

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/

© Chris Haslam

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

NRSV

This passage says much about God and his relationship to humans. Long ago, people in the Near East asked how the earth came to be. A single creation story (with variants) was known throughout the region; one such, dating from at least 1700 BC, is *Enuma Elish* from Mesopotamia (now Iraq.) It and Genesis 1 have a similar sequence of events, so studying what the authors of the Genesis story added, and what they left out, tells us about our God.

First, “In the beginning when God created ...”: God pre-exists all creation; he existed before all time. The whole visible world came into being as a result of divine activity. At first, there was no order to the earth; it was *chaotic*; it was empty; “a formless void” (1:2). However here, unlike in *Enuma Elish*, a force is present, a life-giving power: “a wind [or Spirit] from God”. From 1:3 on, the creation story is in the form of a hymn, with a refrain, “God saw that ... [it] was good” (1:4, etc), This ancient story is divided into seven *days*, or stages of creation. The sequence is like *Enuma Elish*.

On the first day, God creates light, thus overcoming the “darkness” (1:2). In the Semitic mind, God’s ability to give names to light and darkness shows that he controls them. To grasp Day 2 (1:6-10), we need to appreciate that people saw the earth as covered by a huge inverted pudding bowl, the “dome”, above which were the upper waters: snow, hail and rain. The “waters” surrounded the “dry land”, which God again names. On Day 3 (1:11-13), God has vegetation created through his agent, Earth. Other peoples worshipped some kinds of vegetation; in not creating vegetation directly, God reduces the chances of Israel doing the same: they are to worship only God. On the following days, living things (as seen by the ancient mind) are created or made. People then thought plants were unable to transmit life. The Sun and the Moon, created on Day 4 (1:14-19), are inanimate to us, but to ancient people they were beings, moving on fixed tracks on the under-side of the dome. To Israel, they are beings under God’s command. On Day 5 (1:20-23), God creates animals of the sea and air. Even the “great sea monsters” (e.g. Leviathan) were seen as creatures of the one God, and are therefore good. They, the fish and the birds get a special blessing because people thought they did not have the same ability to reproduce as land animals. On Day 6, land animals are created. 1:24 says that God caused the earth to “bring [them] forth”; however, in 1:25, God creates them directly. The creation story was handed down orally for centuries, and a tale varies in the telling. As we often find in Genesis, the author (or editor) is not afraid to include divergent versions.

“Let us” (1:26) is like a *royal we*; the creation of humans is the climax of the creation story. *Human* is made (created) in God’s “image” (the Hebrew word implies

an exact copy or reproduction); but he is also a “likeness” (resemblance, similarity). He rules over all creatures. Sex is of divine origin. It is because of God’s blessing that we have procreative power. *Human* is to “subdue” (1:28) the earth and all that is in it. His rule over the animals won’t always be easy. 1:29-30 say that we were initially vegetarian. (God permits Noah to eat meat.) Day 7 is the day of rest, a reminder of the Sabbath. God blesses the seventh day, thus setting it apart. There is no evening of this day: the relationship between God and man continues for ever.

Genesis uses “generations” (2:4) to mark important stages in God’s actions, starting with creation. The text shows him as creator in his total and uncompromised power, the intrinsic order and balance of the created world, and mankind’s importance and his key role in the scheme of creation. God’s creation is also peaceful, unlike the warring factions (gods) of *Enuma Elish*. The focus is on the emergence of a people; the earth serves as an environment for the human community. Genesis 1 works within the *science* of its time to tell of divine power and purpose, and the unique place of humans.

