

**God Questions His Creation:
A Look at Genesis 4-11**

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Table of Contents

Foreword.....p.	3
Introduction.....p.	5
Genesis 4.....p.	9
Genesis 5.....p.	48
The Flood.....p.	61
Genesis 6-9 thru the Lens of Source theory.....p.	65
Genesis 6.....p.	73
Genesis 7.....p.	99
Genesis 8.....p.	120
The Conclusion of the Flood..p.	134
Genesis 9.....p.	137
Genesis 10.....p.	155
Genesis 11.....p.	162
An After Word.....p.	176
Glossary.....p.	177
Bibliography.....p.	181

Foreword

In the autumn of 2007 I decided to continue a project I had begun earlier in the year – writing a series of reflections on the Book of Genesis. During Great Lent of 2007, I wrote daily reflections on Genesis 1-3, which I emailed to my parishioners at St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church, Dayton, Ohio. That effort resulted in those reflections being collected and published as the book QUESTIONING GOD: A LOOK AT GENESIS 1-3.

The response from those who read the reflections was positive and some encouraged me to continue writing such meditations. I took up that work deciding to write daily reflections on Genesis 4-11 and emailed them to my parishioners each day of the Nativity Fast in 2007. This is a collection of those reflections.

These reflections are not a dogmatic treatise. I did not set out to write an exposition of the Orthodox Faith. Rather, the ideas expressed herein are my reflections that arose from repeatedly reading and praying through Genesis 4-11 during a 4 month period. As in the earlier work, sometimes I provide no answers but recorded questions that came to my mind about the text. That is for me part of the reflection process – forming questions that the text suggests. As I studied the text I recorded ideas that I found in books I was reading about Genesis. I scoured Patristic commentaries, and liturgical texts for references to the events and people recorded in these scriptural chapters. Some of what occurred to me is simply word and theme associations to other Scripture passages or liturgical texts which I added to my reflections.

Consequently the meditations which follow the scripture passages are a collection of ideas, not a continuous thread. Each paragraph following the quoted scripture verse is a separate thought and not meant to be read continuously like the paragraphs of a novel. My hope is that you the reader might also find reason to pause and think about the scripture to which each reflection refers. While I hope these reflections do touch upon issues of contemporary concern and will help the reader wrestle with living the Christian life, it is also my intention that you will be inspired to ask questions about the scriptures and to further reflect on them yourself.

It is neither wrong nor necessarily bad that the writings of the Bible trouble us, or challenge our thinking, or cause us to seek further clarification and understanding. All of these things can be part of healthy spiritual growth and maturation of faith. I hope that you will come to see the Scriptures as a rich and abundant garden which one enters to enjoy the variety of scents, colors and tastes, and to become nourished by the life-giving fruit.

Dedication

This collection of reflections is dedicated to my parents, Vlad and Helen Bobosh from whom I learned the goodness of love, wisdom, faith and tradition, not by theories they taught but by how they lived their lives.

Introduction

The first three chapters of the Book of Genesis, so Bishop Kallistos Ware tells us, were described by St. Gregory of Nyssa as “not so much history as ‘doctrines in the guise of narrative.’” It is not whether the Genesis creation story is literally true which is essential, but what is of absolute importance is the truth which the story tells. We learn from this how the Fathers of the Church looked far beyond any literal reading of the Scripture to seek the fullness of truth that God reveals to humanity. Genesis is important to us not so much for its human history as because it reveals the doctrines of God.

Genesis 1 opens with a bang – not the Big Bang by which astrophysicists claim the universe came into existence, but with a very intense theological revelation. The Book opened with God, the main character of the story (the only character!) creating the center stage upon which He will recite His creative poetry which brings the entire cosmos into existence. In Genesis 1, the Word of God is the actor in the narrative, not the narrator himself. God “clothes” His active love in words which bring the physical universe into existence. God’s words becoming physical reality will culminate in the New Testament when the Word became flesh and God actually enters into history and into the world which He created. The incarnation of the Word changes everything and yet it is only the culminating completion of what God started “in the beginning.”

God originally clothed humans in glory, and at least by the understanding of the early Christian, it is precisely this garment which humanity lost when it sinned against the Lord. Sin led to God exchanging the garment of glory in which He originally clothed the humans for the garments of skin. Such was the Fall of humanity – we lost something vital and beautiful. The world we now live in is not the Garden of Paradise God originally planted for us nor where He intended us to live.

Genesis 4-11 is completely the **postlapsarian** world (terms in **bold print** are defined in the glossary) - a look at humanity immediately after Eve and Adam had committed that original sin against God and were expelled from Paradise. These early chapters of Genesis do place us in the world that we know, but they do not intend to leave us here for they are written with a sense of motion. They are moving us to and through the events which ultimately culminate in Christ coming into the world. In this sense Genesis 4-11 might be described as the precursor or prequel to the story of the **incarnation** of Christ.

It is only with the incarnation of the Word of God that glory is restored to humanity, something which the Orthodox commemorate at each Saturday evening Vespers with the Prokeimeon, “The Lord is king, he is clothed in majesty.” It is a hymn of the incarnation in which the flesh is not glorious but is glorified by the God-man putting it on. It is the Word of God putting on flesh which bestows majesty to that flesh with which He has clothed Himself. Christ is God in the flesh working to undo the effects that ancestral sin has had on all humanity. Each Saturday evening at Vespers we celebrate the fact that God has not left us in the world of Genesis 4-11 but has in fact begun the process of salvation in which His Kingdom breaks into this fallen world giving us hope for the future and a reason to love and obey Him in this world.

However, to understand the salvation given to us in Jesus Christ, we do need to understand the world to which God sent the first humans when He expelled them from Paradise. In Genesis 4-11 the story of creation is going to become decidedly more focused on the humans as God recedes into the background (or into the heavens, if you will). God will play an active role in the story, but in some ways the story is less God’s story and more the story of God’s creation and of the creation’s relationship to its Creator God.

The same narrator who described the creation of the cosmos “in the beginning,” continues with his reporting of events. The narrator offers us no editorial comments about what he is describing, very little moralizing. His task is descriptive not prescriptive. It is our task as the readers of or listeners to the Scriptures to understand their meaning which is derived from the big picture – the entirety of Genesis and of the Old and New Testaments. “When you read Holy Scripture, perceive its hidden meanings,” as St. Mark the Ascetic (5th Cent) said. “For whatever was written in past times was written for our instruction (Rom 15:4)... Those who do not consider themselves under obligation to perform all Christ’s commandments study the law of God in a literal manner, understanding neither what they say nor what they affirm (1Tim 1:7). Therefore they think that they can fulfil it by their own works.” St. Mark argues that those who think they can fully understand the scriptures by themselves are relying on their own works for salvation. He argues that the Christian cannot simply read the scriptures literally, he must be willing to do what Christ has taught, and for St. Mark this will only occur in Christian community where one can see others living according to the commandments and be taught and corrected by them. For Christians the key to understanding Genesis is found in Christ. And the key to opening the full meaning of the text comes with being willing to obey Christ within His chosen community. Genesis is seen by Christians as bearing witness to Christ, and being fulfilled and explicated in and by Jesus Christ. (St. Augustine claimed, “the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament lies open in the New.”) Thus to read Genesis apart from Christ is to miss its main purpose and meaning. Our main way of reading scripture in Christ is to do it within His Body, the Church. Thus my reflections on Genesis include quotes from the New Testament and from the Patristic writers in which we learn how Christians inspired by God have interpreted the text of Genesis through the centuries. I also have included quotes from our sacramental and liturgical prayers and hymns which are related to the texts we will be studying to show how Genesis 4-11 is used in the worship of the Orthodox Church which shapes much of our understanding of the Bible.

Fr. John Behr (TMOC) points out that in Acts 8 when the Ethiopian eunuch ask the Apostle Philip about the scriptures he was reading (which would have been the Old Testament), he does not ask “what is the meaning of the passage?” but rather he asks Philip “of whom does the prophet speak?” The meaning is not found in the text itself (as modern readers would assume) but rather meaning is in the person of whom the text speaks – Jesus Christ. Christ is the key who gives meaning to the scriptures, even to the Old Testament texts. For early Christians the Word of God was Jesus Christ, not a book. The only book of scriptures the authors of the New Testament knew was our Old Testament, and they believed this bore witness to Christ, not just to past history. They weren’t as worried about whether the Old Testament was literally true as they were interested in knowing how the Scriptures reveal Christ to us and of what precisely that revelation consists. The modern obsession with whether or not Scripture is literally true is a very narrow perspective and causes us to lose sight of the depth and riches of the Scriptures.

As in my first book, QUESTIONING GOD: A LOOK AT GENESIS 1-3, so too in this series of reflections I caution against making a literal reading of the text as the test for whether someone believes in God. Not because the narrative is not “true” but because limiting the text to a literal reading is to limit the revelation of God. God is not restricted by our literary efforts nor by our need for literalism. God is the poet par excellence. He also is the master story teller and giver of parables. God’s Word is living, active and sharp, not flat and one dimensional. It is a deep well of spring water which gushes forth with new and life giving meaning. Just for the sake of example, Genesis 2:24 says that a man leaves his parents and is joined to his wife as one flesh - perfectly understandable in its literal form. St. Paul however makes very specific use of this text. After quoting Genesis 2:24, he wrote, “This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church...” (Ephesians 5:32). St. Paul takes the text of Genesis and says its real meaning is figurative not literal. God’s revelation recorded in Genesis finds its fulfillment and meaning in Christ and in the Church. The literal reading of Genesis would never get you to that truth – to the fullness of the text’s meaning - only a **Christocentric** reading can.

Because of the way St. Paul interprets the Old Testament, St. Augustine in his LITERAL COMMENTARY ON GENESIS declared, "No Christian would dare say that the [words of Scripture] are not to be taken figuratively." He cites in defense of his idea the interpretation of the Old Testament that St. Paul himself uses in 1 Corinthians 10:11 ("Now these things happened to them *as a warning*, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come." The RSV's "*as a warning*" is the Greek word "*typikos*" - *a type* or as Augustine's latin said, "*figuratively*") and also in Ephesians 5:31-32 (where Paul figuratively interprets Genesis 2:24 - about a man leaving his mother to cling to his wife - to refer to Christ and the Church rather than interpreting it literally). Augustine like most of the Patristic writers assumed scriptures have a meaning which is deeper than any plain reading of the text can reveal. He assumed that scripture has multiple levels of meaning and the believer's task is to discover those meanings. The Patristic Writers could point to the many texts in the New Testament where the Old Testament is read and interpreted by non-literal methods.

When reading the first book of the Bible, we might also remember the words of St. Augustine who in his own commentary on that book warned against pitting Genesis against science and reason, "In matters that are so obscure and far beyond our vision, we find in Holy Scripture passages which can be interpreted in very different ways without prejudice to the faith we have received. In such cases, we should not rush in headlong and so firmly take our stand on one side that, if further progress in the search for truth justly undermines that position, we too fall with it." Long before the modern debate between science and religion, Augustine almost presciently can imagine that progress in the human understanding of things might show us truths that contradict a literal reading of scripture. He warns Christians not to rush into that trap and to be cautious when speaking about things (like science) that may through further observation and reason be shown to be true yet are not taught by the Scriptures. Many Christians fail to realize that much of the demand that Scripture must be literally true doesn't come from the Scripture itself, but comes from non-believers who say if the Bible is not science or scientifically true then it is of no value (or is not true). The Bible contains the revelation of God, not the discoveries of science. The Bible never claimed to be a textbook of scientific discoveries. Rather the Bible reveals God to us and reveals what it means to be human. That is what we should be reading the Bible for, and that is why we often must get beyond the literal statements of the Bible to discover the revelation of God which is found, and sometimes hidden, in the written words.

St. Clement of Alexandria (d.211 AD) argued that meaning of scriptures is hidden intentionally so that we are forced to seek out their meaning. He takes what Jesus says about parables in Mark 4:11-13 ("To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven."), and applies the teaching of Christ to the entirety of the Bible. We either are going to be dull and tired of God's Word, or we are going to work hard to try to understand its meaning even when it is hidden from us. Theodoret of Cyrus, 5th Century bishop, acknowledges there is meaning concealed in the text of the scriptures, but he believes it is God Himself who will reveal the meaning of the text to us:

Previous scholars have promised to resolve apparent problems in holy Scripture by explicating the sense of some, indicating the background of others, and, in a word, clarifying whatever remains unclear to ordinary people. ... trusting not in myself, of course, but in the one who dictated this manner of composition for the Scriptures, as it belongs to him to bring to the fore the meaning concealed in the text. He it was, after all, who in the sacred Gospels presented his teaching in parables and the provided the interpretation of what had been in riddles. My appeal, therefore, shall be to gain illumination of the mind from him, so I may endeavor to penetrate the innermost sanctuary of the most Holy Spirit." (TQOTO, pp 3-5)

St. Jerome (d. 420) in his day, praised the widow Marcella for her persistently inquiring mind when it came to the scriptures: "...she never came without asking something about Scripture, nor

did she immediately accept my explanation as satisfactory, but she proposed questions from the opposite viewpoint, not for the sake of being contentious, but so that by asking, she might learn solutions for points she perceived could be raised in objection. What virtue I found in her, what cleverness, what holiness..." (quoted in Hall, RSWTCF). To approach the scriptures in order to learn, with an inquisitive mind, with difficult questions was once viewed as virtue by the Christian Church and the right way for believers to approach the Scriptures in order to understand them. To hunger and thirst for a deeper meaning of the scriptures, beyond a superficial or literal reading, was once thought to be normative for Christians and not just the prerogative of the non-believers. Strange that today if someone asks difficult questions about the Bible we assume they are a nonbeliever!

In writing my reflections, I found the first three chapters of Genesis to be a luscious orchard filled with a super abundance of ripe fruit perfect for meditation. Each verse blossomed into many ideas each filled with live-giving wisdom and understanding. Certainly every verse yielded a hundredfold in terms of the number of words in my reflections! I found Genesis 4-11 to be a garden with much more difficult soil to work, and requiring myself as the husbandman to do a lot more work for a lot less yield. This may reflect the fact that the earlier chapters of Genesis take us into the Garden of Paradise where God-given fruit abounded, and all that is left to us is to reach out and partake of the sweet fruit. Genesis 4-11 is life outside of the Garden of Delights. The soil has become cursed and requires us to till to produce any fruit at all. Nevertheless, God commanded us to do just this work and to produce the fruit of the ground with thanksgiving and to His glory. These reflections are the result of those labors – a labor of love. My hope is that it will bear fruit in your life as well – an ever deeper appreciation for the scriptures, and the joy of searching in God's garden to find the fruit of hidden treasures. Questioning is a very appropriate gardener's tool when working one's way through Scriptures, and wondrously enough questions are also and often the fruit of the labor of reading the Bible.

A disclaimer – this is a collection of reflections, it is not a scholarly word study. I do not read Hebrew or Aramaic, so I don't comment on the etymology of each word in the text, though that is a valuable way to study the Scriptures. I do not comment on the meaning of each person's name, although that too can be helpful in understanding the Scriptures. Nor have I done a numerological study, even though certain numbers repeat throughout Genesis and obviously have a symbolic value. Generally such studies can be found in scholarly bible commentaries, dictionaries and encyclopedias (a couple which I have listed in the bibliography). This work is also not meant to be Orthodox dogmatics. These are simply my reflections on the text. I've included concepts found in the text that disturb me or that I cannot readily explain. I believe that in reading God's Word, one way to approach the text is to look for answers. But a different and very insightful way to approach the text is to discover what questions arise from the text? To what mysteries does it open our minds? Since it is a revelation from God, what challenges does it present to our very limited and one-sided human thinking? I embrace St. Basil the Great's notion that a God who is totally comprehensible is no god at all, but nothing more than the projection of the best of human intellect. The God whose ways are not our ways, and whose peace is beyond our understanding, is going to have a logic that we are not always going to comprehend. It is exactly this logic which is at work in the universe and as revealed in the Scriptures – a logic which is beyond our human understanding – which actually led Dostoyevsky to believe a God must exist for how else can we explain the seemingly incomprehensible events of life?

The Lord Jesus said, "As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (Matthew 13:23).

Genesis 4

4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."
2 And again, she bore his brother Abel.

"Adam *knew* Eve his wife...": a Biblical euphemism for "had sexual intercourse." The very first thing the humans do after being expelled from Paradise is have sex which might give testimony to the strength of this drive in humans. Were they afraid their "kind" might go extinct as a result of God's death-threat punishment of them and so felt the need to procreate immediately?

In Genesis 3:16, God imposes the following consequence on Eve for her sinfully disobeying His command: "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." But in the immediate aftermath of her and Adam's expulsion from Paradise, there is no indication that any of the punishment is enforced – no pain in childbirth is reported, Eve shows no desire for Adam (credits the baby to the Lord!), and there is no report that he ruled over her in any sense of the word. Eve speaks, Adam is speechless. There may be a feud between Eve and Adam. Eve credits both the birth of Cain and Seth to God (4:1, 4:25). In Adam's genealogy (5:3), Seth is said to be in Adam's likeness and neither Eve nor God are mentioned in relationship to Seth's birth.

Adam was made from the dust of the earth, Eve from the rib of Adam, and now Cain from the sexual union of Adam and Eve. Cain is the first human not directly created by God but born of the flesh and of human will. Our Lord Jesus Christ alters this process and transforms the children of sexual procreation once again into children of God. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Christ restores in us through adoption that childhood born of God which belonged to Eve and Adam naturally from the beginning. The begetting of children which Christ inaugurates is also not sexual procreation, but is being born again of water, the Spirit, and of the faith of the one being born.

Cain is the first human conceived by sexual union and born of a woman. In some sense

all humans are more like Cain than we are like Adam who had no human parents. And though in the Scriptures the first born male child will be special to the Lord (Thus says the Lord, "Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." Exodus 13:2), not so of the first human conceived and brought to life by the first human parents. Our lineage is not traced through Cain but through the 3rd born son, Seth. The line of the first-born Cain will be wiped out according to the story of the great flood. Is this a harbinger of the bad fruits humanity seems to produce? Not only will our hearts be continually inclined toward evil (Genesis 6:5), so will the fruit we produce - our offspring?!? The first born and the first fruits are normally special in God's eyes, but not so of the first born son of a sexual union.

"Adam knew Eve his wife..." There is no indication in the text that the first humans actually had sexual intercourse or even sexual feelings while in Paradise. The scripture's silence on the issue led to the **Patristic** conclusion that Paradise was a sexless state of existence for the humans and that virginity was thus the normative and natural state for humans. The fact that the Theotokos Mary conceives as a virgin – conception without sex – was viewed by some Patristic writers as the fulfillment of God's original intention. Mary's ability to procreate without sex was interpreted to prove sex is not essential to being human. Sexual relations from this point of view belong to the fallen world and to the Old Covenant. They are interpreted as a concession by a loving God so that the human race doesn't become extinct. With the New Covenant in Christ and with the resurrection of the dead, procreation itself becomes unnecessary, and thus sex no longer has a role in salvation but is seen as purely recreational, superfluous and unspiritual. The resurrection brings humans to life - without sex.

Eve – this is the last mention of Eve by name in Genesis or anywhere in the Old Testament. She will be mentioned in Genesis 4:25 when Seth is born but only as "Adam's wife." Besides giving birth, no

parental/motherly role is ascribed to Eve in Genesis. Before she gives birth to any children Adam calls her "the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20) but this seems to mean only that she gives birth and is not a description of her role as parent. No interaction or dialogue is described between Eve and her children and motherhood seems mostly to consist of childbearing. Eve is also referenced in the Septuagint prayer of Tobit as he asks God to bless his own union with his wife. The only use of Eve's name in the New Testament occurs in the writings of St. Paul who connects Eve to the first disobedience of God's commands, to sin and the fall of humankind. Eve is nowhere in the Bible connected to any positive qualities or characteristics. In post-apostolic Christianity, the Virgin Mary will be called the "new" Eve, but this refers not to Eve's virtues but to Mary as the one who replaces/corrects/heals the first Eve. Eve who is the only other human in the Bible described as being directly created by God rather than coming from human birth seems to have no positive role to play at all. She was created by God to correct what was "not good" in His original creation, but the story indicates she made things a whole lot worse for creation, for humans, for God! In the Muslim Quran which appears in the 7th Century AD there are similar creation stories as appear in Genesis. However Eve is never mentioned by name in the Quran – her existence is implicit only. Eve, the first woman, created directly by God according to Genesis 2, is virtually excluded as having any positive role in the history of humankind.

Adam's role as parent/father is also never described, nor is any conversation or even interaction between Adam and Eve or Adam and his children described. Fatherhood seems to imply only providing the sperm. Despite Adam's role in the fall of humanity, he is mentioned as fathering other children, and his death is recorded, unlike Eve's whose death was unmemorable. His name does appear in the ancestry of Christ the Lord in Luke's Gospel (3:38). Adam in the New Testament is seen as the prototype of all humans with Christ being the New Adam (Romans 5). Adam's role as the first human and first male is noted in the New Testament, and his name is not repudiated

though he sinned against God as Eve had done.

"I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." For the first time in the Biblical story Eve has a role in bringing forth life. Adam had been used by God to bring Eve into existence. Now Eve sees God helping her to bring forth life. The woman who Adam had called "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20) had so far only brought death into the world. Now she lives up to her name.

It is interesting that Eve alone has something to say about the first human birth. Adam says nothing, and seems to have been nothing more than the sperm donor for the baby. In Genesis 3:16, in what some consider to be the proto-evangel (the first prophecy of the good news of Christ) God foresaw the seed of woman as engaging in a continual warfare with the serpent's descendents. That the story places this battle through the seed of woman and does not mention the male in this salvation warfare is unusual in an otherwise male dominated story. Eve's punishment is linked to childbirth in Genesis 3, but Adam's punishment is not linked to fathering but only to farming and mortality. In Genesis 3:23, God expels Adam from Paradise so that Adam will not be able to live forever. Adam is neither able to keep himself alive, nor will he be able to propagate the human race without a woman. But in the story God does not overly link Adam with the continuation of the human race, nor in Genesis 4 does Adam have any say about the process. For as much as we play up that we all are descendents of Adam, Eve is the more significant personage in the story of the continuation of the human race after the Fall as recorded in Genesis.

"...gotten a man with the help of the LORD." The English translation adds a bit to the original text. Eve only says she has gotten a man with God (or through God) – "with the help of" is not in the text. Eve really is saying it was she and God who did this. Is Eve still thinking about the serpent's promise "to be like God" –even if she didn't achieve that status through eating the forbidden fruit, maybe she can pass that trait along to her

offspring by claiming they are God's children? Eve ignores Adam's role in procreation.

Eve was created to be the man's helper, Here she credits and praises God for being her helper in procreation. Being a helper is obviously not a denigrating position and certainly would not suggest the helper's subservience as some want to read into Genesis 2. Note also that Eve credits her pregnancy and giving birth to divine help, not to Adam's virility. She is crediting the continuation of the human race to God and herself. Does she in some prophetic way foreshadow the Virgin birth? Certainly if we look back to Genesis 2 we see that Eve was created by God from Adam. God used Adam to create Eve. Now Eve is saying she and God are responsible for the next generation of humans even though the text clearly says the child resulted from Adam "knowing" Eve. Does she not want to credit her husband with the child? Adam says nothing to defend his masculinity. Was there a war between the sexes ever since **the Fall**? Or is it that Eve intuits that the procreative process in bringing into existence new life imitates the Creator? Is procreation one way in which we are in God's image? Is it the moment in which humans are most like their Creator? Certainly in the Psalms God is credited with forming the baby in the womb: "For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13) and also with bringing the child forth from the mother's womb (Psalm 71:6). The mother has an experience of God that no father can ever have – God knitting the child in her womb, and bringing forth new life from her body.

For as important as modern Christians assume parenting is, one can't help but notice the total lack of emphasis on parenting in these texts. The parents give birth to children, but God never offers any parenting advice, instruction or rules. Not even a basic Ten Commandments are offered for the upbringing of children. The absence of any parental advice or instruction is particularly glaring in the case of Adam and Eve who would have had no examples from whom to learn. They have

to do the parenting on their own. We are not told how they did the parenting, though the rapid downward spiral of human morality might be indicative of their failure as parents, and certainly offers some explanation for the need for rules, order and civilization.

If as it is said we know a tree by its fruit, the first fruit of Adam and Eve's sexual union is Cain, and he turns out to be a murderer. Once outside of Paradise the fruit that is produced by Adam and Eve turns out to be rotten fruit. Sexual procreation was ordained by God, but outside of the Garden of Eden that which is conceived and that which is born is somehow defective – not oriented toward God but at the mercy of human desire. God had warned Eve that child birth would be accompanied by pain. God warned Adam that his farming efforts would meet with stiff resistance from the earth. But it is not just the soil that now will produce problems. As Adam and Eve will learn, their own son is to show himself a noxious being. For those who like to think of sex as always good and a human right, the story of Cain is going to show that sex though blessed by God and being a good **in this world** is not an ultimate good, but a relative one. It is not a good from all eternity – its value and goodness comes only in this fallen and mortal world. Sex in the fallen world turns out to produce fallen children. This is probably why many Patristic writers didn't see sex and procreation as an ultimate good, but a conditional, relative and temporal one. By their thinking the end result of sexual procreation is a world full of sinners and corruption. By embracing celibacy, monastics are defiantly saying we will not live according to the values and demands of the fallen world where death still reigns. They are denying that death has any ultimate value also – they are not afraid that death will cause the extinction of the human race. The faithful saints are but a rare remnant in the world, holiness a recessive trait. Humans find the sex drive very powerful and sexual attraction intoxicating. Because we experience sex as so pleasurable we want to define sex as an ultimate good, but it has no eternal value. It is a relative good, belonging to life in the fallen world. There is no direct mention of sex in the perfect Paradise of God. In the

New Testament it is said that in the kingdom of God there is no marriage. The sense that sex may belong only to the fallen world and that it should be engaged in only with all caution, does not sit well with modern humans who find recreational sex on demand to be not just pleasurable but a God-given right – as if sex in itself is always good. But outside of procreation it is not even clear in Genesis what value sex has. It certainly is not portrayed as being worth living for or dying for. And it is never in Genesis described as a virtue. Sex like everything else we experience is part of this fallen world. It can be very enticing and alluring, but like the forbidden fruit, being attractive doesn't make it ethically good. Because it is such a powerful force in our lives, and because our thinking and our passions are distorted by the Fall, the sexual drive becomes one of the things in life humans must learn to master or they will become a slave to it.

:2 Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

Adam and Eve are now replaced as the main characters in God's story by Cain and Abel.

"...keeper of sheep...tiller of the ground..." For the first time the humans are identified with and by their work. Life outside of Paradise necessitates work in order to survive. Adam the first man is not associated with any job or skill though in Genesis 3:23 God banished him from Paradise to "till the earth." We are not told if he ever took up that job, but his son Cain did. Work is generally viewed in the Scripture as having dignity. "We gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

"...keeper of the sheep..." This is the first mention in Genesis of the domestication of animals. There was no mention in the opening chapters of Genesis of God creating domesticated animals – the animals were all wild. It is humans apparently who domesticated the sheep – as part of the human mandate to subdue the earth and have dominion over the animals (Gen 1:26). Abel is keeping the sheep. Genesis does not tell us how this came about, but perhaps we are to assume that since Adam and Eve would have lived peaceably with the animals, the fact that sheep and humans still can live together is reminiscent of Paradise. How did Abel learn to keep sheep? And for what purpose is he keeping them? Remember a carnivorous lifestyle emerges for humans only after the flood. The text assumes sheep keeping is normative for humans though no "use" of sheep has yet been mentioned in the text. Humans have not been blessed by God to use animal products for food, and other than the clothes that God made Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:22, the opening 11 chapters of the book make no mention of wearing or making clothes, nor the tools to do it with.

Cain is "a tiller of the ground" which is actually the role God envisioned for humans before (Gen 2:15) and after (Gen 3:19, 3:23) the Fall. Noah is the only other person in the Bible who is identified as a tiller of the earth; the end result of his labors is his getting drunk and passing out (Genesis 9). Cain tills the ground to bring forth fruit from it

– the same ground from which God created Adam. And the tiller of the ground will eventually spill his brother's blood on the ground – returning it to “from which it came.”

“...tiller of the ground...” One would assume this implies some sort of till or farm implement to help him do his work. If so this would be indicative of some advancement in human innovation. The Genesis story is amazingly free of anachronisms. The first people are basically primitive. Only slowly do culture, technology and civilization emerge. Farming also implies a somewhat stable lifestyle – owning a land and possessing a defined property. Farmers will not be the common image of God's people who will be much more a nomad and shepherding people. The Jews will spend so much time in exile and in search of a homeland that the image of themselves as wanderers remains. However the imagery of an established nation of Israel is found in the promised land and the city of Jerusalem both suggest a permanency to them. As the famous creedal confession of Deuteronomy 26 says, "And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the LORD the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 26:5-9).

Cain is doing what God willed for the humans – to till the ground. Abel is the one engaged in a new and hitherto for unmentioned occupation - shepherding. It is shepherding which will become such a significant role and image in the leadership of God's people: King David was a shepherd, Christ is the good shepherd. The tiller of the soil will not have the metaphoric role that the shepherd will have in the Old

and New Testament. And we know it is not simply seed with which Cain will scatter on the ground, for soon he will spill his brother's blood. And the ground which Cain tills will after he murders his brother become cursed.

Though the text does not offer us any deep insight into why or how one occupation is valued or measured against the other, certainly in the text Cain and Abel are viewed differently by God as are their offerings. Is it possible that Cain as the tiller of the earth somehow symbolizes what has happened to humanity? No longer are humans viewed as being in God's image and likeness as they are being creatures of the dust of the earth. Sin has reduced and dehumanized God's favored creatures. Cain tills the earth, looking to it to give him life, rather than to God. Is this what annoys God about Cain? Does Cain remind God how far his humans have fallen and to what they have been reduced? Cain is not even looking to the animals as Abel does for finding purpose in life. Is this why God shows disdain for Cain and his offering? It is possible that the story is offering the two brothers as signs of humanity - Abel has dominion over the sheep in fulfillment of what God promised in Genesis 1:26. Cain on the other hand has to till the soil which has become hostile to the fallen humans and no longer freely produces the abundance of food found in Paradise. Does God see the two brothers as prototypical symbols of his fallen humanity – capable of doing His will and also suffering the result of their own sin?

3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

“An offering...” In the **Septuagint**, Cain brings an offering or sacrifice to God. God sees Cain’s offering and has no regard for it, but He regards Abel’s as a “gift.” Perhaps because we cannot fathom how God views our actions, we are left puzzled as to why the LORD viewed the two offerings differently. The text offers us little in terms of a justification for God’s varied response. We are the ones who don’t like being left with uncertainty and mystery when it comes to God. We want God to be effable, comprehensible, conceivable and obvious, even though we claim at the Cherubic Hymn to believe in a God who is none of these things (the priest’s prayer says we worship the God who is ineffable, inconceivable, invisible and incomprehensible). St. Basil the Great said that a God who is comprehensible is no God at all. God surpasses our understanding, and is not limited by human reasoning nor human imagination – otherwise he would simply be a figment of our rationality and creativity. We are forced rather to deal with the sovereign God as He reveals Himself, not God as we want or need Him to be. The story is about God revealing Himself, not God justifying Himself or justifying His behavior. God’s decision is revealed to us but not the rationale for the decision. We are the ones who are not satisfied with God revealing His judgment. We want to know “why?” We want to subject God to human reason and demand that God’s revelation be consistent with our logic. To our dismay, God however sometimes leaves us with “My ways are not your ways.” Believers through history have tended to take theology seriously; God is love and that must be part of the rationale for His judgments and actions however mysterious or inexplicable they seem to us.

