

First Presbyterian Church
Greenfield, Indiana
Pastor John J. Paulson
January 11, 2009 Baptism of Our Lord

Our Awesome God!

Genesis 1: 1 – 5	In the beginning
Psalm 29	Give God glory and praise!
Mark 1: 4 – 11	Jesus is the Son of God!
Acts 19: 1 – 7	The Holy Spirit is ours!

Informally Before the Sermon: We have been chosen by an awesome God! God has reached out to each of us in love and grace to offer us the opportunity to become one of God's children. We have accepted that offer, and are here this morning in recognition of God's awesomeness. We come to praise and thank God, and to listen to God's word in order to understand what God is saying to each one of us. This morning we have heard we have heard a story about the very beginning of everything, a story about the baptism of Jesus and a voice from heaven declaring "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased," and, we have heard how the Holy Spirit came to some Christians at Ephesus, and. All three stories reveal something about our Awesome God to us. All three are worthy of reading and rereading as they help us understand our God and our relationship with God as one of God's chosen children.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be pleasing to you, Oh Lord, our rock and redeemer. Amen.

The Bible begins with an introduction to God that has always fascinated me. These opening lines in the story of creation from the first chapter of Genesis that describe God during process of creating:

"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day."¹

¹ Genesis 1: 1 – 5 (NIV)

What image do you get in your mind as you think about these few words? What is the image you get of God? Of the Earth? Of Nature? When I was a kid, there was a joke going around about the Bible. It went something like, where does the Bible take about baseball? The Answer, in Genesis where it says: "in the big inning... Of course it isn't about baseball; it is about God. Right here, in the very first lines of our Bible, we get our first glimpse of our Awesome God.

We find that God was there at the very beginning.

We find that God is methodical. God follows a logical sequence in creation. God thinks it through; makes certain that it is right the first time.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The word used for create has the sense of making something new; not modifying something else like creating a building out of wood and brick, but making something out of nothing; making something where there was nothing before.

Then the writer tells us that this thing God created has no form and is empty. It was dark over the surface of the deep. Probably meaning the space beyond the surface of the earth. The ancient people believed that there was water surrounding the earth that was kept out by a shield of some sort, like a big plastic bubble. And, the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. To get the feeling of hovering, think of one of the traffic helicopters trying to remain stationary over the scene of an accident? They are hovering; slowly moving back and forth while trying to stay in the same place. That's the image of the hovering of the Spirit that the writer is trying to convey. Constant motion; constant attentiveness to what is going on.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

I tried to think of a way that I could describe what happened when God said "Let there be light", and there was light. I thought about the week or so after we had our new bedroom ceiling fan with a remote controlled light installed. Several times in the middle of the night the light would suddenly go on and we would be suddenly awake bathed in bright light. It turned out one of the neighbors had a remote to something that was on the same frequency as our fan; when they turned on their remote, our fan and light would come on. But, I don't think that quite describes it. Although we were surprised by the coming on of the light, we were asleep and not really conscious of the darkness. I needed a way to describe a time when there was

consciousness of the darkness and suddenly light appeared where there was none before.

One dark night in June 1969, I was on the bridge of the USS Schofield, a guided missile destroyer escort in part of a United States – Australia joint exercise in the South China Sea. There were over one hundred ships involved in the exercise, spread out all over the ocean. We were in a formation of seven or eight ships, some US ships, others belonging to friendly foreign governments, providing a submarine screen for USS Kearsarge, trying to prevent the submarines who were also in the exercise from getting close enough to get a direct hit with torpedoes .

Ahead of us, about a fifty nautical miles, was another group of destroyers and escorts providing the same coverage for the Australian Carrier Melbourne.

To make the exercise realistic, we were operating in total darkness, using radar to guide us as we sailed in close formation. There was no moon, and it was impossible to see your hand in front of your face. That is dark! Suddenly one of the radiomen came on the bridge from the Combat Information Center and told us there had been an accident in the Melbourne formation ahead of us. Melbourne had collided with the Frank Evans. There was an eerie silence on the bridge as we all began to think about the implications of what had happened.

