

# OpenTheo

## January 1st: Genesis 1 & John 1:1-28

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Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Genesis chapter 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

And God 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 an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse, and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so.

And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening, and there was morning, the second day. And God said, let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into

one place, and let the dry land appear.

And it was so. God called the dry land earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called seas. And God saw that it was good.

And God said, let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind on the earth. And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the third day. And God said, let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.

And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the fourth day. And God said, let the water swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.

So God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves with which the waters swarm, each according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.

And there was evening, and there was morning, the fifth day. And God said, let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds, livestock and creeping things, and beasts of the earth according to their kinds. And it was so.

And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the

heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. And God said, behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. And God saw everything that he has made.

And behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. When reading Genesis chapter one, many have argued that the passage is poetry.

The implication being, to their minds, that it is not to be taken so seriously as an account of concrete reality. And in many ways, this is a modern prejudice. The suggestion is that poetry and literature can't reveal deep truths about the world as it really is.

And that the truest form of expression is that provided by bare scientific prose. But yet by using a poetic form of expression, the scripture gives us a sense of a world that is alive with connections, analogies, interactions between levels of reality that we would not see merely within a scientific form of expression. So the form of literature that we have here, which isn't exactly poetry, but a more elevated literary form, is not accidental.

It is something that's appropriate to the world that God has created. And the form of this passage should invite us to reflect upon the reality of the world that God has created. There is an original problem with the world in that it is formless and void.

It's without shape and without structure and without order, and it's also empty. And so those two problems need to be addressed on the one hand by forming, and on the other hand by filling. The first addresses the formlessness, the second addresses the emptiness.

And in the days that follow, there are three days of forming and three days of filling, and each corresponds to the other. So we have the creation of the light on the first day. On the fourth day that corresponds to that, the lights fill the heavens.

The sun, the moon, and the stars are placed in the heavens. On the second day, we have the formation of the firmament, heaven above and earth beneath. And on the fifth day, we have the birds that fly across the face of the firmament and the fish that fill the seas.

On the third day, we have the creation of the earth as distinct from the seas. And then on the sixth day, we have the earth bringing forth living creatures that will fill that realm. And so the first three days involve, among other things, the creation of great binaries of day and night, of heaven above and earth beneath, and of the sea and the earth.

And there's a sort of liturgy that God follows in the course of his action. It's important to

consider the aspect of time as we're going through this passage. It begins with God striking up a beat, as it were.

Evening, morning, evening, morning. The division between day and night is not a division primarily between object of light in the heavens and darkness around it. It's a division in time between the state of the light and the state of the darkness between day and night.

And that temporal pattern provides the pattern for what follows. Day by day follows this day-night pattern. And the liturgy that God follows is he speaks.

The creation comes into being, or he acts to bring it into being. Then God names his creation. God sees and he judges it.

And then there's evening and then there's morning, that particular day. And so God is following a work week. Not every single day has all these elements contained, but more generally, these are the typical patterns that are playing out.

And note also the different modes of creation. God relates to his world in different ways. He relates to the world as the transcendent creator, who by the power of his word, brings creation into existence from nothing.

He also exists as the one who sustains things in their imminent order. He holds things together in structure and in their shape, in their form. But he's also the one who gives life and breath to all things.

And so in each of these modes of creation, they each represented at some point and in different overlapping ways within Genesis chapter one. On the later days of creation, we see God delegating the rule of his creation. So God has begun by acting himself to order the world.

And now increasingly he passes over the reins. God doesn't fill the seas. He gives the fish the power to reproduce themselves so that they will fill the seas.

He delegates the rule of the heavens to the sun and the moon and the stars. And he delegates the rule on the earth to human beings. Man is placed at the center of the stage of creation, but this creation does not merely exist for our sake as humanity.

The image of God is the way in which we represent God in our dominion. This shouldn't be narrowly focused on individuals. It should be perhaps read alongside the chapter that follows and should be related to such things as the delegation of the rule of the day and the night to the sun, moon and stars.

It's a dominion that represents the rule of heaven as it's symbolized on earth. As you look through this chapter, here are a few questions to think about for the rest of the day. Why did God create the animals? God could have created a world without animals just

with food supplies, for instance, or with other machines perhaps to help man work and labor.

