

## The Baptism of Christ

**Collect:** Heavenly Father, at the Jordan you revealed Jesus as your Son: may we recognize him as our Lord and know ourselves to be your beloved children; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

**Genesis 1.1–5:** In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

### **Psalm 29:**

<sup>1</sup> Ascribe to the Lord, you powers of heaven : ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

<sup>2</sup> Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name : worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

<sup>3</sup> The voice of the Lord is upon the waters : the God of glory thunders; the Lord is upon the mighty waters.

<sup>4</sup> The voice of the Lord is mighty in operation : the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord sits enthroned above the water flood : the Lord sits enthroned as king, for evermore.

<sup>10</sup> The Lord shall give strength to his people : the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

**Gospel Reading: Mark 1.4–11:** John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

### **Reflection:**

Today I would like to focus on the Old Testament reading. In the beginning ... When God created Heaven and Earth.

Heavens and earth – this text loves pairs of words. This phrase would seem to mean 'everything' rather than two distinct things Heaven and Earth. This reveals the poetic nature of the writing here. There are lots of poetic indicators in this bible reading. As someone who has Dyslexia, poetry has sometimes been a struggle for me. Unpicking double or triple meanings is hard at Thebes of times. We get the 'formless and void' which in English is pretty boring but in Hebrew becomes a rhyming pair. Tohu Wa Bohu (pronounced Tohu Va Vohu). This could be translated as more of a total Chaos, a mess. The land and Sea were separated so does that mean that before this the land and sea were mixed into some sort of solid and liquid mixture or a super state of matter? Or is this just a way of describing the creation of land and sea in a poetic way.

Either way, the Creation story starts. This has been said to be a battle ground between Science and religion for many years. But it isn't really. It is two ways of describing the same thing. Science would currently suggest that there was nothing and then the big bang. There was a time before atoms were created when everything in the universe was not anything but rather chaos. It is hard to see how these first words of the bible are different from what Steven Hawking explains in his book a brief history of time.

I could bore you all for hours talking about the scientific and theological views of the creation. But I won't – well not today, anyway. But I find it absolutely astonishing that when these first words of the Bible were written down – probably about 6th Century BCE – there is so much similarity about the start of the universe with what we understand now and what the scientific evidence points towards. (By Scientific evidence I mean Cosmic background radiation, and red shift – Ask me about it, sometime, if you want a lesson on evidence for the big bang.)

We all might be aware that there are two accounts of the creation in the first book of the bible. This one and then it is shortly followed by the Garden of Eden narrative. If we look at the way they have been written it is clear that they were written in different styles and probably at different times. Most interesting are the different reasons the accounts have been created. You can tell the different bits from each other if you look at the style or genre, but as I am not very good at that, I simply look for the word used for God.

In this section The Creator is simply called God. We find that God is present and active in the account. God said.... God Created.... This is likely to have come from a source that is referred to as the Priestly source. There is a formal nature to it and the priestly account focuses on the law, shrines, rituals and genealogy.

Further on is the second account of creation that refers to God as YHWH – Hebrew didn't have any vowels. This is usually translated into The Lord God. The Lord God is described here as causing things to come out of the earth. The Lord God formed Man from the earth. Caused trees of every kind to grow. God essentially is the life force that breathes into the lifeless earth.

So how do we cope with this challenge of difference in the first book of the Bible, and this is one that the 'fundamentalist atheists' love to challenge Christians. "How can you believe in the Bible when it contradicts itself and doesn't mention evolution or dinosaurs?" The only answer I have is to place it in context. This was a time when things were not generally written down. There are clearly at least two different sources that present the account in different ways. Both may well have started with an oral tradition of sitting around a campfire and telling stories of how "it" all began. The Second source, The YHWHist source, tells a story of how life was brought into being and linked it with people's understanding of how things grew into life from the earth. The other I have mentioned is called the Priestly source for a reason. Is this an official account that the religious leaders agreed upon to explain the creation?

What caused the different people to write down the accounts of creation. What was their motivation. When the Bible was created from all the books, scrolls and scriptures, why were both accounts put in together? We really don't know.

What I do know is that the creation story written in the first chapter in the first book of the Bible strikes a remarkable similarity with the current scientific theory written thousands of years later. Secondly, none of us can really comprehend the work of God and even if we could understand we would simply not have the language to explain it to others.

It doesn't matter how you hear the creation accounts, how you interpret them and how you perceive God. Do you experience God as the Priestly God who says and does things, the YHWHist God who brings things into life from the earth, or any other biblical expression of God for that matter. The important thing is to build a relationship with God that is yours. In our gospel reading we hear of Jesus being baptised by John and God tearing open the heavens and saying: 'You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased' This shows us an example of the relationship that Humans can have with God. I hope that when we all seek a message from God you hear "with you I am well pleased."