At almost the same time a voice came over the fleet radio saying something like “Stop the exercise. All ships turn on full lighting.” In an instant, the entire area around us lit up like the middle of a sunny afternoon. All the ships turned on their flood lights; the Kearsarge turned on all the flight deck lights. Suddenly the ships that had only been green blips on a radar screen were visible right there next to us; we could see them only two or three hundred yards away still sailing in close formation. Under the circumstances, we saw that the light was good

Only the exercise commander, the Admiral in charge, could have given that command. He had the ultimate authority and power over the ships involved in exercise Sea Spirit.

I think that’s what it must have been like when God said “Let there be light”, and there was light. God had the ultimate authority and power over all creation!

This must be how the world looks to God when light suddenly appears after the command, "Let there be light." From total blackness to total brightness. From seeing nothing to seeing everything.

God saw that the light was good, God stops right there in the midst of the beginning to evaluate what has been created. Is it good? Is it acceptable? This is the foundation for all creation. It must be perfect.

We go about creating things the same way, don't we. Imagine the builders of a one hundred story building as they start construction. After the first beams are in place, they check and recheck the angles and distances. If the first beam is allowed to be even one degree off square at the very bottom of the foundation, by the time it gets up one hundred floors it would be as bad than the "leaning tower of Pisa". The foundation must be perfect, and it must be solid. At one point in his teaching, Jesus talks about building on a foundation of solid ground and compares it to building on a foundation of sand. God knows that a good foundation for Creation is essential, so God evaluates the light as God will evaluate every step of creation as it progresses.

God looks at the light and decides it is good, God separates the light from the darkness. God calls the light "day," and the darkness he calls "night."

What a great decision! Just enough light; not too little or not too much. We get light for planting and growing crops and outdoor activities; we get darkness for sleeping and rest. The light is just perfect, providing darkness, but not too much darkness, and heat, but not too much heat, for life to flourish on our planet.

And, our storyteller adds, there was evening, and there was morning--the first day.

So, what does this really mean to us? Obviously nobody was there to see it. There is no way to determine if it really happened this way or some other way. No way the author could possibly know if this is what happened. In fact, there is really no way to find out if it took one of our twenty four hour days for this first step in creation. All we know is that it happened. God created the world out of nothing.

So, what does it mean to us? If we can't prove that it is true or false, why even worry about it? Why not just skip Genesis, at least this part of Genesis, and get to the real meat of the Bible when God calls Abraham and Sari? In fact, why not skip all of this and get right to the manger in Bethlehem where the Christ child is born? Well,

maybe it would even make more sense just to skip right to Easter morning and the empty tomb; after all, that's where God really makes something happen that we can relate to.

Why not? Because we are God's chosen people. This God that we begin hearing about in Genesis is the God who showers us with grace and love. As God's chosen people, as God's children, it behooves us to know as much about our God as we possibly can. If we are to understand our place in this world and what is expected of us, we need to know and understand our God. That's what the storyteller in Genesis is trying get across to us; the beginning of our understanding of God. Our first steps in getting to know God. Helping us to see that our God is a living God, not a stone statue or golden idol. Our God has power, but power that is under control.

What kind of power must God have if God can create something out of nothing? Awesome power, right? The kind of power that can do anything, absolutely anything. Does it help us to know that God controls this power? That God takes time to evaluate what has been created before creating something else?

Our God is an awesome God, reaching out in love and peace to us every day of our lives. Waiting for us to reach back and accept love and grace and forgiveness. The Bible introduces us to God, helping us to know God personally and to establish a relationship better than the relationship we can have with anyone else.

Then, knowing this God personally, we can come to God with our most distressing problems and ask for help. We can come to God and ask for forgiveness without the fear of retribution. We can come to God with open minds and hearts, knowing that God is waiting for us with open arms.

And, aren't we glad our God is an awesome God!

AMEN!