

Genesis 1; John 1.1-18

REFLECTIONS FOR CREATION-TIDE

Father Lord of all creation;

Before the world began;

Alleluia sing to Jesus;

All creatures of our God and King.

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to Chris; explain background; Sandy; poetry; God, Humanity & Cosmos
Creation-tide—two amazing readings, first chapters of OT & NT—in 10-12 mins?!
Both designed to answer some of our basic questions:

- Why is there anything rather than nothing?
- Who or what made the universe? How do its parts relate to each other?
- What about life on this planet – vegetation, fish, animals, humans?
- Why are we in two genders? How are we supposed to view or relate to each other, the rest of the world, and to God, and what are we to do?
- And why does it go wrong, why is it a mess, pain and suffering?

All in 10-12 mins?! Refer you to Chris' writings, esp *Groaning, Glory*, poems.
I am a biblical scholar, just going to comment on those two amazing readings,
to give some reflections on the biblical text, rather than a traditional sermon.

1 OT READING

Background: Genesis as part of Pentateuch – 5 Books of Moses. Complex history of how it was all put together. Scholarly consensus is that the oldest layer was written around 950BC, not long after the period of David and Solomon, and in Greek terms, the fall of Troy. Like the Homeric poems, the first drafts of the stories of the patriarchs may well contain older oral material that goes back several centuries before the first attempts at writing, but, also like the Homeric poems, it all went through various revisions before reaching something like its final form around 500BC, the same time as Homer and Classical Athens. But it is different from other ancient creation legends, most about sex and violence of the gods producing the world! It even reflects what modern scientists think is the order in which things came into being. But it is

not what we would call history (any more than the Iliad and Odyssey) and it is certainly not a scientific text book about how the universe was created – but it is magnificent literature. *Restaurant at the End of the Universe* comparison. So I take Genesis as ‘literally true’, not scientifically or historically true, but true to its literary form, a great work of theological insight and poetry designed to provide some answers to the greatest questions of human existence. Look at its simple poetic form, arranged around seven days (not meant to be 24 hours, given that the sun and moon are not created until the fourth day!).

And so it begins simply, ‘In the beginning’ בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים, or Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς the heavens and the earth. Explain Greek LXX = NT’s Bible

Gen. 1:1 In the beginning when God created¹ the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void (תְּהוֹ וְתוֹה) and darkness covered the face of the deep (σκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου), while a wind (רוּחַ – also breath and spirit) from God¹ swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. (compare modern Big Bang – massive explosion of light) ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Refrain – poem)

6 And God said, “Let there be a dome (רָקִיעַ סτερέωμα firmness, firmament, = solid land, with Sky above and water above and below – air and water, the necessity of life) in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸ God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. Still following the basic order that we know from science, the formation of the solid globe of the earth, seas and dry land forming, with vegetation and fruits being the first to appear

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years,¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so.¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars.¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth,¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. Interesting that we only get sun and moon and stars at this point – but again, unlike other ancient myths who thought that these heavenly bodies **were** the gods, whereas here they are just Gods lights in the sky!

20 And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.”²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good.²² God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. Then life begins ‘in the waters’ as the seas bring forth living creatures in the seas, the land and the air

24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so.²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Note the shift from wild animals to domesticated beasts to help and feed humankind

26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind^a in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,^b and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind^a in his image, (אָדָם / ἄνθρωπον genderless) in the image of God he created them;^b (צֵלֶם וְעִקּוֹן tzelem κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ - according to the Icon of God, representation, image, computer) male and female he created them. (זָכָר וּנְקִיבָה , zakhar ve negevah, ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ both genders needed to make humankind in God's image)

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion (כָּבַשׁ וְרָדָה kavash ve radah ,

κατακυριεύσατε αὐτῆς καὶ ἄρχετε dominion, not domination, act as ‘lord’ ‘ruling’ over the world like God’s agent, not destroying it, but like farmer ‘tilling and keeping’ it as in Gen 2) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, 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.³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good (τὴν βίον *tov meodh*, poetic assonance again, καλὰ λίαν, refrain changes, only becomes ‘very’ good after creation of human beings to look after it – cp previous refrains about being ‘good’). And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Gen. 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude.² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

So it goes on in Genesis 2 to a more detailed account of the creation of the man and the woman (Adam – human, and Evah – life, from his side) and in Genesis 3 to an explanation about why things go wrong and why the man blames the woman (whom GOD gave him anyway!), and the woman blames the snake in the grass . . .

