

The Nicaea & Creation Course

2. Jesus Christ

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, Lord God, creator of day and night: to you be praise and glory for ever. As darkness falls you renew your promise to reveal among us the light of your presence. By the light of Christ, your living Word, dispel the darkness of our hearts that we may walk as children of light and sing your praise throughout the world. Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: **Blessed be God for ever.**

In the previous study, we looked at the way in which the bishops at the Council of Nicaea reframed the relationship between divinity and the material world, as a direct result of the church's encounter with Jesus Christ. Within this reframing, the Son is free to be both Creator and creature, because of the non-competitive nature between the Creator and creation. Both can occupy the same space, and do, in the person of Jesus Christ. We call this incredible paradox "**the incarnation**" (meaning enfleshment). The Nicene Creed makes the bold and beautiful claim that through this incarnation all things were made.

This seems an important point for our reflection on the Creed in relation to Creation. Scripture speaks of the whole salvation story enacted through incarnation as intended by God before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). Even before the wondrous story of Jesus of Nazareth unfolded, the design of God was to enter into the world that God so loves and in so doing, to save it.

"The Christian account of creation is set within the context of the economy of salvation. There is thus a presupposition of interconnectedness between creation, redemption and consummation, which places a theological interdiction against seeing creation as an isolated action or event, complete in itself. In particular, the Christian concept of creation is linked to that of incarnation."

Alistair McGrath, The Open Secret: A New Wisdom for Natural Theology



“In the beginning was the Word...”

From the beginning, the Judeo-Christian tradition is steeped in an awareness of the goodness of creation. By way of contrast to surrounding religions and cosmologies, the authors of Genesis offer a uniquely positive and favourable view of the material world. The Genesis creation narratives overflow with praise for a beautiful, abundant earth which God calls “good”, and the human figures of great importance within the story are made of nothing less than the earth.

One of the great projects of the Council of Nicaea was to further refine the doctrine of the incarnation, through which Christians enjoy a robust affirmation of the goodness of creation. In the Creed, we are offered not a static statement about Christ’s identity, but rather a creative and generative dynamism, a fruitful interplay between two radically different natures from which endless possibility, new life, and new creation flow.

Through the unique humanity that is Christ’s, the Church has come to recognize a new set of relations between the divine life and the created world. The union of infinite and finite in Christ creates a transformative capacity for communion between God and creation, as well as between human beings, and between humans and the rest of the non-human creation. That new set of relations is the vehicle for salvation, salvation which is nothing less than the healing of the whole of creation. Christ’s redemptive work has a cosmic dimension. No life is untouched by it.

Even as we remind ourselves of the wonderfully comprehensive work of salvation inaugurated by Christ, who died for the love of the world (the Greek word in John 3:16 is *cosmos*, everything that exists!) we are acutely aware that the cosmos is not in fact experiencing the life, healing, and freedom which God intends. Not all is right with the world. In the Season of Creation, we turn our attention to one of the most catastrophic ways in which the world is not right: the current climate catastrophe. Created in loving freedom, humanity often chooses the opposite of God’s creative purposes and rebels in sin against God’s good intentions for the world, and against God’s desires for our redemptive place within the order of creation. The climate crisis is a devastatingly real-life example of the damage that human rebellion reeks on everything and everyone.

Scientists agree that we are living through the seventh great extinction event, with biodiversity loss and death on a scale that has been unprecedented since human beings came into existence. Human beings are consuming the resources of the earth at a rate that outstrips the earth’s capacity to renew those resources. The world is in the fullest sense of the word a “wounded” world.

“To declare [the world] instead sick, ‘a vale of tears,’ is not pessimistic. It is to own that the world needs saving still; that Easter is not a past event, but present; that our life, our joy and hope depend on it.”

Bishop Erik Varden, Healing Wounds



In order to accomplish the great work on salvation through incarnation, Philippians 2 speak of Christ “emptying” himself, not grasping for the privilege of divinity, but choosing the “humility” of human form (and in so doing, exalting human form!). Another theological term for this self-emptying is ‘kenosis’. Perhaps the greatest example of this self-emptying in the hymn of Philippians 2 is the willingness to undertake woundedness, to accept the woundedness of the cross. In Jesus Christ, we are presented with the example of taking on the woundedness of the world in order to heal in, the example of acting through self-limitation, crucial considerations for taking climate responsibility.

“... kenosis must come to the fore in theological reflection on humanity before the current ecological crisis. It is a meaningful, sound, and timely interpretation of the imago Dei... It is Jesus’ own kenosis that reveals the true face of divine power – power in love – which decidedly aims at the wellbeing and fulfillment of creation. This twofold movement of self-limitation and self-giving love can certainly inspire the desirable renovation in theological anthropology.”

