

# The Nicaea & Creation Course

## 3. Holy Spirit

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life...**

In this section, we will revisit the Genesis creation narratives and the One we know as the “giver of life”, the Holy Spirit. To begin this session, you may enjoy reading aloud or singing the following hymn, which introduces us to the Holy Spirit as a weaver.

### HYMN

#### **Weaver-God, Creator**

*Author: Kate Compston, sung to the tune Noël Nouvelet (“Now the green blade riseth”)*

Weaver-God, Creator, sets life on the loom,  
draws out threads of colour from primordial gloom.  
Wise in designing, in the weaving deft:  
love and justice joined – the fabric’s warp and weft.

Called to be co-weavers, yet we break the thread  
and may smash the shuttle and the lock, instead.  
Careless and greedy, we deny by theft  
love and justice joined – the fabric’s warp and weft.

Weaver-God, great Spirit, may we see your face  
tapestried in trees, in waves, and winds of space;  
tenderness teach us, lest we be bereft  
of love and justice joined – the fabric’s warp and weft.

Weavers we are called, yet woven too we’re born,  
For the web is seamless: if we tear, we’re torn.  
Gently may we live – that fragile Earth be left  
with love and justice joined – the fabric’s warp and weft.

In the two creation narratives found in Genesis, there is a wonderful depiction of an abundant earth which God calls “good”. Commentators note that in the first narrative in Genesis 1, the earth is formless and dark. Something mysterious, the Hebrew word is *ruach*, hovers over the primordial waters. This mysterious presence is sometimes translated as “breath”, sometimes as “wind”, and sometimes as “the Spirit of God”. The Spirit is moving over the formless and dark earth, and out of this presence and movement, God creates.

“Wind” and “breath” cannot be seen directly, only known by their effects. These images are commonly used for the Holy Spirit, whom one writer has referred to as the divine Person “without a face.”[1] The Spirit’s desire is to make the Father and Son known. In so doing, the Spirit may be thought of as the member of the Trinity who does not draw attention inwards, but outwards through activity that opens us up to the Father and to the Son.

[1] (Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. By David Smith (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997), p. 144).

Let's return to Genesis for a moment to look at the second creation narrative found in Genesis chapter 2, which offers a slightly different take on a similar story. In Genesis chapter 1, very little is specified about the creation of human beings, though they are depicted as having great importance. In Genesis 2:7, a more detailed picture emerges: human beings are made of nothing less than the earth (humans from the humous). This "earthiness" will come again in the final chapter next week. Yet we also note that human beings are made of more than earth. God breathes (here once again we find the Hebrew word is ruach) into the earth creature and the creature becomes a living being.

**Genesis 2:7: "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being."**

Is this verse introducing us to the Spirit of God once again, the Lord and giver of life? Made alive by the breath of God, the human being called Adam is given a home in a garden, to "work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). We get a glimpse of the kind of work that Adam is given to do: he gives names to the other living creatures. There is something wonderfully playful about the description of Adam's work in Genesis 2:19: "Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them." The impression given is of a co-creative process: God creates living beings, Adam creates names for these beings, and God waits expectantly for the outcome.

Through the creation story, we come to know the Spirit as the one who creates and the human being as a co-creator. "Creating" and giving life is one way in which humanity images God as Spirit.

In the Creed, the Holy Spirit is also celebrated as the agent active in creating the "new Adam". In the second paragraph of the Creed, we affirm that Jesus Christ "was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man." This brings us to the heart of a creation story which unravelled with Adam's sin and is woven back together in the One who images God perfectly, Jesus. The Spirit not only created Adam but also re-created Adam by bringing humanity to perfection in the God-man.

Perhaps no Gospel details the work of the Spirit as does John's Gospel. The famous prologue to John's Gospel in chapter 1 hearkens back to the work of creation and we explored this a bit in the last chapter. After poetically describing the Incarnation, the Word who became flesh, the very next event in John's Gospel is the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism. This is a moment in which God's healing of creation breaks through. Then in John chapter 3, we read the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus, a conversation about the activity of the Holy Spirit in birthing us again, creating and re-creating us, restoring us to the life for which we were intended.

**John 3:5-8: Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

The Gospel of John 1:3 speaks powerfully about creation, saying that all things were made and came into existence through God; and without God not even one thing was made that has come into being. The authors of the Nicene Creed, along with the early mothers and fathers of the church, wove this understanding of “creation out of nothing” into our foundational texts. This matters to us today. God does not rely upon anything to create, God’s very love and very breath is the source of life and creativity.