Psalm 136:1-9,23-26

NRSV

This psalm is one of thanksgiving for the great deeds that the LORD has performed for his people, evidence of his enduring love. It is unique in that the second half of every verse is a response by the congregation, the same in all verses. Psalm 118 also has this pattern, but only in the first four verses. God’s love for his people is “steadfast”, enduring. Vv. 1-3 are the summons to give thanks; vv. 4-9 praise God as Creator. The “great wonders” in these verses (v. 4) are the same as those in Genesis. The reference to “us” in vv. 23-24 links those who sing the psalm now with Israel’s experience over the generations. V. 26 recapitulates, echoing v. 1

Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18, 8:6-18, 9:8-13

NRSV

In 6:6 the LORD regrets that he has made humans, they being wicked, and decides to obliterate them, all but Noah and his family. To save them from the Flood, they are to build an ark. They “alone are righteous” (7:1) so they are to “go into the ark”, taking with them representative animals and birds (7:2-3). The animals selected are to be both “clean” and “unclean” (per Leviticus 11). Per 1:7, the waters are confined to being above and below the earth; now they are let loose: there is a temporary reversal of the orderliness of creation. It appears that the number of animals and birds Noah takes aboard the ark (in 7:14-15) differs from what God has commanded (in 7:2) but note “God” and “LORD” in 7:16. The different names for the deity suggest that the story as we have it combines two literary sources. It is the LORD that shuts the door of the ark, not Noah: it is the LORD who is in command.

In 8:1-5 the Flood begins to subside. The return of the “dove” in 8:11 shows Noah that the water level is dropping. 8:4 says that “the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat” which are in northeastern Turkey. They were thought to be exceedingly high. Our reading skips to Chapter 9. The covenant God makes with

humankind is unilateral: it places obligations on God but not on “every living creature” (9:10). There will never be another world-wide flood (9:11). The “sign of the covenant” (9:13) is the rainbow (“bow”).

Psalm 46

NRSV

This psalm tells of God’s protection and defence of his people. Perhaps the psalmist thinks of Isaiah 8:6-7; there “streams” (v. 4) are what God provides to the godly. The “city of God” is Jerusalem, God’s dwelling place on earth. Even if natural disasters (earthquakes, vv. 2-3) or political turmoil (v. 6) occur, or earth returns to its primordial chaotic state (“waters”, v. 3), God will remain (“not be moved”, v. 5), answering night-long prayer in the “morning”. Israel has suffered “desolations” (v. 8) for not doing God’s will. In a liturgy, a priest or prophet invites participants to consider God’s deeds: he ends political turmoil, bringing peace (v. 9). Recognize that God is supreme over all the earth! (v. 10) He is with his people and keeps them safe (v. 11).

Genesis 22:1-18

NRSV

God has given Abraham and Sarah a son, Isaac. Ishmael, born of a slave woman, has been banished, with his mother, Hagar. While Abraham’s line will continue through Isaac, Ishmael too will be the father of a nation. Rabbis pointed out long ago that Abraham is tested ten times by God; our reading tells of the tenth.

We know that Abraham is being tested, but he does not. When God calls him, he is ready and available to do as God asks (“Here I am”, v. 1). Isaac is his “only [remaining] son” (v. 2), the one through whom he will become “a great nation” (12:2). God asks much of Abraham: offer Isaac to him as a sacrificial offering – accept that God may *undo* his promise of descendants. Abraham travels from Beer-sheba (in southern Palestine) to a mountain God will show him – later known as Mount Zion. He is a man of action (v. 3). Part way there, “on the third day” (v. 4), he and Isaac leave their retainers behind. Isaac is naturally curious: where is the sacrificial animal? (v. 7). His father’s answer (v. 8) is not a ruse; rather it shows Abraham’s trust in God: he will “provide”.

Abraham follows the normal procedure for a sacrifice; he even takes out his knife to slay Isaac, as an animal was slain. But at this moment “the angel” (v. 11, a messenger from God, perhaps the one who had called to Hagar from heaven, showing her the life-saving well during her flight with Ishmael, 21:17-19), calls; he is God’s life-preserving agent here too (v. 12). Abraham has shown himself totally obedient to God; he has shown that he holds God in proper respect (“fear”). A “ram” (v. 13) is sacrificed instead. V. 14 tells us how Mount “Moriah” (v. 2) got its name. In vv. 15-18, through the angel, God renews his promise to Abraham: he will bless him with many descendants (v. 17), and make them politically and militarily powerful; Abraham will be the source of oneness with God for “all the nations of the earth” (v. 18) – as God promised him, in 12:8, if he would leave Haran and settle in Palestine.

