

THE STRONG NAME OF THE TRINITY

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Matthew 28:16-20

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I haven't seen the movie *Star Wars – The Attack of the Clones*, but I plan to. One review claims that the movie portrays a time when chaos threatened the galaxy. The writer of the book of Genesis claims that the earth was created out of the chaos of a formless void into which it will never return. Our ancestors looked for signs in the sun, moon and stars to assure them the chaos wouldn't return. But many of our best-educated men and women aren't so assured. They see in the stars a melancholy reminder of their utter insignificance and they speculate whether the universe will return to chaos.

Most of us are familiar with the ancient Biblical story of creation. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void" something like chaos. The Hebrew words for "formless void" are *Tohu wa'bohu*. A *tohu wa'bohu* is a vast shapeless nothing absent of everything. In the beginning the universe was like the random notes of a symphony before it has been composed and arranged; like a formless block of marble before the sculptor begins to chisel away; like an unformed child in the womb. The universe was *Tohu wa'bohu* and darkness covered the face of the deep.

*As far as the eye could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.*

Imagine the darkness. Imagine a dark shoreless ocean. Waves rise to titanic heights and fall into abysmal depths. The Deep of which the Bible speaks does not consist of any kind of ocean we're familiar with. The oceans hadn't yet been created. It was a bottomless deep; an abyss of nothingness. A chaos. And *Out of deep, unordered water God created light and land.*

All this happened “in the beginning” before time itself had been created. It happened in the time before time began. Time is one of the world’s deepest mysteries. No one can say exactly what it is. One way of thinking about time is to imagine a world without time. A timeless world would be at a standstill – like a single frame in a movie reel. No alterations of light and darkness. Nothing to see because there’s no light. No light. No movement. No way to measure time in the primordial darkness.

Think, for a moment, about how we measure time. Today watches mark the hours, minutes, and seconds of the day. But in the beginning there were no watches. Before watches we measured time by the periodic rising and setting of the sun and the phases of the moon – but in the beginning there were no sun or moon. There was a time when we measured time by the seasonal change of the stars. When the constellation Orion was high in the sky we knew it was winter in the Northern Hemisphere – but in the beginning the sky had not yet been created and there were no stars. There was a time when we measured time by the yearly flooding of rivers but in the beginning there were no rivers. So there’s no way of measuring how long ago this all happened. But one clue is provided by the speed of light which travels at something like 186,000 miles per second. It takes the light of the sun about 10 minutes to reach the earth. Light from the closest star, Alpha Centauri, takes over four years to reach us. When we look up at the stars we’re looking thousands of years back in time. Our most powerful telescopes capture light from distant cosmic objects that began its journey twelve billion years ago. We don’t know when creation began except that it was “in the beginning.”

The ancient biblical story of creation says, “In the beginning... a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” In Hebrew *wind* and *spirit* are one word. The Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters, swept like a woman sweeping her house clean looking for a lost coin,

swept like a seagull sweeping down from the sky and gliding over the face of the waters. I love how John Milton addressed God's Spirit at the dawn of creation.

*...thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss,
And mad'st it pregnant.*

Then God spoke. "Let there be light." What language did God speak? Some claim God spoke in Hebrew. Virtually no one has ever suggested that God spoke in English. "Let there be light and there was light."

*Then God smiled
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said: That's good.*

God didn't shape the world with his hand like a sculptor. God didn't forge the world on an anvil like a blacksmith. God didn't put the pieces of the world together like an assembly line worker. Nor did God fashion the world from God's body as some ancient myths claim. God created the world with words like a poet. Like J.R.R. Tolkien created *Middle Earth*. Like C.S. Lewis created *Narnia*.

God's Word and Spirit created the world. The Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters and with a powerful word creation got jump started. The light of a billion stars burst forth and began an endless journey. Long before the birth of Jesus ancient rabbis spoke of God's Word and Spirit as though God's Word and Spirit were God. These ancient Jewish scholars were monotheists. They believed in one God and yet they spoke of God's Word and Spirit as distinct from God, equal with God, and existing with God before Creation. Early Christians identified God's Word with the crucified and risen Christ; a claim Jews and Greeks found blasphemous. They prayed to God's Word and Spirit as to God. They baptized in the name of

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And yet they didn't believe in three gods. They believed in one God who created the world through his Word and Spirit.

In the beginning, before time existed, God's Spirit swept over the face of the waters and God's Word spoke the world into existence. Something like that happens again when we baptize someone. Baptism reminds us of the creation story. The water in the font symbolizes the primordial waters over which God's Spirit swept. I'll hold Holly over the water of the Baptismal font and pray for God's Spirit to sweep into the sanctuary, over this congregation, over the face of the waters, and descend upon Holly. And I will say words - ancient, creative, life-giving words that accomplish what they say: "Holly, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. May the Holy Spirit descend upon you and remain with you forever." Just as God's Word and Spirit created the world we trust God's Word and Spirit to give Holly a new birth.

Notice that the baptismal font is an octagon. Traditionally a baptismal font has eight sides. Each side represents the seven days of creation. But prophets and apostles spoke of a new creation. There's a new day coming. "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation." The eighth side of the baptism font reminds us of God's promise to give us new life, eternal life, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God promises to include us (and all who call upon the name of the Lord) in his new creation where there will be no darkness and where chaos will never again threaten us. Amen.

Let us pray: In the beginning of time, your Spirit moved over the watery chaos, calling forth order and life. Send your Spirit to move over this water that it may be a fountain of deliverance and rebirth. Wash away the sin of all who are cleansed by it. Raise them to new life, and graft them to the body of Christ. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon them, that they may have power to do your will, and continue forever in the risen life of Christ. To you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, be all praise, honor, and glory, now and forever.