In all of Genesis so far, God has never commanded the humans to make an offering to Him of any kind. From where did they learn this practice? Why did they begin making sacrifices? Both Cain and Abel make an offering to God without any Law demanding this of them: “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they

are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them..." (Romans 2:13-15). Perhaps Cain and Abel discerned that it is good and right to worship God without ever being commanded to do so. Genesis assumes the naturalness of the sacrificial offering – probably reflecting an anachronism – the text was written later in time when sacrifice was the normal way of approaching God to seek his favor. Otherwise the text offers no command or clue as to why sacrifice was begun as a way to seek God's favor. Since the humans have not yet been given permission to eat animal flesh and since no mention of carnivorous animals has yet been made, the sacrificial slaughtering of animals seems out of place. The notion that this text comes from a much later time period in Judaism seems justified. The earlier chapters in Genesis have few anachronisms, but this does seem to be one. Orthodoxy does assume that humans are by nature worshipping beings. In the Divine Liturgy the priest recites the following prayer at the anaphora: "It is meet and right to hymn You, to bless You, to praise You, to give thanks to You, and to worship You in every place of Your dominion: for You are God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing and eternally the same, You and Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit." The prayer asserts it is proper for us to worship God. However in Genesis 4, God had yet to command any type of worship. What is surprising is that nowhere in these early chapters of Genesis do the humans ever offer thanksgiving to God.

"In the course of time...." Did Cain have to wait a season or two, or perhaps even years of farming before his plants and trees could produce fruit? Obviously the story is now dealing with our world as we know it. Time has to pass for things to happen, no more instant and spontaneous creations. But this is as true for Abel who would have had to wait until the right time for him to have a flock and to have firstlings. While Genesis generally is concerned with time and ages, the murder story lacks such precision. Nowhere in Genesis are we told the ages of

Cain or Abel. Were they teenagers or adults? We do not know the age of Cain at his death, nor the ages of his descendants. All the other men in the story have their age at death recorded. Obituaries seem fairly important to the author(s) of Genesis, unusual that Abel and Cain's age at death are missing. This is perhaps a hint that the Cain and Abel story comes from a hand other than the one who so carefully recorded the ages at death of the story's other personages.

"the LORD had regard for Abel ... but for Cain ... no regard." We all feel angry whenever we feel we have been treated unfairly. The scripture certainly introduces a notion of the capricious universe in this text for it offers no explanation for the Lord's behavior. God is made to appear to have favorites for no apparent reason. The text does not help the reader understand the situation. Was Cain left equally clueless? Does he see himself victimized not just by mindless acts of nature, but by the Creator of the universe? Is God unfair and arbitrary in His actions? Is this part of the lessons we humans must learn – that "life" is at times unfair, that because we live in a fallen world where we are separated from God we sometimes cannot know what God thinks or wants, that God's sovereign will includes His favoring some over others without His having ever to explain why? Living in a world which is alienated from God due to sin leaves us very vulnerable to misunderstanding what God is doing or what God wants from us. As it says in the Wisdom literature, "I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11). Certainly the text does introduce us to the mysterious favor of the Lord. God who favored Abel for reasons not known to us will also choose and favor Israel. When God told the Prophet Samuel to anoint a king to replace the discredited Saul, "the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the

heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). We cannot see what God sees, nor do we always know His judgments. This does cause us great grief in the world. Even though God favored Abel over Cain, God continued to speak to and encourage Cain. God did not totally reject Cain but exhorted Cain to look into himself and master his own thoughts. When we are displeased, we can let anger and jealousy rule our hearts, or we can look into our selves to see what changes we need to make to please God and we can learn to master our emotions thus gaining a benefit from our unhappiness.

"for Cain and his offering (the LORD) had no regard." This is perhaps one of the most difficult lessons for believers: if God is truly free and sovereign, He can reject our offering. He is not under any constraint to hear our prayer let alone respond to it positively. The Divine Liturgy fully understands that God is not predestined to act if we pray to him. One prayer of the priest before the Cherubic Hymn acknowledges this terrible reality: "Do not turn Your face away from me, nor cast me out from among Your children; but make me, Your sinful and unworthy servant, worthy to offer gifts to You." We are not worthy to approach God as that same prayer states: "No one who is bound by the desires and pleasures of the flesh is worthy to approach or draw near to serve You, O King of Glory..." We approach God in worship because He commands us to, not because we are worthy to approach Him. And approaching Him comes with some risk, for He might be displeased with us! The world is not so "perfectly" designed as is claimed by one character in a John Updike novel who said that we are destined to sin and God is destined to forgive us. God is love and is good, but He is also free to look upon our offerings and reject them if He finds fault with them. The priest asks God in the Liturgy to "Accept also the prayer of us sinners, and bear it to Your holy altar, enabling us to offer unto You gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins and the errors of the people." We actually ask God to accept our prayers, we do not assume that He has to.

Cain brings an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Is the Lord displeased because the fruit offering reminds Him of Eve and Adam eating the forbidden fruit and all that has been lost? Is God displeased because that which is now offered to Him is not from His Garden of Delight, but an inferior produce which is the result of human labor and thus another reminder of humankind's sin? The text offers no explanation for God's reaction. In the New Testament the Book of Hebrews claims what is wrong with Cain's offering is related to Abel being a man of faith. "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking" (Hebrews 11:4). Hebrews appears to say, "we see how God reacted so we know one offering was more acceptable to God, we don't really need to know what Cain or Abel did – our concern is God's reaction." Is it possible that Cain made his offering purely out of some sense of obligation or superstition but not believing in the God whom He worshipped? Is it possible that the entire story hinges around faith in and love for God, which Cain lacked? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God" (James 2:23). Perhaps Cain lacked any faith in God – he had no trust in the Creator and so does the sloppy minimum He thinks he has to do, but has no intention of really giving God His due.

Patristic writers from the earliest days also puzzled over why Cain's offering was not acceptable to God. Scripture is silent on this point. Among the explanations put forth by the Fathers of the Church: Cain didn't offer God the first fruits of his garden – he had already satiated his own appetite and only then turned to offer thanks to God; Cain didn't offer the best of his fruits but only that which he couldn't use himself; Cain's intentions were wrong; Cain was lackadaisical in making the offering; Cain made the offer grudgingly; Cain was indifferent to God and offered only out of a sense of obligation but not joy or thanksgiving. Genesis offers no moral rather reporting the story with objective indifference.

Abel offers an animal sacrifice, which at least so far in the text, has not been commanded by God. But God has regard for the shedding of the sheep's blood. Somehow this seems incongruous with the God of Paradise, who gave the humans only plants and fruit to eat, not other animals. Why has blood sacrifice become pleasing to God? Humans still are not permitted to eat flesh/meat in Genesis, nor has any killing of animals been authorized by God.

Abel the killer of animals is to be killed by his brother Cain who offers only the bloodless offering of fruit. Did Cain learn to shed blood from Abel? Did Cain think that perhaps the shedding of blood is what pleases God? He apparently has no sheep to offer, so he sacrifices his brother instead.

Abel's offering inspired Orthodox hymnographers. "I have not resembled Abel in his righteousness, O Jesus, never having offered to You actions worthy of God – pure gifts, an appropriate sacrifice, an unblemished life." "Like Cain, O my wretched soul, my offering to the Creator of all has been filthy deeds, a polluted sacrifice, and a worthless life – and like him I now stand condemned" (Tuesday Canon of St. Andrew of Crete). The hymn assumes Cain is rejected because of sin, but the Genesis text still at this point has sin "crouching at the door" (4:7). In other words, Cain has not yet sinned, but the chance for sin is there. He doesn't need to repent, he needs through self control to deny himself and thus refuse to sin. Cain's sin occurs after God's rejection not before it.

Cain seems to be doing the right thing – he brings an offering of fruit. We are not told why God has regard for Abel but not Cain. St. John Chrysostom, ever the moralist, suggests it would have been better if Cain had not brought an offering at all, rather than offer something which is not pleasing to God. Chrysostom advises people to be cautious of what they offer to the Lord, and to make sure the offering was honestly earned and not some ill-gotten gain. Chrysostom postulates that Cain's offering was not well thought out, not the first fruits or the best fruits of Cain's garden, but merely whatever he had gathered up or

gleaned – this is why God won't accept it as it is an offering of carelessness and indifference. "Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness" (Jeremiah 48:10).

The Patristic writers were always quick to defend the goodness of God in every biblical story. So though the text offers no explanation for God's rejection of Cain's offering, they each found justification for God's action. The 3rd Century Patristic writer now called the Pseudo-Macarius believed Cain's offering was insincere, done only for show to keep up with his brother rather than done to please God.

"...regard..." The text offers no clue as to how exactly the brothers knew God regarded one offering and rejected the other. It is clear however that the brothers were somehow able to discern God's reaction to their offerings. Cain is aware not only how God responded to his offering, but also acutely aware of God's response to Abel's offering. Apparently the response of God was not just internally intuited but could be objectively observed by both brothers.

Cain's reaction – feeling rejected causes him to be angry (a new emotion for humans – this is the first time it is mentioned in Genesis), but still his reaction seems normal for humans. He feels God's rejection after all. Anger is not presented in a pejorative sense – it simply is an emotion which Cain is expected to gain mastery over. Instead Cain allows the passion to control him and his anger turns to murderous sin. Nothing in the text suggests anger must naturally result in sin – his anger could motivate Cain to change his own ways, instead he looks at his brother as the cause of his passion. In Cain's thinking it is his brother's fault that he is angry. He does not look at himself, at his own jealousy as the cause of his anger, disappointment and depression. Instead of owning his anger (I am angry), Cain blames Abel ("you make me angry"). He wrongly attributes his inner emotion to his brother. He distorts brotherhood into that which allows him to blame his brother for all his unhappiness. The Lord Jesus Christ attempts to heal this sinfully distorted thinking in us. "What comes out of a man

is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man" (Mark 7:20-23). Passion and sin are within us. The other person may stir our passions, but that only reveals what is in our hearts. The other, the brother or sister, cannot put sin in us – anger, cursing, rage, murder are in our hearts, they are not the fault of someone else. This is the level of healing we try to attain in Confession – to admit the sin which is within us. We might feel angry as a result of what someone else does. This anger can motivate us to change the situation, to correct a problem, to flee from danger. Anger can serve a good purpose. But when it smolders in our hearts, it is a dangerous passion that leads to further sin. We then use our anger to justify our own sinfulness.

By St. Paul's understanding, Cain's grief was certainly worldly grief not godly grief. The fact that his offering does not measure up to God's standard does not bring Cain to repentance but rather through envy cause him to hate his brother and ultimately to commit fratricide. "... God, who comforts the downcast ... As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:6,9-10).

The story is not only about the sin of Cain. It is about passion in each of us. It is a story of sibling rivalry, of jealousy, and of the rage we feel when someone else is favored over us, or the fury we feel when we believe we have been unfairly treated. Such anger and rage appear in us because we often suffer from doubts about ourselves, we fear we are of little value in the eyes of others and so we feel the need to assert ourselves, violently if necessary in order not to lose a position of favor or simply not to be forgotten. The story can help us put our own emotions – jealousy and rage – in the safe context of a biblical story – so that by being able to see

the wrong in another person, we might be able to correct the fault in ourselves. It is a warning that a passion which you do not control will control you. The control of one's passions is a major theme of any Lenten period.

6 The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? **7** If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

We are not told how Cain would know God is talking to Him. God is not visible, He has no body, no mouth, so how did Cain "hear" God and know it was God's voice when there was no form to project the voice?

God does not advocate law or the police to force Cain to make the right choice. God appeals to self-control. The theme is very Lenten, very ascetic. Fasting is part of self denial and self control. God wants us to exert dominion over our own appetites and passions.

Though God has not looked favorably on Cain's offering, God notices Cain's sadness and anger and speaks to Cain to mollify, encourage, exhort and correct him. God does not reject Cain himself or turn away from Cain because He has rejected Cain's offering nor because of Cain's bad attitude. God's action toward Cain still shows love and concern. God does not threaten Cain or command Cain to do anything. Rather the Lord acknowledges Cain's emotions and encourages Cain to be master over his passions. Cain does not comprehend the opportunity which God has placed before him and will end up acting on his own emotions and by his own will, totally ignoring the loving exhortation from God. God is optimistic that Cain can overcome sin. God does not assume that the human is depraved and incapable of choosing the good. But neither does God take away the choice of Cain nor intervene to make this spiritual battle easier. Cain is left to choose the good or not, to cooperate with goodness or reject it. Cain has free will and must decide which way he will go. God encourages him to choose the good but leaves the choice to Cain. St. Paul speaks about the choices that are before us and reminds us that pleasing God cannot be reduced to following law, rules, rituals, or regulations. "All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). "All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). Being godly cannot be reduced to obsessive and compulsive keeping of the

details of the Law. Righteousness demands of us going beyond the demands of any law to overcoming our selfishness and of practicing love for others.

God is patient with the troubled Cain. “Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works...” (Romans 2:4-6)

In Genesis 3:15 God cursed the serpent saying there was going to be enmity between the serpent’s seed and the women’s seed. Are we seeing this enmity at work in Cain? Instead of loving his brother as his mother would have wanted him to do, Cain is tormented with destructive and wicked thoughts about his brother. Is the serpent starting the warfare against humanity?

Note in the story that Abel hasn’t actually done anything to his brother. Abel did simply what he believed was right. It is Cain’s offering which falls short and for this Cain is enraged and directs his rage at his brother instead of considering whether he himself might be at fault or if he should make some change in himself. Cain apparently can’t imagine that he has done something wrong or that he has not measured up in some way. His thinking is purely “if I haven’t measured up there must be someone else to blame.” The very purpose of the Sacrament of Confession is to challenge the Cainian thinking within each of us. “Grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother.” Help me to see the log in my own eye and not worry about the speck in the eye of the other (Matthew 7:3-5).

Judaism does not see in its scripture a sense that humans are predestined to sinfulness and evil. As it says in the Septuagint’s Wisdom of Sirach: “It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the

commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything; his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin” (15:14-20). Humans have the capacity to choose the good and to overcome evil. This belief was held by Eastern Patristic writers who do not embrace the Augustinian sense of predestination toward sin. If we are not predestined to sin, we then have to admit that we sin by choice, and so have little defense and no excuse for what we do. As one of the prayers of the Church says, “Laying aside all excuse we sinners offer to You as Master this supplication: have mercy on us.” Our sins are inexcusable, so we must beg for God’s mercy.

In the Divine Liturgy the priest prays to God, “who does not despise the sinner but instead has appointed repentance unto salvation...” God knows what is on the heart of Cain, but calls Cain to change his thinking. God does not reject Cain despite his murderous thoughts but ever hopes that we will repent.

What is perhaps more amazing, God does not speak to Abel whose sacrifice God blessed, rather God speaks only to the less favored brother. Being God’s favored doesn’t mean one will have close conversation with God. Being disregarded by God does not mean God will not speak with you.

“If you do well, will you not be accepted?” St. Peter in his First Epistle perhaps gives us a hint as to what God wanted from Cain. “For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly... But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God’s approval.” (2:19, 20). Was God giving Cain a way to get His approval? Did God hope that Cain would realize the injustice of God having no regard for Cain’s offering, and that Cain mindful of

God would choose to endure the pain and in the end he too would receive approval? Perhaps God was providing opportunity for Cain to choose virtue. Abel as far as we can tell from the story was simply enjoying God's unmerited favor. Was Cain being given opportunity to learn that one could also receive favor from God by choosing the good? If so, Cain missed the opportunity and not only does not choose the good but far worse chooses to do evil. For us, we can see Cain's example and what happened to him – how by not choosing the good, he rushed headlong into deadly sin. St. Peter tells us on the other hand, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:21-23). Cain failed to trust Him who judges justly, and/or he failed to trust His judgment. Cain felt he knew better how things should be done, and he will literally take matters into his own hands, murdering his brother.

Sin. This is the first time the word is used in Genesis. It is used in relation to Cain. The word sin did not occur in Genesis 3 in relationship to Adam or Eve.

As God exhorted Cain to overcome the sin of anger which was lurking in ambush, we too are taught by St. Paul: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Ephesians 4:26). We have power to control our anger. We are not just instinctive and irrational animals. We have free will and can control our passions.

Chrysostom warns that envy is passion worse than fornication or adultery. He says adultery is confined to the one who commits it, but envy is the mother of murder and has caused entire wars. Cain was possessed by envy and even God's reproach could not cure him of this affliction.

What kind of God is it who allows his creature (Cain) to consider murdering the man with whom God is pleased (Abel)? God is certainly mystery. He respects the free will of humans, even when the humans

oppose Him (as did Eve and Adam) and when they threaten His favored son (as did Cain). God practices great restraint with His creation, or perhaps limits His own power and confines His power within the constraints of the created world. He is not a God who constantly and always intervenes in every human thought or action. He is not a God who needs to control everything the humans do even if they do something wrong. He is not a God who always prevents wrong doing from occurring, nor does He prevent people from experiencing the consequences of their own choices. He is not a God who punishes in an "eye for an eye" fashion. And yet the scriptural witness is also that He is a God of love, justice, mercy, truth and judgment.

We pray "thy will be done" in the Lord's Prayer. We see this in action in Cain's life. He feels a certain way toward his brother, and God gently confronts Cain about his thinking and his feelings. God tells Cain to master his sin, his anger. This is the will of God for Cain: master your sin. God however does not force Cain to do His will. We often know the will of God (forgive those who have offended you, love your enemies, give expecting nothing in return) and we pray "Thy will be done." And yet our own emotions and beliefs and rationalizations argue against doing the Lord's will. We think we are generally good and generally we want to do the Lord's will – or at least as long as that will coincides with what we want. Each of us is Cain, and Cain is each of us. We have been hurt by many others in life. We are jealous of the success of others. We feel neglected. We are angry about our lot. God tells us also to master these thoughts, these emotions, these sins. Will we do more than pray, "Thy will be done"? Will we do it?

"... master it..." Cain must either master his anger or become a slave to it. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). This is the first instance of slavery in the bible, and it is a direct result of sin. The humans created to have dominion over the entire created order, cannot even control themselves and their emotions.

8 Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

"Let us go out to the field..." Cain has premeditated what he is about to do. He invites his brother to follow him. It is an absolute betrayal of what it means to be a brother. His action is not an uncontrollable fit of passion. He coldly calculates where and how he will kill his brother. And he leads his brother out into the field where there will be no witnesses to his action. He intentionally hides what he is going to do from his parents (who the author of the text has faded out of the story in any case). He obviously knows what he intends to do is wrong and must be concealed. He knows murder is wrong even before there is any law that says "You shall not murder." God has not given any law forbidding murder. Cain has not witnessed murder but conceives of this new thing in his own heart. And though many will see his act as a deed promoted by Satan, nowhere does the scripture mention or blame Satan for what Cain has decided on his own to do. Evil truly comes from the heart of a human.

"...out to the field..." Does Cain imagine that he can find a place where even God cannot see what he is doing? Certainly his parents had attempted to hide from the presence of God after they sinned (Genesis 3:10). Had they somehow conveyed to Cain that they thought God hadn't actually seen them sin, but only discovered their crime later since God didn't intervene while they were sinning but only appeared after the fact? Eve and Adam apparently had no awareness of God's presence until after they sinned so maybe they suspected God didn't really know what they had done until Adam let slip that something was wrong. By going out into the field did Cain hope he was beyond the watchful eye of God? How very human we are when we try to hide our sins, misdeeds and mistakes from others and from God thinking since no one witnessed what we did we can walk away free from our misdeed. Healing and forgiveness come only when we acknowledge the sin, not when we escape being detected and fingered for what we did.

Since human death was an unknown concept to Cain, is it possible that he had no concept of the enormity of his act before he

killed Abel? It is a most interesting question in the light of the story - for Cain takes his brother Abel out into the field away from his parents and quite apparently with and for the intention of killing Abel. So though death was an unknown concept, Abel planned the death of his brother. In the story to this point no animals are carnivores, and so Cain would not have witnessed much killing except for the animal sacrifice which Abel did. Possibly he didn't understand the finality of death, but then why kill his brother? He could have just bullied him or run him off. Did he know what he was doing? Could he understand the concept of death? What made him believe the death of his brother would resolve his own anger/unhappiness? God disregarded Cain and this is what made Cain unhappy/angry. So why did Cain imagine that killing his brother would make either God happy with him, or Cain happy with himself since he still wouldn't have God's favor? It is possible that Cain concluded, "I cannot strike at the invisible God who is prejudiced against me, but I can strike at the one whom God favors."

"Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him." How fast and how far humans have fallen. Death which was a consequence of human willfulness and disobedience is now being used by humans to accomplish their selfish and sinful ways. Had God not foreseen this? Did God not understand that when He introduced death as a consequence for sin that the sinful human beings would then use death to sin even more? Whatever God understood about the role death would play in humanity, the picture of fallen humanity is one of depravity. There still is no mention of love between any of the characters of the story. This certainly is noticeable in the early chapters of Genesis. The humans each are very self centered and show little concern for their fellow human beings. There is as of this point in scripture no commandment from God not to kill and at least by the literal reading of the story Cain would not have seen animals killing one another as there are no carnivores. Once again humans turn something from God into their own distorted purposes. And again God will take a human invention, murder, and by allowing it to become the means for His own

Son's death will transform what the humans deformed into the salvation of humanity. Why God did not intervene and stop the fratricide is not known, but in allowing this event, God is setting the stage for His own Son's death. God is going to experience all that becomes part of human existence. God does not allow any human experience that He Himself is not willing to suffer.

Someone once said that every generation is faced with an invasion of barbarians – their own children. Were Adam and Eve also caught by surprise as to how uncivilized their son could be? There is no indication in the text that Eve and Adam reared Cain or taught him any values or morality. Is this a lesson that had to be learned by humans coming out of paradise – assume nothing from or for your children, you must teach and discipline them? All was provided for Adam and Eve in Paradise, but now they must learn the importance of discipline and rules in their own lives and that of their offspring. Having the image of God in us, is not sufficient for a human becoming a moral being. Beings of free will must be taught consequences and responsibilities. This is a lesson that self-centered, self-loving, consumption-loving modern people do not appreciate.

"...killed him..." By what means Cain killed his brother the story doesn't tell us. No weapons of any sort have been mentioned in the Genesis narrative to this point. As a tiller of the soil, one would imagine Cain had some sort of farm implements and so it is possible that he used one to murder his brother. However in the story Cain simply lures his brother out into the field – no indication he is carrying anything. Did he murder his brother with his bare hands? Did he use something that nature provided to kill his brother? In either case we see God's "good" creation being used for violence and sin. Was Abel caught off guard? Was he truly a righteous man who had never even considered the possibility of murder? The story doesn't tell us if he resisted the evil of his brother, if he begged for mercy, if he accepted martyrdom rather than give in to the evil passions which possessed his brother. The Church through time has

tended to see Abel as that righteous martyr, a prototype of Christ himself.

The first reported death in Genesis is not Adam or Eve who had been told if they ate the forbidden fruit that they would die (Gen 2:17). Adam according to the story will live about 800 years after Abel's death. He certainly had plenty of time to think about how his sin contributed to his son's death, and ample time to consider the death sentence under which he lived. The first death is not the "natural" result of their disobedience, but rather occurs due to human violence. No human had yet died, even though that had been promised, but now Cain hastens the fulfillment of the promised mortality. To add to the sin, Cain does not kill his enemy, he murders his brother. God's dire warning to Adam about death is not even given the chance to work itself out. Cain takes matters into his own hands and brings about the first death of a human being. The violent violently hasten death's mastery over humanity. If God intended to help the humans cope with the eventuality of death, Cain circumvents that process and makes death a permanent part of human existence right then.

Theodoret of Cyrus, 5th Century, asked why it is that Abel is the first to die when it was Adam that sinned. He concludes it was God's way of showing that death is unjust. "God wanted Death's foundation to be unsound. If Adam had been the first to die, Death would have established a strong base by taking the sinner as his first victim. But since he first took the man unjustly slain, his foundation is insecure."

The Greek Patristic writers almost all agree that envy is the culprit vice in Cain, and that envy is the father of the sin murder. Chrysostom said of Cain's action, "Nothing is worse than jealousy and envy; by them death came into the world."

God had reproached Cain to get control of his passion, but even God's direct counsel did not move Cain to rid himself of the envy which gave birth to murder. The story shows the importance of confession – of confessing not only our misdeeds, but our sinful thoughts. To gain mastery over our

passions, we need to confess our sins and renounce them. Do you feel envy and jealousy in your life? Do you think these passions are unimportant and not worth confessing? God counseled Cain to master his envy, but he refused and allowed the envy to go full term, and its offspring was murder. Here we come to see confession as a real gift from God to help us overcome our sinful thoughts and feelings. Not only does God counsel us to overcome our passions, in the sacrament of confession He provides a tool and medicine to help us achieve the goal.

One of the themes we find repeated in scripture is the wicked lying in wait to harm and even kill the righteous. The Psalms, Prophets and Wisdom literature frequently raise that theme (Psalm 119:95, Proverbs 12:6, Jeremiah 5:26, and of course Judas in the Gospel). And though they do not shy away from exposing that reality of life, their ability to explain it satisfactorily is not always there. Sometimes the writer can only lament, "Why, O Lord?" Why do the wicked succeed? Why do the righteous or innocent suffer at the hands of the wicked? (see Job 21:7, Jeremiah 12:1, Habakkuk 1:13) The theme is worsened by the fact that sometimes it is a familiar friend, not an enemy, who treacherously harms an innocent friend (Psalm 55:12-13, and Judas). Of course Genesis provides the whole background as to "Why?". It does have to do with the Fall of humans, that ancestral sin which has tainted humanity. It has to do with the human willingness (and even gleefulness!) to choose evil, to decide that vengeance is a right and that unfairness in life demands that others be slain or forcibly injured. God sorrowfully notes in Genesis the inclination of the human heart to do evil from the time a human is young. Is this a defect in humans – did God goof when He made us? One of the difficult lessons of Genesis is that for humans to have true free will, humans must be capable of horrible evil – that is the only way there can be real freedom of choice if we can actually do the evil. For humans to be able to love others, it must not be pre-programmed in their hearts but rather must be a choice. For the universe to have true love, there must be true and risky choice which includes failure and evil. God sees

this reality in the human heart and does not treat it as a defect, though it brings Him to grief. Even God wonders in Genesis whether having a being capable of love (and thus capable of evil) is worth it. Genesis 6-9 (Noah and the flood) presents God facing up to this dilemma. God created beings He loves, beings who are capable of loving Him. But the capacity to love is the capacity to reject and to do evil. To God's dismay the humans constantly and continually are willing to reject love – love for others, love for Him, His love for them. And thus is born the repeated pattern in history that there are a few who actually choose righteousness and love, but they live in a world where that choice is often an unusual one and the person who makes the choice becomes the target of those who choose a way which rejects God, rejects love, rejects holiness. So to love God, to live a life of love means one may be subject to the same bitter disappointment and grief that God Himself experiences in relationship to His creation. There is a sad reality that humans frequently want “love” but are less often willing to give it, or to joyfully suffer for it.

Fratricide. Seemingly common human foibles, sibling rivalry and jealousy become in the fallen world the basis for fratricide – murdering one's own brother. In Genesis 3 the Fall of humanity led to a world of alienation, division, isolation, opposition. Humanity against God. Male versus female. Mankind versus the rest of the created world. Death. And quickly after death becomes part of the human condition, murder becomes part of human activity. Humans die not only from natural causes but in Genesis 4 the first recorded death is from intentional human violence against another human being. God gave procreation for the continuance of the human race, humans, even brothers cannot get along and act to kill one another. Humans use death to accomplish their own goals – and also reveal the evil within themselves. God will intervene again into the human order and use death, even murder, to accomplish His Plan for the world. That is the story of His Christ.

The shedding of blood - Abel shed the blood of the sheep and God was pleased.

Has Cain misunderstood God? It is not the shedding of blood in the animal sacrifice which is important, but something else. Cain's shedding human blood is not going to find favor with God. Keep in mind the Ten Commandments do not exist yet. There is no command from God forbidding murder, but God will not let Cain escape with a plea of ignorance of the law.

In Wisdom 10:1-3, the blame for Cain's shameful action is said to be that he abandoned wisdom to follow his own anger: “Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, and gave him strength to rule all things. But when an unrighteous man departed from her in his anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother.” Wisdom protected Adam despite his sin because Adam did not attempt to drive Wisdom away. Cain rejects Wisdom (God's Word) and follows his own heart to the murder of his own brother. “Because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin” (Wisdom 1:4).

In Matthew 23:35, Abel is called both righteous and innocent. He is not seen as having provoked his brother in any way. Cain is completely at fault for the murder.

St. John in his first epistle proffers a damning critique of Cain: “For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous” (1 John 3:11-12). In his Gospel St. John says Judas is “a devil” (John 6:70-71), perhaps showing how far humanity has truly fallen. In Luke's Gospel genealogy, Christ, the Son of God, has his ancestry traced through Seth to Adam who also is son of God. Cain is portrayed in St. John's epistle as not being in a godly line but rather being a descendent of the evil one. Nothing in the Genesis text remotely suggests that any human is or could be a child of Satan as all humanity is traced through Adam to God.

St. Cyprian of Carthage praises Abel's offering as coming from someone who is peace-loving, with simplicity of heart, and innocent, and says we all should approach the altar of God at Communion with this same attitude. He says Abel is the first martyr – a man who possessed peace and harmony is struck down by one intent on doing evil. Abel is the prototype of the righteous person who suffers at the hands of sinners.

St. Gregory the Great the Pope of Rome notes somberly, that all of us on earth live between heaven and hell, and no good person can live without coming into contact with those who are evil. "No good person is left untested by the wickedness of the bad," he says. The wickedness of the wicked is opportunity for each good person to hone their righteousness.

Cain's murder of Abel introduces into the biblical text a theme of the unjust suffering of the righteous. Christ Himself mentions the righteous Abel in His warning to His fellow Jews about a coming judgment day: "that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechari'ah the son of Barachi'ah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar" (Matthew 23:35). This is one of the few instances in the Gospel where retributive justice is suggested – upon the current generation will be visited the justice demanded by the murders of righteous people.

In John 8:44 Jesus says to the Jews, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning..." St. Makarios of Egypt interpreted "your father the devil" to refer to Cain not to Satan. He says everyone who chooses sin is a child of Cain.

Interestingly St. Maximos the Confessor (7th Century AD) partly blames Abel for his death saying that Abel should have been vigilant regarding the things of this world, and uses this as a lesson for all Christians not to be lulled to sleep by sin or by associating with sinners.

