

Colossians 1:15-20
Genesis 1:1-19

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Devon, Pennsylvania, 19333
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IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth *Genesis 1*

Before the dawn of creation there was only heaven, inhabited by God and the angels. I say inhabited, though that is somewhat misleading since spirits do not take up space or move through time; they just are. But of course that seems nonsensical to us who can only think in terms of time and space, for that is all we have known.

As celestial beings of another order, the angels are used to doing all things at once, in the same instant—sort of like a mom three minutes before the school bus arrives. But let's expand the scene for our sake.

Now the God of heaven gathered the angel host before the seat of majesty, a vast, shining aura like a galactic cloud that glowed with a fierce intensity toward its center. And so the angels arranged themselves with perfect symmetry all around and above and beneath the white radiance, a great hovering sphere of adoration, all equidistant from the glowing presence, each shimmering with divine adoration.

Now, I want to say that God then spoke when all were so assembled. Though had you been there you would not have heard a voice, because those who are divine have no need of such limiting constraint as language. The angels rather communicated with God and with each other as we might imagine a loving couple to communicate after sixty years of marriage, their wordless thoughts drifting seamlessly into each other, and perfectly understood. I judge by your faces that you haven't reached that higher plane yet. Neither have I! But again, for our sake, let us imagine that we can listen in. Some thoughts, nevertheless, could be harbored, kept within with infinite discretion, and the gathered angels now perceived that God had kept from them such a thought. They could only imagine it to be something spectacular and splendid, for one who loved as God would choose only to do things perfectly.

The angels were conscious, then, of something momentous and imminent, and they were becoming very agitated and excited, in an angelic

sort of way. Secrets were rare among them and they were eager to learn of God's great secret. Then the Almighty proposed to them that they need be still—which they did, and with extraordinary self-control. Then, being still, they worshiped God with perfect adoration, asking nothing for themselves—because, as angels, they had no lack of anything needful.

Now, suddenly into this vast stillness they perceived something alien within God's shimmering presence, something close to the heart of God. They could not have called it a darkness or a shadow since no darkness had heretofore touched their experience. So they perceived this *thing* as rather an absence of light, an oval thing like a deep velvet cloud that rippled upon its surface, floating like an egg at the heart of the divine light in their midst. And could our ears have listened to the depths of those angelic souls, we would have heard something like a startled inhalation, as one arrested by shock and consternation. Then there came upon this brooding spot a series of transformations that took many eons by our calculations, far less so to those inhabiting eternity. And what they saw began a great debate.

God first willed to this turbid, cosmic egg, a new name—God called it “chaos,” and the angels felt a new and troubling emotion for the first time in their long and beautiful existence. Each felt a twinge of *fear*. Now within this egg-like form a change began—as if the light of God's presence, too intense to resist, penetrated the outer film of the egg, and the chaos within shone like a silver cloud. Then the cloud began a regular pulsation between thick blackness and streaming light. All the while it never left the heart of God, but lay there pulsating between light and darkness, light and darkness, the one arising the other overcoming; the darkness chasing away the light, and after its brief season the light triumphant once again. And the angels detected in this oscillating universe a hint of things to come—a world one moment so wondrous fair, the next so steeped in trouble and in woe.

Now, to the all seeing, discriminating eye of the angelic host, in one tiny aspect of this pulsing egg, this little universe close to the heart of God, darkness settled into deep liquid pools below and an azure void above. And God willed to each a name: the one God called *sea*, the other *sky*. Then a mighty upheaval shook those seas to their very depths and filled the air above with sulphurous smoke and ash. And from the boiling sea a molten form all streaked with streaming veins of glowing red and gray broke above the waters, and pushed its boiling borders back. Each day the seas would rush upon the cooling form, and each day would retreat as if wearied and overcome. And the angels seemed to gasp and wonder, taking in the names and marveling at it all.