Psalm 16

NRSV

The NRSV translation is significantly different from Peter’s quotation in Acts. He quotes the then-current Greek translation loosely (probably from memory); it takes liberties with the Hebrew original. Vv. 1-2 summarize the psalm. The speaker probably *takes refuge* in worship in the Temple; he sees God as *supreme good* (v. 2). He takes the members of the faithful community, “the holy ones” (v. 3) as models for living; he will not worship with those who choose pagan gods – and not even associate with them (v. 4). His fate and his future (“portion and ... cup”, v. 5) are in God’s hands. The author compares his devotion to that of a Levite. For other tribes, there were “boundary lines” (v. 6) between tribal territories in Israel, but Levites received no land; the psalmist’s “chosen portion” (v. 5) is God himself. God gives him “counsel” (v. 7) and deep understanding (“heart”). God teaches him his ways. Because God supports him, he will not stumble (“be moved”, v. 8) in following godly ways. V. 10 is unclear: it may refer to immortality or just to living a full lifetime. “Forevermore” (v. 11) may be meant literally but is more likely to mean *throughout the rest of my life*.

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21

NRSV

After suffering from plagues sent by God, the Pharaoh has allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt. While the direct route to Canaan is along the coast of the Red Sea, God has led them towards the Sea of Reeds, out of concern that they may abort their mission if beset by enemies. Finding the Egyptian frontier forts too strong (14:2), they have turned back at God’s behest. He has fooled the Egyptians into thinking that the Israelites were trapped (14:3), and then pursuing them. His plan will show Israel’s God to be victor over Egypt and her gods. The Pharaoh has had his chariots prepared for battle (14:6). The appearance of the Egyptian army has struck fear in the Israelites – they have complained (14:11) (for the first of many times in the Exodus saga) about Moses’ leadership (and God’s): they prefer slavery to certain death. But Moses has calmed his people, by assuring them of rescue – with God fighting with them – if they do not panic. God has commanded Moses to divide the sea (14:21).

The “pillar of cloud” (v. 19), “pillar of fire and cloud” (v. 24), may have its origin as a marker carried at the head of an army or caravan, but from this event on they become symbols of God’s presence. The “angel of God” (v. 19) comes between the Israelites and the Egyptians protecting God’s people and confusing the Egyptians, as does the “pillar of cloud”. The Sea of Reeds (“the sea”, v. 21) is shallow and surrounded with marshy land. God uses a natural phenomenon to achieve his purpose: *east winds* strong enough to blow away the water do occur. The battle turns when the Egyptian chariots bog down in the soft earth (v. 25). The story was handed down orally from one generation to the next; that “the waters” (vv. 22, 29) form a “wall” suggest that it grew in the telling. Vv. 30-31 are probably a later editorial comment: God saves; subjugation to the Egyptians is over; the Israelites have seen the marvel which God has done for them, so they hold him in awe and trust in him. We do not know precisely what happened at the Sea of Reeds, but we see the result: God sets his people on his way, led by Moses.

Exodus 15:1b-11,17-18

NRSV

After God has rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians, Moses and the people sing a song of praise and thanksgiving to him. He is pictured as a “warrior” (v. 3) fighting for his people: a common metaphor in the ancient Near East. God’s “right hand” (v. 6) symbolizes his power. “The waters” (v. 8) were seen as powerful and hostile; God even commands them. Early Israelite theology recognized multiple “gods” (v. 11) who later became members of God’s heavenly council; God is the greatest – in sacredness, worthiness of awe-full contemplation, and in deeds to be marvelled at. To a later generation, “mountain of your possession” and “the sanctuary” would be understood as Jerusalem, site of the Temple on Mount Zion.