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" **10** And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

"Where is Abel your brother?" The Patristic Authors tended to see this question, like the one posed to Adam ("Where are you?"), as God in His mercy inviting Cain to confess his sin. Cain like his father will not confess or repent. In his commentary on the story, Chrysostom moralizes that like God we should never condemn a fellow Christian before asking questions and seeing evidence that proves their guilt.

In the Divine Liturgy before singing the Trisagion ("Holy God! Holy Mighty!..."), the priest's prayer says that God is one "who does not despise the sinner, but instead has appointed repentance unto salvation..." God gives His people opportunity to confess their sins and to repent. Cain will not avail himself this opportunity, but instead denies his brotherhood with Abel. Similarly, Peter denies the Lord Jesus when Christ is on trial before Pilate, swearing, "I don't know the man."

"brother" - a new concept in the Genesis story introduced with the births of Cain and Abel is that of brotherhood. What are the responsibilities of a brother? The brothers are not portrayed as doing all that much together and have different occupational interests. God's dialogue with Cain suggests brotherhood in fact means one is responsible for one's brother. Cain's question denies his brotherhood with Abel. The notion of brotherhood among all disciples is a key element in early Christian thinking. Cain does not kill an enemy, he murders his only brother. One need only think about Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) to see that for Jesus being a neighbor means to show mercy to another (10:36-37). One would think that at a minimum that is required of being a brother to someone.

"...am I my brother's keeper?" Abel was the keeper of sheep. Cain was not listed as keeper of anything. Is Cain challenging God – "How should I know where he is? YOU are his keeper. After all he is YOUR favorite, why don't YOU know where he is? Have You lost him?"

"...am I my brother's keeper?" Cain slyly (skillfully?) parries with God, question for

question. Does Cain hope God doesn't know what actually happened and that he can avoid detection by deflecting the question with a question? Is Cain inventing a new human behavior - playing dumb? Unlike his father Adam who blamed both Eve and God for his sin (Genesis 3:12), the polemical Cain cannot think who to blame. God does not answer Cain, but flays him with a new question revealing that God is quite aware what has transpired. God knows Abel is dead and he demands Cain to explain whether he (Cain) understands what he has done. Is it possible that Cain didn't really know what happened to his brother? Cain had physically killed his brother, but perhaps he had no clue what happened to the breath/soul of his brother. The idea of heaven or the place of the dead is not part of the narrative yet. Maybe Cain felt ignorance of the true state of his brother gave him some excuse. "I didn't really know what would happen to my brother's soul after death, so I can't be responsible for what has occurred." Many a sinner tries a similar excuse – I didn't intend for these results to happen, I was only trying to...." We do not want our sins to count if we never really intended them to do all the harm they do. But the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), whether or not we intend death to occur.

"your brother's blood ..." The Ancients believed life was in the blood of a being. This idea might be a contrast to life being associated with breath (Genesis 2:7) or the notion of the soul/psyche/living being the center of life (also in 2:7). Biblical imagery is richly varied and thus has a greater depth than the rather narrow thinking of pure literalism which wants only one possible meaning for any text. But since in the ancient perspective "life is in the blood", blood is basically synonymous with the soul. It is Abel's soul which cries out to God. Hebrews 12:25 mentions Abel's blood which speaks. It is perhaps the first indication in Genesis of a life beyond/after death, and that the dead continue to exist and that at least the righteous dead can speak to God. In Genesis 3:19 when God sentenced the sinful Adam, He pronounced the words, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" – words oft repeated at Christian burial. And while we may be dust, obviously that is not

all we are, or the only thing we are. For humans have both blood with life in it, and a soul. And the blood of Abel cries from the ground showing that a human is more than dust even if he or she returns to dust at death. The text does not assign any place to the dead Abel except for the ground which had absorbed his blood. Eventually Judaism forms a notion of Sheol, the place of the dead which originally was conceived of as being somewhere beneath the surface of the earth. Burial sends the dead on their journey to Sheol. In early Jewish thinking, Sheol had a purely shadowy existence and were not capable of doing anything, even praying to God ("For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?" Psalm 6:5) because in Jewish anthropology a human needs his or her body to do anything and the dead were somehow separated from their bodies ("for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going" Ecclesiastes 9:10). Later Jewish thinking imagined the day when the dead would be reunited to their bodies in the resurrection – only then could they enter heaven. The concept of Sheol changes over time, as belief in the resurrection of the dead grew in ancient Israel, from a shadowy emptiness to a place where the righteous dead can hope in God's promised resurrection and eternal life. Late Judaism envisioned even God filling Sheol in the redeemed world. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!" (Psalm 139:7-8) For Christians God's presence in Sheol is fulfilled in Jesus who through His death enters into Sheol and rescues all the dead beginning with Adam and Eve, an event memorialized in the icon of Holy Saturday.

"your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground..." If Cain believed he could hide his sin from God, the story has his crime being exposed by his brother's blood crying from the ground. If God had decided to stay out of the picture and give free reign to human and thus Cain's free will, Abel's blood demands justice, and God will not ignore the cry of Abel's blood. If God respects human free will, the murdered man's blood demands action from God, and

God for the sake of the blood and the ground chooses not to ignore what Cain had done. (In the book of Revelations we have this imagery: "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" (Revelations 6:9-10) While Abel's blood cries from the earth to God, in the New Testament, the blood of the crucified Christ which is shed for the life of the world speaks of forgiveness for humanity. "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24). An interesting phrase that blood has a voice – a prefiguring of Christ's own blood saving us?

"The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." The ground was cursed as a result of Adam's sin, but now it is defiled and made unclean by Abel's blood being shed upon it. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22-23). The earth which God fashioned into a living being now receives back the body and blood of one of God's creations. The consequence of Adam's sin and curse is now fulfilled for the first time and the human surely dies and returns to the dust from which he was fashioned, despite the serpent's promise that this wouldn't happen (Genesis 3:4). There is no discussion of the soul or of life after death. The earth has simply swallowed Abel's blood ("the ground... has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood..."). Biblical physiology has the life of the person being in the blood.

11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **12** When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

"cursed from the ground..." Humans who were made from the ground in Genesis 2 have a very close connection to the earth. Cain's murdering his brother has even cut his connection with the earth from which he was made. The effects of the Fall on humanity are worsening, and the alienation between humanity and the rest of creation is widening. In Genesis 1 God blesses the human, but now for the first time the human is cursed – cursed by the ground from which he came.

At one point, Chrysostom argued that Cain's sin is even worse than Adam's.

"...understand how much greater this sin was than the transgression of the first formed human being. In that case, remember, he said, 'Cursed shall be the soil as you till it,' and it was on the earth he poured out the curse, to show his care for the human being, whereas in this case, where the crime was deadly, the outrage lawless and the deed unpardonable, he receives the curse in person: 'You shall be cursed from the earth,' the text says, remember. You see, since Cain perpetrated practically the same evil as the serpent, which like an instrument served the devil's purposes, and as the serpent introduced mortality by means of deceit, in like manner Cain deceived his brother, led him out into open country, raised his hand in armed assault against him and committed murder. Hence, as he said to the serpent, 'Cursed are you beyond all the wild animals of the earth,' so to Cain, too, when he committed the same evil as the serpent. In other words, just as the devil was moved by hatred and envy, being unable to bear the ineffable kindnesses done the human being right from the outset, and under the impulse of hatred rushed headlong into the deception that introduced death, so too Cain saw the Lord kindly disposed to his brother, and under the impulse of hatred rushed headlong into murder." (HOMILIES ON GENESIS 18-45, TFOTC Vol 82, pp 27-28) In calling Cain's sin equivalent to the serpent's deception, Chrysostom is also revealing that he does not embrace a strict "original sin" theology which would condemn all humans as a result of what Adam did. To some extent Chrysostom is saying each of us has to answer for our own sins, not for the sins of our ancestors. He also is saying

that each sin will be judged by God based on the evil which is done by that person. In this sense Adam must answer for Adam's sin just like each of us will be judged for our own sins, not for the sin of Adam even though we do receive a mortal nature as a result of the original sin. St. Basil the Great said, "Do not go beyond yourself to seek for evil, and imagine that there is an original nature of wickedness. Each of us, let us acknowledge it, is the first author of his own vice."

"...a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." Though today humans think of the earth as their home, in Genesis there is always a degree to which humans must recognize that there is no true homeland on earth, as the human homeland is Paradise from which we have been exiled. We are all sojourners on this earth. Cain serves as a **prototype** for all humans whose sins will forever cause them to feel like and to be homeless wanderers. Cain is forced to become a nomad – this is an interesting detail as generally it is assumed by anthropologists that humans moved in the opposite direction from being nomadic to becoming sedentary. In the Genesis account it Abel as shepherd would have had the more nomadic life when compared to Cain the farmer. Now Cain's life is nomadic because it is cursed. Nomads are not all rejected by God, since Abel's offering was more acceptable to God than the sedentary Cain's farm produce. It does seem that God had more regard for the pastoral way of life than for that of the farmer. Indeed David the shepherd who becomes God's favored king, and Jesus the Good Shepherd carry this theme throughout the Bible.

"fugitive and wanderer..." St. Makarios of Egypt (4th-5th Century AD) offered a figurative interpretation of Cain's punishment. He writes that Cain is the image of every one of us who sins. "For the race of Adam, having broken the commandment and become guilty of sin, is shaken by restless thoughts, full of fear, cowardice and turmoil. Every soul not reborn in God is tossed hither and thither by the desires and multifarious pleasures of the enemy, and whirled about like corn in a sieve." St. Markarios obviously thought

believers were much more stable and didn't suffer such inner turmoil.

"cursed from the ground ... When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." When Adam was expelled from Paradise he lost the abundance of the fruit of the Garden of Delight and was forced to return to the earth to till the ground in order to receive the fruit of it. Cain's punishment is even more severe for now the ground is cursing him and will resist his agricultural effort and he will be forced to become nomadic. As a result of sin humans have lost wholeness and wholesomeness with separation and alienation causing humans to be at enmity with the very soil from which they were originally created (Genesis 2). Humans as holistic beings – at peace with the Divine and in harmony with nature – have been undone causing humans to experience a divide between the spiritual and the physical that was not originally part of God's creation or plan. The story also picks up on another theme found in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise – alienation and exile. Sin causes humans to lose any sense of "home" and causes them to be exiles everywhere on the earth, endlessly searching and restlessly searching for what they have lost. This will become a main biblical theme in the Book of Exodus with the Jews in search of a homeland. The theme of exile is an integral part of Jewish spirituality, which Orthodoxy picks up during Great Lent when we sing Psalm 137: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" (Ps 137:1-4) Christianity embraces the theme of exile further expanding it to include all of humanity in search of a homeland. (They)... "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Additionally in Christian imagery the entire earth is a foreign land and even Jerusalem itself becomes a mere shadow of the true Jerusalem which is a heavenly reality. Christians see all of humanity as being restless in this world as they search for God's homeland which is beyond this world. "For Christians are distinguished from the rest of men neither by country nor by language nor by customs. For nowhere do they dwell in cities of their own; they do not use any strange form of speech or practice a singular mode of life...but while they dwell in both Greek and barbarian cities, each as his lot was cast, and follow the customs of the land in dress and food and other matters of living, they show forth the remarkable and admittedly strange order of their own citizenship. They live in fatherlands of their own but as aliens. They share all things as citizens and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign land is their fatherland and every fatherland a foreign land" (Epistle to Diognetus, ca 150 AD). St. John Chrysostom has a related thought: "For the person who says 'I am a Christian' has revealed both their country and family history and occupation. Let me explain how. The Christian does not have a city on earth, but the Jerusalem in heaven. 'For the heavenly Jerusalem, which is our mother,' scripture says, 'is free' (Gal 4:26). The Christian doesn't have an earthly occupation, but arrives at the heavenly way of life. 'Our citizenship,' scripture says, 'is in heaven' (Phil 3:20). The Christian has as relatives and fellow citizens all the saints. 'We are fellow citizens of the saints,' scripture says, 'and God's own' (Eph 2:19)" (TCOTS, p 72).

13 Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. **14** Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me." **15** Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him.

Now suddenly Cain shows some remorse. As is often the case with humans, it is not committing the sin which bothers us, it is getting caught. Our sorrow is often related to the consequence we suffer, rather than lamenting the suffering we inflict on others.

"My punishment is greater than I can bear..." In one sermon Chrysostom portrays Cain as trembling uncontrollably at this point in the story. St. John sees Cain's punishment as being worse than death. "God wanted men of later times to exercise self-control. Therefore, he designed the kind of punishment that was capable of setting Cain free from his sin. If God had immediately destroyed him, Cain would have disappeared, his sin would have stayed concealed, and he would have remained unknown to men of later times. But as it is, God let him live a long time with that bodily tremor of his. The sight of Cain's palsied limbs was a lesson for all he met. It served to teach all men and exhort them never to dare do what he had done, so that they might not suffer the same punishment. And Cain himself became a better man again. His trembling, his fear, the mental torment that never left him, his physical paralysis kept him, as it were, shackled. They kept him from leaping again to any other like deed of bold folly. They constantly reminded him of his former crime. Through them he achieved greater self-control in his soul." (AGAINST JUDAIZING CHRISTIANS)

"...from thy face I shall be hidden..." Cain has a legitimate fear. He has been trying to hide his activities from God's presence, but now is terrified to realize that in fact God might never look upon him with favor again. We all in Psalm 51:11 pray that God will not cast us away from His presence and that He will not take His Holy Spirit from us. Cain's spiritual lesson is a difficult one. As with most of us, Cain does not want God observing his every word, deed and thought. He wants God to ignore him for most of what he does, especially that which is wrong. But when Cain wants God present, he expects God to be at his beck and call to rescue him and protect him.

Cain fears that those who find him shall slay him. But who on earth was there to find and kill him? Obviously the text assumes there are in fact other people existing on earth whose existence is not explained by the Genesis story. The text is focusing on one set of humans but the existence of other humans not in this particular lineage is implicitly admitted.

“...a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth...” The implication of the text is that Cain will never be able to be a citizen of any civilized people. He has in fact cut himself off from society.

Chrysostom comments that just as Cain’s repentance came too late – only after the punishment was ordered – so too those who fail to repent before the Judgment Day will be sorely disappointed when they attempt to repent after God has pronounced judgment. Yes they will at that moment be sincerely sorry for their sins, but no it will not save them from eternal punishment. It is not the sorrow that saves, but changing one’s life while there is still time. God promises to accept our repentance and promises to forgive our sins. He does not however promise us a tomorrow. Now is the time of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

God puts a mark on Cain to protect him so that no one kills him. Why didn’t God so mark Abel whose sacrifice was pleasing to Him?

God does not immediately requite the death of Abel by slaying Cain. Why? Perhaps to give Cain the chance to repent. "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord GOD; so turn, and live" (Ezekiel 18:30-32). God is not demanding retributive justice, but rather hopes for the conversion of the sinner.

“...the LORD put a mark on Cain...” The apparently physical interaction between the LORD and a human is remarkable. To our dismay, the text does not tell us how this happened or what the mark was, but gives the impression that God in an **anthropomorphic** fashion is able physically to touch the human. This would imply some form of “incarnation” of God or of God’s action. God is able to physically touch/mark that which is “not God.” In this we see that the Bible does not embrace any form of dualism – neither a complete spiritual vs. physical dualism, nor a divine vs. created dualism which would totally separate these realities. The divine can indeed touch and even mark the physical. This is the very basis for the Christian affirmation of the incarnation of God.

What was this “mark”? It is not described at all. Yet somehow anybody who would encounter Cain would be able to “read” the mark and know that Cain was not to be killed. What kind of “mark” would be universally understandable by any person is not known. Why would people who aren’t related to the story and who don’t know God honor a sign that came from this God? What perhaps is more interesting is that God putting the mark on Cain seems to imply that killing was almost common place or both Cain and God realize it is about to become so. The early chapters of Genesis report only two murders – Abel’s and the unknown man killed by Lamech. Yet despite the few deaths reported, Cain is fearful that just about everybody in the world will want to kill him and God seems to think it is necessary to provide Cain with this extra protection because either murder was already common or it is going to about to become an everyday occurrence. No other murders are reported in the Genesis 1-11, yet God will come to regret having made humans because they are so violent. This all certainly suggests that a lot more was going on with humanity than the Bible is reporting. Apparently the Bible is following the story of but a select few men, but many others exist beyond the scope of the text.

Cain was the only brother to whom God spoke directly. Now after Cain murders his brother, God decides to protect Cain from

any act of vengeance. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). God does not at this point will that humans practice capital punishment, nor does He inflict the death penalty on Cain. The God who is love demonstrates tremendous patience and mercy with his violently sinful creation. "As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11) God does not desire the death of the sinner, not even the murderer. His constant goal for His favored human creatures is that they would always choose the good. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live..." (Deuteronomy 30:19). Failing that, humans are given by God the grace to repent, to confess their wrongdoing, to change their heart and mind, to return to their God, begging His mercy and mending their way. The story of the scriptures though is that humans constantly abuse God's mercy in order to continue sinning. "Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4)

16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. **17** Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. **18** To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Me-hu'ja-el, and Me-hu'ja-el the father of Me-thu'sha-el, and Me-thu'sha-el the father of Lamech.

“...away from the presence of the Lord...”
Is this possible? Has humanity fallen so far that a person can actually move somewhere away from God’s presence? It may be that this is what Cain had in mind when he lured Abel into the field - he hoped it would be away even from the presence of the Lord. Is there such a place on earth that is in fact away from God’s presence? Literally speaking the text does not make sense though we can understand its figurative sense. But theologically speaking we profess a belief in the Holy Spirit which is “everywhere present and fills all things” so there is no place which would be away from God’s presence. Psalm 139:7-10 bears witness that there is nowhere in the cosmos that we can go where God is not present: “Whither shall I go from your Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.” The created world is by definition “not God” but literally speaking there is nowhere on earth that is away from the presence of the Lord.

The threat of being cast away from God’s presence because of our own failures as Christians even if figurative in language is still a spiritual reality. The story of Cain is a lesson for us; it is not just a sad story about a man who lived long ago. In the Divine Liturgy the priest prays during the Cherubic Hymn, “Do not turn Your face from me nor cast me out from among Your children...” Just because we pray (even for priests!) does not mean that God must accept our prayer. It is possible that we can approach God in an unworthy manner, with an unclean heart, and God can cast us out as He did Cain. Remember Cain’s problems started with God not accepting his offering. Cain’s being sent away from God’s presence began not with sin, but with Cain’s offering not being acceptable to God. This led to Cain’s murderous sin; it wasn’t murder that led to God rejecting Cain’s offering. The prayers of the Orthodox Church constantly call for our own humility in approaching God – calling us first to humbly repent and to cast all evil from our heart before we even begin to pray. Before the

Lord's Prayer in the Divine Liturgy, the priest says, "And make us worthy, O master, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call upon You, the heavenly God as Father and to say..." Modern sensibilities which assume God must listen to our prayers find such groveling prayers to be offensive to human dignity. But the modern attitude where God has no choice when it comes to listening to prayers, deprive God of His sovereignty. Such an attitude reduces God to servitude – He is nothing more than our servant who must respond to our every beck and call. Orthodox spirituality does give full respect to God as our Lord, and recognizes that because of our sinfulness and human limitations we are not just servants of God, but frequently unworthy servants who have no sway over the Master. Rather all we can do is approach Him with the greatest reverence, acknowledging our sins, and begging Him to consider our requests. We recognize the reality that our prayers are that of feeble sinners. We do not want to provoke God's goodness by presuming He has to listen to us. We always approach God acknowledging our sinfulness and begging His forgiveness and mercy. This is also why the Orthodox so rely on the prayers of the Theotokos and God's saints on our behalf. Even if God will not listen to our pleas, perhaps He will listen to the saints which He loves as He has found their prayers worthy.

Note well, though Cain is a murderer God never threatened to punish him eternally in hell (such a concept does not exist in the Genesis account) nor does God threaten Cain with the death penalty. Cain's punishment is banishment from the rest of his family. Only, as more people come to exist on the earth does God determine a greater need for "law" and various forms of punishment to influence or control the humans. When law fails is the next level of threat an eternity in hell?

"land of Nod" The fact that lands beyond those of the current humans already have names suggests there are in fact other people on earth not accounted for by the Genesis tracing of humanity through the descendents of Adam.

"east of Eden" In Genesis 2:8, Eden itself is said to be "in the East" and now Cain is moving east of Eden (the east). The east is where the sunrises, yet it appears that Cain and his descendents are not people of the light.

"Cain knew his wife..." Even in the 4th Century the Patristic writers puzzled over from whence Cain's wife could have come since the scriptures are silent about their origin. Some thought God simply populated the earth with other people, some felt she must have been a daughter of Eve and that incest was justified at that time in order to secure the continuation of the human race. The text seems to be following only a particular people, keeping the others outside the purview of the story. It's not denying that there are other humans created by God, but they are clearly secondary characters in relationship to those the Bible focuses on.

"...he built a city.." The notion of Cain building a city seems to contradict the curse that God placed on him in verse 14 where is made into a wanderer. Such contradictions may indicate different traditions have been blended into the final text (so Source Theory would argue) or that the text is not meant to be read with an inflexible literalism.

The first mention of a city occurs in the lineage of Cain. "Civilization" is not presented in the best of light in this passage. The "city" is seen as founded by sinful and violent men. There is no mention of God in the city. The fact that a "city" would be built suggests there are many more people in existence than our Genesis story is accounting for. Cities can only exist if people (the farmers) have learned how to produce more food than they need for their own survival. City life assumes the residents can purchase needed food or otherwise everyone would live on their own farms to sustain life. City life implies a certain level of social development – life developed beyond that of nomadic tribesmen. The story doesn't tell us what constitutes a "city" at this point, so we have no way of knowing what building a city requires; it probably implies, however rudimentary, some architecture, engineering and building skills, and also the tools and

simple machines to do the job. In Sirach 38 we read the following ancient ideas about what it takes to establish a city: “So too is every craftsman and master workman who labors by night as well as by day; those who cut the signets of seals, each is diligent in making a great variety; he sets his heart on painting a lifelike image, and he is careful to finish his work. So too is the smith sitting by the anvil, intent upon his handiwork in iron; the breath of the fire melts his flesh, and he wastes away in the heat of the furnace; he inclines his ear to the sound of the hammer, and his eyes are on the pattern of the object. He sets his heart on finishing his handiwork, and he is careful to complete its decoration. So too is the potter sitting at his work and turning the wheel with his feet; he is always deeply concerned over his work, and all his output is by number. He moulds the clay with his arm and makes it pliable with his feet; he sets his heart to finish the glazing, and he is careful to clean the furnace. All these rely upon their hands, and each is skilful in his own work. Without them a city cannot be established, and men can neither sojourn nor live there. ... But they keep stable the fabric of the world, and their prayer is in the practice of their trade” (38:27-33).

Unusual in the genealogy of Cain is that his death and that of his descendents is not recorded, nor are their ages listed. Did the inspired author of Genesis want their memories forgotten as soon as is possible?

The names of Cain’s descendents are going to be paralleled almost exactly in the family tree of Seth (Genesis 5:15-25). The names Enoch, Me-hu’ja-el, Me-thu’sha-el, and Lamech all have corresponding names in the genealogy of Seth in the same order of birth. The significance of the repeated list is not known. One theory of scholars is that the list of names is unquestionably ancient but through time oral tradition which carried the memory of these forefathers became unclear as to whether it was Cain or Seth’s lineage. So both possibilities were recorded in Scripture. We see perhaps a similar issue in the New Testament in which the names in the ancestry of Christ in Luke 3:23-34 and Matthew 1:3-16 do not completely coincide.

19 And Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. **20** Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. **21** His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. **22** Zillah bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Na'amah.

23 Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. **24** If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

Unusual in these early genealogies Lamech's wives are not only mentioned but their names are given – Adah and Zillah. Some scholars think they are mentioned because they are disapproved of. Is it possible that the author of the text so despised these women of Cain that their names are in the text for the same reason that Pontius Pilate's name is in the Creed? As can be seen in the other genealogies, not only are woman seldom named, often no woman is even mentioned with men fathering sons without reference to woman. The first mention of wife's names in the Seth lineage will come only in 11:29 with Sarai wife of Abraham.

"...took two wives..." The first mention in the Bible of polygamy occurs in the genealogy of the accursed Cain. Originally God intended the man to leave his parents and cling to his wife implying monogamy. God does not command or bless polygamy here, Lamech simply takes two wives just as Eve took the forbidden fruit. Lamech son of Cain is the only man in Genesis 1-11 to practice polygamy. Later in Genesis Abraham will take a concubine to bear him a child, but that is not within the scope of our interest.

"...the father of those..." In some sense the text introduces an inconsistency. Since all these people will supposedly be destroyed by the flood, in what sense they can be claimed to be the father of all tent dwellers, or musicians or metal workers is unknown. Perhaps if different sections of the bible were actually written by different authors as Source Theory suggests, this source may be one that did not know of a flood tradition.

"Jabal...dwell in tents... have cattle" This is the first mention of domesticated cattle. It also is the first mention of any dwelling place for humans – tents. Tents are the only housing mentioned directly in Genesis 1-11. Noah also slept in a tent (9:21). There are references to cities which one would assume implies some form of housing. Genesis remains surprisingly barren of references to tools, transportation, furniture, housing, clothing, cooking utensils, food, weapons, commerce, or technology of any kind.

“Jubal...lyre and pipe...” The first mention of musical instruments. Civilization and culture are appearing. The fact that this is occurring in Cain’s lineage may indicate the scriptural author somewhat disapproved of this development. Same is true of “Tubalcain...forger of bronze and iron.” This is the first mention of industry and technology. The Iron and Bronze Age have arrived. A certain degree of sophistication and technical knowledge is needed to make iron and bronze yet the text gives us little evidence of these emerging technologies.

“sister...was Na’amah” This is the first mention of a daughter/sister by name. Among the descendents of Seth, the lineage which the Bible clearly favors and follows, neither wives nor daughters will be named until Abram takes Sarai to be his wife in Genesis 11. We are given virtually no insight into the domestic lives of these men of God.

“Lamech said to his wives...” This is the only time in Genesis 1-11 that a man says something directly to his spouse or that any man directly addresses a woman – and he addresses them by name. Adam spoke in the presence of his wife but the Scriptures record no words directed to her. St. Paul commented that women should learn from their husbands at home (1 Corinthians 14:35), but Genesis might give an idea as to how hard that would be since the only man who spoke to his wife in these chapters is a vile and violent man. In the more godly lineage of Seth through Noah, there is no record of the men talking to their wives.

“Lamech said...” This is considered to be the first poem recited by a human in the bible. Historical scholars do consider it to be poem from antiquity – thus representing the development of culture.

Oddly, Chrysostom sees Lamech’s “confession” as a positive sign that Lamech is choosing not to repeat the sins and denials of his father and grandfather and so he confesses his sin without even being asked. Chrysostom uses the passage to encourage Christians to likewise openly confess their sins.

“I have slain a man...” This is the second death of a human mentioned in Genesis and once again it is not a natural death but is done at the hands of a human. The first two human fatalities were both murders. We know nothing of the man Lamech murdered, but the existence of other people again suggests there were other human lines not recorded in Genesis. Genesis is not actually reporting on all human history and experience but focuses on what will become known as “the people of God.” In this sense Genesis is not pure history as we understand it. Rather Genesis is an archetypical story of what it means to be human. It is in fact “our own” story even more than a history. In Genesis we learn about ourselves and what it means to be human. We learn about our relationship to God and to creation. We learn about why we don’t live in a perfect world, why there is death and why there is sin in God’s creation. We learn from the story of Cain and Lamech that by God making mortality – death – to be the consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin, He allowed death to become part of human experience. And we see in these stories how humans take death, that consequence of human sin, and turn it into a weapon for further sin – murder! In fact humans now knowing that they are mortal will use that knowledge to violently kill others. Death which is the enemy of humanity becomes in the distorted human heart a tool for accomplishing human sinful will. We often think that sin leads to death, but humans are so wicked that they use death to do more sin!

The Ten Commandments are given long after the events described in Genesis 1-11. The commandment not to kill is thus a response to human behavior rather than a pre-determinant of human behavior. God does not prohibit humans from killing and then impose mortality on humans. Rather he forbids humans to sinfully misuse the punishment – death - He had imposed on them for their sin.

Law of vengeance. “If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” In the text it appears that the law of vengeance and revenge is being extended greatly, not only allowing for but legitimizing

even more violence in a tremendous spiral. Lamech claims the right to have killed someone who merely injured him. Lamech is praising violence and boasting about how vile he can be. Lamech is justifying terrible vengeance on any who oppose him. He is suggesting he will kill 77 people for every one he loses. This is just advocating mass murder. Some scholars feel that the Torah's later "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" (Leviticus 24:20) was actually a move toward mercy and severely restricting both vengeance and violence, limiting punishment to nothing more than whatever damage had been done. Lamech's vengeance amounts to a constant scorch the earth policy – there would never be any peace as each act of violence would bring about a 77 fold increase in violence by the opponent. His policy would engulf every town, village and tribe in total warfare for every little offense between two people. And nowhere does he suggest the injury he received was intentional - simply for being injured he killed the person who injured him. This was not justice but brute force. Lamech will not allow someone to apologize or repent. Christ himself countermands the law of vengeance entirely, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also..." (Matthew 5:38-39). Jesus then turns around Lamech's vengeance, in answering a question about forgiveness. "Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22). Jesus uses the exact same number as Lamech, except where Lamech sees this as how many times he will avenge himself, Jesus says this is how many times we must forgive the brother who sins against us. As Christ undoes all of the effects of the fall, he casts out vengeance in favor of forgiveness.

The use of the scriptural texts in Orthodox hymnography often "spiritualizes" the text so that the lesson can be applied personally to our lives. This method does not deny the literal reading of the text, but moves the scripture reader to apply the text to his or

her own life. "Lamech cried, 'I have killed a man for wounding me, and a young man for hurting me!' ... How well have I imitated those first murderers, Cain and Lamech! Through the desires of the flesh, I have killed my soul as did Lamech a man, and my mind as once he did a young man. I have also murdered my body as Cain murdered his brother." (Thursday Canon of St. Andrew of Crete)

The genealogy of Cain will not be followed in the next chapters of Genesis. It certainly represents a "dead end" especially with the cataclysmic flood of Genesis 6-9. It is noteworthy that the ages of Cain's descendents are not mentioned – but age is a pronounced feature in the Adam genealogy that is traced through Seth. The Wisdom of Solomon in the Septuagint offers this observation: "But the prolific brood of the ungodly will be of no use, and none of their illegitimate seedlings will strike a deep root or take a firm hold. For even if they put forth boughs for a while, standing insecurely they will be shaken by the wind, and by the violence of the winds they will be uprooted. The branches will be broken off before they come to maturity, and their fruit will be useless, not ripe enough to eat, and good for nothing" (Wisdom 4:3-5).