When a human makes or creates something, we require materials. But God is unique from us and creates out of nothing. If God did not create from nothing, then there would be something that did not derive from God and would be beyond the possibility of God’s transformation. Because God has created everything from nothing, because all that exists has been spun from divine creativity and love and because nothing exists outside of that love, all that exists can be healed and redeemed by that same love.

All of these themes lie in the background of the simple affirmation of the Creed, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life...”

The Spirit continually gives life through the Spirit’s intercession on behalf of creation. Romans 8:22 speaks of creation’s groaning, the outpouring of the grief of a wounded world to the God who hears. Creation is longing for the future of hope of which Christians speak in the final lines of the Creed, the glorious liberty of the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. As creation groans, the Spirit amplifies that groaning within the Godhead, groaning with us and helping us in our weakness and inability to pray (cf Romans 8:26-27).

Casting our minds back to that co-creative work of Adam in the garden, as he named the creatures made by God, we may consider that a powerful act of “naming” that we can engage in today is the act of naming this moment of travail in creation. Groaning with and on behalf of creation, participating in the life-giving intercession of the Spirit for the world. And as we pray for that freedom and liberty for which creation groans, we seek also to become part of the answer to our prayers.

To draw some threads together from the last three chapters, then, we are assured that God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are all equally and fully present to creation. The Father, the maker of heaven and earth, is fully seen in the Son through whom all things were made, and both are witnessed by the Holy Spirit, the life-giver. Eternally one God, they hold all that exists in being. We believe and trust that God will bring to completion the good work begun in creation.



## Unity and Diversity & Interfaith Horizons

The Holy Spirit enables unity but does not eliminate diversity. Because we are made differently, in the image of a triune God, we should expect difference among us. We may all hear different invitations from the Spirit, inviting us to respond to the climate disaster in different ways. Would you be willing to share with the group how you have been called to respond? If you are not sure, that's okay. There will be some suggestions next week in the final chapter.

In order to truly “give life” in an age of environmental degradation, human beings will need to find common ground and make common efforts. The Holy Spirit also opens up conversations about God beyond Christianity, as belief in the Holy Spirit is a point of connection between many faiths, not least Judaism and Islam. Thinking about creation through the lens of the Holy Spirit may enable a conversation with people of other faiths.

Facing this crisis together requires all of our mutuality and good will, all of our creativity and cooperation. To borrow an expression from the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, to engage in interfaith dialogue is “to see the face of the other person turned toward God.” Perhaps a further gift of the Holy Spirit is to create a context for dialogue and enrichment, to awaken within us our co-creative potential, and to illumine our faces as we collectively turn toward God.

### Practice

Rather than further discussion, here we suggest an embodied spiritual practice. Embodied spiritual practice is not just something that we “do” — it's about recognizing what we are. We are made of earth and divine breath. Harnessing our attention to the “breath of life” can transform everyday activities into opportunities to notice our dependence upon God and God's presence within creation. These practices also help to quiet the thinking mind and bring awareness to the physical sensations, cultivating harmony between body and spirit and transforming physical actions into expressions of embodied spirituality. Working through the body and through breathing can be a profound form of spiritual journey.

- Breathe in for four counts. You might like to hold in your mind the words “Giver of life” as you inhale.
- Hold your breath for three counts.
- Breathe out for four counts. You might like to hold in your mind the words “Heal us, we pray” as you exhale.
- Repeat the exercise twice.