In time the skies cleared and the cooled earth was clothed in a soft

green carpet. And to the discerning eye there appeared tiny bursts of color, sometimes spreading across the broad canvass of the land, sometimes breaking out in a small solitary triumph in the cleft of a rock, with only the eye of the Lord to behold it. And the angels were touched by the beauty of it all, for all its tender smallness in the scope of things.

Now into the trackless wastes of velvet blackness great orbs appeared of silver and of gold, each set in perfect motion (as it appeared) around the tiny sphere which they guarded. In the nearer darkness, whole companies of suns emerged in spinning disks and wandering clouds, each with their own hidden promise. Then from the surface of the waters far below there flashed the tails of living things. While on the land and in the air, some alone, many in great hordes of fellowship, vast assemblies of animals and birds took form of every imaginable size and disposition; each finding their nourishment among the constantly replenishing earth and sea and sky.

God beheld all that had been made; and God declared it to be very good—*all* of it. But among the angels looking on, some hesitated, for they detected among the shifting bands of light and darkness both beauty and ugliness, well-being and suffering, providence and want, tranquility and violence. And some wondered at the goodness of it *all*. But all acknowledged that God's wisdom saw beyond their own, and they were willing to concede what they could not comprehend.

Then God addressed the hovering company of heaven, and said:

“Let us make humankind—*atham*—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.”

Now, to each angel was assigned the guardianship of a divine trait for all eternity, but none fully comprehended all of the traits of God. So there was much consternation in heaven, for the angels perceived that God was inviting them to concur with the decision. Some wondered at putting the divine spirit, a sacred and reverential thing, in a mere animal form, even the pinnacle of all life forms. Others wondered that God would create something with the imprint of the divine, then consign it to so small an existence in so remote a corner of this little universe of overwhelming stars and space.

So, one by one, they began to speak.

The Angel of Freedom opposed the creation of humankind because so many would misuse so precious a gift, using their freedom against the will of God, and corrupting others in the process.

The Angel of Love supported their creation because love's nature is to

set its object free to choose, even at the risk of losing it.

The Angel of Sovereignty opposed the creation of these new beings because they would likely multiply tyrants, and too much oppress the poor and weak.

But the Angel of Compassion supported the creation because of all the acts of love and service that would be done.

The Angel of Truth objected because of all the lies that would be told, even in God's name.

The Angel of Righteousness agreed with the Angel of Compassion, since many righteous deeds would be done.

Meanwhile the Angel of Peace stood quietly opposed because people would wander apart in their freedom, and discovering differences in their separateness would come to fear each other, and out of fear make war. They would even lionize their war-likeness. Besides, they would always want more of whatever they desired.

Then the Angel of Grace spoke in support of humankind because of the many startling acts of grace and kindness that would win others to God.

Some asked, "How will these creatures know of eternity, and of you, O God?"

"Because I shall place a sense of the eternal in their hearts," said God, "and the quest for it."

"How shall they enter heaven?" asked others.

"I shall receive what I gave—the *spirit* of a man, a woman, a child," said the great God of heaven. "And to the earth shall be returned what it gave—the body, the shell that conceals the soul."

So the debate swept back and forth. And while they were so distracted, God reached into the little universe at the divine heart, into a distant corner of it—to an insignificant galaxy, past the whirling disk of fiery gold and melancholy moon, down to the small earth warming in the light of the ever rising sun, down through the grey clouds to the moist earth, called *athamah*. Then with gentlest care God scooped a mound of misty earth and shaped it to a pliable form, and lifted it, and set it to his lips as in a kiss, and breathed one breath—sufficient for all eternity—into the first tiny form. And it became a living thing, complete in all its parts. And God set it on the *athamah* and called it *atham* . . . Adam.

Then God turned again to the company of heaven and bid them be still. And in the sudden silence said: "What I have done, I have done. And behold, it is *very good*."

And there was silence and wonder in heaven for the longest time.
Amen