As God looks upon the world, it must be agonizing for Him. First there are genealogical lines, such as Cain's, which are cut off from God, and whose descendants pursue an ungodly life. But then in the family trees which actually produce the righteous ones, God sees people whose hearts are continually on imagining and doing evil from their youth. The Lord in choosing humans to be His favored creatures has not given Himself much to work with for accomplishing His will in the cosmos. When God shaped the soil into the first human in Genesis 2, did He imagine that working with and shaping inert dust was going to be easier than working with or shaping supposedly "intelligent" humans? The entire universe does the will of God, except for humans who are the only ones who possess God's image and supposedly are rational beings (Is that not the gist of the Vespersal Psalm 104 hymn of creation? – all created things do the very

things they are appointed by God to do; only humans created in God's image and favored by God resist doing the will of God). Human synergy with God is sorely lacking, and the history of salvation is reliant on the grace of God. This is why the Virgin Mary is such a unique person in history and so honored by the Orthodox Church. Though she is upheld as the fulfillment of humanity's synergy with God, she also goes against the common grain of human intention – the continual wickedness in the human heart. She truly is full of grace (Luke 1:28). Indeed she is more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim. The Cherubim and Seraphim have positions close to God – they are constantly in God's presence - but they do not come from a race of beings whose hearts are constantly bent on evil. Mary on the other hand precisely has the same heart as any of us, and yet her heart is not continually conceiving evil, and in fact she is able to conceive God in the flesh. The fact that a woman was capable of being the Theotokos by her willful acceptance of God's way and despite her being of the lineage of Adam and Eve is truly one of the greatest miracles recorded in the Bible. It explains the great reverence for Mary as Theotokos in Orthodoxy. And it tells us that we each do have the capacity to resist evil and to love both God and our neighbor.

25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him." **26** To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Though her name is not explicitly used in the text, this is the last reference to Eve in the Jewish Old Testament. Eve speaks as she did when Cain was born and she is the one to name the son. Adam who had little to say in Paradise remains mute after the fall of humankind. Adam engages in no conversation nor are any more words attributed to him. Despite being a man of so few words, his name will be remembered throughout the history of the people of God.

As with Cain, Eve names the child – an interesting twist since the mother's name is excluded from the text and women will not be named in the genealogical lists until long after the flood when Abram takes Sarai to be his wife. Sarai will be the next named wife and mother in the Sethite lineage.

It is through the lineage of Seth that St. Luke will trace Christ the son of God back to Adam the son of God. "Shem and Seth were honored among men, and Adam above every living being in the creation" (Sirach 49:16).

With the murder of Abel, Adam and Eve lose both sons – Abel to death, and Cain is banished from their company. Eve laments only her dead son and finds comfort in the new child who replaces the deceased Abel.

"To Seth also a son was born..." Unless the text is suggesting that the men of yore were able to bear children, we have to assume there was a mother. Mothers and wives get short shrift in the Seth family tree. They are implicit in the text, but never explicitly mentioned. The question is often asked, "Where do the wives of these men come from anyway?" While some think the wives were their sisters and that early on God allowed incest, this seems unlikely as nowhere in the text is incest ever blessed. Polygamy was mentioned in the text in relationship to Lamech son of Cain. Incest is not mentioned let alone approved. In fact, incest is needed to explain the source of the nameless wives only if one reads Genesis literally and assumes there are no other people on earth other than those specifically mentioned in the text. Genesis does not deny the existence of people outside of the purview of the text, and

seems to imply their existence. The story only focuses on a very particular lineage, and is already developing the Biblical theme of the chosen people. The text mentions the main characters have “other sons and daughters” but it has no interest in these other children and gives us no account of what becomes of them. Genesis narrowly follows a very particular genealogy, shows little interest in the mentioned “other” children of the main men (they are in fact called the “other” son and daughters – those children not pertinent to “our” story), and absolutely no interest in the humans that are unrelated to the chosen lineage. The story does not deny the existence of other humans which God created, it ignores them. Ignoring the “other sons and daughter” is indicative of the author’s focus and his total disinterest in people who are not of this particular pedigree. The Bible contains truth, it is the revelation of God, but it never claims that all the facts of human history are contained in Genesis. It never claims that it is co-terminus with all that can be known about humankind and human history. It does in fact give strong hints of “other” peoples not part of the main story – the Nephilim for example. When it comes to people, the Bible has a very narrow and precise focus and interest. It is showing how God worked in and through a very particular people on earth. The sense of election and favor are essential to the biblical revelation and message. Genesis does offer us the truth about being human, but does not claim to give the history and name of every human that ever existed. Genesis is the true story of what it means to be human – it really is doctrine in the guise of narrative as St. Gregory of Nyssa claimed. In this sense in every generation it is the story about “us.” St. Paul wrote about Adam being a prototype (1 Corinthians 15) – his story is the story of all humans that ever existed. We don’t have to be genetically related to Adam to be spiritually related to him. The same is true of Christ who is the new Adam, the new prototype of all humans. St. Paul who knew nothing about genetics sees our human relationship in this way: “For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the

heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God. ... We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but also follow the example of the faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (Romans 2:28-29, 4:9-12). This is as close as Paul gets to a genetic conversation. He is not much interested in those related to Adam or Abraham according to the flesh. The real issue is if we are people of faith. The importance of Genesis 1-11 is not lost if we are not all related genetically to Adam. The fact is Adam is a prototype of all humans – we are related to him spiritually and are his descendants because we have his same mortal nature not because we have his genes.

Seth has a son named Enosh, but no wife is mentioned, unlike Lamech who though in a discredited lineage mentions the names of his wives.

The “name of the Lord” seems to imply that the relationship with God is being made “personal” – now on a named basis do people approach God. The claim that people begin to call upon the name of the Lord is unusual since earlier in Genesis 4:3 Cain and Abel are both offering sacrifice to the God who has a name. LORD (Lord in all capital letters) in English bibles is used to replace the name of God (YHWH in the Hebrew) and follows the practice of Hebrew Scriptures where God’s Name is too sacred to actually say.

“men began to call upon the name of the LORD.” The scriptures do not give a totally consistent picture as to how Israel came to worship the God whose name is YHWH. In Exodus 3:14, God first reveals His Name to Moses at the burning bush, which is why the

Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai is such a holy place. But in Genesis 4:26 the implication is that from the earliest times people knew the Name of the Lord and worshipped the God whose name is YHWH – long before the Name was revealed on Sinai. How they learned the Lord's Name is not detailed in Genesis. Certainly they didn't learn the Name from scriptures as they weren't even written yet. But it is to be assumed that God wanted humans to call upon His Name and so He revealed it. The holiness of God's name is never in doubt throughout the scriptures. God's name (YHWH) is in the name of the Word incarnate, for the name "Jesus" means "YHWH saves."

Seth is honored in both Jewish and Christian tradition. "Seth's fervor for the Creator is sung throughout the world, for he served Him truly with a blameless life and disposition of soul. Now in the land of the living, he cries aloud: 'Holy are You, O Lord!'" (From the Canon of the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers)

'...began to call upon the name of the LORD." If this is meant to imply prayer, it is the first mention of prayer in Genesis. There is no record of Adam and Eve praying to the God who has a Name. The word "prayer" in fact occurs only once in the entirety of Genesis in chapter 25. The word "prayed" occurs only twice in Genesis, the first time in chapter 20. There is very little mention of, let alone emphasis on, prayer in the Book of Genesis and none in the opening 11 chapters. Abel, Cain and Noah will each offer sacrifice to God, which implies some type of ritual. But prayer itself does not seem to have been a major part of their lives. Is this perhaps because they still felt closeness to God that will be lost later as the effects of the fall widen the divide between humanity and divinity? Noah is given in the building of the ark a superhuman project to complete but is not recorded as ever praying to God, or asking for God's help or mercy. No one before the Flood ever asks God for anything in prayer – for themselves or for others. Nor does anyone ever offer thanksgiving to God or express any form of love for Him. Cain's lament in Genesis 4:13 that his punishment

from the Lord is too severe is as close to prayer as we can find in these opening Genesis stories.

The Name of the Lord. God's Name is sacred, yet we know what it is - YHWH. The Name is sometimes written as Yahweh in English Bibles, but in Judaism no vowels are listed in the Name and it is a name even too sacred to pronounce. Some English Bibles preserve this ancient Jewish sense that one never uses the Name of God and will substitute in the bible "the LORD" in place of YHWH, God's Name. Some Jewish texts will not even use the generic word God for the Creator Lord and following the Jewish practice of leaving out vowels will write only "G-d". In Christian theology, Jesus is the Word of God incarnate - Jesus is God revealed to us. Jesus' own name contains the Name of God for Jesus means "YHWH saves." Christianity believes God's Name is a significant part of God's revelation which is recorded in the Scriptures. Moses at the burning bush specifically asks God for His Name. There he learns that God's Name is YHWH, or in the Greek, "ego eimi o On" – "I am who I am" or "I am the One Who Is." In almost every Orthodox icon of Jesus Christ in the halo around his head, there is the image of the cross in the halo, and within this image of the cross are the Greek letters for God's Name, "o On." Christianity affirms the revelation in Christ that Jesus is fully God and fully human. Jesus is "The One Who Is" for He is of the same essence as God the Father. So in every icon of Christ we encounter the Name of God. In the Church we bless with and are blessed by the Name of the Lord. God's sacred and holy and powerful Name is an integral and essential part of our Orthodox Faith.

Why is God's Name so important? It has to do with Judaism's absolute monotheism. Because Judaism abhors idolatry, there is an absolute prohibition against thinking that God has any form whatsoever. "Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, ... And beware lest you lift up

your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them” (Deuteronomy 4:15. 19). The Genesis stories which describe God in anthropomorphic terms (J-Source stories) represent an alternative tradition to the absolute monotheistic prohibition on idolatry of the transcendent God found in the P-Source stories. The texts describing God in graphic anthropomorphic terms remain as authoritative Scripture. They will be however ultimately filtered through the lens of the tradition which says God has no form and are interpreted in a non-literal fashion. It is another example of more than one tradition being fully accepted in the scriptures especially when it comes to describing God, who cannot be completely understood by humans. But the God who has no form, is incorporeal and non-anthropomorphic, because He cannot be seen in any way and is “invisible” to humans, thus to some extent non-existent. For such an invisible God there would be no sign of His existence, though there might be signs of His activity in the world. The invisible God does take on a real existence in His Name. His Name makes Him real and present. The Genesis witness is we are not worshipping an invisible God with no name. To know His Name in this world is to experience His presence. His Name is in some ways an incarnation of the invisible God. His Name makes Him real to people who can talk but who are forbidden to make any image of Him. A totally transcendent and formless God would be totally unknown to us. But knowing His Name virtually brings Him into our experience – causes Him to have as “tangible” an existence as an incorporeal being can have. His Name makes Him personal and real – not an impersonal force or natural power – but a personal being. When we pray “in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, we are invoking the presence and power of that particular divine being who has a Name and who wants us to be aware of His presence and wants us to worship Him.

Genesis 5

5:1 This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. **2** Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.

“This is the book...” The second creation story in Genesis 2:4 begins with these identical words. One would assume the author of Genesis wanted the reader to hearken back to that story. Whereas the first story of creation in Genesis 1:1 began with God speaking His Word which caused creation to come into existence, Genesis 2:4 made the first reference to the written word, “the book” (The RSV refers to “the generations” to translate the Greek word “Biblos”, our word for the Bible, the books). Genesis 5:1 is thus the second reference to “scriptures” in Genesis. Though 5:1 certainly echoes 2:4, this seems to be a third telling of the creation of humans in Genesis, albeit a summary of what we learned in the opening chapter. This telling of the story reaffirms the teaching of Genesis 1, though here humans are only created in God’s “likeness” (RSV) – the **Septuagint** however says “ikon” = image. The word “man” is the generic “anthropon” (=human, not specifically male). The patristic writers opined that humans having the “image” meant that God made humans “lord” over the visible earth in the same way that He was Lord over all things visible and invisible in the universe, including Lord over the humans. While the text reaffirms the teaching of Genesis 1 that humans are “ikons” of God, it offers no further explanation of the significance of this anthropology. As the story unfolds we are going to see that one way humans are like God is that we too have a heart, just like the Lord does.

“the book of the generations of Adam.” St. Matthew begins his Gospel with almost identical words: “The book of the generations of Jesus Christ” (Matthew 1:1). Matthew no doubt intended to invoke the memory of Genesis as his genealogy imitates the first book of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. This is perhaps Matthew’s version of John 1, where St. John the Theologian intentionally harkens back to Genesis 1 as the very basis for understanding Christ. And certainly Matthew’s imitation of Genesis 5:1 is also hinting at the typological thinking the New Testament writers loved when interpreting the Old Testament. Adam was but the type of the real man Jesus who was to come.

Jesus is the type of all those living in the light of the New Creation brought about by the coming of God's chosen Messiah.

"When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God." The "When" at the beginning of the verse tells us we have moved back in time, back to the beginning of creation, to the time before the Fall of Eve and Adam, to the prelapsarian world. This time, however, the story is not going to remain long in this prelapsarian state but is going to leap to the fallen world, skipping any mention of the cosmos before the Fall or how we got into our current state. The world before the Fall is just the springboard to dive into our world's **postlapsarian** condition. Within a few verses of this return to the creation of the world, Adam will be dead, his 930 years of life condensed into a few summary. We are going to be impressed with how long these early humans live, but the text dismisses their long lives in a sentence telling us nothing about these men other than they once existed, had a son and died. No glory is given to their long lives. Their names and ages are remembered, but they are not credited with doing anything with their long lives except perpetuating the human race. But what the text does reaffirm is that despite sin, despite mortality, humans are created in the image of God – this has not been taken away from us humans. Biblical anthropology affirms that even after the Fall, after the fratricidal Cain, the image of God has been preserved in us. Even when the entire earth has become wicked and destroyed, the image of God is still visible in the one righteous man left on earth – Noah. Orthodox anthropology holds strongly to this positive view of humanity. Neither **Ancestral sin** nor our own current wickedness wipes out the image of God in us which is indelibly impressed upon our soul. Evil cannot wipe out the innate goodness which God planted deep within each of us. That image can get buried beneath a lot of dirt and corruption, but it remains alive in us.

If this is intended to be a third telling of the creation story its focus this time is on the humans with little reference to the created world. Genesis 2:4 which this verse echoes claimed to be the book of "the

generations of the heavens and the earth." Here in 5:1 it is the book of Adam and his descendents. The story begins with humans, not with chaos or with the earth, and it hardly mentions the world in which humans live but jumps right into the first humans and their descendents. The rest of the created world is largely ignored – no sun or stars or even animals mentioned, and unlike Genesis 1 & 2, no mention of food in God's creation. The story of paradise and the Fall are also absent. And though God creates the first humans, this time it is the humans who are central to the story and the real actors as God becomes more distant from His creatures and is hardly mentioned in the chapter.

God intended for humans to have some affinity toward him. Our God-likeness relates us to God by nature, whether or not we believe in Him! But the image of God which is bestowed on us by God does not make us God, nor even like God, a lesson which Eve and Adam learned to their and our eternal sorrow. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the people of God are sternly warned away from mistaken idol/image worship. Isaiah 40:18 states flatly that no "likeness" of any sort compares with God. So though we are created in God's image, we humans are not comparable with God. God is totally other. In Deuteronomy 4:15-18, the Israelites are reminded that God is invisible and therefore it is forbidden to make any graven image in the likeness of any male or female or of any animal which humans might then worship. Christians believe that the imagelessness of God changed when the Word became flesh and dwelt on earth and we were able to both see and touch Him. The incarnation of God suddenly made God visible in the flesh. To see Christ is to see God the Father (John 12:45). This becomes the basis for the theology of the icon in Orthodoxy. God really has brought about a new revelation, and Orthodox icons are an affirmation of the truth of the Gospel that Jesus is both God and man.

And again as in Genesis 1 both male and female are created simultaneously and co-equally, both in God's likeness. God blesses both the male and female. In the

Septuagint God *names* the male Adam. Naming another being is a sign of the power God has over the man.

“When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man.” The unusual wording which is reminiscent of Genesis 1:27 reinforces the idea of God making man both male and female and giving them one name. This may be what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote: “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). For in Christ we both are blessed with what humans were before the Fall as well as with being a new creation.

Despite the apparent equality between man and woman being repeated here from Genesis 1, many who read Genesis including St. Paul still saw a male dominance as being normative on earth. Paul comes to that conclusion by reading Genesis 1:27 through the interpretive lens of Genesis 2:22. Genesis 5:1-2 repeats the Genesis 1:27 version of God creating humans: male and female are created simultaneously and both are ikons (in the image of) God. Usually such a repetition in scripture would be seen as significant by the Patristic writers such as John Chrysostom who thought that every verse and word was essential – doubly reinforced if the verse is repeated. In this case despite this particular repetition, St. Paul more or less downplays Genesis 1:27 and 5:1-2, in favor of a notion that the woman is created after the male so therefore is not equal to the male but must submit to the male (1 Timothy 2:12-14). His interpretation of Genesis 1 & 2 because it is part of Christian scripture becomes normative in Christian thinking, and yet it must be noted that his interpretation is not entirely faithful to the verses he downplays or outright ignores in 1 Timothy. In the Gospels, the Lord Jesus clearly accepted and affirmed the text of Genesis 1:27 and did not reinterpret that text through Genesis 2. “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female...” (Matthew 19:4, Mark 10:6) Jesus uses this passage in arguing against easy divorce and affirms that the husband and wife become one flesh – they share a

union, a oneness which God intended when He made them male and female. Here Jesus does not rank the woman as either second rate to the male or somehow below the male in God-given dignity. When Jesus then makes the statement, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9, Matthew 19:6), one realizes He is not simply referring to their marital union but how God created them from the beginning – male and female sharing a God ordained oneness.

“... he blessed them...” The original blessing of humans in Genesis 1:28 included words for the humans to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it. The blessing by God is not fleshed out in this text. To “bless” is far more than to “wish them well” or “wish them good luck.” In the Bible words and names have power and are chosen carefully for they are thought to contain the essence of thing they represent. To “bless” means to convey vigor, strength, life and peace to the one being blessed. God in blessing is bestowing the very life and peace which belong to Him.

Genesis 5:1 takes us back to the beginning of humanity one more time. It is not going to repeat the story of the original Fall of humankind. Rather the story simply reminds us that in the beginning humans were blessed by God. No paradise in the story this time, and no original sin is mentioned. But quickly in the story it becomes clear that the world is not paradise for in it there is sin, and though humans live long, they still die. The story is going to move quickly to the lives of the most important characters in the early history of the people of God.

3 When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. **4** The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters. **5** Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.

We know nothing of Adam's life since his expulsion from the Garden of Delight, other than he fathered a few children. After committing his original sin, Adam becomes silent, voiceless. Had he nothing to say? He lives 130 years before fathering Seth. What was he doing all this time? The text gives us no clue. If he did much as a parent, we will never know. He lives 930 years and apparently said nothing worth remembering; he had nothing to say for himself. Besides living long, he is noted for little else. He is not credited with having contributed anything to human culture, skills, inventiveness or achievement. Even those inspired by God to write Genesis were given nothing to say about his incredibly long, yet apparently totally uninspiring life. When God punished Adam for his sinful disobedience, God said, "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19). Genesis however never speaks about any hardships Adam has with farming, and he is never reported to having broken a sweat about anything. The only part of the consequence for Adam's sin that is recorded to have come true is Adam dies – some 930 years after God sentenced him to death. Adam was granted a speedy trial, but it took almost a millennium to carry out the sentence. "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:8). Was the Lord waiting all that time for Adam to repent?

"a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." In Genesis 4:2, Eve attributed the birth of Seth to herself and God (her helper). Here the story reasserts the patriarchal connection - Eve may have given birth to Seth with God's help – but Seth is in Adam's image and likeness. Eve credited God with the birth, but here God is not directly in the picture – the fatherhood is

Adam's not God's. Eve is not mentioned at all. And the text clearly wants to trace the history of humanity from God through Adam, not through Eve who is not listed even as the generic "wife." In this telling of events, Seth is a virtually motherless child. Of course, this also tells us why it is important to read all of the scriptures and not just select verses or versions of the stories that we prefer. It is even important for us to know how these Old Testamental texts were used by the New Testament authors. In doing this we come to understand the original text in its context, how it compares to parallel or similar texts, and how it was understood by Christ and His disciples. To read a text without the greater context of the entire Bible is to lose elements of the story and of Truth itself.

Jesus is said to be the new Adam – Christ God's Word incarnate gives new voice and hope to all humankind. Adam may have lived an incredible 930 years, but he still dies and passes mortality to his descendents. "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Romans 5:12). Jesus lived only 33 years and yet managed to give eternal life to all. "For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ... If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Romans 5:15-18). It is not longevity of life that measures how much any one person contributes to humanity or to salvation.

In this version of the Adam story there is no mention of Cain and Abel, but the descendents of Adam begin with Seth. This is a quick recapitulation of what the Genesis text has taught us up to this moment. Note that Eve is also absent from the picture. This is a patriarchal retelling of the story. The absence of any reference to Paradise or

to the murderous Cain convinces scholars that several different traditions (sources) have been blended together to form the Jewish/Christian scriptures.

Perhaps the text is suggesting Seth is in the image and likeness of his father in a way that Cain was not. Cain was a murderer, as is Satan (John 8:44) who is described as Cain's real father (1 John 3:12). Seth is in Adam's image and Adam in God's image. Cain is in the image of Satan for he was disinherited by an act of God from Adam's descendents. Cain is not even to be remembered.

"all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years ...' The incredible ages attributed to the first humans may be the effort of the final editor's of the Bible who wrote much later in history to show how sin will shorten the life spans of people through the centuries. Proverbs 10:27 says, "The fear of the LORD prolongs life." Adam though disobedient to the Lord still fears God when he heard God walking in the garden (Genesis 3:11). The fear of God is a holy thing not a hellish thing. The biblical text may be suggesting that as time went on people decreasingly feared the Lord, and thus the life span of all humans even of God's chosen ones becomes shortened through history. Many scholars note however that the life spans in the bible's chronology pale in length to what one can find in other Mideast and Asian religions where sometimes rulers are said to have lived thousands of years. In 2005 MIT's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW offered a prize of \$20,000 to any molecular biologist who could disprove the idea that humans are capable of living to be 1000 years old. This contest had nothing to do with the Bible, but was a challenge issued because of the claims of certain scientists that aging is a disease that can be cured. The scientists who judged the contest concluded that not one biogerontologist could refute the claim nor offer irrefutable scientific evidence to support their own claims that thousand year life spans were impossible. Thus by the standards of modern science, there is nothing scientific that says it is impossible to live the number of years suggested in Genesis. It perhaps is ironic that secular

scientists who might reject the ages of the ancient biblical characters as myths, now in seeking “eternal youth” say that such life spans are totally possible. Of course that doesn’t answer the question of whether living such incredibly long lives would be either good or fruitful. As Ralph Waldo Emerson quipped, “What would be the use of immortality to a person who cannot use well a half an hour?” And in Genesis even though these early humans live for centuries, the totality of their lives is summed up in a sentence. They live nine hundred years and their biography can be written in 4 lines. Longevity of life is obviously not everything to the God whose revelation of truth is contained in these Scriptures.

Because numerology was popular at different times in biblical history, it is also possible the numbers had significance to the composers of the stories which are lost on us. Much speculation exists about the secret meaning of the ages of the men named in Genesis.

Adam’s death is recorded. But very unceremoniously and quite unremarkably Adam (the first human, the parentless man created directly by God, and former resident of paradise) now returns to the dust from which he was made (Genesis 3:19). Was there even a funeral of some sort? Eve’s death is not even recorded, she simply disappears into history becoming dust unnoticed by anyone and unrecorded by those inspired by God to write down His revelation in the Scriptures.

“Adam lived 930 years.” Though God had warned Adam if he disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit he would surely die in the day he ate it (Genesis 2:17), Adam lives on for 930 years according to scripture. Adam surely didn’t die in the day he ate the fruit! The text itself suggests it is not meant to be read literally. Adam’s death fulfills the warning of God, but God allowed him to live for the continuation of the human race.

Adam died. Adam’s death is actually the first “natural” death recorded in Genesis. Abel was the first human to die but he was violently murdered by his brother Cain.

Lamech also boasted of murdering a unknown man. From then until the death of Adam (some 800 years according to the biblical text), no other human death was recorded. No women’s death is recorded at all – the mothers and wives of these men are given no names and no obituaries.

If one reads the genealogy carefully one realizes Adam is alive when Lamech is born - all nine generations of humans living together on earth. Adam’s death still must have come as a shock – for now it is clear that even without violence, humans will die. The first man to be born after Adam dies is Noah.

Adam had “other sons and daughters.” This is the first mention of Adam’s daughters. Biblical **literalists** assume Adam’s sons got their wives from his daughters and that such sibling incest was needed for the humans to fulfill the command to be fruitful and multiply. Many Christian writers assume the story is precisely a narrative talking about humanity in general but not in scientific and historic accuracy. Christian scholars also see the Adam story as symbolic and prototypical with all human beings coming from God but not all are necessarily genetic descendents of Adam and Eve.

6 When Seth had lived a hundred and five years, he became the father of Enosh.
7 Seth lived after the birth of Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters. **8** Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died. **9** When Enosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Kenan.
10 Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred and fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters. **11** Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died. **12** When Kenan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Ma-hal'alel. **13** Kenan lived after the birth of Ma-hal'alel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters. **14** Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died. **15** When Ma-hal'alel had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Jared. **16** Ma-hal'alel lived after the birth of Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters. **17** Thus all the days of Ma-hal'alel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died.
18 When Jared had lived a hundred and sixty-two years he became the father of Enoch. **19** Jared lived after the birth of Enoch eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. **20** Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died.

There are no wives' names mentioned in the genealogy. No accounting is given of where the wives came from or who their parents were. The genealogy is purely patriarchal: a father-son schema. Each man's life is marked by only three events: 1) the man's birth, 2) what age he was at the birth of his son of this genealogy, and 3) how old he was when he died. The only mention of females at all is almost parenthetically – they are among the “other” sons and daughters each man had. These “other” sons and daughters are not named, are not part of the direct lineage being followed, and though their existence is acknowledged, they are not significant for the story. That they must have been marrying and producing families and descendants is not within the interest of the text.

Chrysostom reminds his audience that every word of the scriptures are inspired, and that they must not just be read in dull, leaden literal fashion, but rather one must allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the depth contained in the verses. He did feel the genealogies were inspired and important, but in his own commentaries he often glosses over them and does not do the verse by verse parsing which is his usual way to approach the biblical text. “I beg you all not to pass heedlessly by the contents of Holy Scripture. I mean, there is nothing in the writings at this point which does not contain a great wealth of thought; after all, since the blessed authors composed under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, on that account they hold concealed within them great treasure because written by the Spirit. ... You see, there is not even a syllable or even one letter contained in Scripture which does not have a great treasure concealed in its depths. ... Sacred Scripture does not call in to play human wisdom for the understanding of its writings, but the revelation of the Spirit, so that we may learn the true meaning of its contents and draw from it a great benefit.” For St. John not only are the writers of Scripture inspired by God, but also inspiration comes upon those who listen to or read them. It isn't literalism that is necessary to read them but more importantly we need inspiration to understand them. Like many patristic writers, Chrysostom saw the understanding of scriptures to be similar to mining gold –

we cannot be satisfied with what we find on the surface, we must dig (work hard) to get deeper into them so that we can mine the depth of their riches.

One might ask why should we read these ancient texts with their lists of names, describing a world that no longer exists and lifestyles to which we cannot relate? St. Peter of Damaskos (12th Century AD) offers these thoughts about reading less interesting scriptural passages: “I went through all these slowly and diligently, trying to discover the root of man’s destruction and salvation, and which of his actions or practices does or does not bring him to salvation. I wanted to find what it is that everyone seeks after, and how people served God in the past, and still serve Him today, in wealth or poverty, living among many sinners or in solitude, married or celibate: how, quite simply in every circumstance and activity we find life or death, salvation or destruction ... Cain and Abel... between them jealousy triumphed, and deceit, and these gave rise to murder, cursing and terror. I was astonished, too, by their descendants, whose sins were so many that they provoked the flood...” For St. Peter, scripture offers us a chance to learn about the sins and mistakes of others, so that we don’t repeat them, and to realize there have been righteous people in every generation even when most people in the world practiced evil.

On the Sunday before Christmas the Orthodox Church commemorates the Holy Ancestors of Christ and has the holy men of the genealogy celebrating the birth of Christ: “Adorned with the glory of divine communion Adam exults today; with him, Abel leaps in gladness and Enoch rejoices; Seth dances for joy and Noah with him.” (Vespers hymn)

All of the men listed in this section live unbelievably long lives. And that is the sum total that we can say about them. No words of theirs are recorded, no deeds, no discoveries, no inventions, no achievements, no contributions to life. Men who supposedly lived 800-950 years left nothing behind but a name and a son. We don’t know where they lived, what occupied their time, what they believed. We have no

knowledge of their relationship to God. An amazing piece of trivia is that despite the longevity of their lives, the first man mentioned to have gray hair is going to be Jacob in Genesis 42:38 – of course he had 12 sons which might explain the allochromasia of his hair!

“Enoch” This is the second man in Genesis named Enoch. Cain also had a son whom he named Enoch (4:17). In fact the genealogy of Cain listed in Genesis 4 is going to be paralleled by a list of similar names and descendents in Genesis 5 following Seth’s lineage. Some biblical scholars suspect the lists were perhaps derived from a single lineage which through time got remembered as two distinct lineages – one of them the godly descendents of Seth and the other of the ungodly descendents of Cain. One idea this might suggest to us is that in every human there is both the potential for good and for evil. Humans like to categorize “other” peoples, races and nations as good or evil, but the truth is that in each of us possesses the ability to do great good and also to do great evil. When we understand that truth, we begin to be more realistic and less arrogant about our selves. We also learn to be less judgmental and have a more balanced view of others. St. Paul wrote about this very real struggle within himself: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (Romans 7:15-25). He understood that each of us, himself included, is capable of doing good or evil. It is a war that rages within us as to whether we will choose the good or the evil. And as was seen in Cain, it is a battle whose outcome is not predetermined but which requires true spiritual struggle, asceticism, to overcome one’s own self-centered selfishness in order to freely love God and neighbor.

21 When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methu'selah.

22 Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methu'selah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. **23** Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. **24** Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

25 When Methu'selah had lived a hundred and eighty-seven years, he became the father of Lamech. **26** Methu'selah lived after the birth of Lamech seven hundred and eighty-two years, and had other sons and daughters. **27** Thus all the days of Methu'selah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died.

Enoch is a mysterious figure in the text. He lives 365 years, a number which corresponds to how many days there are in a year, though if the connection is intentional, its meaning still remains obscure. Enoch's description interrupts the formulaic description of each of the other personage's in the lineage who die after having children. Enoch however walks with God and his death is not recorded. The Prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 2 is the only other man in the Old Testament who is taken by God rather than dying. In the book of Hebrews much is made of Melchiz'edek for whom neither a birth nor a death is recorded and so Melchiz'edek becomes a prototype of the Eternal Word of God who became man. "For this Melchiz'edek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God... is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever" (Hebrews 7:1-3). As with Melchiz'edek, Enoch too is a prototype of the person who has a genealogy (as does Jesus) but for whom death has no permanent meaning because he is taken by God.