Do you see what I mean about it being an extraordinarily beautiful and poetic account designed to help us with all our basic questions about existence and meaning, rather than a simplistic physics text book.

Hugely influential and absolutely basic piece of human literature – even if inspired by God the Holy Spirit.

2 NT READING One of the most important later works it influenced is the beginning of John’s gospel, which echoes it in so many ways – look at briefly. It not only repeats and reflects Gen 1 and its story of the creation of everything, but it also shows how God takes responsibility for what he had created, including the mess, and the pain and suffering by coming to live among his created beings, pitching tent/tabernacle on the human journey.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life,^a and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.^a

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own,^a and his own people did not accept him. (Programmatic) ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,^a full of grace and truth. ¹⁵

John 1:1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. ² οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. ³ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν ⁴ ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ (= EVE) ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. ⁵ καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

6 Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης. ⁷ οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ. ⁸ οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.

9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. ¹⁰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. ¹¹ εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. ¹² ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, ¹³ οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

(John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’”)

¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

¹⁷ The law (= Veuch) indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,^a (only ‘God’) who is close to the Father’s heart,^b who has made him known.

¹⁵ Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων· οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον· ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν. ¹⁶ ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος· ¹⁷ ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ

Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο.

¹⁸ Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς Θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

Exegesis – leading out, explaining or interpreting God.

John 1 not only repeats and reflects Gen 1 and its story of the creation of everything, but it also shows how God takes responsibility for what he had created, including the mess, and the pain and suffering, by entering into it, coming to live among his created beings, pitching tent/tabernacle on the human journey.

CONCLUSION

- Why is there anything rather than nothing?
- Who or what made the universe? How do its parts relate to each other?

God caused everything to come into being – and it is all good

- What about life on this planet – vegetation, fish, animals, humans?

It is all interlinked – and humans make it ‘very good’

- Why are we in two genders? How are we supposed to view or relate to the rest of the world, and each other, and God, and what are we to do?

Human beings in an intermediate position between creation and God, between physical and spiritual, co-creators with God, and need each other (man and woman) to reflect the ‘imago Dei’, all for the purposes of dominion, **not** domination = to care for the universe, for each other, for creatures, for planet,

- And why does it go wrong, why is it a mess, pain and suffering

Gen 1-3 reveals the Massive effect of human beings, sin and selfishness, doing opposite of what God tells us – but not a full or perfect answer.

NT/Jn 1 repeats it but goes further, and tells us how the Creator takes some responsibility by coming to live among us as a human being, to share our suffering existence, to show us his love and a better way, and that he took upon himself the worst of human behaviour, and absorbed it into himself, rather than retaliate, and we are called to do the same, be like him.

As for deeper answers to these questions – ask Chris! *Doxology*

Collect

Almighty God, you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

CONFESSION *Prayers of Penitence*

Let us confess our greed and repent of the ways
in which we have damaged God's good creation:

We confess to you our lack of care for the world you have given us.
Lord have mercy.

All Lord have mercy.

We confess to you our selfishness in not sharing the earth's bounty fairly.
Christ have mercy.

All Christ have mercy.

We confess to you our failure to protect the environment.
Lord have mercy.

All Lord have mercy.

May the Father of all mercies cleanse you from your sins,
and restore you in his image to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **All Amen.**

Prayer after Communion *Silence is kept.*

Creator God,
send your Holy Spirit to renew this living world,
that the whole creation,
in its groaning and striving,
may know your loving purpose
and come to reflect your glory;
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**