humble heart, that we may see ourselves as part of the great and rich whole of which you have created humanity. Grant us compassion, understanding, responsible thinking, and meaningful work according to your will and purposes.

We pray for your Church, that she may be a messenger of life and an agent of your love throughout the world. Instill courage and conviction in the hearts of those who follow you, that we may boldly proclaim hope to those who live in fear, encouragement to those who doubt, comfort to those who despair. Give your Church the strength of unity to proclaim your Gospel in word and deed to a world that is filled with people and situations that are creating greater anxiety, fear, conflict and crisis.

We pray for the sick, the destitute, the oppressed, the marginalized and the vulnerable. We pray for our fellow human beings and for all fellow creatures affected by war, conflict, genocide, and ecocide. Serve justice to those who cry out to you, and to those who have no ability to cry out. Humble our hearts to relate to our fellow creatures in distress as true brothers and sisters. Give us the courage to act on behalf of those who silently endure injustice and guide our steps in the way of reconciliation, and long-lasting peace.

We pray for all victims of war and violence. We pray for countries where the greed for oil and gas and valuable minerals are leading to war. We

hold in our hearts those areas where fossil fuel projects have destabilised communities and human rights abuses have occurred. We pray for areas where climate change has led to drought and conflict over water and resources. May we respond to the cry of the Earth and those living in poverty, and may peacemakers be willing to challenge the abuse of power and violence that threatens us all.

We pray that God sustain those who respond when wildfires roar. Keep them safe from harm and hold them in God's sheltering embrace. We pray for all the evacuees, those who have lost their homes, and those waiting to return to survey the devastation of their homes and communities. Give them strength, endurance and hope as they rebuild their lives and communities. We pray for those who have suffered flooding, typhoons, hurricanes, and losses of homes, schools, churches, hospitals, roads and infrastructures in communities in Japan, Thailand, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and North Carolina.

This week we learned about a village of 1,000 people in western Sudan that disappeared under a landslide, and about the earthquake in Afghanistan that killed 600 people and injured 1300 more. Be with the people as they grieve those who lost their lives.

God of deepest mercy, on the other side of the world, many people remember the horror of the concentration camps in Germany, in Poland, in Austria, in the Czech Republic, and a multitude of other countries during World War II. May we never forget them.

We remember those who lived in Palestine, who, through the memories of their ancestors, grieve the story of the Nakba, marking the beginning of the destruction of the Palestinian homeland, and the mass displacement in 1948 of the majority of the Palestinian population. May we remember them and their current suffering with bombings and mass starvation.

Compassionate God, we have grieved this week, along with the people of the community of Ascension Catholic Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, over the deaths of two of the students at the school. The senseless horror of shooting children still happens throughout the world, especially to the most innocent among us: in the U.S., Austria, Brazil, Russia and Sweden. We heard of the 67 children threatened with deportation by the US

administration by plane in the middle of the night last Sunday. How can we ensure the safety of all children, and preserve the good gifts of childhood? How can we ensure they have good memories and quiet their fears?

We hold in our prayers the congregation of Our Saviour's Lutheran in Prince George. We pray for: Pope Leo XIV; ELCIC Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Bishop Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Shane Parker, congregations and Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, Bishop Elect Imad Hadda and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, all serving full communion congregations, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, and Holy Trinity Lutheran in Port Angeles. We pray that you would bless the ministries of all deacons, pastors, lay leaders, musicians and volunteers. We pray for all seminarians completing studies to prepare for a vocation as rostered leaders in your church.

Holy God, God of love, We pray for family and friends who are suffering: those struggling physically or emotionally, those working to overcome mental illness; those facing challenges at home or at work; those grieving the death of a loved one. Today we lift up in prayer; Dawn Hill, and Josh, Pastor Ron Bjorgan and family. Give them strength to recuperate and surround them with your love and compassion.

Lord Jesus come and tell us what is ours to do. We are your body here on earth for a while. We are listening for your word for us – your purpose, your dream, your story told by the lives we live. Be present to your children who are not near us, except through our prayers. Though we may never meet them, make them part of our stories on this earth and in the life to come. And so, Lord, we come to you today. Meet us as you meet our kin, in the cries, in the tears, in the love we share. We will meet you there. In the loving name of Jesus Christ, we pray together the prayer you taught us

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**Our Father ..**