

Genesis 1:6–13  
Wed. of Reminiscere (Lent II)  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
March 8, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

*And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*

*And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together He called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

This evening we consider the second day of creation, when God created the firmament, that expanse between the waters the ancients called “heaven” and that we call the sky, or the atmosphere. We also consider the third day of creation, when God separated the waters on the earth into seas, and caused the dry land to appear with all sorts of vegetation. Here we see how God was perfectly ordering our planet to sustain life, especially our human life. Like parents preparing their home for a newborn, so did our heavenly Father prepare an earthly home for His children, the human race. And even now, our Lord Jesus Christ is preparing a place for us in His Father’s house in the heavens (John 14:3).

Last week we saw how water was there at the beginning of creation, how the Spirit of God was brooding over the waters. As the Apostle Peter says in his second letter: “the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the Word of God” (1 Pet 3:5). The Earth was born out of water, as the Lord asks Job: “Who shut in the sea with

doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band?” (Job 38:8–8). God prescribed limits for the sea and set bars and doors, and said: “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed.” That limit for the sea comes in day two and day three of creation, with the separation of the waters by the firmament and the separation of the waters by the dry land. God put everything in its place, exactly as it was supposed to be to sustain life.

The expanse, or the canopy, God made between the waters below and the waters above we also call the sky, or the atmosphere. In German, it’s still called “heaven,” {“Himmel”), which you see in v. 8: “God called the expanse Heaven.” In English, we sometimes refer to this expanse as the “firmament,” from the Latin word “to make firm” or “to strengthen.” The atmosphere is a firm and fixed border between our habitable earth and the void of outer space. The atmosphere contains the oxygen we need to breathe. It protects us from solar radiation and prevents extreme temperatures. Without the firmament, without the atmosphere, the earth could not support life.

The waters above the expanse are somewhat of a mystery. We know the sky is blue because of how light passes through the atmosphere and scatters. We also know there is plenty of water in the atmosphere, which you see every time there are clouds in the sky or you experience the water cycle with snow, or with a downpour. That water then evaporates back into the atmosphere and comes down to earth again later as condensation. We know from Genesis 2, though, that at first the earth was watered by a mist going up from the land (Gen 2:5–6). When God sent the Flood to destroy wickedness from the earth, “all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.” Maybe the atmosphere simply had a much higher concentration of water before the flood, so that Moses can describe the firmament as having water above and below it.

Either way, we see how God separated the waters from the waters and the earth from the waters for the good of mankind and all living things. When judgment came in the Flood, that good order was reversed and water again inundated the dry land, destroying everything God created except Noah and his family along with the animals on the ark. At the crossing of the Red Sea, God would again separate the waters from the waters so dry land could appear and the people of Israel could flee from slavery in Egypt. Judgment then came against the Egyptians when God allowed the waters to return to chaos, destroying pharaoh and his army. No wonder, then, that the Church sees a picture of Baptism in both the Flood and the crossing of the Red Sea. As Luther's baptismal prayer puts it: "Almighty and eternal God, according to Your strict judgment You condemned the unbelieving world through the flood, yet according to your great mercy You preserved believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all. You drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, yet led Your people Israel through the water on dry ground, foreshadowing this washing of Your Holy Baptism." God uses water to drown the Old Adam that a new man might arise daily, to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. It seems as though water has always been part of God's plan.

On the third day, after God caused the dry land to appear, He said: "Let the earth sprout vegetation." God created all the plants to bear seed and propagate themselves according to His creative and sustaining word. The plants then became food for the animals and for man, who remained vegetarian until after the Flood (Gen 9:3). Of course, two plants stand out above all the rest: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, as a test of man's faithfulness and loyalty to God's Word. Adam and Eve failed the test, but God provided another tree upon which He Himself would become the atoning sacrifice for the sin of man. During Holy Week, the Proper Preface, which is the chant before the Sanctus in the Service of the Sacrament,

will go like this: “It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who accomplished the salvation of mankind by the tree of the cross that, where death arose, there life also might rise again and that the serpent who overcame by the tree of the garden might likewise by the tree of the cross be overcome. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven” and so forth. As St. Paul says in Galatians 3[:13]: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written [in Deuteronomy 21:23], ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’” Yet in Jesus Christ, the curse is transformed into a blessing. The tree of death becomes a tree of life.

Adam and Eve and all their descendants were cast out of Paradise lest they eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in their state of sin. So the LORD stationed angels on the eastern side of Eden to guard the way to the Tree of Life with a flaming sword. The Tree of Life then shows up again at the very end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, where the Apostle John says that in the new heavens and the new earth there will be the river of the water of life, with the tree of life growing on either side of it with its twelve kinds of fruit and leaves for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2). The curse will be completely removed and we will enjoy nothing but God’s blessings for eternity. The Tree of Life the LORD had to guard us from eating will be a blessing because of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up His life on the tree of the cross that we might live forever not in sin, but in the righteousness and purity He gives to us.

Here again on days two and three of creation, we see how our LORD both created and ordered all things for our good, and also how the LORD redeems all things from the curse that we brought upon creation. God prepared a place for us to live at the Beginning and God is even now preparing a place for us to live in the new heavens and the new earth. In that way, God’s

creation in the beginning points us ahead to God's new creation, which has already begun to enter this world in Jesus Christ our Lord and in His life-giving death and resurrection, and will be completed when our LORD returns again on the Last Day. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Magnificat.