

My best friend's the creator of the universe

Prayer: Canticle of the Creatures, by St Francis

Verse for the day: Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Prayer for the day

God of wonders beyond our galaxy - you are holy!

The universe declares your majesty - you are holy, Lord of heaven and earth!

Bible reading 1: Colossians 1:15-20

Bible Reading 2: Genesis 1: 1-19

Music: God of wonders

'My best friend's the creator of the universe' (The Lads)

Sermon

by Silvia Purdie

We live in a time in which scientists all around the world are agreeing on possibly the greatest question that science can ask – how it all began. Just this year the telescopes in space and the enormous telescopes in the driest highest places on earth have produced data which proves the creation of the universe. And the astonishing thing is that what they have discovered is amazingly similar to what we have always known, the description of creation in Genesis Chapter 1.

It wasn't long ago that the 'Big bang theory' was one among several theories about the universe. Many scientists actively fought against it, because they wanted it to be true that the universe was eternal and self-contained. They wanted to rule out any need for God. And so scientists argued for a 'Steady state' universe, or that our universe is just one of many universes, or that our universe cycles around in periods of expanding and contracting, like a bouncing ball. But this year, 2014, even the Pope, even ardently atheist physicists have agreed that the Universe began out of nothing, in an incredible instantaneous explosion ... because the scientific evidence for this is now so strong and so detailed.

Before we get into the details of that, let's hear the story that we are most familiar with, the Creation from Genesis chapter one. Minty is going to read for us Days 1 to 4.

Genesis 1: 1-19

Genesis 1 became a central part of Jewish worship after Solomon built the Temple back 3,000 years ago. This formed the world-view of the Jewish people, and is the basis of huge arguments in the church today. Genesis 1 is utterly unique among the myths and legends of the ancient world. As far as I know all cultures tell stories of the origins of things, but these are all filled with monsters and gods – projections back in time of people and animals that are kind of familiar to us. Genesis 1 begins with nothing at all, other than one god. Genesis 1 is formed in a shape, 7 days, with patterns of repeated phrases, written to be read aloud, in worship.

But I believe that before it became that, Genesis 1 also had a beginning in a moment of time. I think that it originated with a vision, a powerful vision of the creation of the universe, given by God through the Holy Spirit, to one man. We don't know who, but it was probably a priest, because when he described this vision he told it in a way that naturally formed into liturgy, form, pattern, worship.

But we can read through that back to a spectacular vision that is astonishing because it describes things which are utterly outside human experience.

And, to be honest, it didn't really make much logical sense. It's obviously daft to say that God created light on day one but didn't create the Sun till day 4! It's obviously daft to describe the sky as being 'waters', and there obviously isn't a dome separating us from the waters above us.

It is only now, 3000 years later, that the vast computing and technological power of the world's science is revealing that the vision of Genesis 1 is an amazingly accurate description of the creation of the universe.

So, shall we start at the very beginning – a very good place to start, yes? In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, all was formless void – empty. Nothing.

No space, no time. Nothing.

then God said 'Let there be light' and there was light

What the scientists have proven, now beyond reasonable doubt, is that 13.77 billion years ago there was an explosion that was the beginning of matter and space and time. Before that there was nothing. There is no such thing as 13.8 billion years ago. It simply does not exist.

But suddenly, out of nothing light and energy and stuff burst out, from a single point ... within a billionth of a billionth of a billionth of a second ... within a couple of minutes particles were hurtling away from each other....

and for a long time particles swirled around, becoming over time hydrogen and helium.

And do you know what this looks like if we try to imagine it? Water, swirling ... a violent wind sweeping over the face of the waters of the deep.

What happened next is that little by little over thousands of years these swirling atoms of hydrogen and helium got attracted to each other. And something called gravity was born. And with gravity, the more you've got the more you get. And the more stuff the more gravity, the more pressure, the more heat

So here is a photograph of what the satellite telescope, (the Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe) saw a couple of years ago.

This is a picture of the background radiation in the universe, which is the oldest thing in the universe, which is an echo of the Big Bang, which they have dated to 300,000 years after the initial explosion.

The hydrogen and helium are clumping together.