In the Septuagint we find this about Enoch: "Enoch pleased the Lord, and was taken up; he was an example of repentance to all generations" (Sirach 44:16). The biblical text does not give us a clue about Sirach's notion that Enoch is a model of repentance. That story comes from the non-biblical Jewish apocryphal literature. The mysterious Enoch's disappearance made him a very popular figure in the Septuagint and in both Jewish and early Christian apocryphal and apocalyptic literature. "No one like Enoch has been created on earth, for he was taken up from the earth" (Sirach 49:14).

"Enoch walked with God" The same verb for "walked" is used of God who walked in the Garden of Paradise in Genesis 3:8. Walking with God no doubt signifies being in God's presence and enjoying fellowship with Him.

Why did God "take" Enoch? The Book of the Wisdom of Solomon in the Septuagint suggests that God took Enoch to protect and

preserve him from the wickedness that was all around him. By Wisdom's understanding God recognizes the effects of nurture and social environment on a person and found Enoch so rare and precious that He decided to preserve him in holiness by plucking him out of the earth. "But the righteous man, though he die early, will be at rest. For old age is not honored for length of time, nor measured by number of years; but understanding is gray hair for men, and a blameless life is ripe old age. There was one who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul. For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind. Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he took him quickly from the midst of wickedness. Yet the peoples saw and did not understand, nor take such a thing to heart, that God's grace and mercy are with his elect, and he watches over his holy ones" (Wisdom 4:7-15, which is a common Old Testament reading on the eve of certain saints in the Orthodox Church). In the New Testament the Book of Hebrews offers a slightly different explanation for why God took Enoch. "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God." (Hebrews 11:5) In Hebrews God is protecting Enoch from death not from the wickedness of his fellow humans.

"It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 1:14-15) {The quote attributed to Enoch is taken from the apocryphal book of Enoch, which is not part of Jewish scriptures, but which Jude obviously had read and valued}. It is one of the hints we have that early Christians read the non-canonical apocryphal literature –

suggesting that the notion of a "fixed" canon was not held by all early Christians.

"Enoch... God took him." Took him where? That question has been asked for hundreds of years. Chrysostom in the 4th Century asked the question and says he was asked does this mean Enoch is still alive somewhere? Chrysostom accepts a sense of mystery regarding these types of questions - we cannot know the answer. He argues we have to believe that the words mean something as the scripture is always precise in its meaning, but he acknowledges that he does not know how to answer the question and that probably the answer cannot be reached by reasonable inquiry for its meaning can be found only in God and God did not choose to reveal the depth of its meaning.

"and he was not, for God took him." It is perhaps more than coincidental that in the Joseph story later in Genesis (chapters 37 ff), after the 10 brothers have sold Joseph into slavery they use a similar phrase to say that their one brother is no more. They use the phrase to tell the lie that he is dead when in fact they have no idea where Joseph is. The text here as well clearly implies that something mysterious occurred and Enoch's whereabouts remain unknown.

"Let us again bless Enoch with holy words of praise, for since he was well-pleasing to the Lord, he was translated in glory: As it is written, he was seen to be too great for death, since he was manifested as a most true servant of God." (From the Canon of the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers. 2nd Sunday before Christmas)

Enoch begets Methuselah. There exists an interesting parallel between the genealogy of Cain in Genesis 4 and that of Seth in Genesis 5. In 4:18 Enoch (Cain's son) has a grandson named Methushael. Methushael (Cain's descendent) begets a son named Lamech, as does Lamech the descendent of Seth. The parallel list of similar names seems to scholars too identical to be coincidence, but how this happened or the purpose it serves is lost in history. Some scholars think that a single list of descendents was variously attributed to

Cain or to Abel by different sources. The final editor of Genesis kept both lists in the scriptures.

Methu'selah at nine hundred and sixty-nine years of age is the Bible's oldest man. Regardless of his age, he gets no more description than the other men in the genealogy. His great age still ends in death – humans are purely mortal beings and cannot escape death for ever.

28 When Lamech had lived a hundred and eighty-two years, he became the father of a son, **29** and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground which the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands."

30 Lamech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred and ninety-five years, and had other sons and daughters. **31** Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died. **32** After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

According to the chronology of this genealogy, Adam dies in the year 930, Seth dies in 1042, and Noah is born in 1056. Noah is the first birth recorded after the death of Adam. This may be intentional to show that he represents a new beginning for humankind. Noah will become the father of all humankind after the flood. Noah is also the first human born who did not know Adam and thus is the first man born without direct roots to the Garden of Eden. This fact may help explain Lamech's comment that Noah is taken from the cursed ground rather than from the purer dust from which Adam was created.

"called his name Noah, saying, 'Out of the ground which the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.'" Lamech makes an unusual prophecy about his son Noah. In words very reminiscent of Genesis 3:18 where God tells Adam that the ground is cursed because of him and only through the pain of hard work will the soil yield crops, Lamech believes Noah is going to provide them some relief from the pain, the labor, and the curse. Noah indeed will rescue the human race but not quite as Lamech probably envisioned it. Noah's role in the salvation of humanity from the curse comes only with the destruction of the rest of humanity. Noah will in fact be involved in saving humanity from its own wickedness, but the toil of labor will continue beyond the flood.

Besides Lamech being a name both in the descendents of Cain and of Seth, another interesting parallel is both Lamechs have a connection to the number 77. In Genesis 4:24 Lamech's 77 fold vengeance is paralleled by Lamech father of Noah's age of 777.

The genealogy of Chapter 5 will be interrupted by the telling of the Noah stories in Genesis 6-9. The genealogy resumes in 10:1. The interruption in the flow of the genealogy gives modern scholars a clue that several different traditions (sources) have been woven together by whoever was the final editor of Genesis. **Source Theory** is an attempt by modern biblical scholars to account for the "inconsistencies" and

variations which are found scattered throughout the Genesis text. The fact that different “hands” may have had a role in writing and editing the text does not in any way deny the inspiration of the text. Whether one or several authors and editors had their hand in assembling the text it all has been received by the Church as inspired and it is assumed the various authors and editors were inspired by God themselves. In ancient days, when communities relied on oral tradition to preserve their significant stories, the community shared in the remembering of the story. It was not just one person’s responsibility to remember and tell the story; the entire community shared this task and responsibility. A good example of this communal responsibility is conveyed in Psalm 78, part of which reads, “He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God” (78:5-8). Every family had the responsibility to tell the story of the community. Thus having more than one person/source being responsible for telling the community’s story is normal to Israel.

Despite the incredible life spans of the men in the genealogy, humans are denied immortality. Humans are mortal beings bounded by their own limitations including their mortality. Whereas the threat of death to Adam may have been an abstraction he could not imagine, now the humans are beginning to learn what it means to be mortal. And the story suggests humans

readily embrace the unrepentant sinner’s philosophy, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (Isaiah 22:13). The Orthodox response to the unbeliever’s indulgence is our liturgical prayer, “that we may spend the remaining time of our life in peace and in repentance.” The unbeliever’s philosophy makes the present world to be all there is and denies the afterlife; the Orthodox view on the other hand lives for that life in the world to come. Or as a modern adage has it, the first “lives to eat” while the second “eats to live.”

According to the Chronology of this genealogy of Noah’s ancestors only Adam (930) and Seth (1042) were dead when Noah was born (1056). Enoch had been taken by God in 987. When Noah was born 7 generations were alive at the same time! All of Noah’s ancestors die before the flood and so are considered to be

antediluvians. Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives are the only antediluvians who survive the flood and thus preserve the human race, carrying the human seed over the flood into the new creation. None of Noah’s ancestors are destroyed among the wicked by God in the great cataclysmic flood as they are all dead before God visits His judgment on the world. Their apparent natural deaths at great old ages were therefore also a blessing in that all of them are spared the wrath of God. When Noah’s children are born there are only 4 generations in the lineage alive. Methuselah, the oldest man in Genesis is the last recorded death before the flood destroys the world. At the time of the flood only Noah and his sons (2 generations are alive). Noah’s father, Lamech, would have lived to see Noah begin building the ark, but he dies 5 years before the flood begins.

THE STORY OF THE FLOOD

It is worth making a few comments about the story of Noah and the flood. While the Patristic commentators certainly noted the variations, inconsistencies and contradictions which occur in the flood story (Genesis 6-9), they endeavored to interpret the story to show that it is really one story. They assumed there was but one author for the text and therefore it fell upon them as the interpreters of the text to show how the text was internally consistent even when literally it couldn't be so. So they came up with ways to gloss over differences or harmonize them by offering explanations in which they tried to show how the text was consistent with itself.

Modern biblical scholarship on the other hand offers an insight into the scriptures which can help resolve some of the problems which a literal reading of the text presents. The insight of modern scholars is that in fact Genesis 6-9 is actually two separate stories that have been interwoven together by a third editor. This idea is contained in what is called Source Theory. It is way beyond my purposes to explain or defend Source Theory. I will only say it is an idea presented by modern biblical scholars based to a large degree on literary analysis of the biblical text. Source Theory is based in scholarship not in theology. Nevertheless it at times can be a very useful tool in helping to uncover a sensible understanding of some biblical passages and problems. I am making use of this tool in my reflections but am not endorsing every idea that gets proposed under the guise of Source Theory. Like most ideas in modern biblical scholarship Source Theory has branched in many directions, and not all of them are useful for an Orthodox reading of the Scriptures. Any tool can be dangerous, but we don't stop using a saw or a hammer because of the risk it represents; rather, we learn to use them with great caution.

Source Theory suggests that when reading a section of Scripture like Genesis 1-2 or Genesis 6-9, it becomes apparent that there are such strong literary/linguistic differences that the section cannot have been written by one author but is the work of several authors/editors/sources. If you allow in these particular chapters of Genesis that there are two distinct stories which have been interwoven you can come to see how each of the two stories is consistent in itself. The contradictions and inconsistencies are actually between the two stories which were woven together. Source Theory reminds us that ancient texts were originally oral stories. These stories belonged to and were authenticated by a religious community – the people of God, the Jews - not by a single "author." There often existed within the community more than one version of a story that was valued by the community. It is only when the story gets committed to a written form that sometimes an effort is made to harmonize the stories, probably because the differences in the stories appear more jarring to us when actually written down. Oral tradition tolerated some variations in the community's story better than does a literary tradition. Source Theory says it is at times in Scripture possible to unwind the various threads that have been woven together into one story and to reconstruct the different original stories from these threads. This is merely a tool of interpretation. It can't undo the fact that the authorized version of the story as written down in our Scriptures presents one harmonized story. But it can point out that if one carefully studies the Bible one can detect two interwoven stories in one text. It is no different than looking at a bouquet of spring flowers – together they are quite beautiful, and yet they are "artificially" arranged as they don't occur in nature they way they do occur in the vase. Someone arranged the flowers in the vase, and the bouquet can be separated out to different kinds of flowers. Each flower or each species is also beautiful and we can appreciate the flowers singularly, separated by species, or placed together in a bouquet.

For our purposes, being able to distinguish a couple of stories within a biblical section does not mean that the scriptures are not inspired or from God. We will make use of Source Theory to help clarify some of the problems that arise from a purely literal reading of the. As it turns out, the biblical text of our immediate concern, Genesis 6-9, actually ends up having 3 "sources" which shaped it – the source of a first story, the source of a second story, and finally the editor who weaved the two stories together. Discerning the different "hands" which had a role in

composing the written story, can at times help us to understand what we otherwise note as inconsistencies or even contradictions. Using Source Theory in reading the Flood story is using a tool to uncover the deeper meaning of the text. Tools of interpretation are good servants and bad masters. We do not need to become a slave to the theory in reading the Bible, but certainly using a tool of interpretation can help us uncover the deeper meanings of the text which the Fathers of the Church valued so highly.

To take a totally secular comparison – this is like having two “competing” sports writers from two competing sports cities, newspapers and teams write a description of the big game. One ends up writing from the position of the losing team and one is the writer of the game for the winning team. They both will be describing the same game, but no doubt their emphases will be totally different. Who gets credited for the win and loss, what went right and wrong, we would really have two different stories. But then imagine that on Monday morning, a third sportswriter sits down and attempts to weave the two opposing accounts of the game together into a “harmonious” account. Perhaps you get the picture- it might be very hard to get the two stories to correspond exactly because the authors would have emphasized different things.

Without going into too great of detail, the two main sources of the Genesis Flood story are known as the J-source and the P-Source. The J-source is thought to have been written about the 10th Century BC. The J-source refers to God by Name – YHWH is God’s Name (this is a real name like JOHN or MARY). It was considered so sacred that it was never pronounced. Many English Bibles do not use YHWH for the Name of the Lord, but will substitute for His Name the words in all capital letters the LORD, or perhaps LORD GOD. So when you are reading Genesis 6-9 and you see the LORD know you are probably reading the J-source author. The God of the J-source is very personal and active in history. The description of the LORD is very anthropomorphic (meaning God behaves much like a human being). The LORD frequently makes promises and also will curse the disobedient. The J-source is also said to have written the second story of creation found in Genesis chapter 2 beginning with verse :4.

Another source identified by scholars is called the P-source. The P-source wrote about 550BC perhaps 400 years after the J-source. (the stories may be much older than this, 550BC is simply when scholars believe the oral stories were put into their final written form). The P-source is very concerned with Israel’s priest class and the temple. The P-sources never uses God’s name but always refers to God by the generic word “God” which is not a name but word for the divine being. The God of the P-source is far more transcendent and distant from humanity than the God described in the J-Source. This God gives many blessings for increase and fruitfulness and likes to offer both genealogies and covenants. The P-source is said also to have written the first creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

The final editor who brought these two sets of stories together is also thought by scholars to have worked about the same time as the P-source. Some scholars think the P-source may also have been the final editor of the bible that we now accept as authoritative.

As you are reading these chapters take note whether the verses are referring to God as the LORD or as God. This will be one clue to help distinguish the two stories. Remember you don’t have to choose between the two stories. Those who were inspired by God to formulate our scriptures saw value in both stories and attempted to weave them together while leaving in some of the discrepancies. This may in fact tell us that the final editor inspired by God did not in fact think that a literal reading of the text which harmonizes every detail is in fact the best way to understand the story of the flood, nor the way to get the most out of the scriptural lesson. The two stories together add richness and depth to the entire narrative. And if we get past the troubling literal inconsistencies we realize there is a tremendous consistency in truth – the truth about humanity, the truth about God the LORD, and the truth about our relationship to God our LORD. Our conception of God is enriched by the very different ways that God is portrayed.

The two stories do not contradict the main point that God both attempts to rid the world of sin and to respect the free will of humanity. God does not abandon humanity to its own fate but endeavors to continue to influence events in the world for the salvation of the world. It is a story of God's undying and steadfast love for His very wicked and rebellious creatures. It is a story which develops a major theme of scripture – God is a saving God, and God will rescue His servants even if they are but a tiny remnant on earth. God commits Himself in the story to working out His plan for His creation through the people He will save from the flood. But God also acknowledges with a sorrowful heart that His beloved humans have wickedness in their hearts from when they are young. This will be as true of the people God saves in the ark as of those destroyed in the flood. God saves them anyway as He is intent on working out His purposes in and through humanity.

So as you are reading through the chapter texts themselves (NOT when you are stopping every few verses to read my reflections but just when you are reading the Biblical text itself), try identifying those sections belonging to the J-source and to the P-source. If you feel that the verses in these chapters sometimes seem chronologically out of sync – like it moves back and forth in time, that is probably due to places in the text where the story shifts from P to J and back again. Or if you notice contradictions in details (7 pairs of animals as versus 2 pairs of animals, how many days the flood lasts, and so on), you probably are seeing the differences in the details of the two stories.

Source Theory cannot explain to the satisfaction of many modern scientific thinkers in what sense the text is true – literally, historically, and scientifically. Source Theory only helps us deal with some of the literal contradictions and inconsistencies by showing that there appears to be more than one literary source from which the final editor of the Bible drew.

As is noted in the reflections, even the ancient pre-scientific Christians of the 4th Century had difficulties with believing every literal details of the story. The Holy Bishop John Chrysostom in the 4th Century cautioned his flock against overly trying to rationalize about the text. He felt there are some things that do not make logical sense but we have to just accept them in order to get to the real purpose of the story which is to teach us both about the God who is the Savior of the world, and the coming day of Judgment. Theodoret of Cyrus, a bishop of the Antiochian tradition in a generation after Chrysostom, notes at several points in his commentaries that interpreting scriptures in different ways is completely acceptable when the issue is not about the doctrine of the Trinity. He sees no harm to religion occurring in instances where different interpretations can be determined, and even allows for the readers of the text themselves to determine which interpretation seems closer to the truth to them.

None of this is to say that it is wrong to believe the texts are literally true. My reflections however do not rely on a literal reading of the texts to point out their eternal truths. A literal reading of the text is one way to approach the text, but the literal reading of the text is not even the primary way that the New Testament writers read and understood the Old Testament texts. The reflections point out how the New Testament made use of these Old Testament stories – as allegory, as prophecy, as **typology**, and as a moral teaching.

While the Source theory helps us to understand the inconsistencies within Genesis 6-9 by unwinding the two stories which were woven together, both stories are completely monotheistic in their message. There is only one God who is the main actor in either story, and both stories are about this same one God whether He is referred to by Name (YHWH, the LORD) or simply as God. But different people were inspired to write differently reflecting their own understandings of God the LORD. This is part of the beauty of inspiration. God is so much different than any one mind can grasp. And so God reveals Himself in story and narration, in figurative images, to help us realize the limits of our ability to describe the incomprehensible God.

Having more than one story forces us to think beyond the plain sense of the Scriptures and to seek out the deeper meaning which God chooses to reveal to us in more than one way. We do not have to explain the differences in the stories, but we must come to understand the depth of their revelation. As St. John Chrysostom said, “Pay precise attention, however: the reading out of the Scriptures is the opening of the heavens.” Orthodox in later generations will also refer to icons as windows into heaven. Obviously the revelation of God, in whatever form it comes to us gives us a view into heaven itself.

Remember, deciding to read the Scriptures literally means making literalism your method for interpreting the text. Reading the text literally will force the literalist to interpret the text so that the 40 days of the flood do not contradict the 150 and 340 days of the flood also mentioned in the text. The literalist must interpret what it means that God “came down” to Ba’bel to see the tower – couldn’t He see it from where He was? Is God near-sighted? Or is the text saying or implying something other than its plain meaning? Literalism is a form of interpretation of Scriptures.

There is always a temptation when reading Scriptures to try to explain away problems and difficulties to ease our doubts. But in so doing we often have to discard what the text actually says in favor of some explanation of the text. Then the explanation becomes the Scripture and the Scripture becomes simply that on which the inspired writing comments. Orthodox scripture readers will sometimes gloss over the actual Scripture and rush to the footnotes in the ORTHODOX STUDY BIBLE as if the footnotes are the inspired part and the Scriptures are the stumbling block which slow our race to the get to the truth. As one commentator on the Old Testament wrote, “There is tremendous interpretive pressure to raise the valleys and lower the hills, to make the way straight and level before the reader. But a reading faithful to this book, at least, should try to describe the territory with all its bumps and clefts, for they are not merely flaws, but the essence of the landscape” (M. Fox, QOHELET AND HIS CONTRADICTIONS). Source Theory at least takes every word of the Scriptures seriously and looks to discover their meaning without trying to gloss over inconsistencies and contradictions. It makes us read the Scriptures as they are in the received text rather than using mental gymnastics to try to make the text say something that refutes the very words of the text.

As a final note to give us a little more comfort with ambiguity when reading the Scriptures, and to challenge our tendency to drift into literalness, consider the following fact about the Ten Commandments. Even Christians who know little about the Bible have heard of the Ten Commandments. We often think they are ten clear laws which no one can tamper with and which no one would be willing to debate what they are. The reality is that if you compare what modern Judaism claims are the Ten Commandments with what the Church Fathers believed and what modern Catholics and Lutherans believe, you would discover that although all talk about the Ten Commandments, the groups do not agree on what the 10 commandments actually are. The first commandment for the Church Fathers was that you shall have no other gods before the Lord. In Judaism the first commandment simply is “I am the Lord your God” – it is a reaffirmation of monotheism. For Catholics/Lutherans the first commandment is that we are not to put other gods before the Lord nor are we to have images of any kind. In Judaism the 2nd Commandment is not to have other gods before the Lord and not to have images of God. For the Church Fathers the 2nd Commandment concerns no false images, and for Catholics/Lutherans the 2nd commandment is about false oaths. The 3rd commandment for the Church Fathers and modern Jews forbids false oaths, while for Catholics/Lutherans it is to keep the Sabbath holy. For the rest of the commandments Modern Judaism agrees with the list of the Church Fathers, while Catholics and Protestants have a different numbering system. So before we get too upset with the various interpretations of the scriptures, note that in something as fundamental as the Ten Commandments Jews, early Christians and modern Catholics/Lutherans do not all agree on how to number the 10 commandments. This doesn’t alter the text which is relied on, nor does it discredit the revelation. It only tells us that interpretation plays a role in how various religious groups interpret the basics of the faith.

Reading Noah and the flood through the Source Theory Lens

What happens if we follow the wisdom of Source Theory and accept a notion that there actually are two distinct flood stories in Genesis that were intertwined by some unknown editor? We can fairly easily reconstitute the two stories if we simply separate out the verses based upon how they refer to God. Remember, in the J-Source, God is referred to by His Name, YHWH, which is usually translated into our English Christian Bibles as “the LORD” or “the LORD GOD.” The P-Source usually refers to God by the generic word “God.” Without doing any other editing or rearranging, we can see one possible way that the Noah story might divide out:

J-Source - Genesis 6:5-8; 7:1-9a, 10, 12, 16b-17a, 22-23; 8:2b-3a, 6-13b, 20-22

P-Source - Genesis 6:9-22; 7:9b-11, 13-16a, 17b-21, 24; 8:1-2a,3b-5, 13a, 14-19; 19:1-17.

I have arranged the text of the Revised Standard Version of Genesis 6-9 below according to this J-Source/P-Source schema and then placed them in parallel so that you can see how the two stories compare with each other. You can judge for yourself whether each of the 2 stories flows well when separated along a J/P pattern.¹

In general, besides referring to God as “the LORD,” the God of the J-Source is described in anthropomorphic terms – He is a very hands on Creator God, very (physically) active in creation. The God of the P-Source is more transcendent – distant from His creation and a supreme ruler from on high. If you follow the two Source Theory, you also realize in the:

J-Source - The building of the ark is not described; Noah is instructed to take 7 pair of clean animals in the ark but only 1 pair of unclean animals; Noah is to take his unnamed Sons, wife and daughters-in-law in the ark; Noah is 600 years old when the flood

¹ While there is a lot of agreement among Source Theorists about the two sources that contributed to the Flood story, there is not a 100% agreement among Biblical scholars precisely how to separate the text between the J-Source and the P-Source. I based my editing almost entirely on the text referring to “God” or “the LORD.” Obviously a phrase here or there (especially the transitional phrases between the two sources) could go either way or actually could go both ways. But you get the big picture of how the Flood story reads as two stories woven together. It is also possible that the editor of the text moved some verses around so that the text would flow better in its final edited/woven form. Two verses that seem possibly out of place when the story is separated into two versions are: 7:16 in the J-Source which seems to fit more naturally after 7:9, and in the P-Source 7:17 seems as if would flow perfectly from the end of 7:11.

begins; Noah, et al, are in the ark 7 days before the flood actually begins; the flood is caused by a rain storm which lasts 40 days, the waters basically cover the tree tops (but not the mountain tops as they do in the P-Source), and on the 61st day after entering the ark, Noah leaves the ark.

P-Source - The building of the ark is given very specific detail; the names of Noah's sons are provided; two of each kind of animal is to be taken in the ark; food for all is to be put in the ark; a covenant between God and humans will be established (covenants are indicative that the verses come from the hand of the P-Source); that Noah "did as God commanded" is a repeating refrain in the story (in Genesis 1 also a P-Source story there is the repeating refrain "and God saw that it was good"); exact day of the year and day of the week is provided for the beginning and end of the story (as in Genesis 1 where God creates the world in exactly 7 days); it is the deeps above and below the earth which burst forth with the cataclysmic flood waters – not just a rainstorm, but the waters of Genesis 1 which were contained by God so the dry earth could come into existence are suddenly let loose again; the flood occurs on the very day Noah enters the ark, not 7 days later as in the J-Source; the flood waters rise above the mountain tops; the flood waters increase for 150 days; Noah, et al, are in the ark a total of 340 days

In rearranging the stories this way we are not denying the inspiration of either story, nor are we denying the inspiration of the editor who wove the two stories together. Following Source Theory can simply help us deal with some of the logical and narrative inconsistencies in the story. The reason the details in Genesis 6-9 seem disjointed at points or inconsistent is that they actually were derived from two different stories. What is also significant is that the final editor of the Bible did not see a need to totally harmonize the two stories – but did weave them together even though their details do not seamlessly correlate. By not harmonizing the two stories, he left us plenty of clues to the existence of both stories – perhaps he did this intentionally as He found both stories inspiring and revelatory. He wanted to have the Scripture read as one narrative, but then kept details from each story which cannot be reconciled. Apparently he had no divine direction to eliminate the differences in the details. So we need to ask ourselves why do set out to harmonize the differences when the inspired editor of the Bible did not?

We of course cannot know if there were any parts of the original two stories that he simply deleted. We also cannot know if any parts of the story were in total agreement and therefore he could pick either of the two to include in his final blended version. Source Theory takes seriously every word of the text. It however does not try to find a way to show all the sentences are literally

consistent with each other. Sometimes the only way to read the text absolutely literally requires the reader to do “violence” to the text – change its plain meaning so much so that the differences in the story appear not to be differences. It seems in some literal interpretations one has to do mental gymnastics to force the text to be literally consistent. The final editor of the biblical text did not attempt to rid the story of its differences and inconsistencies. So why do we think we should explain them away or eliminate them by forcing an interpretation on them which unnaturally does away with the literal differences? They were left in the text by a man inspired by God, and for a purpose. Let us recognize that, and deal with all of the verses, all of their variations and all of their implications.

Since the story of the flood is given as one continuous story in our Scriptures, we will most often read it that way. The story was not handed down to us in the form of two parallel stories, but rather different pieces of the two stories were contiguously placed to have us read it as one “chronological” narrative. The differences in the stories have certainly given Scripture commentators much to comment on as they attempted to harmonize the differences in the stories, and these efforts have given many great insights into both the Scriptures and into the nature of God. The same happens if we read the text as two distinct stories which have been woven together. Since the Patristic writers always assumed that every detail of the Bible is important for gaining wisdom and understanding, they might have found the insight of Source Theory to be one more layer of depth to the Scriptures. Reading the story of Noah and the Flood as two distinct stories is really no different than reading the 4 Gospels as a basic telling of the same story from 4 distinct perspectives (as sometimes the details of the Gospel according to the 4 evangelists do not agree).

Generally, when reading Scripture, if you accept it as the inspired word of God, you can have a couple of different approaches when you encounter “inconsistencies” in the text. A) You can accept a notion that the text is inspired and therefore the inconsistencies are apparent but not real. This requires then developing an interpretive method in which you find a way to harmonize the differences – explain them away, spiritualize them, show in some way that they are not in fact inconsistent. The Patristic writers frequently attempted this method as have modern believers who demand that the text be read literally. B) You can also sort out the differences to see if the “inconsistencies” might be explained by there being more than one author/editor/story contributing to the narrative. This is an interpretive method in which you decide not to harmonize the differences, but to accept them as contributing to our understanding of God and His revelation. This method is also frequently used by the Patristic writers (though they never conceived of a different source idea, they did believe that all the differences were placed in the text intentionally by the Holy Spirit and were part of the depth and richness of Scriptures which we are to discover). It is also the method of many modern Biblical scholars. This method tends to assume a non-literal reading of the text and says the importance is not in the literal reading of the text, the importance

lies in the grand revelation which we encounter in the Scriptures. This generally means we are looking for a deeper meaning beyond the “plain” reading of the words. Even when the Patristic writers accepted the Genesis narrative as literally true, they always also and simultaneously believed the text had much more significance than its “plain” meaning. They frequently looked for the not-so-obvious or hidden meaning of the text – and certainly the notion of more than one author remained hidden from them! But they advocated digging deep into the text until all of its meanings were revealed. They always assumed the text had some relationship to and revelation about Christ, and only in Christ would the full meaning of the text be revealed.

Is separating out the received text into two separate stories ever an “Orthodox” way of approaching Scripture? One need only think about the “Composite” Old Testament Paramoia which are read during Vespers on the eve of certain Feasts to realize Orthodoxy engaged in similar Bible editing in its own communal and liturgical vocalized reading of Scriptures. Think also of the Gospel Lesson for the feasts of the Virgin Mary – Luke 10:38-42 is connected to and read uninterruptedly and continuously with 11:27-28 giving the Orthodox listener the impression that those texts flow seamlessly and naturally together whereas in Luke’s Gospel they are not connected at all. The Church thus has on limited occasions selectively chosen and “re-arranged” verses to fit its own purposes.

The use of ideas from Source Theory are offered here only as one additional tool in the study of the inspired Scriptures of God. Please remember even the chapter and verse numbering system in our Bibles is an invention of biblical scholars as those numbers are not in the original text, and yet they do influence how we think about and read the Scriptures. We often read a “chapter” at a time, but that is following an artificial division introduced into the biblical text by scholars. This numbering system also is a potentially good tool for us, but again we have to recognize it is a tool, it isn’t Scripture.

J-source

6:5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. **6** And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. **7** So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

7:1 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. **2** Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; **3** and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth. **4** For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground."

5 And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

P-source

6:9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. **10** And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. **11** Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. **12** And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. **13** And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. **14** Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. **15** This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. **16** Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. **17** For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. **18** But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. **19** And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. **20** Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive. **21** Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them."

22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

J-source

7:6 Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth.

7:7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark, to escape the waters of the flood. **8** Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, **9** two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah,

10 And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

7:12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

7:16 and the LORD shut him in.

7:17 The flood continued forty days upon the earth

7:22 everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. **23** He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth.

Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark.

P-source

7:11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, **14** they and every beast according to its kind, and all the cattle according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every bird of every sort. **15** They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. **16** And they that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him;

7:17 and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.

18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. **19** And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; **20** the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. **21** And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man;

7:24 And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.

8:1 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; **2** the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed,

J-source

8:2 the rain from the heavens was restrained, **3** and the waters receded from the earth continually.

8:6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, **7** and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. **8** Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; **9** but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. **10** He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; **11** and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. **12** Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more.

8:13 and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry.

18 So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. **19** And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.

P-source

8:3 At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; **4** and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ar'arat. **5** And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

8:13 In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth;

8:14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

8:15 Then God said to Noah, **16** "Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. **17** Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh--birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth--that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth."

18 So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. **19** And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.

J-source

8:20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21 And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

22 While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

P-source

9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. **2** The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. **3** Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

4 Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. **5** For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

6 Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. **7** And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it."

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, **9** "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, **10** and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. **11** I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: **13** I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. **14** When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, **15** I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. **16** When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." **17** God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

Genesis Resumed: Genesis 6

6:1 When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, **2** the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose.

...**3*** ...

4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.