Isaiah 54:5-14

NRSV

This part of Isaiah was written when the people of Israel were living in exile in Babylon. They hope that God will soon end their exile. Jerusalem lies in ruins. Israel is pictured as God’s “wife” (v. 6) with God as their “husband” (v. 5). He seeks to surround her with protection and joy. V. 7 recalls the time before Noah’s flood in Genesis 6. Back then, God, recognizing the wickedness of humankind, decided to obliterate humans, except for the only godly family, Noah’s. He confirms what he said after the Flood: as he “swore” (v. 9) that the “waters of Noah would never again go over the earth”, he will never be “angry” with his people again, nor “rebuke you”. Those in the ark were “storm-tossed”. Vv. 11-14 depict a heavenly Jerusalem, more glorious than the one that was destroyed, where they will be taught by him, where they will be prosperous, where there will be neither “oppression”, “fear” nor “terror”. They will live in peace (v. 17). No one can assault God’s “servants” with impunity.

Psalms 30

NRSV

The psalmist clearly praises God for his recovery from grave illness, but this psalm may also be allegorical: its title says that it was sung at the dedication of the Temple, which was desecrated in 164 BC and rededicated in 161 BC. “Sheol”, “the Pit”, (v. 3) was thought of as a place under the earth where the dead existed as mere shadows. In vv. 4-5, the psalmist invites all present to join in giving thanks. In vv. 6-10, he recounts what happened to him. He had felt perfectly secure and healthy (v. 6), but he fell from God’s favour (God “hid”, v. 7, from him) – he became ill. Feeling near death, he prayed to God, pointing out that if allowed to go to Sheol, no one, not even God, could hear him. God did hear his prayer and restored him to health and favour (vv. 11-12): his sorrow was turned to joy, even to liturgical “dancing”. He will praise God for the rest of his life.

Isaiah 55:1-11

NRSV

This chapter concludes a section of the book called *Second Isaiah* by many scholars. It was written during the Exile, after the fall of Babylon to the Persians. This section began with Chapter 40, and key themes presented there are repeated here: the way of the Lord, calling the people to enjoy God’s gifts, a new deliverance,

the word of the Lord, the king, heaven and earth, God’s relationship with Israel, forgiveness, and the participation of other nations.

Vv. 1-3 invite all *who thirst* for God (even the impoverished) to join in his freely-given banquet at the end of time. The meal symbolizes God’s love, his abundance. Recall other banquets: (1) in Egypt, after a plague killed every first-born son but *passed over* (did not afflict) Israelite sons; and (2) after Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai. Here the banquet is for “everyone”. The food is both invaluable (“without price”) and cannot be bought (“without money”). God made an “everlasting covenant” (v. 3) with David, making him a great leader and guaranteeing him an enduring line of successors; now this greatness is transferred to Israel (“you”), so that they “may live”, i.e. see the promises of long ago fulfilled now and in the future. Now nations who neither know Israel nor are known to her will come seeking Israel’s “LORD” (v. 5).

All may now “seek the LORD” (v. 6), turn humbly to him, not only in the Temple but wherever he may be found, for “he is near”. The invitation to share in the life of this new community is even extended to evildoers who repent and “return to the Lord” (v. 7), for they will be pardoned. God may be “near” but he is transcendent, sufficiently removed not to be contaminated by human sin. His ways are beyond human comprehension (vv. 8-9). Vv. 10-11 say that God’s *word* comes gently from him, to permeate the earth and return to him, mission done. His spirit, infused in humans, brings in them godliness, success in furthering God’s plan. Vv. 12-13 say that sin will be abolished; all the world will recognize God; creation will be renewed, and all will rejoice. This will be an “everlasting sign” of God’s love.

