

John 1:1-14

Colossians 1:15-23

July 17, 2022

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

THE LORD OF ALL LIFE

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

At 7:20 a.m. EST on Christmas Day 2021, NASA launched the James Webb Space Telescope, an infrared space observatory. According to one news release, “NASA’s largest and most powerful space science telescope will probe the cosmos to uncover the history of the universe from the Big Bang to alien planet formation and beyond. It is one of NASA’s Great Observatories, huge space instruments that include the likes of the Hubble Space Telescope to peer deep into the cosmos.”¹

On Tuesday, NASA released some of the first images sent from the James Webb Space Telescope, and they are truly breathtaking and mind-boggling.

Picture #1: Carina Nebula

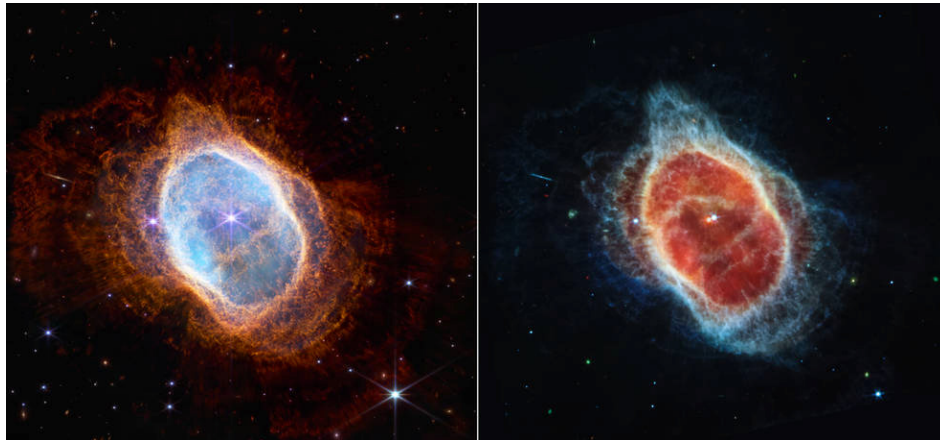


Read Genesis 1:1, 3-4, 14-18.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth . . . God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good . . . 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, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.”

This is a picture of the “Cosmic Cliffs,” in a star-forming region called NGC 3324 in the Carina Nebula. The highest “peaks” in the photo are approximately seven light-years high. The Carina Nebula is about 7,600 light-years from Earth.

Picture #2: The Southern Ring Nebula



Read John 1:1-3.

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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

This is a picture of the Southern Ring Nebula. The star at the center has been sending out rings of dust and gas for thousands of years. The James Webb Space Telescope has revealed that the star is cloaked with dust. It is approximately 2,500 light-years from Earth.

Picture #3: Galaxy cluster SMACS 0723



Read Colossians 1:15-17.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers — all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

This picture is just a slice of the universe. It shows a part of the sky that is approximately the size of a grain of sand held at arm's length of someone standing on Earth.

No wonder the psalmist exclaimed, “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, 3-4)

But, God is mindful of us. God does care for us. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah, “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1) And the words of Jesus, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6-7)

The Christ Hymn in Colossians 1:15-20 is both cosmic in scope and personal in nature, just as is the hymn that begins the Gospel of John. God the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, Creator of all that is, seen and unseen, loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to be like us humans and to die so we could be free from sin and death and live for God.