***** *(note: Verse 3 will be dealt with on the next page. Verses 1-2 and 4 have a similar theme and so are grouped together)*

“When men began to multiply on the face of the ground...” Although God had commanded the humans at their creation to be fruitful and multiply, throughout the early chapters of Genesis increasing numbers of humans seem to multiply mostly sins and problems.

“...daughters were born...” Daughters and women in general have played a very minor role in the opening chapters of Genesis. Eve was the first human to rebel against God, but the only other women mentioned by name are those in the genealogy of Cain. It does appear that the reference in these chapters to daughters or women in general is a sign of further problems. In most of the genealogy following the descendents of Seth wives are not even generically mentioned; only fathers and sons get mentioned by name. After Eve, the next time a wife is mentioned in the Seth lineage is with Noah and his sons. The next wife actually named will not occur until Sarai, wife of Abraham is mentioned at the end of Genesis 11.

“...sons of God...” It is possible that this section of the story with the references to the sons of God might actually have originated in a pagan source where avatars, “sons of Hercules, and other human offspring of the gods are common themes. Judaism developed its own language and imagery which includes the phrase “son(s) of God”. The inclusion in Genesis of verses 6:1-2 and 4 may have resulted from the Jews adapting some erstwhile pagan stories to their own use. Some interpreters have seen the “sons of god” as a reference to angels or demons intermarrying with humans and producing “divine” offspring. Such an explanation is totally inconsistent with Jewish and Biblical anthropology. First neither angels nor demons have been mentioned in the text. Second, both angels and demons are bodiless powers and would have no way to have sexual intercourse with the humans. Angels in Biblical thinking don’t become human when they sin – that would be more a Platonic or dualistic idea, not a biblical one. No matter what the origins of stories about the “sons of God”, probably the

interpretation of the text which is most consistent with the witness of the rest of Genesis would be that the descendents of Seth (the sons of God) began intermarrying with the daughters of the outcast Cain, something which displeased God.

“...they took to wife such of them as they chose...” The text indicates a disorderly world, with each person doing as they saw fit with no regard for anyone else and especially with no regard for God’s wishes. If God intended an orderly universe with each kind of animal and even each kind of human (descendents of Cain or the Sethites) maintaining separate realms, then the story is showing that the humans continue to push the world toward disorderly chaos by failing to respect the boundaries in creation established by God. The human penchant for disregarding and destroying God’s established boundaries and realms is a major theme of the early chapters of Genesis. In the Flood story God will be described as grief stricken because of this destructiveness of humans.

“...daughters of men...” The earlier genealogies rarely mention daughters (except in the lineage of Cain), here nameless daughters are mentioned, and their role is that of temptresses. Is it the women’s fault that they are good looking? It is not the women who are out of control; they simply are what they are. It is the “sons of God” who are doing whatever they want. Is the text suggesting that lust is uncontrollable in the sons of God? St. Isaac the Syrian believed that lust was the only major sin of these early citizens on earth. Such stories will contribute to the monastic ideal of chastity and celibacy as the means for humans to overcome their own sinfulness. It is desire which gives birth to so many evils, a theme common in ancient Hindu and Buddhist writings as well in which desire destroys the underlying unity of all things and causes the formation of the “self” which is in opposition to all other “selves.”

...“the daughters of men were fair...” The word “fair” in the Septuagint is the same word that is used when God in Genesis 1 saw each day that what he had made was “good.” It also is the same expression that

is used when Eve is tempted by the serpent and she looks at the forbidden fruit and saw that it was “good” (Genesis 3:7). The goodness that God sees in his creation is distorted in the eyes of humans who see goodness and instead of being awed or grateful form lust for the “object.” Instead of moving from created to Creator in their thinking, fallen humans displace the Creator with the created. The created is beautiful and desirable but it no longer lifts human thought to the Creator God who is all but forgotten. In the Septuagint we read: “If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wisdom 13:3-5). The distortion of humans to see things as that which must be possessed rather than that which is appreciated is part of the sinfulness within the human heart. The humans see nothing as God’s gift, and nothing as a sign of God’s presence and favor, but rather like Eve see creation as something to be grasped and claimed for themselves. Humans fail to see themselves as stewards of God’s creation. On the contrary, feeding their selfish sense of entitlement they believe everything is theirs for the taking. As described in the Epistle to the Romans: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather

than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them" (Romans 1:19-32). The result of seeing creation as an end in itself rather than seeing it as a way to know the Creator is all manner of sin.

The Nephilim so closely resemble ancient stories from Greek mythology that one has to suspect that legends of ancient giant like men were accepted by the Jews and eventually made their way into Jewish thinking and scriptures. Many efforts have been made to explain the Nephilim and the men of renown. The main point of the text is the corruption of humanity as it continues its downward slide away from God.

"The mighty men..." In 3 Maccabees 2:3 the Nephilim are referenced as part of the fallen creation. The text argues that even these giants of men were corrupted by the sin of arrogance and pride. "For you, the creator of all things and the governor of all, are a just Ruler, and you judge those who have done anything in insolence and arrogance. You destroyed those who in the past committed injustice, among whom were even giants who trusted in their strength and boldness, whom you destroyed by bringing upon them a boundless flood." Size and strength, which so impress humans, apparently do not impress God who looks for holiness not height in His people.

The inclusion of 6:1-2, 4 in Genesis is a good example of the principle which the Patristic Fathers held to - once a text is recognized as scripture it cannot be rejected, but it must be interpreted. Many people through history have tried to ignore and even eliminate difficult passages from the Bible. We have no authority to remove passages which are hard to understand. But sometimes it will leave us with the realization that there is mystery in scripture, perhaps as some Fathers speculated, put there intentionally, like the Parables of Jesus, to make us hunger for truth, even when the truth seems to escape us.

Is it possible that stories of the "sons of God" mating with human women reflect a human desire to attain immortality? Does the story reflect part of what is wrong with humanity - namely that humans want immortality but do not want to have to be holy to attain it? They want immortality magically bestowed upon them, even if this involves immorality? Humans want an immortality that comes without requiring any self denial. They are afraid of an immortality which says to attain eternal life one must love others by emptying one's self - by taking up the cross and losing one's life. Humans want eternity but without the moral demands of the eternal God and without having to give up anything they also greedily and selfishly want. This desire for immortality without self denial is in the Scriptures part of what is wrong with humanity. Humans are not going to attain immortality through self-centeredness or through lust. Self denial is a normal part of spirituality according to the Scriptures (and according to most of the world's great religions as well).

3 Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."

"My spirit shall not abide in man forever..." In Genesis 2:7 God breathed his breath (or Spirit, the word is the same in Greek or Hebrew) into the nostrils of the man of dust and at that moment the man of dust became a living being (Greek: *psyche*, soul). "Every soul is enlivened by the Holy Spirit," is how we sing it at Matins (2nd Antiphon, 4th Tone). In Biblical anthropology, the soul is the very locus of God's Spirit animating the physical "dust" of humanity's being. The soul is where in each person the divine interfaces with the physical dust. In Genesis 6:3 God gravely pronounces His Spirit will not stay in a human forever. This is not a new revelation, for God had warned that if Adam ate the forbidden fruit he would surely die. Adam did the forbidden act, and death is now part of the human experience. According to the text not only is there death, but also longevity of life is to be restricted. God does not refuse to send His Spirit or breath to enliven humans; He only limits how long His Breath will abide in them. Maybe now God is defining of what death consists for humans. God is not refusing to bring new souls into existence, but is limiting their lifespan. He is not permanently cutting the humans off from Himself, but is certainly limiting the duration of His Spirit abiding in humans. No longer are humans made for eternity but rather have become transitory and mortal beings.

In John's Gospel we encounter the reversal of Genesis 6:3. "And John bore witness, 'I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God'" (John 1:32-34). In Christ God's Spirit once again permanently abides in humanity. In Christ the Spirit doesn't temporarily rest on him but remains in Him. The Spirit remaining on Christ does not alter the fact that Jesus as a human will die. What changes is that death is no longer a permanent state; death cannot sever the the relationship between the human Christ and God His Father. Christ in fact lives forever even through death in which his body remains uncorrupt. This is the defeat of death and is the hope Christ Jesus gives

to all the world. The Holy Spirit's remaining on Christ at His baptism is a sign of humanity's reconciliation with God. The feast of the Baptism of Christ is not only a theophany, but it is also a revelation of humanity – a humanity restored to communion with God. Theologically the Baptism of Christ is a feast of the revelation of the Trinity; personally it is for each of us also the manifestation of what it means to be human.

“...for he is flesh...” These are ominous words in the text. Humans are more than just flesh having been made in God's image and likeness and receiving His Spirit. But, the text is plain, humans are not immortal by nature but belong to that which is “not God.” So we are not merely flesh, and yet we share with all animals that fleshly nature which means we will die and will return to the earth from which we were taken. As it says in the Septuagint's Wisdom of Solomon: “I also am mortal, like all men, a descendant of the first-formed child of earth; and in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh” (7:1). We cannot escape our flesh nor our mortality. Christ however will restore the flesh making it capable of being God-bearing. He will also transform our mortal nature. “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:52-57).

“his days shall be a hundred twenty years.” God's decision to limit the human life span to 120 years is connected to the Fall of humankind. Humans will not live forever. The number 120 however is not meant to be read literally for it is being established as a limit for humans but not as the norm. Noah the next hero of God's story lives to be 950 years old according to the bible, well beyond

the 120 year limit just declared by God. The only person in the bible who lives to be 120 is Moses. “Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deuteronomy 34:7). In the upcoming chapters of Genesis, the claimed length of lives of the people will become progressively shorter suggesting that the Fall of humankind through sin had very detrimental and cumulative effects on the lives of people.

“...a hundred twenty years...” Could the word “year” mean something other to the ancients than it does to us? While this is possible, the word “year” does seem to refer to a twelve lunar month time period so the word is referring to something close to our understanding of a “year.” Because the Bible is a revelation from God it is more likely that the literal reading obscures a deeper message which is the main point of the text. The Bible is a revelation from God and conveys to us God's message in human terms so that we can understand it. The age of the individual characters is not quite as important as the bigger picture – our lives today are cut short by death, which is the direct consequence of human sin. Why do people die? Because people have sinned. This is both the consequence of personal sin but also the common experience of all those who share the same human nature.

Humans have been expelled from Paradise and lost God's favor and the chance for immortality, but now God's Spirit is to be withdrawn from them as well. The very nature of what it is to be human is at stake. What exactly constitutes being human? Can we become “inhuman” or “dehumanized”? Did the loss of God's Spirit change humanity? Chrysostom argues that it is avoiding evil and practicing virtue which makes us human. If we practice self control over our passions we are human, if we have to be controlled by others, we have lost our humanity. Though God gave humans free will, it distresses God to see humans not only choosing to be wicked but rushing to do evil things. It brings grief to God that humans created in His image and likeness lack self control and must be controlled through vigilant police tactics and

punishment. It grieves God that He must impose such things as law, punishments and hell with which to threaten His creatures because humans are often not motivated by love for God or love for their neighbor.

The text suggests there is a growing estrangement between humans and God – the effects of the Fall are both progressive and cumulative in nature; the separation between God and his favored humans is growing ever wider.

5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

The narrator tells us that God sees, but does not tell us how a being with no eyes can see or what He sees. Nevertheless the invisible God who has no eyes has vision, unlike the idols which men make. "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat" (Psalm 115:3-7). The God who has no organs and no limbs is able to do all the things that idols cannot do. Furthermore, God's sight is not value neutral. God sees things as good (Genesis 1) and as evil (6:5). God does not merely observe, He evaluates and judges. The God who has no mouth is able to speak and to convey His judgment. We do not know how exactly the people of God "heard" the Lord speak, but for us we can hear God's voice through the revelation recorded in Scripture. St. John Chrysostom says, "The mouths of the inspired authors are the mouth of God, after all, such a mouth would say nothing idly – so let us not be idle in our listening, either." (Notice: for Chrysostom the Word of God is first listened to, it is not first and foremost a written word).

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth..." In Genesis 1, each day God saw that the creation was good, and creation with humanity was very good. In Genesis 2 God noted that man's being alone was "not good." In Genesis 6 for the first time God sees evil in His creation. Now God sees how wicked His humans can be. There exists in the Bible and in traditions based on the Bible an idea that there are beings (rebellious angels) who are endeavoring to turn God against His favored human creatures. In the book of Job, Satan as the prosecuting attorney endeavors to prove to God that the Humans He loves are in fact no good at all. God however counters Satan by showcasing His servant as proof that humans are capable of being good. In the Quran the angels at creation question God's wisdom in bestowing so much trust and power in humans when God knows these humans will commit murder and other sins. Despite God seeing our intentional wickedness, He does

not completely reject His creation: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth" This section began with verse 6:1 "When men began to multiply on the face of the ground..." In the beginning of the world God did bless humanity and encourage them to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). Humans now are apparently filling the earth... with evil! God's reaction to this development does suggest He had high hopes for his free willed humans, but those hopes have been dashed to His divine disappointment. God is portrayed as wrestling within Himself about the very meaning of creation and having creatures with free will. He is grieved by what His creatures have become. Yet knowing all of this, He doesn't create a different set of creatures to replace or displace the fallen humans, but continues to work with those He has already made. He doesn't choose to shelve the human project or abandon it. God's steadfast love for His creation is unalterable despite the grief caused to Him by His creation. He endeavors to deal with, purify, or transform humans within the limits and means allotted him by physical creation. But God does not abandon hope and holds to the smallest shred of evidence that there is goodness in humanity, even if it is found in only one man.

The evil of humanity comes from the heart – it is not attributed to Satan or some outside source. The humans are not forced or predetermined toward this evil, but rather they willfully conceive it in imagination of their own hearts. As Christ taught, "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man" (Mark 7:20-23). "Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men and needed no

one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man" (John 2:25). St. Augustine pondered how humans who were created as very good by a good God could turn out to always choose wickedness. This troubled him greatly. He concluded that there must be some external influence on the human which lures the human into evil. Augustine's writings will contribute to an increase in blaming Satan for every wrong thing people do. Augustine could not believe that God's creatures on their own would choose evil, yet Jesus Himself seemed to have a clear belief as is also expressed in Genesis that wickedness resides in the imagination of the human heart.

"...every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.." While God sees the evil imagination of the human heart, He deals with it in the most unexpected way. As the Theotokos Mary sings in her post-conception Magnificat, "He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts..." Humans can continue to imagine evil, God incarnates the good.

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great ...that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually..." Despite God's observation of the tendency toward wickedness of human, Judaism did not embrace any ideas of predestination for fallen humanity. Humans do evil because they choose to not because they have no ability to resist it. Free will is strongly defended by the Eastern Patristic writers and is found in Sirach 15:14-20: "It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. ... He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given anyone permission to sin."

Though in the text God sees the wickedness of man, the evil humans were doing is not spelled out. What exactly was the

wickedness that causes God to so harshly judge the world He had made? St. Isaac the Syrian notes that at this point in the text there has not been any mention of war or greed or idolatry or sorcery. He proposes that the only sin specified in the text is that of sexual lust. In Psalm 94, there is a lament about the wicked which might give us some sense as to just what evil humanity was engaged in that caused God to be distraught and brought the judgment of God upon them: "O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? They pour out their arrogant words, they boast, all the evildoers. They crush thy people, O LORD, and afflict thy heritage. They slay the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive" (94:3-7)

The heart. In the text both God and humans have a heart; perhaps this is even the very manner in which humans are said to be in God's image. The heart in Genesis is not so much the physical organ for pumping blood as it is the center of intellect and emotion. Genesis says blood is the life of the animal, but the inner life, the self, is centered in the heart. The heart in this sense is being used metaphorically or figuratively more than as a body organ. God's heart (His inner self) is grieved by the evil He sees in His created humans. The grief and pain in God's heart is contrasted in the text with the wickedness which is in the heart of humans. God's heart is filled with love and thus subject to grief. The human heart is closed by the selfish wickedness in it.

6 And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. **7** So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

"it grieved him to his heart." He who loves much suffers much or so one adage says. God's grieving heart is being contrasted with the human heart in the previous verse, "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). God's thoughts are on grief, human thoughts on how to do evil. The extent of the fall is obvious – for now in what way is the human in God's image and likeness? Certainly the human heart has become 'unlike' God's. Thus says the Lord "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

"...it grieved him to his heart..." A most profound theological thought: the sins of humans touch the very heart of God! We often excuse our sinful behavior by saying, "It's between me and God." This may be true, but the text also points out that our sins cause God pain and grief! God is not merely a transcendent being untouched by His creation. He is a very immanent and loving Creator whose inner being is touched and affected by what we, His creatures, do. The incarnation does not result from God's distance from us, but rather from His connectedness to us – from the fact that He is touched by our sin. His response to this pain is to take on Himself our sin by assuming our flesh. St. John the Baptist "saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29).

"So the LORD said,..." To whom is God speaking? To whom does God share His sorrow and grief? In Christianity this is another sign of the existence of the Three Persons of the Trinity. God is not a soliloquist; for after all this is all about revelation! The thoughts of God are shared by the Three Persons of the Trinity and revealed to those inspired by God to record His thoughts in the Scriptures. We do not

know all that God thinks, but we do need to know all that He thinks to reveal!

What kind of God do we worship? Not only One who is creator and judge, but also the God of love who grieves in His heart when humans sin. He is a God of compassion and feeling. The image of the angry God who judges the ungodly which some like to preach, may misrepresent God because they ignore the foundational thoughts in God's heart: love and painful sorrow. When we fail to understand the compassionate nature of the God who is love, we reduce God in rationalistic terms to a God who is logic. Genesis reminds us that God is not just mind, He also experiences life deeply through His heart. We would do well to remember the words of God to Job's totally rational interlocutors: "After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eli'phaz the Te'manite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7-8)

God who saw the goodness in humanity and creation in the beginning, now regrets what He sees on earth. What had God intended for humans? What went wrong? Had God not foreseen this turn of events? Prior to this the only time God saw that His creation was not good was when He recognized the loneliness of the first human. But at that time God formed the plan to create another human who would be able to procreate with the first man. Now God sees way beyond the world being imperfect to recognizing the evil in humanity.

St. Augustine not willing to concede that humans were created with "a defect" (or that the perfect God would create something defective), speculated that Satan has such a powerful influence over humans that humans cannot choose the good without the help of God. He did believe humans had free will but he concluded that they were so

influenced by Satan that they could only freely choose evil. Humans in his thinking no longer were capable of choosing the good without God's grace. He formulated his ideas on predestination, a speculation that actually was rejected by the Church in the Christian West in his own day. The later Medieval Roman Church will embrace his ideas despite their having been rejected by the early Church. The radical reformers such as the 16th Century's John Calvin took these predestination ideas to the extreme and declared humans as incapable of any free choice with lives totally pre-determined by God. Such ideas of total predestination were never embraced by Biblical Judaism nor by early Christianity or even by later Orthodoxy which have always upheld human free will and responsibility.

Such pessimistic ideas about humanity certainly are challenged by many sayings in the Scriptures themselves. Such as, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7) or First Peter's more cautionary comment, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Peter 5:8-9). The New Testament exhorts us to resist Satan, not fear him; and certainly the New Testament authors seem to assume we can resist the Evil One. Satan, according to our pre-baptismal exorcism does not even have power over swine. We renounce him in the exorcism and spit on him – we claim to not only resist him, but to despise him, and to trample him beneath our feet. Evil is pervasive in the fallen world, but its powers are limited. We have the full power from God to resist evil and to overcome it.

The story of the flood sets another Old Testament theme: that of a divine judgment. The forces at work in the world may appear to be capricious, meaningless and random, but the Scripture puts the otherwise irresponsible forces under the control of the Creator God who purposefully uses these forces to accomplish His judgments.

God's sorrow at having made the humans should be as shocking to us as it was to Him. But what is more amazing is God's plan for salvation requires His Son to become flesh – to become fully human. Considering God's assessment of humanity, this is a most amazing plan of all, and certainly was not expected by the people of God, though a few prophets caught a glimpse of this plan of God. Despite its wickedness humanity is not totally depraved but is totally savable. What humility and love on God's part to embrace such humanity - God became man, became fully human taking on a human heart (whose inclination to evil so grieved the Lord) and all the temptation to sin. In some ways more amazing than God's becoming human in the incarnation of Christ is the Virgin Mary, a woman whom God realizes is capable of conceiving divinity in her womb and of giving humanity to His Divine Son. Mary, the Theotokos, is totally of the same fallen human nature, heart and genes as the rest of humanity (whose wicked hearts so grieve God!). Yet she is not corrupted by such wickedness. She is chosen to do what angels, the cherubim and seraphim and heaven itself cannot do – unite God to humanity.

God's plan for dealing with the wickedness of humanity involves neither an eternal hell of punishment nor totally annihilation (returning the cosmos back to the nothingness out of which He created it). God deigns to drown the wicked humans along with the rest of His creation. God originally saw creation as all good (Genesis 1), but in the Genesis 2 second story of creation God noticed a flaw in His creation – the loneliness of man. And God decided it was not good for man to be alone. So He made all of the creatures of the world for the benefit of man, culminating in the creation of woman and the chance for humanity to procreate. Now, in Genesis 5 the Creator God is sorrowful as He looks at what humans have become. The Lord does not turn the clock back and try again. (Is it possible that once His creation has been called into being, once time and space exist and are blessed by God that He will not return them to nothingness?) The God of existence, the God of love, the God who is creator "cannot" undo what He is, nor is He

to will creation out of existence. He who calls "not God" (= creation, that which is not God) into existence does not permit non-existence to replace His creation, for if that happened would He as Love, as Creator, as Life-giver cease to be Himself? So God deals with His creation, and He doesn't send it all to eternal punishment or banish humanity from His presence. Rather the story of the flood is going to be one of a great cleansing of creation, a washing away of the sins of the world, a death which provides for a resurrection, a flood which allows for the salvation of the faithful remnant so that life can be renewed and permitted to continue. The flood will prefigure the rescue of the Hebrew race through the Red Sea, and it will prefigure the role of the Church which too is an ark of salvation in a world awash in sin. The story of the flood is a symbolic story of who God is – not only Creator, but Savior. God triumphs over death which merely destroys human life, and He uses death as the way to cleanse the world of sin. He shows that though He is a God of justice and judgment, His wrath is not eternal, though His love is. "For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

Punishment and death do not destroy the world, but they cleanse it in order to allow it to be renewed, to attain holiness. Punishment is not permanent, but a necessary temporal tool to end wickedness and to bring humans into self control by learning that there are true limits to human endeavors. Humans are not eternal, not divine, not sinless, not perfect, but they are perfectible, forgivable, deify-able. The story of the flood is a revelation about God and His dealing with fallen sinful creatures. God is love (1 John 4:8), and as such God deals with His rebellious, fallen creatures in love. His goal is not to punish them eternally, but to bring them to repentance. His goal is not to wipe them out of existence, but invite them to change in order to embrace His forgiveness.

When God looks down upon the earth again after the deluge He still sees the same wickedness and evil coming from the heart

of all people (Genesis 8:21), but as He promises He will not destroy all flesh but instead will become incarnate in it.

8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. **9** These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. **10** And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Noah finds favor – not because he is “manly” or macho or heroic, but because he is righteous/godly. This alone is what God values and looks for in a human. Noah is the prototype of the just man who escapes the punishment of God. Noah escapes the ruin that the wicked world must suffer because of God’s judgment. “...if (God) did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment...” (2 Peter 2:5,9). We get here a sense of what Peter got out of the flood story – it is not mostly about ancient history. The lesson of the flood story is to teach us about how God acts, especially in relationship to a righteous remnant in a sinful world. The moral of the story is God knows how to rescue the godly person and knows to punish the sinner.

Noah is an example to all believers that it is possible to live a godly life even in a time when godliness is otherwise absent from the world. God is still able to see something good in His creation – and it is in a human being! Today we often look for good and beauty in nature, not in our fellow humans. God however has His eyes upon the righteous. God can be pleased with a human; He was with Noah and can be with us too!

God seems concerned to find some good in His creation and to be able to maintain some continuity with the original creation rather than to simply obliterate the old creation and begin a totally new one. It is the righteousness of but one man that stops God from annihilating the earth. In God’s eyes the worth of one righteous person is more than the all the rest of humanity which deserves obliteration. A similar idea is presented in Genesis 18 when Abraham continually pleads to God to spare the city of Sodom from destruction even for the sake of five righteous ones. God is willing to show mercy if even one righteous person is in the mix, which is why Orthodoxy so often invokes the prayers of the saints on our behalf – perhaps God will be merciful to us for the sake of His saints.

St. Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-16 instruction which could easily have been based on the story of Noah, the righteous man in a perverse generation: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life...” Faithfulness to God will not be accomplished by “keeping up with the Joneses” nor by following the crowd or doing what everyone else is doing. We are however not just to stand out or stand apart to condemn the world, to the contrary we are to be a light to the world showing them the way to the Kingdom.

“Noah was a righteous man” In the desert fathers, Abba Poemen upholds Noah as a model of poverty, probably because he saw Noah willing to give up all his possessions to do the LORD’s will. Noah did not try to save or preserve his wealth or belongings but rather did as the LORD commanded, leaving everything behind in order to save his family and himself.

“Noah walked with God” Like Enoch in 5:22, Noah too walks with God. These are the only 2 personages in the Bible who are credited with walking with God. However, in Genesis 18:16-33, Abraham walks with his three mysterious visitors and talks with the Lord while walking, giving us an idea about what a walk with God consists and what one converses with God about when walking with Him. The implication is clear that those who walk with God are viewed as righteous, though the text doesn’t indicate whether the walk or the righteousness comes first.

“Noah walked with God” Noah is described as being righteous in his generation – there were perhaps many paths he could have walked and many companions he could have chosen. He chose to walk with God. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers” (Psalm 1:1). With whom do we prefer to travel? What path do we chose and which

destination? Noah seemed willing to take any path as long as it was with God. What would it mean for us if we were to make that choice?

“Noah, as He saw your nobility, the purity of your character and perfection in all things, God manifested you openly as the founder of the second world. You preserved for it the seed of every kind, as He Himself decreed, from the overwhelming flood.” (From the Canon of the Holy Forefathers of Christ)

Noah, the man to whom God spoke, is left speechless in the story. There is no record of what if anything Noah may have said to God. There is no record of any dialogue between God and Noah – all we have is several comments from God to Noah. Is Noah’s righteousness purely that he was obedient - God said it, Noah believed it, that settled it? The very first words Noah will speak, and his only words recorded in the scriptures are his curse of his grandson Canaan in Genesis 9:25.

“Noah had three sons...” He also had a wife, yet she is not even given honorable mention at this point in the story. Her name is never mentioned. These early chapters of Genesis do not place a strong emphasis on family or marital life and values in a way modern Christians might prefer. Whatever role the husband and wife have with each other or whatever role the parents are to play in the lives of their children is not discussed. Fathers and sons are listed without mentioning wives or mothers, though the existence of women is implicit in the text – it is not explicit. The focus on the father-son relationship is suggestive that a very patriarchal tradition (tradition means a handing on of values and wisdom) is the normative way for families to operate. The text offers us little insight into or from family life among these fathers of our faith.

Noah’s sons are not credited with being righteous as Noah is, however they will benefit from the righteousness of their father as God will invite them to enter the ark of salvation.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.

12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

God had commanded the humans to fill the earth, and they have filled it with violence. And God sees this and apparently cannot or will not take his sight off of what He sees. Though we often pray that God will not turn away His face from his people (Psalm 132:10), and we fear God's hiding his face from us, when it comes to sin, certainly our prayers are that God not remember them and rather that He cover them over in His mercy. But in this text in Genesis God's vision is squarely fixed on human corruption. Can He still see His creation or does He now only see corruption? Again and again in verses :11-12 the text mentions God seeing the "corruptedness" of the earth (Not unlike Americans on 9/11 watching over and over the video showing the jetliners crashing in the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon!) God sees the sin of His people but He still at times expresses the hope that "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). God's hope is that we can see our sin and turn away from it to seek the face of God. In our Genesis text the humans apparently are not as offended by their vileness and violence as is God.

"the earth was corrupt in God's sight... it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth." Three times the text specifically mentions the corruption of the earth. In the Septuagint, the Greek word for corrupt is the same word that God uses in 6:13 for destroy, "I will destroy them with the earth." The implication seems to be that as God sees it the humans have destroyed (corrupted) the earth; He now is going to finish the destruction which the humans began. God is simply going to bring to completion what the humans have started – the destruction of the earth. The God, who cannot be seen, can see. God has no eyes as He is not a physical being, so we cannot know how God sees, nor exactly what He sees. We hear that God "sees" and project onto that word our ideas of what seeing means. But God does not see as we do, His vision is not limited by physical eyes and sight. How and what He sees remains a mystery to us. Can God see what we see, since He has no eyes? Again, we can only

guess. In Genesis 1 God was able to see goodness when nothing but light existed. He was able to see goodness when nothing but inanimate sea and earth existed. God's vision enables Him to see good in inanimate objects. We are not able to see what He sees, nor do we see as He sees since our sight is limited to our eyes. Sadly there came a time when God could no longer see good on earth.

"And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt..." In the seven days of creation described poetically in Genesis 1, seven times the narration says that God saw what He had created and it was good. When God called into being that which is "not God" and fashioned humans both male and female (Genesis 1), He somehow made "not God" both in His image and in relationship to Himself who is God. But now as God looks upon His "not God" creation, He is unable to recognize His image and likeness. That which was created, the "not God" is no longer looking good to its Creator. "Not God" has become antithetical to God and is at enmity with God. God had originally seen that His "not God" was very good (1:31) but now apparently cannot see any good in it for it has all become corrupt/destroyed. However, the God who is love is not going to abandon His fallen "not God" creation. For we know that this story is part of and moving towards God becoming "not God" in order to redeem and renew and restore "not God" to its original goodness, and then to move it beyond that goodness to a totally new oneness with God. In fact, mysteriously in God's seeing the corruption of earth and the wickedness of humans is the very cause of God's decision to have the Word of God become flesh. The corruption of the flesh will prompt the God who is love to unite Himself to the corrupted flesh to save it rather than destroy it. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17).

Noah is different from other humans: he doesn't need threats of punishment, the flood or hell to make him obey God. Noah is motivated by love for God – and Noah is a rare human being! Apparently nothing was able to make Noah turn away from God.

Noah's righteousness is contrasted with the wickedness of the rest of humanity. Noah wasn't blameless in God's eyes because he lived in a time in which it was easy to be godly. The story precisely contrasts Noah to the world around him. The story is not offering some ideal golden age in which humans knew how to behave. Noah's world like the modern world is corrupt and filled with violence. Yet despite what the wickedness of the world, Noah found it in himself to be godly and righteous. Noah turns out to be a model for all believers in any generation. Despite the alleged corruption of everyone else in the world, one person can still live righteously, a good lesson for us. We don't have to just live up to the standards of everyone else, we can choose to follow God and to seek God's favor.

Note the wickedness of humans is not attributed to Satan – he is not even mentioned in the mess. Humans are quite capable of evil and cannot blame the devil for their own wickedness.

In the creation account of Genesis 1, God imposes increasing order on the chaotic and formless cosmos. The suggestion of the text is that by the corruption on earth God's good order is both threatened and being undone. God decides He must once again step in and deal with his rebellious humans to restore good order.