Why did God create the animals? What could be learnt from reflecting upon the poetic form of the description of God's creation of humankind in his image? That description is one that has a more elevated form of poetry than that around it. When God says, let us make man in his image, another question to ask is, who might the us be? And in reflecting upon that, how might that help us to read the chapters that follow? John 1, verses 1 to 28. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "he who comes after me ranks before me "because he was before me.' For from his fullness, we have all received. Grace upon grace.

For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the father's side.

He has made him known. And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who are you? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ.

And they asked him, what then? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the prophet? And he answered, no. So they said to him, who are you? We need to give an answer.

We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? He said, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, then why are you baptizing if you are neither the Christ nor Elijah nor the prophet? John answered them, I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know. Even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.

These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. Each of the gospels, but particularly Matthew and John recall Genesis at their very outset. But whereas Matthew particularly recalls the latest story of Abraham's family, John brings us back much further to the very beginning of creation itself.

And he retells the event of creation itself as one in which the word, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ is active. The one who comes in the incarnation is one who has been active in creation from the very beginning. And this is a theme that appears at a number of points in John.

We have met this person already. He is one that has already part of the story. And now he is entering into the story in a new way.

Jesus is presented as the source of light, like that what was created on the very first day of creation. In this chapter and in the chapter that follows, John is also following the patterns of the days of the creation. He's drawing our mind back to the original story of creation.

And he's retelling it in terms of a new series of events that are playing out. Jesus is initiating a new creation. And John is introduced to us as the witness, John the Baptist.

Note that the book of Revelation also starts with a John the witness. John isn't the Baptist in John, but he's the witness. And bearing witness will prove to be a very important theme throughout the book of John.

As we look through it, the witness born by Christ, the witness born by the spirit, the witness born by people like John the Baptist. And in the context that we see here, one of the things that is brought out most powerfully is the contrast and the connection between the story of Moses and the law and the story of Jesus, between the grace that comes with the Mosaic order and the greater grace, the grace in the place of grace that comes with Jesus Christ. If we look back in the Old Testament, in Exodus chapter 33, we see an encounter between Moses and God where Moses asked to see God's glory.

And in this event, he sees something of God's glory, but yet there's a deeper and greater revelation of God's glory in Jesus Christ, who is the word made flesh. In Exodus chapter 33, God tells Moses that you cannot see my face and live. And in John chapter one, we see that statement alluded to.

No one has seen God at any time, but yet here is one who has seen God. This is one who is God himself. This is one who is in the bosom of the father.

Whereas Moses saw the back of God on Mount Sinai. Here is one who sees the face of God, one who is in direct relationship with the father, one who is towards the father. Moses has a brief encounter with the back of God.

Jesus Christ is the one who relates to the father face to face. And Jesus is described as full of grace and truth. And in Exodus chapter 34, verse six, where God declares his name to Moses, he declares that he abounds in love and faithfulness.

And those two expressions are similar for a reason. One of the things that we're seeing within the book of John and as we go through it, which will become clearer, is that Jesus Christ is a character that we have met in the Old Testament. In these great theophanies, as Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up the train of his robe filling the temple, that is Jesus Christ that he has seen.

Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad, as Christ says later on in chapter eight. Jesus is the one that Moses saw on the Mount. He saw the back, but in Jesus, we can see the face.

We can see the one who it is who has come to us. The one who has been active from the very beginning of creation. He's the one through whom the world was made.

And now he has come into the world and the world does not receive him. But yet to as many as receive him, he gives the right to be called children of God. Some questions that you can think about this chapter include things like Christ being introduced to us as the one whose life gives light.

What are some of the ways in which the metaphor of light helps us to understand Christ's ministry? It is in this chapter, the key introductory metaphor that frames Christ's ministry. What is it about light that helps us to understand what Christ is doing and who he is? Also, what are some of the Old Testament concepts that the concept of the word or the logos in Greek that that might be drawing upon? Is this related to concepts of the law or to wisdom? And in which particular ways might it do that? How might this be mediated by other traditions, by Greek philosophy, by the works of Philo, for instance, or by things such as the intertestamental wisdom literature? These are questions that people have wrestled with a lot. And they're worth thinking about.

What are some of the threads that are being picked up here by John? In what framework does he want us to understand what Jesus is doing and who he is as the word?