

A MASS CELEBRATING GOD'S EVOLVING CREATION

An Occasional Liturgical Resource

From the Lutheran Alliance for Faith, Science and Technology



The following “Cosmological Time Scale” may be displayed on a screen or as a large poster, together with illustrations of galaxies, prehistoric creatures, etc., as well as traditional and modern Christian iconography, throughout the service. (The “dates” are approximate.)

Beginning of the Big Bang	t = 0,	14 billion (14 x 10 ⁹) years ago
Origin of the lightest atomic nuclei	t = 3	minutes
The microwave background radiation	t = 4 x 10 ⁵	years
Origin of the oldest known stars	t = 2 x 10 ⁸	years
Origin of our solar system	5	billion years ago
Origin of the planet Earth	4.5	billion years ago
Origin of life	3.5	billion years ago
Origin of oxidizing atmosphere	1	billion years ago
First well marked fossil beds	600	million years ago

GEOLOGICAL EPOCHS	MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO	EVENTS
PALEOZOIC ANCIENT LIFE		
Cambrian	600	Predominance of marine invertebrates
Ordovician	500	Rise of plants on land
Silurian	425	
Devonian	405	
Mississippian	345	First great tropical forests which became coal we burn
Permian	310	Evolution of modern insects
Pennsylvanian	280	
MESOZOIC MIDDLE LIFE		
Triassic	230	Dominance of cycads
Jurassic	181	Tree ferns and dinosaurs reigned
Cretaceous	135	
CENOZOIC MODERN LIFE		
Tertiary		
Paleocene	63	Dominance of flowering plants;
Eocene	58	Diversification of mammals;
Oligocene	36	Rise of anthropoids
Miocene	25	First humanlike apes
Pliocene	13	Humanity evolving

Quaternary

Pleistocene	1	Age of humanity
Recent	0.025	

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PREPARATION

[The congregation gathers in a group, perhaps around the baptismal font, removes their shoes, and sit in silence on the floor.]

A reading of the first Creation Account, Genesis 1:1 2:4
Silence for meditation

P: Silence is the motif of creation.
Silence is the motive for creation.

TOWARD THE EXPLOSION OF BEING

P: The whirling void, without form, the deep before the darkness, the spacelessness before light, a time without remembrance, and stillness the peace of God. For all was GOD, the Father; and Jesus the Son: a birthing in the womb of history; and the Spirit moved on the face of the Deep!

CONFESSION

A: And you are marked with the ashes of the void, and the nuclear waste of time and space the sign of the heat of the explosion of Being and the dust of the destruction of history's life seeds.
You are marked with the ashes of life and death: with the promise of evolution and the curse of chaos and entropy.

[At this point the pastor and others put ashes on the faces of all saying, "You are marked with the ashes of life and death."]

P: Let us confess. Our moment in history often seems so urgent for us that we banish from our minds the fact of the beginning, Lord, and the cosmic expanse of your time that has preceded us in being. We center so much on ourselves that we lift not our eyes to the horizons of time and space in your full universe.

C: Turn us toward remembrance, Lord. We are so consumed with the energies of what we can do that we do not live for the benefit of the

evolving life of your creation.

P: Open us to the processes of your nature. We are creating our own world, with steel and plastic precision, and with political arrogance, and we look for our growth through the collecting of products and power. We create too often against your creation, Lord.

C: Free us to be a help to your evolving creation, Lord. We seem to have forgotten where we came from. We are not limited by the instincts you have given other creatures. Our ancestors are lost in the annals of antiquity or in the mind of God. We confess that in this world we are both too much at home and too cut off from our roots to be at home. We bear sorrows and joys and hope for life.

ABSOLUTION

P: God breathed on the void, gave it order and life, gave it the forgiveness of his silence and peace. He set the neutrons playing in a rhythm of stellar birth and death. Out of a cosmic celebration shout the Big Bang, he brought the elements of our world into being. God hears us in the voids of our destructiveness. God's creativity comes anew out of the ground of life. Be of a new heart and mind because God creates out of Nothing the long journey towards his fulfillment. Come! Let us wash off the marks of disorder and take up the processes of remembrance.

C: Amen! Water is one of your primal compounds. It is also your baptismal wash that takes away our sins. Wash us and we shall be clean.

[A bowl of water and the elements for the Eucharist are placed around the altar. Small bowls of water are passed around. The people wash off the ashes from one another's faces by whatever means seem appropriate.]

ENTRANCE HYMN – “All Creatures Worship God Most High” (ELW 835)

DIALOGUE OF PRAISE AND REMEMBRANCE

[Rocks are brought forth and placed near the altar.]

A: We remember the earth's own birth. God, we come bearing rocks, the signs of the travail of our planet, its molten cooling mass forming a land for life.

C: We see your strength in the solidarity of the strata, Lord, but we know that they also reveal ages of ferment. Even beneath such mass and established immobility, we know that atoms play in space.

A: Let our strength be dynamic and our mass filled with the energies of Grace, Lord.

[Some flowers are brought forth and scattered around before the altar.]