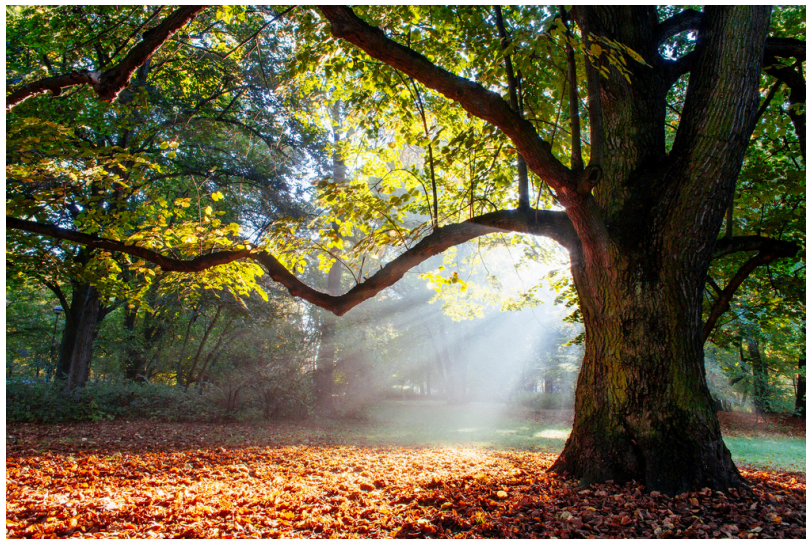
## **Worship Holy Spirit**

### **POEM**

*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.





## PSALM 139

Consider punctuating the Psalm with deep breaths, in and out, at each diamond ♦ grounding yourselves individually and as a group in this moment of worship.

**Refrain: Where can I go then from your spirit? ♦**

Or: **Where can I flee from your presence?**

1 O Lord, you have searched me out and known me;  
you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

2 You mark out my journeys and my resting place  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

3 For there is not a word on my tongue,  
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

4 You encompass me behind and before  
and lay your hand upon me.

5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
so high that I cannot attain it.

**Where can I go then from your spirit? ♦**

**Or where can I flee from your presence?**

7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there;  
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

8 If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

9 Even there your hand shall lead me,  
your right hand hold me fast.

10 If I say, 'Surely the darkness will cover me  
and the light around me turn to night,'

11 Even darkness is no darkness with you;  
the night is as clear as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.

**Where can I go then from your spirit? ♦**

**Or where can I flee from your presence?**

12 For you yourself created my inmost parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

13 I thank you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
marvellous are your works, my soul knows well.



**14 My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.**

**15 Your eyes beheld my form, as yet unfinished;  
already in your book were all my members written,**

**16 As day by day they were fashioned  
when as yet there was none of them.**

**Where can I go then from your spirit? ♦  
Or where can I flee from your presence?**

**17 How deep are your counsels to me, O God!  
How great is the sum of them!**

**18 If I count them, they are more in number than the sand,  
and at the end, I am still in your presence.**

**19 O that you would slay the wicked, O God,  
that the bloodthirsty might depart from me!**

**20 They speak against you with wicked intent;  
your enemies take up your name for evil.**

**21 Do I not oppose those, O Lord, who oppose you?  
Do I not abhor those who rise up against you?**

**22 I hate them with a perfect hatred;  
they have become my own enemies also.**

**23 Search me out, O God, and know my heart;  
try me and examine my thoughts.**

**24 See if there is any way of wickedness in me  
and lead me in the way everlasting.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit ♦  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**Where can I go then from your spirit? ♦  
Or where can I flee from your presence?**



## HYMN

She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters,  
hovering on the chaos of the world's first day;  
she sighs and she sings, mothering creation,  
waiting to give birth to all the Word will say.

She wings over earth, resting where she wishes,  
lighting close at hand or soaring through the skies;  
she nests in the womb, welcoming each wonder,  
nourishing potential hidden to our eyes.

She dances in fire, startling her spectators,  
waking tongues of ecstasy where dumbness reigned;  
she weans and inspires all whose hearts are open,  
nor can she be captured, silenced or restrained.

For she is the Spirit, one with God in essence,  
gifted by the Saviour in eternal love;  
and she is the key opening the scriptures,  
enemy of apathy and heavenly dove.

*John L. Bell & Graham Maule, 'Enemy of Apathy', in The Iona Abbey Worship Book (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2003), 193. (The hymn also appears in Church Hymnary 4, #593, and in some other places too)*

## CLOSING PRAYER

A candle may be lit...

**Spirit of God, You established the dance of Creation; bring life out of death bring order out of chaos. Call us to radical action: to care for the web of Creation, to share our resources justly and to work for the renewal of our Mother Earth. We light this candle as we commit ourselves to fast and pray for climate justice. Amen.**



*Most Revd Dr Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town*

You may wish to end this session in silence.

Some of the material in this book is extracted from Common Worship: Times and Seasons (2006), Common Worship: Daily Prayer (2005), Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England (2000) and New Patterns for Worship (2002). Copyright © The Archbishops' Council 2006, 2015, 2020