

**John 1:1-14**

**Genesis 1:1 - 2:3**

**July 14, 2019**

*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

**ALL IN GOD'S TIME  
IN THE BEGINNING**

***Let us pray: Almighty God, your Spirit swept over the waters of creation. May your Spirit sweep over us now, creating something new. You spoke your Word and there was light. Lead us to the Light of Life in Jesus Christ. Amen.***

In a speech at the Rice University football stadium on September 12, 1962, President John Kennedy laid out this challenge: “We choose to go to the Moon! We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win, and the others, too.”<sup>1</sup>

Fifty years ago next Saturday, President Kennedy’s challenge was met. U.S. astronauts on Apollo 11 were the first human beings to set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969, and Neil Armstrong uttered those famous words, “That’s one small step for man . . . one giant leap for mankind.” This month we celebrate the remarkable achievement, and rightly so.

However, a mere seven months earlier, three other U.S. astronauts — Frank Borman, Bill Anders, and Jim Lovell made history as the crew of Apollo 8 were the first human beings to see the far side of the moon as they orbited the moon ten times on Christmas Eve. The Apollo 8 mission in December 1968 was crucial to the success of the moon landing in July 1969.

The astronauts sent a live TV transmission from Apollo 8 to Earth. Commander Borman said, “We were told that on Christmas Eve we would have the largest audience that had ever listened to a human voice. And the only instructions that we got from NASA was to do something appropriate.”<sup>2</sup>

On Christmas Eve 1968, from a distance of 238,900 miles, astronaut William Anders said, “We are now approaching lunar sunrise, and for all the people back on Earth, the crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send to you.” Then he and his fellow crew members, Frank Borman and James Lovell read the first ten verses of Genesis 1, “In the beginning . . .” They ended their broadcast with these words: “And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas — and God bless all of you, all of you on the good Earth.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps you’ve seen the iconic photograph taken by William Anders on December 24, 1968 of the blue and green Earth suspended in space.

On December 11, 2018, NASA and the Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum commemorated the Apollo 8 mission with a service at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal

Church remembered the astronauts' reading from Genesis 1 and said, "I wonder if God kind of gave a cosmic smile, and He said, 'Now y'all see what I see.' God whispered in their ears, 'Behold the world, the world of which you are a part. Look at its symmetry. Look at its beauty. Look at its wonder. Behold your world.'"<sup>4</sup>

When you look at the picture of planet Earth or stand out under a starry sky at night or consider the mind-boggling numbers of years and miles and sizes of the galaxies, it's no wonder the psalmist would write, "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Psalm 8: 1, 3)

"In the beginning . . ." How else would you begin telling the story of the creation of everything there is? And yet, we may hear those words — "In the beginning . . ." — and think of creation as something that happened only a very long time ago. But that kind of thinking misunderstands creation and severely limits God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

In his book, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, Frederick Buechner writes, "When God created the Creation, he made something where before there had been nothing, and as the author of the Book of Job puts it, 'the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy (Job 38.7) at the sheer and shimmering novelty of the thing.' 'New every morning is the love/Our wakening and uprising prove,' says the hymn. Using the same old materials of earth, air, fire, and water, every twenty-four hours God creates something new out of them. If you think you're seeing the same show all over again seven times a week, you're crazy. Every morning you wake up to something that in all eternity never was before and never will be again. And the you that wakes up was never the same before and will never be the same again."<sup>5</sup>

We sang the same sentiments in our opening hymn today, "Morning Has Broken," which was originally called "Thanks for the Day." The song helps us welcome each new day as if it were the "first new day."

\* Morning has broken like the **first** morning.

\* Blackbird has spoken like the **first** bird.

\* Praise for them springing fresh from **the Word!** [And God said . . . And God said . . . And God said . . . And it was good. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.]

\* Sweet the rain's new fall . . . like the **first** dewfall on the **first** grass.

\* Mine is the morning, born of the one light **Eden** saw play!

\* God's **re-creation** of the new day!