A: We remember the rising of life out of the inorganic world. Flowers of life we bring before the Lord, blooms that color the pale moon dust of dying planets with possibilities. And molecules gather carbon. The mystery of life comes forth out of a pregnant atmosphere. For now the course of history demands newness, as God frees genes to chance their play of change.

C: Growth and color, reproduction without repetition, with genetic swirls of DNA, the dance of life begins. We still marvel at the lilies of the field, Lord, because the more we know their elements, the deeper the mystery of beauty becomes. Lead us to praise even in the midst of our dissecting, Lord.

A reading of "Pied Beauty" by Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

(Poems and prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins [Penguin, New York, 1982], pp.3031. Permission would be needed to print out the poem.)

[Animals are brought forth and put before the altar.]

A: We remember the eruption of consciousness, the beasts, friends of the fields and birds, mappers of the air, and animals of all kinds. We remember before the Lord, Creation God's zoo teeming with a mural of life that blends with the colors of nature, but also responds with the advent of consciousness.

C: Animals prefigure ourselves, Lord. They give us responsive companions, food, the seeds of play and the intimations of protective conflict.

A: So the struggle of life comes, Lord.

C: We protect and display animals to remind ourselves of our kinship with them. They create, but are physically confined. In them you have placed the seeds of the Spirit, Lord.

A reading from Fr. Teilhard's "Building the Earth". (Details are needed.)

A: We remember the emergence of human beings, culture and religion.

C: We hope toward the grace of creativity, Lord, and the Christ of cosmic fulfillment.

[The people come forward and gather around the altar inside the altar railing.]

A: Now we present ourselves, Lord, the people of the earth, bearers of the mystery of creative consciousness, the preservers of history and the makers of culture a new level of your evolving creation.

C: We are people of hope, Lord, because we know that creation which is unfolding is stamped with your purpose and meaning.

A reading of Colossians 1:13-20.

C: In him everything in heaven and earth was created.

A: But Christ has shown us that there is no true and fulfilled life apart from pain, the struggle with evil, and even sacrificial death.

C: We shall touch God in the world he has made only when, like Jacob, we have been vanquished by him.

A: Suffering and failure, tears and blood so many byproducts begotten by the process of creation on its way.

C : It is always true, however we look at it, the human epic resembles nothing so much as a way of the cross.

The reading of the Gospel: Mark 15:16—23.

C: They brought him to the place called Golgotha. They fastened him to the cross.

A: We confess our faith in the God of Creation and his cruciform plan of evolution.

The people recite the Nicene Creed.

OFFERTORY

(From Teilhard's "The Mass on the World")

C: "Once upon a time people took into your temple the first fruits of their harvests, the flower of their flocks. But the offering you really want, the offering you mysteriously need every day to appease your hunger, to slake your thirst, is nothing less than the growth of the world borne ever forward in the stream of universal becoming. All the things in the world to which this day will bring increase, all those that will diminish, all those that will die; all of them, Lord, we try to gather into our arms, so as to hold them out to you in offering. This is the material of our sacrifice; the only sacrifice you desire."

INTERCESSIONS

THE THANKSGIVING

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And with your spirit.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them up unto the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God.

C: It is meet and right so to do.

C: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

P: Holy God, Loving Creator, Source of Life Itself:
From the beginnings of the universe
To the far flung future,
Unimaginable is your overarching power,
Unfathomable your everpresent love.

You established consistency and communication
Instead of disorder and chaos.
You engineered dark space with stars and planets,
Earth and water, elements and energy, light and life.
All that there is resounds with your loving glory.

You made human beings step forth on our fragile world.
You fanned the fire of faith in Abraham and others
who were filled with your presence.

You chose the unfit and imperfect: the weak from the dust,
Israel from captivity, those laid low by oppression.

You inspired prophets to speak of the mystery of your grace.
If all this was not enough, you expressed yourself in Jesus,
the Special One who came into our history, walked among us,
proclaimed your compassionate rule, and was obedient to Your will,
even to the point of dying for us on the Cross.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
Our Lord Jesus took bread,
and gave thanks, broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.

Again after supper,
he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this in remembrance of me.

For as often as we eat of this bread
and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

C: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

P: And we pray that you will bless and sanctify, with your word and
Holy Spirit, these your gifts and creatures of bread and wine; that they
may be to us the Body and Blood of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ.

C: Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.

P: And also over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to
ripen during this day, speak again the words: "This is my Body."

And against all the forces of death which waits to corrode, to wither, to
cut down, speak again your words, "This is my Blood."

C: As we take this bread, so may we offer ourselves to you in and through
the powers and the concrete realities of this world.

As we take this cup, so may we offer ourselves to you in and through the
forces of diminishment and dissolution and death;
That in life and death we may show forth the power of your Resurrection,
who are the Lord both of the living and the dead.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

C: O Christ, thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have
mercy upon us.
O Christ, thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have
mercy upon us.
O Christ, thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, grant us
thy peace.
Amen.

THE COMMUNION

CLOSING PRAYER

DISMISSAL

Adapted and used with permission from services prepared by the Rev. H. Frederick Reisz and from "The Mass of the World" by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin S.J.