Isaiah 12:2-6

NRSV

V. 1 and v. 4 begin “... in that day”; 11:10 says “On that day” other nations will note that a king of David’s line (“the root of Jesse”) sits on Israel’s throne; they will ask about him and the divine glory that is with him. “On that day”, says 11:11, God will gather the remnant, the remaining faithful, from throughout the world. So the *day* is the end of the era, when the Messiah will come. “You” (12:1) is singular, so perhaps God instructs a herald of events to come. He will tell the people to give thanks for the end of God’s anger and return to his *comfort*. Perhaps metaphorically, “salvation” in 12:2 and 12:3 is restoration to the Promised Land: note “wells of salvation”. God’s “strength and ... might” (12:2) will protect his people. Life-giving water (12:3) symbolizes God’s saving power. In a second song (12:4-6), the people not only give thanks but also proclaim the good news to all nations: that all may know of him and his actions. His people are inhabitants of “Zion” (12:6), “royal” because God, “the Holy One of Israel” dwells there.

Baruch 3:9-15,32-4:4

NRSV

“The commandments of life” (3:9) are “wisdom”. 4:1 says that “She”, lady wisdom, is “the commandments of God”, Mosaic law, so living by the Law is wisdom. While 1:1 says that the author wrote “in Babylon”, scholars tell us that

Baruch is made up of several small books, some much later, as is this reading. It probably dates from after the people of Israel had returned to Israel, at a time when they were governed by gentile Hellenic rulers. Other Jews had spread around the Mediterranean, forming the Diaspora. The people were suffering, as they had during the exile in Babylon.

Jews in the Diaspora, and even in Israel, are “defiled” by association with gentiles, who to Jews are all but “dead” and are ready to depart for “Hades”, the abode of the dead, because they do not observe the Law. It is God who is the “fountain of wisdom” (3:12). The “light for the eyes” (3:14) was thought to be what enables a person to see. 3:33 says that it is God who causes the sun to rise and set. The sun and the “stars” (3:34), which stand their “watches”, obey him when he calls them. The author personifies them, as she is in 4:1. The “way to knowledge” (3:36) is the way to wisdom. In 4:2 the people are counselled to “walk towards” wisdom. 4:3 seems to be saying that if Jews fail to live by the Law its “glory” and “advantages” may be given to gentiles.

Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6

NRSV

Wisdom, “understanding” is personified as a woman. She “cries out” (v. 3) to all people everywhere (“all that live”, v. 4). Her message is primarily to young people. She speaks “utter truth” (v. 7) – she is absolutely reliable. She is completely opposed to anything dishonest or insincere. Her message possesses integrity and makes sense, to those who understand (v. 9). While *walking* with great integrity, she brings material prosperity to all who listen to her (vv. 20-21). 9:4b-6 is her invitation to those who lack wisdom, the unwise, “those without sense”. They too are invited to join in the great banquet at the end of time, promised by God. There will no longer be death. We think of the parable of the marriage feast in Matthew 22:1-14. There Jesus says “invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet”.

Psalm 19

NRSV

To the Israelites, the “firmament” was a giant inverted pudding bowl over the earth, beyond which was a hierarchy of “heavens”. God’s glory is told “day” (v. 2) and “night”, yet silently (v. 3a), to all people. He has created the sun as his agent (v. 5); it rises early in the morning, as does the “bridegroom” from his night’s rest, traverses from one edge of the heavens to the other, making God’s presence known with its “heat” (v. 6). Vv. 7-9 present the wonders of the law, as an expression of God’s will for Israel. Here we find synonyms for the Law, characteristics of it, and its benefits for humankind, e.g. it *makes* “wise the simple”, those immature in understanding and judgement. It warns the psalmist (“servant”, v. 11). If he accidentally break it (“hidden faults”, v. 12), may God forgive him. May God protect him from those who intentionally go against God’s ways (“the insolent”, v. 13), lest he be influenced into sinning intentionally (“great transgression”). May his words and his thoughts be acceptable to God, who restores him to godliness (v. 14).