In his commentary on the creation story in Genesis 1, Walter Brueggemann writes about the importance of "In the beginning . . ." way back when and for our lives right here and now. Listen to how he describes the hope we have "in God's time" because of the new thing God has done and is always doing as our Creator and Sustainer: "The good news found here is that there are beginnings. There are not simply repetitions, moving pieces around, or copying. There are beginnings, and they are wrought

by the Speech of God which evokes among us a new world. The church has discovered this good news in Jesus of Nazareth. Through him, God's powerful Speech is still being spoken. God's powerful wind is still blowing."<sup>6</sup>

In one of our Confirmation classes, as we were talking about the meaning of the Apostles' Creed, I asked the junior highs, "With everything there is to say and know about God, why do you suppose the Apostles' Creed begins with and says only, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth'?" One of them looked at me and said, "Well, that pretty much says it all!"

And it does! When we say "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," we're not just saying "I believe in some higher power out there somewhere that somehow brought creation into being." On the contrary, when we say "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," we are saying, "I believe in God who created everything there is, in God's time, according to God's purpose. And, in addition to that, I believe the same God continues to sustain the creation, always bringing new things into being. And, as if that were not enough, I believe the same God — when the time was right — sent his Word to become one of us so we might know God as a God of love who is always making all things new."

Many scholars believe the Genesis creation account was written when God's people were languishing in exile in Babylon. Think about that! Jerusalem had been destroyed. The Temple had been torn down and burned. The Jews had been carted off to a foreign land. Psalm 137 expresses their despair and deep grief: "By the rivers of Babylon — there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" How, indeed? But not only did God's people sing the Lord's song in a foreign land, they said, "In the beginning . . ." In the beginning, **our God** created the heavens and the earth . . . and **our God** "saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."

Our second hymn today, "All Things Bright and Beautiful," is just one of thirteen hymns written by Cecil Frances Alexander to teach children about the Apostles' Creed. Hymn #20 takes the opening affirmation — "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" — and fleshes it out with images of little flowers and birds, mountains and rivers, sunset and sunrise, cold wind and warm summer sun, and fruits in the garden. The last line of the hymn reminds us our place and purpose in God's marvelous creation: "God gave us eyes to see them, and lips that we might tell how great is God Almighty, who has made all things well."

When you gaze into the night sky and see the works of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, the numbers are astounding! The universe is approximately 13.7 billion years old. Compared to that, our planet Earth is a relative youngster at 4.5 billion years old. Scientists estimate there may be anywhere from 100 billion to two trillion galaxies in the universe. No wonder the psalmist asks, "What are we, God, that you even think about us?" Father James Kurzynski, the developer of the Vatican Observatory's faith and astronomy workshop, has mused on our place in God's creation: "The wonder of

humankind is that, despite how minuscule we are, we can actually comprehend and ask questions about the universe. I have a saying: The larger the universe gets, the greater my faith. The way we know that we have a God that wants us to know him is that we live in a universe that wants to be known. And therefore, the universe has a creator that also wants to be known.”<sup>7</sup>

There’s another way we know that we have a God that wants us to know him. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem this who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

“In the beginning . . .” was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-2, 14) And God so loved the world [that he created] that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

In Jesus Christ, we have a new beginning!

***Let us pray: Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, your voice called out over the deep and darkness and brought forth light. Your voice called out over the waters and brought forth life. Your voice called out over this earth and brought forth our very beings. Your voice continues to call out life in our universe and brings new hope and new life. May we hear, listen, and respond to your voice in our lives and in our world. In your name we pray. Amen.***

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “We choose to go to the Moon,” at [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org).

<sup>2</sup> “Apollo 8: Christmas at the Moon,” at [www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov).

<sup>3</sup> “Apollo 8 Genesis reading,” at [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org).

<sup>4</sup> David F. Coppedge, “NASA Commemorates Apollo 8 Genesis Reading,” December 12, 2018 at [www.crev.info](http://www.crev.info).

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 38-39.

<sup>7</sup> Hilary Ribons, “Statistically a Miracle,” *Mysterious Ways: More Than Coincidence* (Apr/May 2019), pp. 25-28.

