

Baptism of Our Lord
8:15 and 11:00 a.m. Sunday, January 8, 2012
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Genesis 1:1-5; Mark 1:4-11

Grace and peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

"In the beginning." What a great way to start. (**Singing**) "Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start." No, I am not going to keep singing the rest of the. . .

^{NRSV} **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a **ru'ah** from God swept over the face of the waters.

No, I just didn't clear my throat there in the middle of that reading. **Ru'ah**, that's a Hebrew word. We heard it tonight as being translated as "wind," but it can also be translated as "spirit." It can be translated as "breath." So think of how that verse changes when we change the word.

. . . darkness covered the face of the deep, while a **wind** from God swept over the face of the waters.

. . . darkness covered the face of the deep, while a **breath** from God swept over the face of the waters.

. . . darkness covered the face of the deep, while a **Spirit** of God swept over the face of the waters.

We get different mental pictures, don't we? We know what wind is. We can't really SEE wind, but we can see the effects of wind. I can see the flags in the parking lot flapping as the wind blows. We can see branches that have fallen down after a wind storm, or shingles missing from a roof of a house. With that beautiful Spring day we had today, perhaps some of you were outside hanging your laundry, and you can see it blowing in the wind as well.

Breathe. We can't see breath. Well we couldn't SEE breath today; earlier this week when we had those sub-freezing temperatures and I was standing with my son at 7:00 AM waiting for the school bus to come, **then** we could see our breath reflected in the headlights of the cars as they went by. But breathe . . . inhale . . . and exhale . . . *while a breath from God swept over the face of the waters.*

But Spirit, I think that's the one with which we all struggle. Maybe we think we know about spirits. I'm a big "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" show fan, even though it's been off the air for many years now. Well we've got other shows like "Ghost Hunters," or "An American Haunting." But, those aren't the "spirit" that Genesis, with *Ru'ah*, is talking about here. The "spirit" that Genesis is talking about is that same Spirit that Mark talks about in our Gospel reading.

Now in our narrative concerning Jesus' baptism we get a calm peaceful story of a couple of guys in a river when suddenly creation happens. The sky is torn apart. *Schizo* is the

Greek word there. It's the same root word of our English word for *schism*, which is to break apart, to divide. In the Greek, it connotes violence and power. This amazing powerful awful thing in the sky just opens up. But what comes out is . . . a dove. Not exactly what you would expect to see coming out of a violent eruption. The images of a dove are calm, peaceful, tranquil; a dove is what brought the branch back to Noah on the Ark. But then, out of the violence and after the dove comes this disembodied voice just like at creation, only this time this disembodied voice said:

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Spirit God comes down upon the Christ God and is recognized and called to by the Creator God. I think it's interesting that in Mark's Gospel the disciples never call Jesus the "Son of God" – he's only called Son of God by unclean spirits or the religious authorities there at the end. At the end of Mark's gospel, he's called Son of God by a Roman centurion. The only other one that calls him Son of God in Mark's Gospel is God's own self.

Let's jump back to that Genesis story for a moment:

³ *Then God said, "let there be light"; and there was light.*

⁴ *And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from darkness.*

⁵ *God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

That disembodied voice again. Only the first time calling forth light.

I rather like the way that Everett Fox, in his translation called "The Schocken Bible," translates this short passage. Reverend Fox tries to make his English translation sound more like it would in the Hebrew. So he says:

¹ *At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth*

² *when the earth was wild and waste, darkness over the face of Ocean, rushing-spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters --*

³ *God said: Let there be light! And there was light.*

⁴ *God saw the light: that it was good. God separated the light from the darkness.*

⁵ *God called the light: Day! And the darkness God called: Night! And there was setting, and there was dawning: one day.*

Two images come to me from our texts: the image of Spirit and the image of Light. I've not seen this personally, but I have heard according to the management at the Luxor casino in Las Vegas, the brightest manufactured light source in the world is a spotlight at the top of their building, which is in the shape of a pyramid. It's a 315,000-watt light beam. It's visible at a flight level from Los Angeles which is more than 250 miles away. According to the people at the Luxor casino, the spotlight was put at the top of their pyramid because the Egyptians believed that their souls would travel up to heaven in a beam of light. Something tells me there's not that many Egyptian spirits traveling there in Las Vegas.

I have read accounts, though, and even spoke with a friend of mine who died on the operating table and was then resuscitated, that they had seen a light, and felt the

presence of Spirits, of others, of those whom they had known, who they knew were dead. They related this after they had died and were resuscitated. So maybe there **is** something to this whole idea of light and spirit.

My father is a licensed electrician, and I understand enough about electricity to be dangerous. But I do know this much, that there are two types of electricity: AC, alternating current, and DC, direct current. Now apparently Thomas Edison was an early proponent of DC. The drawback to direct current thought was that the farther you get from the source, the weaker the charge. That's why AC, alternating current, caught on because it doesn't degrade as quickly the farther it gets from the source. And then, as it arrives at my house and powers up my computer, TV, or whatever, it turns around and goes back out again, and it goes back to the source.

Now I know that we as humans don't necessarily recharge God; so don't think we can equate our faith life with alternating current. And, I know as well, that the farther away that I take myself from God; the less willing I become to try to return to God. The catch there though is that we can NEVER go so far away from God that God won't reach out and touch us again. The Being who created EVERYTHING that is, is way too powerful for us to escape. We only cut ourselves off. God will never cut us off.

Just like the Dove coming down from heaven. Like the light in Genesis, coming out of nothingness, God is more powerful than anything that we can imagine. And more importantly, God is with us wherever we go. Always.

Amen.

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