Like the great hymn in *Glory to God* says, “Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?” But we're not the only ones singing and praising God for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, Lord of heaven and earth. It's a cosmic event of celebration and praise! The choir opened worship with these wonderful words again this morning:

*You are holy, you are whole. You are always ever more
Than we ever understand. You are always at hand.
Blessed are you coming near? Blessed are you coming here
To your church in wine and bread, raised from soil, raised from dead?
You are holy, you are wholeness; you are present.
Let the cosmos praise you, Lord! Sing hosanna in the highest!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna to our God!*

As I have said to our weekly Bible Study groups, the question raised by our praise of the cosmic Christ is the same question we should ask after reading any scripture passage — “So what?” Or maybe we could ask, “What next?” When we look at God's heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars that God has established, or try to comprehend what we are seeing in the pictures beamed back from the James Webb Space telescope, we might find ourselves feeling insignificant. But the same God who

created the moon and the stars and all things visible and invisible calls us by name and reveals his purpose for us in his Son Jesus Christ, who is Lord of ALL life. . . [interesting aside: as I was writing about Psalm 8, Tom Fettke's marvelous anthem, based on Psalm 8, "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name," started playing on YouTube — how appropriate!]

. . . which is why the Apostle Paul follows his cosmic hymn about the supremacy of Christ with these words to his fellow believers in Colossae in the first century A.D. and in Wallace, North Carolina in the twenty-first century A.D.: "And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard. . ." (Colossians 1:21-23a)

The God, who in Christ holds all things together, is the same God who calls us by name, marks us with the waters of baptism, claims as his children, and commissions us to live worthy of the Lord, to walk the talk and walk the walk, to trust and hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is Lord of ALL life.

But how often do we forget that Jesus Christ is Lord of ALL life? How often do we compartmentalize our faith? Pull it down off the shelf when it's convenient? Confine it to worship or "spiritual matters" only? Keep it far away from the more practical, everyday matters of life? Our pocketbooks, politics, allegiances?

During three days, May 29-31, 1934, one hundred thirty-nine delegates (ordained ministers, church members, and university professors) met in Barmen, Germany to discuss a declaration to the German churches that were accommodating the gospel of Jesus Christ to the demands of Adolph Hitler's National Socialism. In six brief propositions, the Theological Declaration of Barmen "proclaims the church's freedom in Jesus Christ who is Lord of every area of life." Proposition #2 clearly connects the Lordship of Jesus Christ to our everyday lives, to ALL of life. It reads: "As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures. We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords — areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him."

In the words of an ancient Christian hymn, we hear about the cosmic Christ, Lord of ALL life, who became one of us and reconciled us to God through his death on a cross, so we might live for God in ALL life.

In the words of a 21st century hymn by Timothy Dudley-Smith, we hear the same praise, promise, and call to follow and serve Christ and Christ alone. The song is called "Lord of All Life and Power."

Lord of all life and power at whose creative word
in nature's first primeval hour our formless being stirred,

you made the light to shine, O shine on us, we pray,
renew with light and life divine your church in this our day.

Lord of the fertile earth who caused the world to be,
whose life alone can bring to birth the fruits of land and sea,
teach us to use aright and share the gifts you give,
to tend the earth as in your sight that all the world may live.

Lord of the cross and grave who died and lives again,
who came in love to seek and save and then to rise and reign,
we share, as once you shared, in mortal birth and breath,
and ours the risen life that dared to vanquish sin and death.

Lord of the wind and flame, the promised Spirit's sign,
possess our hearts in Jesus' Name, come down, O Love divine!
Help us in Christ to grow, from sin and self to cease,
and daily in our lives to show your love and joy and peace.

Lord of the passing years whose changeless purpose stands,
our lives and loves, our hopes and fears, we place within your hands;
we bring you but your own, forgiven, loved and free,
to follow Christ, and Christ alone, through all the days to be.

Let us pray: Christ our savior, we are grateful for we are overwhelmed by your love for the world. We are made new by your costly and sacrificial love. We pray that the love that you have given us shines through us to all we meet. Make our faith worthy of your faith. Make our lives worthy of your life. Make our love an extension of your love. Let us be known to the world as brothers and sisters of Christ, the King of Love, who is and was and is to come. Amen.

NOTES

¹Elizabeth Howell, Daisy Dobrijevic, "NASA's James Webb Space Telescope: The ultimate guide," July 12, 2022 at www.space.com.