

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 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.” And so it begins, the story of our salvation history, right down to the creation of the world as we know it. These words are a poetic hymn of praise giving glory to God. Their purpose is less about what came first, the chicken or the egg or where the formless void and the waters came from and more a statement about who we understand God to be. This is why as Episcopalians we can quite happily believe the truth of these words of scripture and absorb all the latest and greatest scientific discoveries about the natural order of creation.

Jewish scholars have always enjoyed exploring every nuance of what these words of scripture might mean and I was delighted to find that one astute scholar had used the following line from Proverbs that “in the beginning God created wisdom and with wisdom began to create the world” to the very notion of beginning. So that what we could read in Genesis is “together with wisdom God created the heavens and the earth...”

Early Christian scholars equated Jesus with wisdom so you begin to see how Jesus himself as the second person of the Trinity was considered to be involved in creation. And you got a bit of that on Christmas Day and on the First Sunday after Christmas when the gospel is always from John: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” because word and wisdom are inextricably intertwined.

It is God’s word that acts as the catalyst for the actions and reactions we hear in our readings this week, reminding us that God is continually involved in creation, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly in order to bring about God’s plans for our salvation.

God’s Word creates the light and separates the darkness. God created time by calling the light Day and the darkness Night. This power of God is proclaimed in our psalm, which describes God’s power as the “voice of the Lord, power that God wields over the natural world: the trees, the waters, the mountains and all the forces of nature. And we certainly saw some of those on Thursday during the blizzard – just in case we have forgotten what God’s power can be like. This is not to say that God is causing the blizzard but rather that in creation God brought these forces of nature into being and that they, like us human beings with our free will, these forces of nature have their own ways of operating.

This is not to say that God spoke everything into existence and then stepped back. No, this is what our gospel underscores. God does choose to intervene on a massive scale and this is what we see in the baptism of Jesus.

As Jesus was coming up out of the waters of the Jordan “he saw the heavens torn apart and the spirit descending like a dove...” The violence of this image is startling. This is no fluttering bird gently floating down from heaven. The boundaries between heaven and earth have been ripped open to anoint this beloved Son in whom God’s voice will say “I am well pleased.” Something spectacular has happened here, God has disrupted the functioning of the natural order. We will see this kind of dramatic in-breaking two more times in the gospel of Mark, once at the Transfiguration when God will once again claim Jesus as his beloved son and once after the crucifixion when Jesus gives a loud cry and the temple curtain is torn in two.

The difference between these moments when the boundaries between heaven and earth are disrupted lies in the public vs private nature of their occurrence.

The Transfiguration occurs in front of Peter and James and John and God's voice was directed towards them. When Jesus is crucified it is a public execution and the tearing of the temple curtain could hardly have been missed.

Now it may seem as if God's words are audible to everyone gathered at the river when Jesus is baptized but this is where Mark is a bit tricky. Like a narrator making comments to his audience, Mark is cluing his listeners into what is going on but the way Jesus and his identity are depicted in the rest of the gospel it is clear that no one else heard those words. Throughout his ministry Jesus will refer to himself as the Son of Man and allude to his fate but when the demons and disciples, and even those whom he has healed start to understand, he tells them to keep it a secret until after his resurrection. So the observers at Jesus' baptism would have noticed the bird but heard no voice, the voice was reserved for Jesus alone.

God's voice initiates the ministry of Jesus and it is Jesus, who as the Word made flesh, it is Jesus who will work on God's behalf to bring about the Kingdom of God, Jesus the co-creator of the world is now co-creator of its restoration and salvation.

I don't think I am being humble and I don't think I am underestimating anyone who is here this morning when I say that none of us are ever going to get zapped quite like Jesus but I also believe that we have experienced moments when it felt like the heavens opened and we received something of the divine. God didn't just co-create with nature and with God's son, God also co-creates with us. Think about one of those "Eureka moments" when suddenly a new understanding emerges in our brain, a new way to solve a problem, a new way to ask a question. Or maybe it was in a moment of creativity in art or music or whatever form your inspiration takes when what you are working on goes from the mundane to the sublime. Or perhaps it was as an athlete, hitting that euphoric zone when even though you have trained rigorously your body is giving you more than you thought possible. As a teacher you might have seen it in the eyes of your students when you have labored to communicate a new concept, principle, or skill. As a leader it might have been one of those moments when the people you were leading seemed to gel and to become more than you had expected. Or maybe it was just in the miracle of birth when out of blood and sweat and tears a new life is born. Whatever the case and these are only examples I am sure that you can find your own moment when whatever you were doing as a mere human being became so much more.

That's what I meant when I talked about God and co-creation, we were created in the image and likeness of God with the capacity to respond to the divine spark when it is received.

Nevertheless I don't expect us to sit around waiting to be zapped – there's work involved and furthermore being zapped is not necessarily a pleasure trip. Jesus was initiated into a ministry that would lead to suffering and death, a different kind of glorification, one that most of us would probably avoid if we could.

But on this celebration of the Baptism of our Lord we are reminded that an in-breaking occurs every time someone is baptized. We who have been baptized have also been anointed to do God's work in the world with the gifts that we have been given, whatever they may be.

What could be clearer than the proclamation made by the priest during the *Thanksgiving over Water*? *“We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”* Then once the candidate has been baptized the priest and the people pray together: *“We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.”*

Now that is a shazaam moment if ever there were one, so hang onto that as we renew our baptismal vows and have confidence that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.

**Amen**