And over the next few million years they clumped and clustered ... in a way that if you described it poetically you would describe in the words of Genesis 1:7 'God made a dome and separated the waters'

And inside the domes (well, spheres actually) they got bigger and bigger and hotter and hotter until bang – the first star burst into life. 150 million years after the initial explosion

Now the story really starts to get interesting, because in the incredible heat inside stars the hydrogen and helium atoms forged in new ways, creating other elements. Every atom that makes up you and me and the air we breathe and the seat you are sitting on was made in the heart of a star billions of years ago. The heavier elements were made not just inside a star, but in the unimaginable heat of a star dying. Look for a moment at the gold ring you or the person next to you is wearing. Every bit of that gold was made in a supernova!

And as a star exploded for the last time it hurled itself outward into space ... and space dust also was attracted to other space dust, clumped together, a gathering together of the swirling stuff into dry land of planets.

SLIDES

Our own solar system was born 4 ½ billion years ago. So quite late in the creation of galaxies. Ours is a young star, bright and lively. I was surprised to learn that most of the stars in the universe are red dwarfs, already too old and tired to support life. Ours at 4 1/2 billion years old is in its prime. Not quite half way through its life. It's got another 6 billion years left. By then the universe will be winding down. The stars will one by one go out

and life will be over. Only God will remain and the eternity promised for his people ...
but anyway, back to the beginning

What I wanted to tell you about today was how science has come radically close to proving the existence of God. Despite itself, despite its own anti-God biases, the discipline of science is to describe what is actually there, and this has described the power of God, and so science has drawn itself right to the edge between fact and faith. There are two fundamental ideas:

1. The first is that in observing the origin of the universe as a single point we are forced into the possibility that an intelligence and power outside of space and time 'kicked it off' in the first place.

To describe a moment of creation logically requires a creator.

Stephen Hawkins and other ardent athiests are struggling to find alternative explanations, such as some kind of 'wrinkle in the nothingness' ... but surely that is far more fanciful than the notion of a creator God!

2. Secondly, in calculating the forces at work in the universe, science has concluded that the probability of these forces combining in just the right way to allow for complex life is basically zero. The fine tuning of forces, distances, powers necessary for what Genesis describes in verses 11 & 12 – the explosion of plants and animals, birds and fish ... this is essentially a mathematical impossibility!

There are dozens and dozens of factors which even a tiny variation one way or another out make our planet too hot or too cold, atoms would be too dense or too loose, electrical forces would be too weak or too strong, gravitational forces, you name it – basically, every single thing that you and I take completely for granted, every force and law of nature is so intricately balanced that the only rational explanation is a vast intelligence and design.

Time to pause. Too much information.

Tell the person next to you something that interests you from our topic today. Is there anything you disagree with? Anything you'd like to find out more about?

Right, time for a conclusion!

And my conclusion is the question – 'So What!?' What possible relevance might all this have for our life together as a church in 2014?

What might be the point in stretching our minds back 13.7 billion years into the dawn of time and outward into the vastness of space?

Two points to close:

1. Our God is a Great Big God!

wider than the univers and beyond our wildest dreams

Our God is the Power behind all powers and forces

vast beyond all vastness yet immersed also in the infinismably small intricacies inside atoms.

We can only worship and adore

We must let God be God

We can easily domesticate God, get bored with God

God is intimate and every day, but never, never a pet or tame or an idol

Our God is awesome in majesty

brilliant beyond brilliance

Our mission as a church is our sharing in the creative power of this mighty God

We work in a power bigger than our own.

We work always listening for an agenda bigger than our own.

Our God is a Great Big God!

2. Number two: Our God creates complexity

Creation, as expressed so beautifully in Genesis 1 is a movement from simple to complex. Science too tells this same story – of atoms combining, of life forming from simple organisms into complex animals, flowers, interconnected ecosystems.

And so we must value our own complexity and differences. Fight, always fight against the need in you for other people to be the same as you!

Our tendency in mission is to look for people we like, to recognize and want to connect with people like us, and so to grow in uniformity.

Unfortunately for us, our universe creating God enjoys diversity and challenge, and so will bring us people who are different to us for us to love.

God might even hurl us out into new time and space, to be formed on the way as his people, a people born in the heart of stars, a people forged in the heart of God.

Enough for one morning! I invite you now to sit and listen to the mighty words of this song, 'God of wonders'. Sing along if you pick it up.

Prayer: Canticle of the Creatures, by St Francis of Assisi

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

