

On Creation and God

Psalm 104

Bless the LORD, my soul! LORD, my God, you are great indeed! You are clothed with majesty and glory, robed in light as with a cloak. You spread out the heavens like a tent; you raised your palace upon the waters. You make the clouds your chariot; you travel on the wings of the wind. You make the winds your messengers; flaming fire, your ministers, you fixed the earth on its foundation, never to be moved. The ocean covered it like a garment; above the mountains stood the waters. At your roar they took flight; at the sound of your thunder they fled. They rushed up the mountains, down the valleys to the place you had fixed for them. You set a limit they cannot pass; never again will they cover the earth. You made springs flow into channels that wind among the mountains. They give drink to every beast of the field; here wild asses quench their thirst. Beside them the birds of heaven nest; among the branches they sing. You water the mountains from your palace; by your labor the earth abounds. You raise grass for the cattle and plants for our beasts of burden. You bring bread from the earth, and wine to gladden our hearts. Oil to make our faces gleam, food to build our strength. The trees of the LORD drink their fill, the cedars of Lebanon, which you planted. There the birds build their nests; junipers are the home of the stork. The high mountains are for wild goats; the rocky cliffs, a refuge for badgers. You made the moon to mark the seasons, the sun that knows the hour of its setting. You bring darkness and night falls, then all the beasts of the forest roam abroad. Young lions roar for prey; they seek their food from God. When the sun rises, they steal away and rest in their dens. People go forth to their work, to their labor till evening falls. How varied are your works, LORD! In wisdom you have wrought them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Look at the sea, great and wide! It teems with countless beings, living things both large and small. Here ships ply their course; here Leviathan, your creature, plays. All of these look to you to give them food in due time. When you give to them, they gather; when you open your hand, they are well filled. When you hide your face, they are lost. When you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust from which they came. When you send forth your breath, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth. May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD be glad in these works! If God glares at the earth, it trembles; if God touches the mountains, they smoke! I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God while I live. May my theme be pleasing to God; I will rejoice in the LORD.

Elizabeth Johnson

Keeping in mind the image of Earth from space, consider four aspects of this planet and its place in the universe. First: it is very old. In billions of years, the key numbers are 14, 5, and 4. The universe originated in a primordial flaring forth, rather inelegantly named the Big Bang, about fourteen billion years ago.... From that explosive instant onward to this day, the universe has continued to expand, so galaxies and their stars come into being and pass away. Our own sun and its planets emerged about five billion years ago, coalescing from the dust and gas left by previous generations of stars that exploded in their death throes. On planet Earth about four billion years ago, a new eruption occurred, life, emerging in communities of single-celled creatures deep in the primeval seas and evolving into the more than one million species present today. Second, the universe is incomprehensibly large. There are over one hundred billion galaxies, each comprising of billions of stars, and no one knows how many moons and planets, all of this visible and audible matter being only a fraction of the matter in the universe, which, being not well understood, is called "dark." Earth is a small planet orbiting a medium-sized star toward the edge of one spiral galaxy. We are but a speck. Third, the universe is complexly interconnected, everything being related to everything else to some degree.... Quite literally, human beings and all creatures on this planet are made of stardust. The story of biological evolution, moreover, makes evident that we humans share with all other living creatures a common genetic ancestry tracing back to the original single-celled creatures in the ancient seas. Fourth, the universe is profoundly dynamic. Even as you read these words, new space is coming into being as the universe continues to expand outward. Galaxies whirl around their central black hole; our planet revolves