

# ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

SECOND MEETING: DECEMBER 6  
CREATION AND COVENANT

CONFIRMATION 2009-2010

*At this, the first of four meetings surveying the Biblical material, we will discuss two of the most important themes from the Old Testament, creation and covenant. We all hear the stories of creation, Noah, and Abraham told over and over from the time we first attend Sunday School, but there is more to them than that. These stories are intricately related to the story of Jesus and still play a formative role of how we think of God and our relationship as human beings to God. This meeting will hopefully provide some insight into the theological meaning behind these stories that remains central to Christians today.*

## **Opening Prayer:**

All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voices, let us sing: Alleluia. Bright burning sun with golden beams, pale silver moon that gently gleams, O praise him, Alleluia.

Swift flowing water, pure and clear, make music for your Lord to hear, Alleluia. Fire, so intense and fiercely bright, you give to us both warmth and light, O praise him, Alleluia.

Let all things their creator bless, and worship him in humbleness, Alleluia. Praise God the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One: O praise him, Alleluia. Amen. (#400, Hymnal 1982)

## **TO COVER TODAY:**

Think back to your childhood...what are some of the first Bible Stories that you remember learning?
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Chances are that you named Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, Abraham and Isaac, and some of the stories about Moses freeing the Israelites from Egypt.

Today we are going to talk about some of those very same Bible stories. They are told to children in part because they resonate with narrative power and have great characters. These stories, however, are at the heart of our understanding of who God is and who we are in relationship to God.

## CREATION AND CREATION AND FALL

Pop Quiz: How many creation stories are there in the Bible?<sup>1</sup>

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### The First Creation Story: Genesis 1:1–2:3.

This is the “And God saw that it was good” version.

The order of creation:

Day 1	Day and Night	Day 4	Sun and Moon
Day 2	Sky	Day 5	Sea Creatures and Birds <sup>2</sup>
Day 3	Dry Land, Vegetation	Day 6	Land Animals, Human Beings

There is a clear pattern here: those things created on 4, 5, and 6 are the inhabitants of those things created on days 1, 2, and 3. This is a very artfully composed passage. The Bible might not always fit our idea of beautiful English literature, but it is a very careful and beautifully written document.

### Creation of Human Beings

Regarding the creation of humankind, Genesis 1:27 says: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” What does it mean about God if both male and female are created in God’s image? What does it say about us as human beings?

*There are two important things to get out of this question: (1) God is not male or female, since both are in God’s image. (2) Males and females are equally in God’s image. (About the personal pronouns ‘he’ and ‘his’: one of the most important things about God’s relationship to us is that God relates as a person--‘God the Father,’ and ‘Jesus’ are only the two most prominent examples.)*

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<sup>1</sup> In terms of the historical development of the Bible as a written text, the multiple accounts of creation likely are the result of multiple traditional sources being combined in a single written text. This is not the only place in the Old Testament where such duplication exists. For some people, the existence of multiple (and sometimes conflicting) accounts in the Bible proves a serious obstacle to faith. If you’re surprised or troubled about the two creation stories and the differences in the accounts, please speak up. It is worth remembering that for the ancient Jews who collected the Old Testament as we know it today, multiple accounts of the same event did not call into question their faith. The multiple accounts, rather, emphasized different aspects of the truth about God and God’s relationship to us. They were not trying to compile a history textbook, but a true and faithful account of God as God had been revealed to them.

<sup>2</sup> That is to say, water animals and air animals. The water animals are created at the same time as the air animals because, like air, the water existed before the dry land was created.

Read Gen 1:28–31. What sort of relationship do you think we are to have with the rest of creation?

## Sabbath

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. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. (Genesis 2:2–3)

This is the origin of the Sabbath. Technically, Sunday is not the Christian Sabbath; Christians worship on the first day of the week. To the extent we have one, our Sabbath remains Saturday. We'll talk more about Sabbath spirituality later in the spring.

## **The Second Creation Story: Adam and Eve**

*We don't have time to read through this whole story this morning, but you are supposed to read it before your second meeting with your mentor, so I do hope you'll read it then.*

Hopefully the basic outline of the story is familiar. God creates Adam out of the dust of the ground, puts him in the Garden of Eden, and tells him not to eat of tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God then creates the animals, which Adam names, and then, having not found Adam a suitable partner, creates Eve out of his rib. Adam likes her very much indeed

Then the serpent comes along. The serpent convinces Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (note, by the way, that this is not an apple tree), Eve convinces Adam to eat, and everything goes wrong.

Traditionally, this story has been interpreted to have several major points:

### #1 Snakes are horrible little creatures.

1. The story marks the entrance of sin into the world. And note that first and foremost, sin is something that is contrary to God's will. As *The Book of Common Prayer* defines it, "Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God." Adam and Eve did not sin against another person; they did not hurt someone or something. There is no room here to allow for such "victimless crimes." There is no saying, "as long as I am not hurting anyone else, it's ok." To say that is to misunderstand the nature of sin. Sin is acting counter to the will of God.
2. In this story, that sin comes through the one person Adam (or, more accurately, two people). In a similar way, redemption from sin comes through one person, Jesus Christ (Paul explicitly writes about this connection in Romans 5).
3. Human nature has something wrong with it, we are not perfect. In the history of the Christian faith, this has become known as the doctrine of Original Sin. One of the best expressions of it is given by Paul in Romans 3:23: "all have

sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.” Our relationship with God is marked by our inability to perfectly obey his will.

