

Lutheran Foundations: A Confirmation Curriculum[©]

It Starts Here! Stories of the Old Testament

The Tomorrow River Lutheran Parish

Year 1, Lesson 2: Creation


The First Creation Story

¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² 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. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was 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. ⁶ And God said, "Let there be a dome 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. 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. 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. 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. ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind 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, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." ²⁷ So God

created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion 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. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.^{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.^{4a} These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a NRSV*)

The Second Creation Story

^{4b} In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground;⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—⁷ then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.¹⁰ A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches.¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;¹² and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush.¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."¹⁹ So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.²² And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:4b – 25 NRSV*)

Genesis 1 Creation in “6 days”	The Progression of Creation	Genesis 2 Creation “In the day”
<p>“Pre-Creation” “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² 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.”</p>		<p>“Pre-Creation” ^{4b} “In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—...”</p>
<p>Day One “Let there be Light” Light separated from Darkness</p>		<p>“In the Day” The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.</p>
<p>Day Two “Let there be a Dome...” Waters above separated from the Waters below</p>		<p>⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.</p>
<p>Day Three “Let the Waters be gathered and the dry land appear” “Let the Earth put forth vegetation”</p>		<p>God makes all the plants and trees and gives the man instructions about what he is to do and what he can eat</p>
<p>Day Four “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky...” Creation of the sun, moon and stars</p>		<p>¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."</p>
<p>Day Five "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky."</p>		<p>God makes all the animals and birds out of the dust of the earth</p>
<p>Day Six "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." "Let us make humankind 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, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."</p>		<p>The man names them all. None of them are a fitting partner for the man</p> <p>God takes one of the man’s ribs and forms woman from the rib.</p> <p>The man recognizes the woman as a fit life partner. Marriage is instituted</p>
<p>Day Seven God Rests</p>		

We believe that God created the Heavens and the Earth!

This part is a key and non-negotiable part of our faith. The Apostles' Creed starts by saying "I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth". So, God created everything that is. That's nailed down for us.

But how God did all that creating is up for grabs and real Christians, people who really love Jesus and who will spend eternity together in heaven, have lots of different opinions about the creation and about how to read the two creation stories that we have just shared.

And this disagreement is not just in the modern American church. Over the centuries and in different parts of the world real Christians have held many different beliefs about how to read these stories and about what should be, or must be, believed.

Here is the modern American temptation: We want to start by asking "Are these stories true?" by which we mean are they historically true?

There are lots of American Christians who want to make a belief in 6, literal, 24-hour days of creation some sort of acid test about whether or not we "believe in the Bible" They tell us that if we don't accept that everything was created in 144 hours, then we can't believe anything that the Bible says. So they have to fight with scientists and assert things that contradict reason, evidence and experience. They are forced to assert that:

- The world is only 6000 years old,
- All sedimentary rocks were laid down during Noah's flood,
- Dinosaurs and humans lived at the same time,
- All human pre-history occurred in less than 1000 years.

To be clear: Scientists of many disciplines think all 4 of those bullet points are totally and completely wrong. So what do we do? Do we have to choose between trusting the Bible or trusting science?

I think that the mistake was made when we assumed that "true" is necessarily the same thing as "historically true".

I'd like you to just ... pause ... for a moment and put all of that on the shelf. You can always go back to it and pick it up... but just let it sit for a moment...

Let's start with the purpose of this story, and with all of the other stories we will learn and study this year.

The Bible itself says that we are to MEDITATE on these stories.

*This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall **meditate** on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.*
(Joshua 1:8 NRSV*)

This same theme shows up 13 times in the Psalms (and for our Catholic friends, 4 more times in the Apocrypha). This isn't some hidden idea. It's right out front. You are supposed to put these stories deep into your heart and then chew on them for the rest of your life. That's the first step of honoring God's word: taking it seriously and meditating on it!

Let these stories baptize your imagination. Learn them in your bones!

Next, let's talk about genre. We touched on this last week. Reading God's word requires you to wrestle with questions of genre. What is this that I am reading? (Example of a headline in a newspaper). If you get the genre wrong, nonsense follows.

So, let's decide what genre we are looking at here in these two stories.

- Maybe one of them is straight up historical reporting (but they both can't be that... right? Because they are different...)
- Maybe one or both of them are poetry
- Maybe the first one is a liturgy
- Maybe they are both intended to teach us about the character of God
- Maybe they are both intended to teach us about our proper relationship with the world and with one another
- Maybe several of the possibilities above

Different Christians in different times and places have held on to all of those possibilities and you can be a good Lutheran while holding on to any of them! Really!

And here is something else that we are sure about. All of the stories in Genesis chapters 1-11 introduce the whole of the Jewish Bible, our Old Testament. These stories are constructed so carefully! The words used, the ordering of ideas, the construction of sentences. It's all a master work of care and precision. If you don't know these stories, you won't see all the connections to other Old Testament stories – or to many of the stories about Jesus. With the Bible, the more you know, the more you see. Whatever else you wind up believing about these stories, you NEED them in your head and imagination to rightly hear a bunch of things that come next!

For example, when we get to the story of the great flood, there is a clear deconstruction of God's work in creating the world. Step by step, block by block. If you are all caught up in some literalistic, dogmatic understanding of the creation story, you will not see everything that is being said about what happens in the flood.

These stories are true, absolutely true, in many ways. And they are leading us into a fuller understanding of ourselves and of God – as we MEDITATE upon them!

Here is a wonderful little video about Genesis 1 from the Bible Project

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/genesis-1/>

Let's Review:

1. There are 2 Creation stories that show us different pictures of Creation, but both agree that God did the creating! Over time Christians have had many ideas about how to read and understand these stories. It is totally possible to love the Bible and to love God and to have differing opinions about what we are looking at in the two creation stories!
2. We think that it is wrong to tell people that they have to disbelieve science to believe the Bible or to honor God. You can love God, love the Bible and be a scientist! You do not have to choose. You should listen carefully in school and commit yourself to learning and mastering everything that is knowable, everything that is true. Jesus says that he is the truth. If you are chasing the truth in the Bible – or in Science – you are getting closer and closer to Jesus.
3. Whatever else these creation stories are, they are certainly very carefully constructed literary structures. They are perfectly written to help us see and understand all the stories that will follow. Learn them. Think about them. Meditate on them!
4. As Lutherans, we allow for disagreement in non-essential matters of faith and practice. You can believe as you will on this matter and be fully welcome in the Lutheran Church. Just be careful that you don't elevate your beliefs into some sort of test or requirement for your neighbor. We believe that God is the creator of Heaven and Earth. How God did that exactly, when God did that exactly, how long it took God exactly are all questions about which we are free to disagree!

I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth

- 1st Article of the Apostles' Creed

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