Ezekiel 36:24-28

NRSV

God speaks through the prophet. He will end the Exile, those in Babylon will return to Israel, and so too will those who have dispersed to other countries (v. 24). God will “cleanse” (v. 25) them of their sins – they cannot cleanse themselves – including desertion of God for other gods. The “heart” (v. 26) was seen as the seat of thinking and loving; they will reorient their way of looking at life, to seeing it as God sees it. He will endow them with a “new spirit”. They will truly live by Mosaic law. The relationship of the spirit to the Law is new. Indeed, they will return to Israel. With the gift of the spirit they will truly become subjects of God.

Psalms 42;43

NRSV

These two psalms are a single lyric consisting of three stanzas, each with a refrain (42:5, 11; 43:5). The psalmist is ill (42:10) and so is unable to make a pilgrimage from northern Palestine (Mount “Hermon”, v. 6) to Jerusalem. He loves God dearly (42:1-4) and desires greatly to come before him in the Temple (42:2). He has fond memories of past pilgrimages (v. 4). To him, illness is a sign that God has forgotten him (42:9). Ungodly people claim that he is ill because he is wicked (43:1). May God show that he is faithful! May he be able to make the pilgrimage again! (43:3-4).

Ezekiel 37:1-14

NRSV

It is likely that Ezekiel was among those deported when the Babylonians first took Jerusalem, in 598 BC. He opposed a political solution to Judah’s woes, espousing instead the notion of Israel as a community faithful to God in religious observance and obedience. Vv. 1-10 are a vision, a prophecy, and vv. 11-14 the interpretation. The “valley” is probably the Tigris-Euphrates plain. The scene the “spirit” of God shows the prophet is of an arid place, perhaps the site of a battle. The bones are “very dry”, long lifeless; they symbolize the exiles, who lack hope of resuscitation of the kingdom of Israel: see v. 11a. Contrasting with the dead bones are “breath” and “spirit” – both *ru’ah* in Hebrew. See especially v. 9. In vv. 12-13 the metaphor shifts to “graves”. God will renew the covenant, restoring Israel – but probably spiritually rather than literally. Perhaps v. 13 led to the Jewish notion of the resurrection of all at the end of time.

Psalm 143

NRSV

The psalmist is beset by personal enemies, and prays for deliverance from them. In vv. 1-2 he calls to God for help, then in vv. 3-6 he explains his situation, and finally vv. 7-12 are his prayer. Note the contrasts: “in darkness” (v. 3) with “in the morning” (v. 8), “my spirit” (v. 7) with “your good spirit”, “you are my God” (v. 10) with “I am your servant” (v. 12). “Selah” may mark where there should be a musical interlude when the psalm is sung. The “Pit” (v. 7) is another name for Sheol, the underworld where departed spirits go.

Zephaniah 3:14-20

NRSV

Earlier in the chapter, the author has spoken of Jerusalem (her inhabitants) and their crimes: they have failed to listen to God, accept his advice, trust in him and

draw near (v. 2) to him. He has destroyed other nations as a warning to Jerusalem, but she has ignored it (vv. 6-7). In spite of this, he will cause Gentiles to turn to his ways (v. 9); they will serve him by permitting the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem (v. 10). When God does rise (“on that day”, v. 11, in an ideal future time), he will bring about Jerusalem’s moral recovery by removing the arrogant from their midst (v. 12), leaving as “the remnant” (v. 13), the “humble and lowly” (v. 12), who will be godly; they will live in tranquillity.

Now the author (or perhaps a later editor) invites Jerusalem to rejoice because her salvation is about to happen. God has intervened (v. 15); he dwells with his people; he protects them. In a military image, God will lead Israel’s army. He will encourage her people (v. 16); he will give them victory, rejoice in their return to his ways, make his love for them apparent again, and celebrate in song. As people expected to happen at the end of time, God will destroy Jerusalem’s (and Judah’s) enemies, look after those who suffer, bring the exiles home, and make the city to be honoured by all (v. 19). They will see Judah’s fortunes restored! (v. 20).

