

Acts 19:1-7  
Genesis 1:1-19  
Text: Genesis 1:1

St. John's Presbyterian Church  
Devon, Pennsylvania, 19333  
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## IN THE BEGINNING

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. *Genesis 1:1-2*

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 can recall.

As celestial beings of another order, the angels were 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 Great God of heaven gathered the angel host before the *seat of majesty*, which was a vast, shining aura like a galactic cloud that glowed with a fierce intensity towards its center. And so they arranged themselves with perfect symmetry all around and above and beneath, a great hovering sphere of adoration, all equidistant from the glowing presence, each shimmering before the divine radiance.

Now, I want to say that God then spoke when all were so assembled. Had you been there you would not have heard a voice because those who are divine have no need of such a limiting thing as language. The angels rather communicated with God and with each other as we might imagine a perfect loving couple might communicate after sixty years of marriage, their thoughts drifting wordlessly 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 did chose only to do things perfectly.

The angels were conscious 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 needed to be still—which they did, and with extraordinary self-control. Then, being stilled, 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, and it floated like an egg at the heart of the divine light at their center.

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 or consternation. Then there came upon this brooding spot a series of transformations that took many eons by our calculations, less so to those inhabiting eternity. Yet 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 existences. Each felt a twinge of fear, as within this egg-like form a change began. It was 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 shadow.

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, the 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 very seas to their depths and filled the air above with sulfurous 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 new names of things and marveling at it all.

Now into the trackless wastes of sky great orbs appeared of silver and of gold, each set in perfect motion around the tiny sphere they guarded. And in the nearer darkness, whole companies of suns emerged in spinning disks and wandering clouds, each with their own hidden promise

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 and solitary triumph from the cleft of a rock, with only the eye of the Lord to behold it. Then from the surface of the waters far below there flashed the tails of living things. And 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.

And the angels were touched by the beauty of it all, for all its smallness in the scope of things.

And God beheld all that had been made; and God declared that it was 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 fully know.

Then God addressed the hovering company of heaven.

“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, each angel had for eternity been assigned the guardianship of a divine trait, yet none fully comprehend 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 a decision to create a *human thing* in God’s own image. 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 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 because such beings make for too many tyrants, and too much oppression of the poor and the 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 Compassion, since many a righteous deed 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 fear each other, and out of fear make war. 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 over to God.

Some asked, “How would these creatures know of eternity?”

“Because I shall place the sense of it in their hearts,” said God.

“How shall they enter heaven?” asked others.

“I shall receive what I gave—the spirit of a man, a woman, a child,” said the Lord. “And the earth shall receive again what it has given—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 his heart, into a distant corner of it, to an insignificant galaxy, past the whirling disk of gold and waning moon, down to the small earth warming in the light of the rising sun, down through the grey clouds to the moist earth, called *athamah*. Then with gentlest care God scooped a mound of wet clay 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 eternity—into the tiny form. And it became a living thing, complete in all its parts. And God set it on the earth 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 a holy stillness in heaven that went on and on and on . . .

Amen.