Román Guridi: Imago Dei as Kenosis: Re-imagining Humanity in an Ecological Era

Scientists further agree that the areas of the world responsible for the most consumption are also the areas of the world that enjoy the greatest “buffer” from the effects of climate change. Developed countries consume huge amounts of resources and contribute vastly to pollution, while less developed countries suffer the knock-on effects. Within the fragile web of life, the people and places who suffer the most due to pollution, drought, famine, and other natural disasters are often the least equipped to mitigate these disasters. The wounds of these communities go largely unattended.

In the book *Learning to Die*, Jan Zwicky suggests that “we attend also to the world’s extraordinary surprise: its refusal to quit, the weed flowering in tar, the way beauty and brokenness so often go together.” Through Christ’s death and resurrection, the last word on wounds is not sorrow; it is flourishing. Flourishing, however, is not automatic. Flourishing is cultivated through hard work and self-emptying, in some instances by those who have resources on behalf of those who do not have, and in some instances by those who will release some comforts for themselves in order that others may thrive. We might think of the parable of the Good Samaritan as an example par excellence of kenosis, self-emptying, and ‘taking on the wounds’ of another in order to bring about healing. God’s great invitation to Christ’s followers is to learn to love this wounded world in the way that God loves this wounded world: by giving, personally and even sacrificially, in order to bring about restoration.



In their excellent book *Learning to Die: Wisdom in the age of climate crisis* authors Robert Bringham and Jan Zwicky advocate for a return to the classic virtues as an appropriate and worthy response to the demands of our times. The virtues that they advocate for include:

- Awareness coupled with humility regarding the limits of what we know
- Courage
- Self-control
- Justice
- Contemplative practice that allows us to see the beauty of brokenness
- Compassion

Much of the discussion about the ecological catastrophe is couched in practical terms, a necessary and urgent conversation about carbon reduction, alternative economic models, politics and human rights, or conservation. Yet unfortunately this conversation may be overshadowed by a fixation on guilt, or injunctions regarding what we should or should not do. Rarely do we get to the moral and ethical heart of the matter, the part where we are called to conversion. We need to sit with the questions: “How did we get here?” and “What in my life needs to be saved and made like Christ?” Getting to the generative, life-giving, creative heart of the matter is precisely what the credal doctrine of incarnation offers to us. By asking these questions of soul-searching and salvation, we will undoubtedly arrive at a life of conservation and carbon reduction! But sitting with the wounds of a wounded world, and knowing my part in that wounding, merits our spiritual attention.

Personal change, and personal self-emptying is a necessary part of learning to love this wounded world that God so loves that he gave his only son. This is the culmination of having created all things: God in Christ is saving all things. The work of salvation is a work that Christ has done, and while we await the fullness of his saving work to be realized here on earth as in heaven, we seek to become more and more like him, formed in his image, actively taking our part in the great love story of the creation and salvation of the cosmos.

Discussion

- What other concerns for justice and flourishing intersect with the concern for climate justice?
- Might living out these or similar virtues (Awareness, Courage, Self-control, Justice, Contemplative practice, Compassion) be ways in which we can also bear the image of the incarnate Christ through whom all things were made?
- What virtues do you think are important to living well in our time of climate crisis?
- Do you have a rule of life or any other similar kind of guide to virtuous living?



Worship Jesus Christ

KYRIE

Turn us, O God, from our desire to turn in upon ourselves,
refuse to hear the voices of our fellow creatures.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Call us again, open our ears.

Gather us into relationships of mutual care and listening.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Enlighten us by your Spirit that renews the face of your Earth.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

ASSURANCE

Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed: forgive us our sins, open our eyes to God's truth, strengthen us to do God's will and give us the joy of his kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

HYMN

Source and Fount of All Creation

By Peter Baelz, former Dean of Durham Cathedral

Source and Fount of All Creation | *St. James Music Press*

Pour thy Spirit from above
On the bearers of thine image,
Offspring of a human love.
Human hopes and human graces
Break beneath the weight of sin;
Fear and envy wrench asunder
World without and self within.

Human love is unavailing
Counter-weight to sin and strife;
Love of God alone can hold us
On the way that leads to life.
Praised be God, whose Son our Saviour
Human nature has restored,
Living, dying, raised in glory,
to the likeness of its Lord.

Trace, O Christ, salvation's pattern,
God and sinner reconciled,
In an all-embracing story:
New creation, new-born child.
Word incarnate, world's Redeemer,
Here in us thy work repeat,
Signed and sealed thine own for ever,
Till the pattern stands complete.

Christ our universal Saviour,
Nature's poet, nature's priest,
Through life's troubled waters bring us
to the eucharistic feast,
Where rejoicing saint and sinner
Praise the Lord of time and space,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Fount of being, source of grace.



A CLOSING PRAYER

Eternal God, giver of love and power, your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world to preach the gospel of his kingdom: confirm us in this mission, and help us to live the good news we proclaim; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.