Psalm 98 NRSV

Worshippers are invited to sing “a new song” marking new evidence of God’s rule. With truth (“right hand”) and power, he has won the “victory”, i.e. salvation, saving acts, for his people Israel. He has triumphed over all who try to overthrow his kingdom. All peoples can see that Israel is right in trusting him (“vindication”, v. 2). Then v. 3: as he did when the Israelites groaned under oppression in Egypt (Exodus 2:24), he now remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – to lead them and protect them. All peoples will see his saving acts. (These verses are in the past tense, but the reference is to a future event.) Vv. 4-8 call on all creation (“earth”, “sea”, “floods” and “hills”) to acknowledge and be joyful in God’s rule. Per v. 7b, people of all lands are invited to join in. God’s coming to “judge the world” (v. 9) will be a truly marvellous event. He will judge us, but his judgement will be perfectly fair and equitable, for he is righteous.

Romans 6:3-11 NRSV

Paul has written of life before Christ: death was final, and “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (5:20). He now asks rhetorically: are we to go on sinning in order to receive even more grace? (v. 1) (Is this the basis for Christian morality?) His answer is *definitely not!*, and poses another question: “How can we who died to sin go on living in it?” (v. 2). Baptism makes the difference for Christians. In baptism, we die to sin. We are baptised into Christ’s death, as well as into his resurrection. We too are raised from death by the Father, so that we may “walk” (v. 4) in the new life. *Walking* implies conscience-based ethical conduct. There is no room for wanton sin in such a life.

Just as we have been grafted on to Christ in his death, so we too will share with him through a resurrection like his (v. 5). We know that we ceased to be dominated by sin and divine wrath (“our old self”, v. 6) when we were baptised. This removed the effects of our waywardness, our *enslavement to sin*, but makes us ethi-

cally responsible for our actions. This is what baptism does (v. 7). Dying with Christ also includes living with him. Because Christ has risen, he will “never die again” (v. 9) – this is unique, once-for-all-time act, an anticipation of the age to come. And then the answer to the question in v. 2: Christ “died to sin” in the sense that sinless, he died rather than disobey the Father, and in the context of a sinful world. He was raised by the Father (v. 4) in order that he might live “to God” (v. 10, as he has always done.) So, as Christ is the model for our lives, and it is he upon whom our lives are grafted, we too must leave sin behind and be “alive to God” (v. 11) in Christ.

Psalm 114 NRSV

Vv. 1-3 speak of the Exodus in the briefest of terms, stating its initial and final events: the people saw the Sea of Reeds and the “Jordan” divided. Perhaps v. 4 speaks of the earth tremors which accompanied God’s appearance on Mount Sinai. Why, ask vv. 5-6, did these remarkable phenomena occur? Because the lord of all creation was present. He even commanded the “rock” (v. 8) at Meribah to gush forth water, thus relieving the thirst of the Israelites during the Exodus. As the physical earth responded to God’s command then, do so now!

Luke 24:1-12 NRSV

Joseph of Arimathea has wrapped Jesus’ body in a linen cloth and has laid it in a tomb newly carved into the rock face (23:53). “The women who had come with ... [Jesus] followed, and saw the tomb and how his body was laid” (23:55). They prepared the “spices and ointments” (23:56) for embalming his body, but there was insufficient time to embalm it before the start of the Sabbath. Now, on Sunday (“the first day of the week”, v. 1), they come to embalm the body. (Tombs were closed with a disk-shaped “stone” (v. 2) door, which ran in a track.) To their surprise, the door is open and the body gone (v. 3). The “men in dazzling clothes” (v. 4) are divine messengers; they ask: *why are you seeking, in a graveyard, one who is alive?* Jesus has predicted that he will be raised, in words similar to those in v. 7 (see 9:22). The word translated “remember” (vv. 6, 10) means: *bring to bear in the present, with power and deep insight, the meaning of past actions and words in God’s plan of salvation.* Jesus used this word of the Last Supper. It is the women who first proclaim the Easter gospel (vv. 9-10), but to the apostles it is unbelievable, as though spoken by a delirious person (“idle tale”, v. 11). Peter goes to see for himself, but he still lacks the *sight* of faith.

