

Beloved, I do not wish to weary you with a story you know all too well. Or rather, you *think* you know it well; for your minds are often sated with knowledge while your actions and attitudes are empty. Forgive me if I sound sharp; but as a farmer must prick a slumbering ox to begin its work, so must I prick your drowsy consciences to begin the spiritual effort of listening. Come then, let us begin. What relevance, you may ask, has the account of Creation? Remember the verse in Wisdom (13:5), “The Creator is perceived by analogy in the immensity and beauty of created things.” Why was the universe made as a vast and colossal entity? So that when it awes you, you might remember that our God is even more awesome. Why are flowers and birds and rivers and lush fields so beautiful? So that through their lowly beauty you may recognize the greater beauty of God.

At the outset we must mention, unfortunately, the fooleries spoken by many in our day regarding the beginning of the universe. You have philosophers like the Pythagoreans, who say there always existed plain old, generic matter, which with the passing ages slowly developed and self-organized into the world and life. Again, you have the Manicheans and Gnostics, who believe that a bad god created all material things, while the good God created only spiritual things. Then you have the Stoics who see God as a sort of chef, who took

the raw ingredients (which he did not create) of the universe and prepared a very fine cuisine—earth. Worst of all, there are those Epicureans who deny every concept of God or creation, and whose life slogan is, “Eat, drink and play: for tomorrow we die!” I wonder how long such vulgar notions will last. Until the end of time? May God save us.

So, passing on from the empty guesses of the world, let us dive into the wisdom of God’s word. At the dawn of time, God communicated rather directly with humans. This He did when, for example, he strolled with Adam in Eden in blessed conversation, or when he rebuked Cain, or when he was received hospitably by Abraham. But then something happened. Man drove himself into an abyss of sin and cut off his dialogue with God. What was God’s response? As if man were a dear friend who had been away on an extended leave, God desired to reestablish the friendship through an “epistle.” And just as St. Paul wrote a letter and sent it to Philippi by Epaphroditus, so God wrote His own and sent it to all mankind by Moses.

Well then, what does the letter say? *In the beginning God made heaven and earth.* How brief this statement is—a single sentence—but how capable of overthrowing the dishonest shams of the adversary! Take an example. A Stoic comes and tells you,



“Matter was never created.” Say to him, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth.*

But he doesn't believe in the Bible, you retort. Then on the same grounds you may ignore his words: for who can believe in ever-existent matter? It requires a clear breach of logic, more startling even than the meek faith you need to believe Genesis.

Remember, “The reasoning of mortals is worthless, and their designs insecure” (Wis. 9:14). If any person approaches you with the sickness of unbelief and coughs it onto you, use this verse as an antibiotic, even if silently in your heart. And if he laughs at you as a lunatic in mind, weep for him for being a lunatic in soul. He may even seem humble and try to persuade you of his folly out of goodwill. But while he seems to you a friend, to our all-knowing Lord he is like a serpent. Beware of his venom.

But we must save the unbelievers, you cry. Yes, God desires the repentance of a sinner. But as the old adage goes, “Save yourself, and you will save everyone around you.” Do not throw yourself into an unneeded debate with a hard, crusty old atheist when your own confidence wobbles. Make sure first that you yourself are planted firmly in God's soil. Draw close to God, and others will be drawn with you. Evangelism is often the product of unwitting magnetism.

Let us skip to another verse: *Let Us make man in Our image and likeness.* Here is a curious thing. Why is the expression “Let there be...” used when speaking of the creation of light, earth, water, and everything else, but with the creation of man He says, “Let Us make...”? It is to show us that we are a creation of special esteem, of unique value in God's sight. The entire universe simply shoots into existence, simply “be's,” while man is specifically “made,” and carefully handcrafted by the Creator. It was for the sake of humans that the rest of creation was made, whose salvation God so loved as not to spare His only-begotten Son. God did not desist, in fact, from performing everything required to lead them up and seat them at His right hand. St. Paul even cries out, “With Him He has raised us up and seated us at His right hand in the heavenly places through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6).

Go out into nature, then, and enjoy its beauty – it was made for you. For God's handwriting is displayed large and clear in His creation: “I love you.” Let us then, admiring His loving kindness, do His will to the utmost of our ability, that having both in this life and in the coming one received abundantly the loving kindness of God, we may be able to enjoy the good things promised to us, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and world without end.
Amen.

A MIGHTY PREACHER On A Mighty Theme

by J.M. Stephanos

A sermon by our Holy Father St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople

Based on his *Eight Sermons on the Book of Genesis*