The National Public Radio program *This American Life* had a recent episode on this phenomenon of doing bad things seemingly without any reason.

Listen to the audio clip from *This American Life*. Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever done something wrong, and been unable to explain why? Have you ever done something wrong, known it was wrong, and done it anyway? Why?

Little stories like that in the *This American Life* clip are just anecdotal evidence of what we all know: human beings have a great capacity to do wrong, to act against the will of God. The rest of the Bible, from creation onwards, is about God’s establishment and continual reestablishment of relationship with human beings in spite of our actions against his will.

## COVENANTS:

### Noah

As Christians, we have this strange habit of telling our youngest children some of the really crazy stories in the Bible. The story about Noah and the ark is fun in many ways; the whole story is just so spectacular—40 days of rain, animals two by two, Noah and his family on a little ark.

*Play audio clip of Bill Cosby’s Noah routine.*

But this story has a darker side:

Someone read Genesis 6:5–8 aloud. You probably didn’t spend much time on that part in Sunday School, did you? But think about this story for a moment. What was the problem God was trying solve? What method did he use to do it? What is the key ingredient of that method? How do you feel about that?

*God was trying to wash sin right off the face of the earth. The key ingredient of this method was water.*

### God’s Covenant with Noah (Genesis 8:21–9:17)

After the flood God made a covenant not only with Noah, but with all of creation. Gen 8:21–9:17 reads, in part:

I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease...As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your

descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. (Genesis 8:21–22, 9:10–11)

As we shall see, all covenants have signs—it's one of the traits of a covenant to have a sign that represents the covenant as a whole. The sign of God's covenant with Noah is the rainbow.<sup>3</sup>

While the other Old Testament covenants were between God and God's chosen people the Jews, this is a covenant between God and the whole world. Everyone, every living thing, lives under this covenant with God—including you and me.

### Noah and Baptism

1 Peter 3:20–21 claims that the story of Noah and the ark prefigures that of baptism. What do you think this means?

*1 Peter claims that only a few people were saved by water in the time of Noah and the Ark. The key component of the prefiguration is that salvation comes through water.*

The importance of this whole complex of imagery for us as Christians comes into even sharper relief in light of passages like this one from Romans:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3–5)

In a way, baptism is our Noah's flood. In baptism, our old selves, the sinful selves estranged from God, die and we are reborn. Baptism is our rebirth—it is the final Noah's flood, the one that works once and for all.

### **Abraham**

Abraham, who at this point in the biblical story is known as Abram, one day hears the following from the Lord:

Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. Then he [God] said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:5–6).

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<sup>3</sup> As an interesting side note, the rainbow makes perfect sense as the sign of a covenant that God will never destroy the earth with a flood, for a rainbow is formed by sunlight passing through a rain shower. The mixture of sunlight and rain illustrates that the rain is for watering the earth, not killing it.

The sign of this initial covenant was quite complicated.<sup>4</sup>

During New Testament times, the Abrahamic covenant became a source of contention.

- Were people who were descendants of Abraham guaranteed to be in God's good favor (see Matthew 3:7–9, John 8:34–47)?
- If the descendants of Abraham were God's chosen people, could people who were not descendants of Abraham also be chosen by God (again, see John 8:34–47, Romans 6:6–18)?

To us, sitting here 2000 thousand years later, these might seem like silly questions—but they can only be silly because they are no longer contentious to us as Christians.

In many ways, one of the most important things about the Abrahamic covenant is how it applies to people who are not literally the descendants of Abraham. The basic answer is that God's blessing and promise (covenant) to Abraham depend on the faithfulness to God, not on human descent (cf. Romans 4:16, 5:9–15, John 8:39–40). We can all be children of Abraham...as the old children's song goes:

Father Abraham, had many sons,  
And many sons had Father Abraham.  
And I am one of them, and so you,  
So let's all praise the Lord...

## CLOSING

*Talk about mentor situation...we really are almost there. Only one more mentor to go (I think).*

*Choose a confirmand to lead the closing prayer. She or he should ask for any particular prayers of joy, concern or thanksgiving and be sure to write them down to be inserted into the prayer below.*

### Closing Prayer

Lord God, thank you for this little group gathered before you. Bless every one of us here today. On this, the second Sunday of Advent, fill our hearts with joyful anticipation of your new covenant in Jesus Christ. We are also thankful for your blessing us in creation, making us in your image, and maintaining loving relationships with us through the covenants you made with your people. We thank you especially today for (*group's joys and thanksgivings*). God, we also ask your grace especially for (*group's concerns*). We ask these things in his name, and pray the prayer he taught us to pray...

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<sup>4</sup> It involves a heifer, female goat and a ram, all three years old, and all cut in half. There were also two turtledoves and a young pigeon involved. The presence of God passed between the animal pieces in the form of a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch.

**The Lord's Prayer**