

Image of

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Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children.

Today's text may be found in Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter 1 verse 15:
'He is the image of the invisible God.'

When we were young, to us everything was new, fresh, exciting. The world around us was a big place for us to discover for ourselves. There was so much to learn. There was so much to do. There was so much to find out about. And in the four readings from Proverbs 8, Psalm 104, Colossians 1 and John 1, we have pictures of creation; that God is the author of that creation; and that Jesus is the instrument of creation.

As Christians, our scriptures are made up of the Old and New Testaments. The largest portion of our Christian Bible is, in fact, the books of the Hebrew Bible. One thing that has occupied Christian thinkers down the centuries is to find evidence of Jesus in the Old Testament. Matthew's gospel is distinctive in the lengths he goes to to show that Jesus fulfils many of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

Sadly, however, in Psalm 104 there is no explicit reference to or parallel with Jesus. What we have here is a Psalm which concentrates on how wonderful and how diverse is God's creation: 'the earth is full of your creatures'; 'the wide sea with its living things too many to number.' And it is the very fact of creation that is the key to understanding something of the nature of Jesus.

Again in Proverbs 8, there is no direct mention of Jesus. Instead, the writer of Proverbs focuses on wisdom. The Hebrew word for wisdom is 'chokmah'. The noun is feminine and the figure of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs is pictured as the embodiment of the virtuous women whose price is above rubies. Here in Proverbs 8, wisdom is pictured as being with God at the very beginning of creation, alongside the creative act, an underlying principle in the wise skill with which God created the heavens and the earth. And here is the link to, the parallel with Jesus.

The opening of John's gospel is a succinct poetical and mystical statement of the creation. Let me quote the familiar words from the King James Bible: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.' Great stuff! Powerful stuff! Great not only because it reminds us of Christmas; powerful not only because the cadences of the Authorised version have the capacity, the power to move us but great and powerful because they are saying something extremely important about Jesus:

that Jesus did not start life as a baby in a manger in an inn in Bethlehem but that he was pre-existent with God in the very beginning of things, through whom those very things, all those very things were made. The word John uses for Word is, as you know, the Greek word λογος (logos). And there we have it: the creative presence of the Word (God the Son) alongside the creative will of God the Father bringing the Creation into being. What in Proverbs is wisdom, here in John is λογος.

And finally, in Colossians Paul explaining the incarnation is clear that Jesus is instrumental in the creation. Paul writes: 'in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible.' Jesus did not start life with his birth in Bethlehem but he himself was in fact the start of life.

Let me, then, conclude by affirming that the creation and Jesus Christ go hand-in-hand, the one due to the other. Proverbs, Psalms, John and Paul all picture God and Jesus in the creation. And in Jesus, the invisible God, our Father, is made visible through his incarnation.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

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H: Sermon 25: Image