"...for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth." By declaring that "all flesh" had corrupted its way, the text implies it is not only humans who are corrupt/violent, but rather that all living animals (everything that has flesh) including the humans have become corrupt. Can animals sin? Genesis is not limiting itself to looking at conscious choices of evil. What has happened is that all flesh has become "destroyed" – the original purpose of all creatures that bear flesh has become so distorted as to no longer be recognizable to God. The cause of the flood is not merely the original sin of Adam and Eve. What God sees is a corruption of the very nature of the things He has created. And this corruption/destruction is not limited to our ideas of conscious and willful sinning. The

world is no longer fulfilling the original intentions of the Creator. This is a “bad to the bone” ontology. Created things do not have to willfully sin, they obviously can become corrupted, distorted, and destroyed in their very being so as to be unrecognizable to their Creator. It is no wonder that God is sick in His heart. It isn’t simply the rational human beings who are using free will for evil. All flesh has become corrupted. Genesis is presenting the starkest of images. God can see in Noah righteousness – since no other being besides humans have free will, no other fleshly creature has the possibility of being redeemable, or of repenting, or of asking forgiveness. The Genesis story is a story of God’s recreating His world. God saves the one human in whom He still sees righteousness (goodness?). Did God imagine that perhaps Noah’s heart was not tainted as is the rest of humanity’s heart with evil? Perhaps God hopes Noah can somehow be the seminal human of the new creation who will pass along righteousness to his descendents and thus to the entire human race after the flood. If this was the first effort at genetically modifying humans, it will not accomplish the desired results, to God’s total regret. Noah is the one being from whom God hopes to be able to recreate the world in which creatures of flesh can repent of their wickedness and try again (for the first time?) to follow God’s way. The rest of the animal kingdom is not capable of repentance or of cleansing the world of the destruction that has distorted every living being. Only humans with a heart can repent of wickedness, can decide to choose something other than corruption, have the rational ability to recognize wickedness and triumph over it. The other creatures lack that dominion over the flesh, over destruction, that humans have been given. The story of the flood is not just about humans willfully sinning, it is about the corruption of the created order – the malformation, the deformity, and the disfigurement of all flesh. It is as if evil was winning in the world and completely taking over and dominating God’s good creation. God steps in to put a stop to this. God may have brought order to the abyss and the waters in Genesis 1, but a malevolent force was resisting what had happened to the abyss and was now at work in all flesh (Very

much like Psalm 91:5-6’s the terror of the night, the pestilence that stalks in darkness, and the destruction that wastes at noonday). This evil chaos God will endeavor to destroy in the flood with the intention of restoring order to His creation. The story is highly symbolic. For Christians it speaks of the waters of baptism – no longer a cataclysmic force of destruction but now empowered by God with order and reason to drown the sin but to save the sinner. This is certainly why St. Peter saw baptism as corresponding to the flood, and why the flood is mentioned in the baptismal service. But now the waters of baptism save not just seven people in the ark while destroying thousands, but rather save thousands and bring them into the ark – the Church. It is also why in the Divine Liturgy when the celebrant lifts up the gifts at the anaphora he proclaims, “On behalf of all (things) and for all (things).” All of creation is in need of God’s transforming salvation, not just humans. All things in heaven and earth need to be restored to their original beauty undistorted by the destruction of evil forces. We need to be saved not only from bad choices but even from all irrational wickedness and evil. As salvation is defined in Colossians 1:13-14, God “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Salvation is not just a matter of dealing with human sins and misdeeds; it involves God asserting Lordship over every force and power even the malevolent ones.

“Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he sent forth his word, and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men! And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!” (Psalm 107:17-22)

13 And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. **15** This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. **16** Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.

The Righteous man Noah learns about God and about righteousness not by reading any book, but by listening to the voice of God (for the Scriptures had not been written in Noah's day, but are put to writing only much later – if we follow the Bible's telling, in the time of Moses). This God who speaks remains a mystery, but His Word and voice are revealed to Noah. The God who remains transcendent speaks so that the righteous man can hear His Word. This is how God first revealed Himself in Genesis 1:3 – through His voiced Word. Listening to God's Word, not reading it, was the initial and primary way to come to know God and God's will for His chosen people. St. Isaac the Syrian (d. 700) wrote: "As long as our nature possessed a pure heart, God had no need to speak to us through the composition of writings, but He spoke to us as He did to Noah, Abraham, Job and Moses without the intermediary of a book. But because our nature fell into an abyss of evils, God spoke with us through writings on tablets of stone, a sign of the hardness of our hearts." St. Isaac suggests that the reason we have Scriptures is because of sin and our hearts hardening against God. Scripture was not the way God wanted to convey His Word to us, but to what He resorted when our hearts hardened against Him. In the fullness of time God acted for our salvation - the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The Word did not become a book. The book only witnesses to the Word.

In the story, God tells Noah to build an ark, which is the first time the word "ark" appears in the text. It is something of a mystery as to how Noah would have understood God if in fact God was speaking about something Noah had never encountered. In the story of Adam naming the animals (Genesis 2), we are not told how Adam created the names. How did he make up the animal's names? How many words did he even know? How would these names have formed in his mind? Did the author of the text assume that language and words are innate – from the time we are born our brains have full vocabularies and Adam just drew from this God-given inborn knowledge? Or did he assume that somehow Adam seeing things for the first time had new names pop into his brain? Genesis is giving us a glimpse into how the

ancients understood the mind or conceived the formation of language. And in the story of the ark as well as in Adam's naming of the animals, the Bible presupposes that the mind has all it needs to form new words – it doesn't need the help or influence of ancestors, society, or even a revelation from God.

When the invisible God speaks to Noah, somehow he "hears" the voice even though there is no one there speaking to him. How does Noah conclude "this is God speaking to me?" If the "voice" simply is in his head (there is no form to see outside of himself), how does Noah determine the source of the voice? At least when St. Paul heard Christ speak to him, he asked, "who are you, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). Noah never asks who is speaking to him, he simply obeys. This invisible God speaks to Noah about something which Noah did not know – an ark. So how did an image form in his brain? How did He know what he was to build? The mystery of the relationship of the mind to the brain is much like the mystery of the soul to the body, and of God to man.

"God said to Noah, 'I have determined to...'" The Prophet Amos tells us, "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (3:7). God reveals His intention and plan to His servant Noah. The flood is not going to come upon the entire earth unannounced. The very purpose of the flood is to reveal God and His holy will, not merely to punish or destroy. God is not capricious, but gracious. The Wisdom of Solomon declares this truth about God: "Do not invite death by the error of your life, nor bring on destruction by the works of your hands; because God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal. But ungodly men by their words and deeds summoned death..." (Wisdom 1:12-16). Clearly in Wisdom bringing about a flood which destroys all life goes against the very nature of God and His creation. The flood story is

not portraying a natural disaster but truly a unnatural act of a heartsick Creator.

God speaks to Noah, and despite Comedian Bill Cosby's retelling of the story, Noah never speaks to God or asks a question. Noah listens and Noah obeys, but He never addresses God. In fact no word of his is recorded until after the flood. Noah is a man of few words but great action.

"...for the earth is filled with violence through them..." God commanded the humans to fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1), and the humans have filled the earth with violence and destruction.

"Make yourself an ark..." God tells Noah to make himself an ark. God doesn't offer to build the ark for Noah. This is an important spiritual lesson for all of us in the Church. God tells us make ourselves an ark of salvation – the Church – God doesn't offer to do our work for us. He doesn't do the work that humans can do. He expects us to do the work we are capable of doing.

"Make yourself an ark..." The story presents us with some information with significant gaps in explanations. God commands Noah to build an ark, and Bill Cosby has Noah asking, "Lord, what's an ark?" Good question. Is Noah is to understand that this ark is to be seaworthy? He is only told that God has determined to destroy the earth, and he is commanded by God to build an ark. The word "ark" as scholars note simply means a box or coffin. But this is no simple ark, it is massive – 450 feet long, and 75 feet wide. Which raises other interesting questions – Genesis has been devoid of any mention of any tools, let alone of engineering or architecture. How would Noah know what the ark is, let alone how to build it? Was he to be the ingenious inventor of engineering and architecture and shipbuilding in addition to all the tools and simple machines needed to do the building? He is not commanded to have anyone help him build the ark, and the story presents him as doing it himself. Since not even one story buildings have been mentioned in Genesis, how was he to know how to build a three story, 45 foot tall box? He would have had to invent and design all his own tools in

addition to the engineering to accomplish the task. Fortunately the story is going to give him 100 years to complete the project.

If we are to assume that Noah understood the ark to be a seafaring vessel, this would be the first mention of a boat in Genesis. Were there other seafarers? If there were, why when the flood came couldn't they simply get into their own boats and try to weather the storm? Were there no other boats on which others could have escaped the devastation of the flood? The ark is not a ship, it has no stern and no way to steer it. It is a box to protect those inside it from the storm, but leaves those inside completely at the mercy of the elements, and of God.

"...gopher wood..." The details of the ark are noteworthy as they contrast with the relatively little detailed information that is generally offered in Genesis. Gopher wood is mentioned only here in the Bible and is otherwise an unknown wood.

Though Noah is made aware of God's plan, Noah does not intercede on behalf of creation to beg mercy from God. Noah is obedient to God's will but apparently does not believe his intercession would make a difference or doesn't believe his role is to intercede for creation. Noah also does not ask his fellow humans to mend their way in hope that God's judgment can be changed. He neither preaches nor prophesies. In a wicked generation Noah is a model of steadfast righteousness where righteousness means obedience. He is not, however, commanded to warn his fellow earthlings about the impending disaster nor to reveal God's displeasure. He makes no call to repentance to the rest of humankind; in fact he shows no particular concern for the fate of his fellow humans.

"...filled with violence..." The text does not list any other sins or evils of humankind. Violence seems to be the wickedness which so upsets God.

"For if God ... did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly... then the Lord knows how to

rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (2 Peter 2:5-10). The New Testament uses the Noah story as a prophetic warning of God's impending judgment of sinners and salvation for His saints.

17 For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die.

18 But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

In the ancient Mideast cultures, there were many stories of a catastrophic flood which covered the entire world. Some of these other non-biblical stories are considered by scholars to be even older than the biblical story. It appears that the biblical story may have adapted some information from these other stories. For some believers the existence of these other stories might help confirm the truthfulness of the ancient belief in such a flood – it is widely written about in the ancient world. For others, the existence of these stories might appear to challenge the notion that the Bible alone has such a revelation. But the existence of other non-biblical flood stories does not in any way disprove that the biblical authors were inspired by God to include a story of a catastrophic flood in the Scriptures of Jews and Christians. The story of a catastrophic flood is not unique to the Bible, though the telling of the story is made to conform to the singularly monotheistic theology of Judaism (which does make it different from the other ancient flood stories). One such ancient flood story which can be readily found by modern readers is in the ancient Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. There are some close parallels between the biblical story and these other stories, and because the other stories are considered older than the biblical version it is assumed by scholars today that in fact the ancient biblical writers borrowed some information from these stories and adapted them for Jewish purposes and Jewish theology.

“...a flood...” A good question is why a flood? If God was determined to wipe out human wickedness why did He choose a flood which destroys everything in its path, not just the wicked? Why didn't God send a plague or virus to wipe out humanity – a “smart” bomb as it were - or a precision killer such as the angel of death that would have spared the rest of creation? We may never know exactly why this method was chosen, but we can speculate on a few things. The ancient idea of justice requires a punishment for the offenders that matches the dignity of the offended. In as much as the universal Creator had been offended by sin, a universal punishment is needed to restore the sense of justice in the cosmos. So a destructive catastrophe that affects the entire earth would be seen as an

appropriate way to re-establish harmony, order and justice in the universe. The all-powerful Creator who has established order out of the chaos of the primordial abyss and brought the earth and humans into existence simply stops imposing His order on the world, and destructive chaos results. It is this cosmic act by God – withdrawing His hand which was keeping the chaos at bay – which cleanses the earth, destroys the nihilistic wickedness of an out of control humanity, and makes possible peace, order and justice in the world again. The Wisdom of Solomon offers us this: “For your all-powerful hand, which created the world out of formless matter, did not lack the means to send upon them a multitude of bears, or bold lions, or newly created unknown beasts full of rage, or such as breathe out fiery breath, or belch forth a thick pall of smoke, or flash terrible sparks from their eyes; not only could their damage exterminate men, but the mere sight of them could kill by fright. Even apart from these, men could fall at a single breath when pursued by justice and scattered by the breath of your power. But you arranged all things by measure and number and weight. For it is always in your power to show great strength, and who can withstand the might of your arm? Because the whole world before you is like a speck that tips the scales, and like a drop of morning dew that falls upon the ground. But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook men's sins, that they may repent. For you love all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which you hast made, for you would not have made anything if you hated it. How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord who loves the living” (Wisdom 11:17-26).

In the New Testament, St. Peter uses the story of the flood and Noah's ark as a prototypical story proving God does separate the good from the wicked, saving the good from a world awash in sin, and punishing the wicked for the sinfulness. “For if God ... did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ... then the Lord knows how to rescue the

godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority” (2 Peter 2:4,5,9-10) . For St. Peter the story of the flood is not as important as a record of past history, its full meaning is found in God's Judgment Day at the end of the world.

“a flood of waters upon the earth...” God does not threaten the earth and its people with total annihilation – a return to absolute nothingness – rather God threatens the world with a return to chaos, the waters returning to the cover the earth and to bring an end to the order He had willed for creation. And He promises an ark of salvation for the faithful, righteous remnant. He is destroying wickedness in order to protect and preserve His chosen ones.

The ark. In Wisdom 10:4, it is Wisdom herself who guides Noah to build the ark. “When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood.” The comparison of the ark to a piece of wood will also connect it to the wood of the Lord's Cross in Christian poetic imagery.

“...destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die.” Everything may be an exaggeration for later fish and sea animals do not seem to be included in the list of all that dies. Perhaps the ancients did not think of fish/sea creatures as having the breath of life since they lived under water. St. Basil the Great noted that “A fish does not resist God's law, and we men cannot endure His precepts of salvation! Do not despise fish because they are dumb and quite unreasoning; rather, fear, lest, in your resistance to the disposition of the Creator, you have even less reason than they.”

The ark. St. Symeon the New Theologian interprets the ark using an **allegorical** typology, as a way for us to understand the New Testament. “Again, the ark was a type of the Theotokos and Noah of Christ and the men with Noah were a first-fruit of the portion of the Jews, of those who would believe in Christ, while the wild beasts ... constituted a type of the gentiles.” St.

Symeon tempers the analogy a bit noting that the ark saved those who were in it, while Christ saved both his ark (Mary) and all the world from the flood of sin.

In the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, Noah is upheld as a man of faith – he begins building the ark one hundred years before the flood comes. But Hebrews also uses the story to contrast Noah with the wicked people who no longer believed in God. Noah alone may have kept faith in God, but by remaining faithful to the Lord he was also calling into judgment all who had forgotten God. There was no excuse for their forgetting God – Noah was able to remember and so should have they. “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith” (Hebrews 11:7).

Covenant. This is the first time the word covenant is used in the Bible. A covenant is an agreement “legally” binding two parties together. God is promising to bind Himself to a particular people on earth - not necessarily to all people but perhaps to all people through this chosen people.

God envisions the flood waters cleansing the earth of wickedness. But the only way to cleanse His creation of evil by this method is to drown all the people and all of the animals and plants. None of this changes the human heart, where evil comes from. It only destroys those who are evil. It is God who will Himself have a change of heart by the end of this flood story and promises Himself never to destroy the world again because of human wickedness. Even if He cannot change the heart of humans, God is moved to change His own heart. (The heart in biblical imagery doesn't often refer to the physical organ used to pump blood. Rather it is the center in a being for not only emotions but also for thinking. It is the inner self of a being. God has a heart according to Genesis and because we do too, this may be one way that we are in His image and likeness). What God will do however is revealed in the Gospel. God will unite Himself to humanity in the incarnate Christ

in order to heal and restore fallen humanity. He will send His Holy Spirit upon humans after the death and resurrection of His Son. God's plan for the world is not to destroy the world but to save it by transfiguring and transforming it. “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). And miraculously, God will use water to wipe away sin – the water of baptism which drowns the sin but saves the sinner unlike the flood waters of Noah's day. As the Lord phrased it, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

“But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark...” Though we think about the flood story mostly in terms of its destruction of all flesh, the story is in the eyes of St. Peter (2 Peter 2) mostly about God saving His chosen people. The story shows that God knows how to rescue the godly no matter how little good can be found in humanity. The mention of covenant at this point in the narrative also is a very strong message of hope: whatever is about to happen, whatever destruction is going to occur, God obviously intends to have an on-going and continuous relationship with humanity. There is a future, even though it is going to be at the very distant other side of after the flood. But God is telling Noah and family not to despair. God is painting a very bleak picture about the world, but in the midst of His judgment there is hope for that faithful remnant.

“...you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.” The order of the list of the person to be saved by God is interesting - the sons rank ahead of their mother. The Commandment to honor one's mother and father has not yet been issued to this obviously male dominated culture. God tells Noah that his wife and his sons' wives are also to enter the ark. One wonders if God had not commanded the inclusion of the wives whether Noah would have thought about it. Noah after all in the story is noted for his righteousness not his thoughtfulness. In fact we are never told what he thought about any of the God ordained events. God

established His covenant only with Noah, not with Noah's family. The invitation to the ark ride shows God's largess and graciousness. The timeless God thinks a lot more about the future than the transient Noah. Noah is totally obedient to God. We are not told who Noah might have wanted on the ark.

Noah's wife is not named in the canonical Scriptures, and nothing is said about her at all. Intriguingly, in the book of Tobit Noah is upheld as a model of morality for taking his wife from among his relatives. In Tobit already a strong "racial profiling" is occurring among the Jews and marrying outside of their "own kind" is frowned upon. Tobit assumes Noah, the father of the saved people would certainly have chosen a fellow Jew to be his wife.

19 And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. **20** Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive. **21** Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." **22** Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Part of the story of the flood is God's own graciousness in not wanting to completely destroy His creation but rather endeavoring to preserve some of it in order to cleanse and renew it. God's goal is not just the annihilation of wickedness. He didn't need to save Noah for that. He saves Noah because His plan is ultimately about salvation not destruction. So of all animals a pair of them is to be saved in order that they may be a continued part of the renewed creation. God does not even eliminate "unclean" animals for He has created them and they too are to be saved. The renewed creation which is to appear after the flood has every kind of creeping animal (including snakes) and every kind of unclean animal which eventually will be forbidden as food to the Jews. (at this point in Genesis humans are apparently still vegetarians as permission to eat animals/flesh is given only after the flood in Genesis 9:3 where all animals are given as food and none are declared as unclean). God wants to save the animal species from complete extinction. He apparently is not intending to recreate extinct species after the flood nor is He planning to create new species, but rather will repopulate the earth from the remnant gene pool. He is not going to create vast numbers of the animals as He did at the beginning of creation; rather He is going to expect the animals to repopulate the world through procreation.

In saving each species of animal, God puts some of the work of salvation on Noah himself. God does not do all the work but expects synergy with humans in saving the world. God doesn't build the ark for Noah; Noah has to do it himself. God doesn't save Noah's family and the animals of the world from the flood; He expects Noah to do that part of the work which humans are capable of doing. God has warned Noah what is to happen – that is something only God can do. It is up to Noah to accomplish the human contribution to the salvation of the world. Why does He need Noah to preserve the animals so that they too will exist after the flood? The salvation of the world is not a spectator sport. God calls His chosen ones to actively engage in the salvation of the world. God doesn't want a people who are in the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, "so heavenly minded as to be no earthly

good.” The ark as a prototype of salvation requires the people who are to be saved by the ark to do a tremendous amount of work for themselves and for the world. There is little reason to doubt that had God so desired He could have simply drowned all the animals on earth and then created in the new world new animals. The God of Genesis is the Creator who also is Savior. If everything had been wiped out by the cataclysmic destruction, the God of Genesis would be little different than the other gods of the ancient world who create and destroy capriciously and amorally. The God who is love loves His creation even when it isn't lovely or loveable. God saves His creation; He doesn't simply trash it and start totally new each time He is unhappy with the results. He intentionally created beings with free will, the humans, and accepts the consequences of their decisions – and He expects them to as well! There is a sense in which there is a permanency to God's creation, even if the creation exists in time.

Patristic writers did see the flood as a foreshadowing of baptism – for in baptism the immersed person's sins are washed away and drowned while the one being baptized is saved and brought up to heaven. The baptismal font is a watery grave where the “old man” (the fallen sinner, the person whose humanity comes from Adam) is left buried along with one's sins, while the “new man” (the person whose humanity is that of Christ's) rises to eternal life. The flood waters are being portrayed not merely or even mostly as destroying the earth, but of cleansing the earth from corruption and freeing the earth of wickedness, decay and of death.

What do we learn about our God – a God who does not return His creation to chaos or nothingness, but rather uses the creation to cleanse and purify His world become corrupt? He is not a God who simply starts over anew, or abandons what He has begun. Rather He is a God who interacts with His creation in order to save it. The created cosmos is both capable of being used by the Holy God to cleanse corruption from it, and capable of emerging from the cleansing in a renewed form. Why did He not more simply deconstruct everything and

then start again? Why does He try to use the little good that He finds in the world rather than starting all over? Could not He who created the animals in the beginning, create new ones after the flood? What is His relationship to and commitment to this cosmos and world? Why does He want to save part of it rather than simply starting from scratch? The answer to these questions is revealed fully only in the time of the New Testament with the incarnation of God the Word. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17). The Lord is the God of love, the God who is love. He is not going to annihilate that which He loves; rather His plan is to save it.

“Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up” Non-edible plants apparently will not be spared in the flood. The amount of food Noah would need to harvest and store up is immense and would require massive farms and storage facilities, as he wouldn't be able to do all this work and food growing and collection and storage on one day. It would be a project worthy of modern mass farming, transportation and storage. Or perhaps Noah was expected to bring back not only animal species from across the globe, but also a sufficient amount of their native foods to last from the time he got them back to the ark until the ark departed. The storage of such plant life (keeping it edible for a sufficient time period) would have been a challenge of “Biblical” proportions.

Noah is seen in the Patristic writers as an example of perseverance, faith and patience. He does everything God commands without ever complaining, asking a question, or even uttering a word. He manages to build the biggest structure known to man, while at that time going out into all the world and corralling representatives of every species of animal. Noah is the very icon of obedience and faith.

Genesis 7

7:1 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. **2** Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; **3** and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth. **4** For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground."

Genesis does not tell us how the invisible God "speaks" nor how Noah would have known God's "voice" which would be coming from "thin air" as it were. Noah who cannot see God, has a mouth but does not speak. Noah is able to envision what God wants from him, even though He cannot see the God who is speaking to him. Noah cannot see God, but he can envision the ark and begins to work on it. Noah is able to see what God wants without seeing God. Noah shows no surprise at hearing the voice of the invisible God. God almost never dialogues with people at this point in the story. He simply speaks or commands and they either do or do not listen. Our story's narrator is obviously not God for the narrator is describing what God is doing and thinking. The narrator gives us no clue how he learned these things, he simply reports them.

In the Septuagint we read the following words using a boat on water as an image of relying on God's Wisdom to carry us safely through the tumultuous threats of a fallen world. The passage is reflecting on the lessons of Noah and the flood: "Again, one preparing to sail and about to voyage over raging waves calls upon a piece of wood more fragile than the ship which carries him. For it was desire for gain that planned that vessel, and wisdom was the craftsman who built it; but it is thy providence, O Father, that steers its course, because thou hast given it a path in the sea, and a safe way through the waves, showing that thou canst save from every danger, so that even if a man lacks skill, he may put to sea. It is thy will that works of thy wisdom should not be without effect; therefore men trust their lives even to the smallest piece of wood, and passing through the billows on a raft they come safely to land. For even in the beginning, when arrogant giants were perishing, the hope of the world took refuge on a raft, and guided by thy hand left to the world the seed of a new generation. For blessed is the wood by which righteousness comes" (Wisdom 14:1-7). The wood of the ark and that of the cross will be frequently associate metaphors in Orthodox hymns of salvation.

“seven pairs of all clean animals...” As in the early chapters of Genesis it appears that more than one tradition of the Noah/flood stories are brought together in the formation of our scriptures. Whereas earlier Noah was commanded to bring a pair of all animals into the ark (6:19, P-Source), here in the J-Source he is told to bring in seven pairs of all CLEAN animals. Modern scholars remind us that before these stories were written down in Scriptures, they were transmitted orally for generations. Oral Tradition doesn’t have just one “author” (as we to think in modern times of an author). Rather it is held, authenticated, honored and handed on in community – by, through and in all the people. Oral communities commonly remember more than one version of a story (Think about the New Testament’s four Gospel writers). It is only when the story is committed to written word that efforts are sometimes made to combine or harmonize the variations, or that the story begins to be examined for its “literal” truth. The story’s discrepancies may be a clue that the story is not to be read quite so literally as we sometimes think it should be read. The text does not offer a reconciliation of the variations and doesn’t command the reader to resolve the discrepancies. Source Theory offers a plausible explanation – there are two different sources at work here. The LORD (**YHWH**) commanding Noah to take 7 pairs of clean animals, while in Genesis 6 it is God (Elohim) who commands Noah to take but 2 pairs of ALL animals. The different ways of referring to God and the different commands given to Noah suggest that different traditions (sources) were blended together to form the canonical Scriptures. Since this was inspired by God, one has to think that God did not intend for the stories to be read only literally – they have deeper meaning and the variations in the story remind us of this. These God-inspired differences and inconsistencies motivate believers to dig deeper into their meanings in order to get beyond and past the literal details. Biblical literalists generally conclude that God was only further refining His thinking – 2 pairs of all animals but seven pairs of the clean ones which will be helpful at the end of the flood when Moses slaughters some of the clean animals in a sacrifice to God. The distinction between clean and unclean

animals does primarily arises in the Bible in the time of Moses with the giving of the Law. Here the J-source anachronistically assumed that even in ancient days they would have known the Torah and followed it even before the Law regarding clean and unclean was given. The Torah-keeping Jews of the time period when Genesis was actually recorded as Scripture would have found the lack of distinction between clean and unclean animals by Noah as unacceptable for a man whom God had deemed righteous.

“...in seven days...” Though in P-Source Noah has 100 years to build the ark, here in the J-Source he is suddenly given a seven day warning and in a new commandment is to gather seven pair of clean animals. The urgency in the story is now great. The reference to seven days in the story reminds us of the seven days of creation. Seven is a sacred time period. The combination of the two traditions (J-Source and P-Source) moves us back and forth from a grand picture of things to the sudden urgency of events. Jesus uses the story of Noah exactly as a warning against sudden and unprepared for death. “As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man” (Luke 17:26). The Final Judgment of God will come upon us just like the flood came upon the people of the world in Noah’s day.

“I will send rain upon the earth...” God foretells what is going to happen. He wants Noah to understand that what is about to take place is not just an act of nature; it is the will of God. He prepares Noah for what will take place and wants Noah to understand the events happening are a fulfillment of a prophecy/promise. There is no coincidence, all that will take place is an act of God; it is what God intends to do. For his part, Noah is to remember what God told him, so that Noah upon seeing the deluge will not attribute the events to the forces of nature, to the unnamed evil, to the gods. Noah will be certain when the events transpire that the force unleashed upon the earth is the hand of the one Creator God.

“I will send rain upon the earth forty days...” One aspect of the flood story that it is easy

for modern people to miss is that ancient people experienced nature and weather as an unpredictable and violent force in their lives. They lacked reliable methods to forecast the weather let alone earthquakes, volcanoes or Tsunamis. They tended to view nature as an anthropomorphic force that could suddenly and violently turn against them, or be used by God as a means of venting His anger on them. Nature was a totally unpredictable, uncontrollable and even hostile force. Though we today sometimes experience that force of nature (such as the hurricane Katrina devastating New Orleans), still we do have some warnings and with satellites and other scientific instrumentation we are given warnings and a little time to prepare for the force of nature. Ancients lived in a world where there was no way to predict even the smallest natural disasters and were often caught unaware. We see that dread of not only nature but also of the unexpected appearance of enemy armies in our liturgical prayer where we pray for deliverance from "Flood, fire, sword, invasion from enemies, civil war and sudden disaster." The ancients experienced the world as much more unpredictable, chaotic, capricious and wreaking havoc without any warning. The story of the flood uses that experience of the ancient people and their fear of natural disaster to portray to its readers a warning about what can happen when humans totally disregard God and offend or anger Him.

"...seven days ... forty days..." Certain numbers repeat so often in the scriptures that they are believed to have symbolic value to them. Many scholars believe that the true significance of these numbers is in their symbolic meaning not in the actual literal numerical value. Seven is a number which symbolizes completeness in the Scriptures. God creates the world in 7 days. He warns Noah that the flood will begin in 7 days – the fullness of time is coming. Forty is symbolic of a long period of time and is often associated in critical situations with a form of consequences – 40 days of rain, 40 years wandering in the wilderness, 40 days of fasting. The idea that numbers stated in the Old Testament have a symbolic meaning to them is bolstered by the fact that in the ancient world alphabetical letters are used for numbers and so often people assume

the number is a mystical spelling of a hidden word. St. Basil the Great for example wrote, "Scripture continually assigns seven as the number of the remission of sins." He does not tell us what made him associate seven with repentance. Whole mystical movements especially in Judaism have evolved around numerology and occasional become faddishly popular. But those engaged in such deciphering of the meaning of numbers have rarely agreed with each other about the meaning of the numerals.

5 And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him. **6** Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. **7** And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark, to escape the waters of the flood. **8** Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, **9** two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. **10** And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

Noah's unfailing obedience to God is noted repeatedly throughout the story. We do not know in the story if it is because he is righteous that Noah always obeys God or if he is considered righteous because he obeys God. In either case, the story is a revelation about how salvation works. God decides to save Noah from the impending judgment and deluge. He tells Noah to build an ark for himself. NOTE: God does not build the ark for Noah. Noah must be willing to do what he as a human is capable of doing for his salvation. God saving Noah does not mean God does all the work. God has already mentioned covenant to Noah – this is a mutual agreement, so Noah needs to do his part. For Christians, we have a responsibility to build the church, which is the ark of salvation. Remember the words edifice and edify have the same root. We are to build up one another – we are to edify one another so that we become the edifice which is the Church, Christ's Body. This is our responsibility and our role in salvation. When the judgment comes, if the Church, the ark of salvation, is incomplete or neglected, we all risk being lost. Building the Church, which is made of living stones (1 Peter 2:4-5) has far more to do with loving one another than it does with the detailed or obsessive keeping of rubrics. We are to love each other more than we love rules and regulations – this is precisely the lesson Christ offered the Jews, and they hated it and Him. It is through love of God and of neighbor that we build the Church. "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up (edify), just as you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Noah was said to be 500 years old when his sons were born (Gen 5:32), and 600 years old when he entered the ark (7:6). Thus he labored on the ark for 100 years – plenty of time for a patient man to build the ship of salvation! Of course he also had to use this

time to gather all of the animal species from around the earth (To be realistic, the ancients in the day when Genesis was written wouldn't have imagined a global flood, as they had a much more limited view of what the entire earth meant. Many ancients actually imagined that the entire earth was limited in size and they envisioned the entire universe to be something like a big box which contained the "flat" earth. In some ways the ark – a big rectangular box – is a miniature version of how they envisioned the entire cosmos. The "temple" was also often thought of as a miniature model of the known world. And just as the ark was surrounded by the waters of chaos, so they imagined that the earth was in a similar condition. During the flood God just allowed the waters of chaos to overwhelm the earth, except for the mini-earth which was the ark floating on the waters of chaos).

"Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark..." Noah's sons are all about 100 years old when they enter the ark. For their entire lives they had watched their father laboring on this big box of his. What would have been clear to them is Noah is building something no one else had ever even conceived. Perhaps the enormity of the project made them believe the idea had to have come from the divine. In the story God speaks only to Noah. The invisible God which only Noah can hear told him to build the ark. What did his family think of their driven 'old man'? Amazingly in the story they go into the ark, which had to have been intimidating to these good folk, trusting Noah and the invisible voice to which Noah was attuned. It is the sons' absolute trust in their father and their cooperation with him that leads to God blessing Noah's sons when they disembark at the end of the flood. They proved themselves to be men of faith. They trust the witness of their father.

It appears in this telling of the story that Noah and his family enter the ark first with the animals following Noah the 'animalherder.' The animals seem to voluntarily follow Noah and his family, and with dignified processional order enter into the ark. There is no rush to get in, no pushing or shoving. Rather the text portrays

a beautiful procession – animals side by side, matched with their mates, patiently waiting their turn to make the grand liturgical procession into the ark. They are following the command which God had given to Noah, perhaps a Scriptural way of taking a poke at the serpent of Genesis 3 who questioned Eve about what God had commanded. Now the animals all obey, apparently recognizing Noah's dominion over them. Indeed this is one of the few texts in Genesis where a human actually has dominion over the animals who follow him in peace. There is no stampede, no panic. And there is no rush to get on board by the animals that were not chosen to go on the ark. The animals are portrayed as knowing their place – which are to follow Noah and in which order. The peaceable kingdom is at hand, lion and lamb respectfully cooperating with the humans. This is not the domestication of all animals, but rather the animals doing by nature what is expected of them. The animals respect Noah's God-given authority. Did these non-rational beasts understand the salvation of the world and of their kind was at stake? Is the fact that God saves all of the species of animals from extinction a hint that God loves His non-rational creatures as well? Is it possibly a sign that in the end, God will ultimately save even the animals of the world? Animals were created for the benefit of humans, but in the Noah story in entering the ark they share all of the benefits of being human.

One of the lessons learned from the Noah saga is that the world is messy. Rational and scientific minds often want a totally mathematically predictable and describable world. But the reality of both love and evil argue against such a world. Beauty adds a totally different dimension to our thinking, but so does randomness. Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle tells us that we cannot know everything about our world. It is not that we lack the proper instrumentation, but rather any instrumentation we might build interacts with the things we wish to understand and changes them making measurement of every last fact impossible. All of this is true without mentioning God or Satan, or hearts which constantly imagine evil, or saints whose sacrificial love defies belief. The story of the flood reminds us that

the non-rational is part of the universe we inhabit – something modern theories in relativity and quantum physics affirms.

St. Isaac the Syrian wrote that the Noah story teaches us that the time to obey God is now – the Day of Judgment or wrath is too late because once God’s judgment begins it will be too late to enter the ark of salvation. We must embrace salvation before the Day of Judgment! And so though today we often feel no immanent threat of God’s impending judgment, now is the time to follow God’s commandments. “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). As St. Paul warned in words that are most appropriate to the lessons surrounding the Flood, “Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:11-14).

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. **12** And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

With almost scientific precision and disinterested objectivity we are told exactly to the day when the flood began. For the modern reader this lends historical accuracy to the story. The ancients were often interested in numerology, and the numbers may have symbolic value lost on us. But using the calendar historians believe was in effect when the story was written, the flood begins on a Thursday. It will end according to this version of the flood story on a Monday.

“..the great deep burst forth... and rain fell...” After 100 years of building and preparing the ark according to the P-Source, the flood seems to almost suddenly and unexpectedly burst forth. Our Lord Jesus himself interprets the advent of the flood as a humanly unanticipated and completely unexpected judgment being visited upon the world: “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” ... For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day. ... As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:20-27). Christ uses the Genesis story of the flood to warn that with an equally unexpected force the Kingdom of God will suddenly appear. We won’t have to go looking in the Holy Land or Jerusalem, for the coming of the Lord will be a cosmic event; the news of it will not spread slowly but rather the world will be instantly transfigured by its happening – which is what happened to the world when the flood burst forth upon it. And in the end of the world, those chosen to be saved by God will be in the ark of salvation – the Church where they will ride out the final storm. One hundred years of warning and preparation are not enough alarm and time for the earth to be ready for God’s judgment. “When people say, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape” (1

Thessalonians 5:3). This is the lesson we are to learn from the flood, and we are to learn it well.

One interesting aspect of the flood is that while God certainly promises to unleash the cataclysm, His role in this chapter is mostly that of the sustainer and protector of Noah and all aboard the ark. The storm that rages is described in mostly naturalistic terms with little reference to God's own involvement – the deep bursts forth, the rain fell, the windows of heaven were opened but none of these things are directly attributed to God. The text is amazingly careful to avoid saying God did these events that brought about the destruction of the world. God promised the destruction, but then the cataclysm seems to “just happen.” God as Creator, Sustainer and Protector of life is very much emphasized in the story rather than God as destroyer. Noah and his family and the animals on the ark are central to what is happening – they are being saved by God's providential warning and grace. All that really is being destroyed is wickedness. The story carefully avoids any idea that God is a wicked, mean, petty, vengeful, capricious, cranky, purposeless or immoral destroyer. God's goal is not to destroy, but to rid the world of evil. God is not evil, He is destroyer of evil. God is not destroying life; He is preserving life on the ark and only destroying wickedness. And all of this comes out of God's heart which is full of grief and sorrow because of the wickedness of the world. The story is not emphasizing God as angry judge, but one who is brought to grief by evil, and destroys the evil to preserve and save that which is good in His creation. The flood itself is not life-giving, rather it is purifying. The flood is not enriching the soil so that it can be more productive, it is cleansing the earth of evil. The story upholds God as holy, Creator and Savior.

“all the fountains of the deep burst forth...” Not only is there a deluge of rain but all the waters beneath the earth spring forth to the surface. The abyss which God tamed and ordered in Genesis 1 to allow the dry land to emerge is permitted to reclaim the earth. On the 2nd day of creation in Genesis 1 God created a great vault to separate the waters

above the heaven from the waters beneath the heaven. All of these waters of chaos were pushed back into their place and contained by God until this moment when God decided to no longer hold back the great waters of the abyss. The Psalmist says, “You did cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they fled; at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.

The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place which you did appoint for them.

You did set a bound which they should not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth” (Psalm 104:6-9). The Psalmist claims God set a permanent boundary for the waters. But though he claims the waters were prevented from ever covering the earth again, in the Genesis flood this is precisely what is said to happen. The permanent boundaries of the waters above and below the earth were removed and the waters rushed in to reclaim the territory from which they had been driven by the orderly creation which God enacted. The cosmology in the Old Testament envisions the heavens as a great ceiling above which are the storehouses of God – where He keeps the waters of chaos and all the extra water, snow, etc, that He might use at some time. But these storehouses of the heavens hold other things as well - “Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; and he rained down upon them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance” (Psalm 78:23-25). In Psalm 78 the heavens are also the storehouse for the manna that rained down on the Israelites in the wilderness. The cosmology certainly envisions a very physical heaven which is well stocked with all kinds of materials. The ancients did not have an idea of the outer space, or the vast reaches of a mostly empty universe. To them the sky was a solid wall holding back physical items.

God does not use some supernatural means to accomplish His will. God uses what already exists in creation – water – to accomplish His plan for the cosmos. Chaotic water upon which God imposed order in the beginning to bring forth dry land and life on earth is now to be used to cleanse the earth. Part of the revelation of

the flood story is that God is Lord even over the flood waters, over the abyss, over chaos itself and over all evil. God's Lordship remains unchallenged by the forces of nature, even when these forces overwhelm the entire earth. God shows His Lordship over nature and the abyss by being able to save Noah and his family and the animals in the ark. However forceful and destructive these powers are, God is able to shield and protect his chosen ones from their might, because He is even more powerful. In the baptismal exorcism, it is claimed that Satan does not even have power over the swine. God in the flood story asserts His authority over human evil, over all the powers of nature and over the powers of chaos. These malevolent forces cannot do anymore to God's creatures than God allows. In Psalm 93:3-5, God's Lordship is established over all of nature, even over the most destructive floods imaginable.

St. Augustine says that like Noah we Christians are today building an ark – the Church – for the salvation of the world. Others are going about their business and ignoring us, but we should all learn from the people in Noah's day and take seriously the respite God has provided us before the awesome and terrible day on which His judgment will occur. For Augustine the Church is the ark which will carry us through God's judgment when it like the floodwaters bursts upon the world with a destructive force.

The 100 years that it takes Noah to build the ark suggests that God's decision is not passionate vengeance, but a plan. And since the plan has to do with God's revelation, Noah working at the ark for 100 years would be a way of saying that plenty of people had opportunity to ask the prophet what he was doing and why. Punishing people by drowning them would do nothing for those folk as they would be dead without having changed human behavior. As it is the wicked are given a chance by God to come to their senses and to ask God what they should do to prevent the flood. No one apparently asks.

If we follow the insight of Source Theory we realize it is in the J-Source that the rains

causing the flood lasts 40 days and 40 nights. The P-Source has the flood waters rising for 150 days from the time the waters burst forth upon the earth. By separating the Genesis 6-9 into the two versions of the same story, we can make sense of the different numbers of days, 40 or 150, being used in Genesis. For our reading of the Genesis Flood account, the length of the flood is not as important as the lessons we learn from the story. It is a story with a moral after all, and it is the lesson learned, not the literal facts which are important for modern believers.

13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, **14** they and every beast according to its kind, and all the cattle according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every bird of every sort. **15** They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. **16** And they that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

How did Jesus make use of the story of Noah and the ark? In the Gospels, Jesus uses the story of the flood as a prototype and warning for the sudden end of the world and the coming judgment of God. "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matthew 24:37-39; see also Luke 17:27). Jesus mentions Noah in response to the question, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matthew 24:3) Basically Jesus warns that as the flood suddenly came upon the unsuspecting people, so too will be His return marking the beginning of the final Judgment Day. There will not be warning signs to be observed, it will catch everyone by surprise (Luke 17:20). He says people will be going about their daily business as they always do and always did (like in Noah's day) because they don't really believe God's Judgment will ever come nor do they believe in its finality, nor that unbelievers will be swept away in the judgment. The Lord Jesus does not use the flood story as a test case for proving the literal truth of Genesis. He uses the story as a prophetic warning about how the Judgment Day will come suddenly upon us and we won't be prepared unless we've heeded His warning. The flood story is the prototype; a foreshadowing of what God is intending to do when the final Judgment Day comes. That Day will come by total surprise just like the flood in Noah's day. "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming... Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:42,44). Jesus uses the story of Noah to teach us to be prepared, alert and vigilant for the Judgment Day. The issue is not whether Genesis records the literal facts about the flood. The moral of the story as the Lord Jesus says is that we need to be prepared and alert unlike the people of Noah's day. The story has a point and a purpose whether it is legend or history; its message is "be prepared for God's coming Judgment." Even if we don't believe in the

literal details, it doesn't truly matter for the Lord Jesus Christ tells us that we have been forewarned about God's Final Judgment by the story of the flood. However we understand the story of the flood, we have no excuse for being unprepared if God in our lifetime suddenly ends the world for Judgment Day. We need to act like the citizens of Nineveh when warned by Jonah that disaster was impending because God had judged the city. Those citizens repented, they didn't argue over the believability of the prophecy, or whether the literal details made sense. If we use the story only to argue about the literal truth of scriptures, we lose the meaning which our Lord assigns to the story. More important than trying to convince people the story is literally true, we need to use the tools God has revealed to us in the scriptures to teach people that there is a God and that each of us is going to have give an accounting for what he or she did in and with his or her life. If we try to turn the prophetic warning of the Noah story into a science or history lesson, we risk never helping people have a relationship with God because we didn't handle the scriptures well and try to turn them into a science textbook, rather than reading them as the theological revelation which they are. What is true about the story of the flood? It is true that we need to be prepared for the Judgment Day which Christ promises is coming.

Literal reading of a text. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:38), and though he didn't wait around for Jesus' answer, his question is significant. In America, most commonly when someone asks, "Is the bible true?", they mean only is it literally (scientifically and historically) true. But this is a very limited way to understand that question. John 1:17 reads, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Does this mean that what Moses wrote – the Torah – is not truth? That is literally what the text says, but it is not what the text means. The Old Testament is also the scriptural record of the revelation of God. It is truth. But truth is more than just words on a page. Jesus said to the Jews, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me

that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). One of the unintentional effects of the printing press is that it makes us think of words on a page in terms of "literal truth." We have a hard time reading poetry because the words are often metaphorical, figurative, symbolic, or present truth in images not in purely factual ways. Because we have printed Bibles, we forget that in the beginning God SAID, He didn't write anything. And in John's Gospel the Word of God is identified as Jesus Christ, not as the Bible! Printed Bibles have tended to make us think about truth as something printed in words, and have in some ways narrowed our ability to understand God's truth because we want one precise (and short!) text to quote - a sound byte. We don't want to have to consider the whole context of a passage, nor its place in the entire Bible. Printing presses have caused us to equate "the Word of God" with words on a page rather than with the Jesus who is the Word of God, the full revelation of God. This has narrowed and limited the depth of scripture and the richness of our scriptures. It has also often forced some to feel the need to defend the literalness of the Bible when reasonable questions are raised about the text and about what we know from science and laws of nature. While we do claim that the Scriptures are true and that the Scripture contains truth, our Lord says that the very purpose of the Scriptures is to bear witness to Him. Scriptures point to the truth, and point out the truth. The truth is not limited by the Scriptures. The Scriptures don't say reading them will lead to biblical literalism, rather they are supposed to lead us to Christ. Reading the Bible merely literally will often not lead to Christ but might lead us into conflict with the truth that God is revealing to us through His created world. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Jesus claims to be truth. His claim is that truth is not a "what" but a "who". While we certainly can read Scriptures literally, and much of Scripture reads perfectly well literally, if that literal reading does not lead us to Christ, then the way we are reading the scriptures (take note: NOT the Scriptures themselves but only **the way** we are reading them) causes us to fail to achieve the very point of the Scriptures in the first place. Some fear,

however, that if every word in the Bible is not literally true than the Bible is not trustworthy at all. This is a false fear and a false belief. The Bible contains parables and poems and stories whose purpose is to lead us to Truth even if they are not literally true themselves. Anyone who reads Aesop's fables knows they are fictional fables, but they teach truth. We quickly can understand the lessons they teach about greed, arrogance, selfishness. They do not need to be literally true to teach truth. The story of George Washington and the cherry tree teaches a lesson about honesty and truthfulness. Yet the story is purely fictitious. It was originally made up to teach us about honesty – the appeal to George Washington was because he is believed to have been an honest man. The story affirms his honesty and teaches us “not to tell a lie.” We all can understand the lesson even if we know the story is fictional (a lie that teaches the truth!). We can easily understand from such lessons that Truth is something more than words on a page. Thomas Jefferson wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men were created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” But is this statement literally true? In what way are we all equal (weight, height, intelligence, wealth, athletic ability, education, artistic talent, health)? Self-evident to whom? Who is the “we” that Jefferson meant? Who do we count in the “we” today? Only when we qualify what we mean, and explain what we mean, and define what we mean, is the truth of Jefferson's statement revealed. A purely literal reading of the text is possible, but it won't reveal the fullness of the truth – what we believe today about this statement nor what he meant when he wrote it. So is the bible true? Yes, because we have the key – Jesus Christ – to unlock the deepest meanings of what it says. Origen, the greatest biblical exegete of the 3rd Century, did take note that there are in fact discrepancies and inconsistencies in the Scripture stories that cannot be explained. He concluded that because of this truth does not lie in the literal reading of the text but rather in the meaning of the text. He speculated that perhaps God Himself put such stumbling blocks in the Scriptures to

make sure we realized there is a deeper meaning to the text. This he felt will get us off reading the Bible merely literally and to look for the deeper, spiritual meaning of the Scriptures.

The story of the flood waters is related to the theme of salvation and judgment. It is a theme which is repeated numerous times in the Bible. In the beginning of creation, the dry land was made to appear from the chaotic deep waters in Genesis 1. The Hebrew people will be saved from Pharaoh by passing through the threatening waters of the Red Sea which will drown their pursuing tyrant. And finally with the coming of Christ, baptism becomes the means of salvation for His chosen people. Thus we can see the theme of water being related to creation, salvation, and judgment.

One of the priest's prayers at Vespers asks God to “Guide us to the haven of Your will.” God's will is sometimes very demanding and difficult for us to perform, and yet it is a haven for us as well. The Noah story is precisely about totally trusting God. In the story Noah builds this huge ark – a huge box for a ship – even though no water is around him. He trusts God. He takes wild and dangerous animals into this giant box along with his family. He trusts God. He is sealed in the box for more than 11 months without being able to see the sunlight, and without fresh air. He trusts God. The ark is sent on a wild ride on a totally destructive flood over which Noah has no control. He trusts God. Noah trusts that God's will is indeed a haven despite its most obvious dangers and uncertainties. This is certainly a main part of the message of the story.

“(The animals)... went into the ark with Noah, two and two ... male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him” As in 7:9-10, so in this version of the story, the animals follow Noah like sheep into the ark. The animals obediently do what God commanded Noah. There is a great emphasis on the fact that only in the moments before the cataclysmic flood do the animals suddenly have the relationship with the humans that God envisioned back in paradise. Somehow the animals know this time, in this moment, salvation is on the

line, and they need to follow Noah as if they are obeying God Himself. The human finally has dominion over the animal kingdom!

“...the Lord shut him in...” Again in the story God acts in an anthropomorphic fashion and is able to shut the door of the ark. Is this a “pre-incarnation” of God? It is at a minimum a prefiguring of God’s intervening in human history in order to save humanity from sin. How is it possible for God to touch that which is “not God”? “Not God” is all now part of the fallen world and yet God is still able to act in the world and even touch it; unless of course the text is only figuratively speaking. But the exact role of God in saving the humans by closing the ark door suggests strongly God lovingly and incarnationally acts to save humankind. Origen in the 2nd Century felt the anthropomorphic acts of God such as shutting the door of the ark precisely show us that we need to read the text symbolically or figuratively or otherwise we make the Creator God nothing more than one of the minor gods of paganism. Arguing in a world awash in paganism, Origen warns Christians against too literal a read of the bible which he felt can only lead to wrong theology and to disbelief.

“and the LORD shut him in.” The anthropomorphic touches in the story give us that strong sense not just of God intervening in the world, but of the closeness of God to His humans. “For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit’ (Isaiah 57:15). If we did not have both the J-Source and the P-Source stories, our imagery concerning God would be impoverished. If the P-Source with its transcendent God had fully controlled the final editing of the Scriptures, we would have no images of the Creator God closely interacting with His creatures. So rather than fearing a scholarly insight like the notion of more than one story being woven into our biblical text, we can appreciate how biblical scholarship actual deepens our knowledge of God and appreciation of the text. The atheistic secularist, who attacks the Faith by mocking

the literal reading of Genesis, might find a much more profound truth about what it means to be human when he experiences the Christian community accepting and being guided by Truth, whether biblical, historical or scientific. The test of faith is not whether we hold on to the literalness of Genesis even when it contradicts common sense or the knowledge of the world God has allowed us to discover through rational search. The test of faith is do we believe God’s promises revealed through His prophets, His people, His Scripture and ultimately through His incarnate Son? Even if we lack proof for His promises – the scientific method and historical research cannot prove whether or not God’s kingdom is real nor if God even exists – do we believe that God created the heavens and the earth and do we believe the life in the world to come? Do we live as if we believed these things or do we live only for the comforts and pleasures of this world? “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder” (James 2:14-19). The story of Noah and the ark teaches that no matter what happens on earth, it is all part of a much bigger plan of God for the salvation of humankind. Perhaps a literal reading of Genesis is of comfort to certain believers, but it is not the God established test for determining who is being faithful to His promises. Our true task and the true sign of faith is to love God and love neighbor – to love one another as Christ loved us - not to decide whether or not Genesis is literally true.

“...the LORD shut him in...” God does not go into the ark with Noah; rather God closes the door behind and Noah and locks him and his family into the darkness of the inner decks of the ark. God has not told Noah that He was going to sojourn with Noah. This is a

journey that Noah and family and the animals are going to make on their own, as it were. God will be on the outside of the ark, not within it. He has shut them in, come what may. The journey in the ark – riding out the storm – is a journey for Noah and his family. The God who walked in the Garden (Genesis 3) will not even so much as get His feet wet in this flood. The flood is indeed dirty business, and God will maintain His holiness this time around. As we know in the Christmas story, God acts in a totally new and unexpected way. By becoming incarnate in Christ, God no longer separates Himself from sinful humanity but rather takes on sinful human flesh and the human heart which is ever inclining to wickedness. In the Nativity story, God no longer will attempt to drown sin, but rather will unite earth to heaven and transfigure and transform fallen humanity making it capable of being God-bearing again. The Theotokos, Mary the God-bearer is key to the salvation of the world.

17 The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.

18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. **19** And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; **20** the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.

Chrysostom, who like most Patristic writers looks at the Scripture as a witness to the goodness of God, speculates that the 40 day rain was used by God to give the people not in the ark the chance to repent as the waters slowly rose and before they drowned. God gives the people the chance to think about why the destruction is happening and to come to their senses like the Prodigal Son and to repent of their sins and seek God's forgiveness. His interpretation of this verse requires us to ignore vs. 11 where in fact a giant cataclysmic Tsunami did overwhelm the earth all at once.

"and the waters increased, and bore up the ark" One is reminded of Psalm 107:23-32 : "Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded, and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men, and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men! Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders." The Psalm in turn brings Matthew 8:23-27 to mind: "And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, 'Save, Lord; we are perishing.' And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?' Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, 'What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?'"

"The waters prevailed and increased..."
The author of the text uses the same word for increase that was used by God in Genesis 1 when He blessed the animals and

told them to increase and multiply. Now the waters are multiplying in order to overwhelm the animal life. The story portrays an undoing of the order God had imposed on the world. One thing that was increasing is that which was wrong with the earth!

Jesus uses the story of the flood as a warning about the coming judgment of God to the people of His generation and to us. Christ's use of the Noah story is to turn it into a typology - a foreshadowing of a future event. It is not the flood itself which is important, but the role the story of the flood serves to prophetically prepare us for the coming judgment of God. "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matthew 24:37-39)

St. Peter in his Second Epistle also uses the story of the flood as a warning to all about the impending Judgment Day of God. He argues that those who scoff about Judgment Day are no different than the folk in Noah's day. Peter's reference to the flood in his verse 3:6 does seem predicated on a belief that the deluge was a historical event. "First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:3-7).

"...the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep." The depth of the water (22.5 feet above the tallest mountains – Everest!)

would have meant most of the space which we now consider our atmosphere would be filled with flood waters. Even the North and South Pole would be under water to this huge depth. The height of the water would have meant both salt and fresh water would be intermixed changing the salinity of both. St. John Chrysostom (4th Cent AD) tries to navigate his flock away from just thinking about the literal claims of the text. "So, sacred scripture narrates this, not simply to teach us the flood level, but that we may be able to understand along with this that there was absolutely nothing left standing – no wild beasts, no animals, no cattle; rather, everything was annihilated along with the human race." He does not question the veracity of the literal details, but tries to move believers beyond overly focusing on them to the point that it raises serious intellectual doubts. The point of the story, he says, is to say all life except that in the ark was destroyed because God wanted to give the world a fresh start and by cleansing the world of all wickedness a renewed chance to pursue goodness. He doesn't think the literal details are what is important. It is what the flood accomplished that is significant. He argues not to get bogged down in the details so much that you lose sight of the story's meaning and purpose.

Chrysostom does not say the Genesis story is mere fable or myth; however he wants to caution against an overly literal reading which would contradict reason and rational truth and thus lead to a loss of faith. He always wants his flock to know that scripture is to inspire in us a trusting faith in a loving God. He certainly tends to downplay interpretations which would make God into an angry tyrant bent on destroying an evil world. God for him is always a saving and loving God, and that in his belief is the revelation of scripture. "So, whenever God does something, dearly beloved, don't insist on inquiring with your human reasoning into whatever he has done: it surpasses our understanding, and the human mind could not succeed in measuring up to it or grasping the secret of what has been created by him. Hence, after hearing that God has so directed, we ought believe and obey what is said by him." (HOMILIES ON GENESIS 18-45, TFOTC, p 135)
Chrysostom's "pray and obey" response to

difficult scripture passages will obviously not satisfy some inquiring and skeptical minds. To his credit he never shies away from difficult questions raised by believers or non-believers and often in his commentary poses questions he imagines people asking when the text might cause an inquiring mind to disbelieve.

Some life in the seas, oceans and lakes would have been able to survive the flood. The text really doesn't concern itself with sea life being able to survive, nor how if it was destroyed it would have been "recreated" after the flood since its seed would not have been saved. The wrath of God seems focused only on land life anyway. This of course raises the question for some, why destroy all life except for that of marine life? The animals on land were not any guiltier of sin than the animals at sea. It doesn't seem fair. But then our ideas of "fairness" are shaped by modern egalitarian notions in which we want all things treated "the same." This was not an idea that was vogue in the ancient world which accepts inequalities as normative and thus had a very different sense of what is fair. In the ancient world when families or tribes or villages or clans suffered as the result of the evil of their leaders, this was considered fair as the ancient world did not really think in terms of individualism. Generally in the ancient world the smallest social unit is not the individual but a person's family or clan. In the ancient world each person is part of a greater social unit and so it would be "fair" if the head of a social unit suffered that all the members of that unit would suffer with him/her. And the ancient notion of fair included an idea that the higher up the social ladder you went the greater the suffering for wrongdoing. Thus the effect of the humans sinning was great throughout the entire creation since in the Genesis story humans had dominion over all other creatures. By our modern thinking it is not "fair" that animals suffered as a result of human wickedness. By our modern thinking it is not "fair" that marine life escapes the fate of land life. But the story of the flood is not about modern ideas of fairness. The story is about how unfair it is that humans, created in God's image and likeness (unlike all the other animals in creation – hey, that's not fair! That's not equal!), created to have

dominion over all other animal life (hey, that's not fair!) respect neither God, nor each other, nor the rest of creation. The humans totally destroy the natural relationships between God and humans, humans and other humans, humans and the rest of creation. Remember when in Genesis 6:11-12 God saw the "corruption" on earth; "corruption" is the same word as "destruction" in the original text. God saw how humans had destroyed the relationship between themselves and everything else. The animal life and the abundant plant life which was created for the benefit of humans in Genesis 2 are being taken away from them in the flood story. This is part of God's punishing the humans. Noah and company are being saved, but they also are suffering punishment for the sins of all humanity. God saw Noah as righteous, but while that spares Noah from dying in the flood, it does not spare him from suffering along with the rest of creation because of sin. There are 8 humans who will survive the flood, but just as Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, so Noah and company lose the goodness of the original earth, and are going to be plopped down into a world which is even more hostile to them. After the flood the animals will dread and fear the humans. The humans are moving ever further away from not only Paradise but the world into which Eve and Adam were sent. The humans are suffering serious loss and consequences for their continued wickedness. The rest of the creatures on earth are becoming increasingly hostile to the humans. So though the story is about a just God angered at the wickedness of His favored creatures, it is not about modern notions of fairness (which shaped our ideas of justice). In the flood story, the One who is directly offended by human sin is God, and the ancient view of "justice" (fairness) demands that the one who is offended is the one who must somehow be made "satisfied" by the action against the offender. Thus the cataclysmic flood which effects the entire world is part of the ancient sense of justice – the God of all creation was offended by human sin, and so a punishment must be meted out that restores his honor and restores order and restores justice to the universe. At least according to the story this is what the flood has to accomplish. Universal justice and

order are restored by cleansing the world of all that was offensive to God. That the land animals had to suffer to restore this justice is considered by the ancients what it takes to complete the task (we might apply a modern concept – collateral damage – to this thinking of fairness. You can't bomb the enemy's industrial production into oblivion without also killing the civilians and destroying the economies and daily lives of the people). But in the end of the story, God is not going to be "satisfied" with the achievement of such justice. He is the God who is Love after all and in the end He is going to promise never again to use universal destruction as a means to re-establish universal justice and order.

21 And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; **22** everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. **23** He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. **24** And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.

While the flood according to the story causes a massive extinction of all life (those in the ark being the only to survive), the purpose of the flood is to free the world from wickedness, not to destroy life. "As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11)

In Matins there is a hymn of light which extols God and includes the line addressed to Jesus: "O Lord and God, lamb of God, the Father's Son: You take away the sin of the world, O You who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us" (translation from New Skete Monastery, A BOOK OF PRAYERS). Since the advent of Christ, no longer does the Lord God use the impersonal and destructive flood waters to take away the sins of the world as He did in Noah's day. Now in Christ, it is the Word of God Himself, not nature obeying God's Word, which takes away the sin of the world. And the Word of God takes away the sins of the world not by destroying the world, but by dying for it to save it. No longer by destroying humans will God save His holy remnant, but rather by the death of His Holy Son will God destroy sin and death. The force of the flood waters destroyed all in its path – animal and human regardless of sin. Christ takes away the sin of the world only by allowing Himself to be destroyed by the world. Truly the love of God surpasses our understanding. The moral of the flood story is a message to all who want evil destroyed – evil is better destroyed by God's love than by His wrath. The Genesis flood temporarily destroyed wickedness by destroying the wicked without giving them a chance to repent in order to save themselves from God's judgment. Christ on the other hand eternally destroys death and gives life everlasting to all repentant sinners. God destroys evil so that love can prevail. It is not God's wish to destroy His creation along with the evil in it but rather God desires that even the wicked be converted to goodness through His love and mercy.

"He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals..." This would have included

children, toddlers and babies, people we would normally consider to be innocent of sin and malice. However, keep in mind in the story that outside of mentioning the birth of the humans (birth of the **men/males**) there has been no mention in Genesis of infants, child rearing, or children. If the story is to be read only literally we have to assume either God drowned innocent children, or that since they aren't mentioned in the story, there were no children when the flood occurred. If however the story was intended to be read figuratively or symbolically (we know the New Testament reads it prophetically, metaphorically, typologically and even allegorically) the story may be suggesting what it literally deals with – the destruction of sin-prone, violent and wicked adults (and maybe specifically adult males since women are not much mentioned in the story either). So rather than portraying this angry, capricious, destructive, unpredictable, and violent God (common ideas in ancient literature about gods) who drowns the innocent along with the guilty (which one might conclude from a literal reading of the story) a more careful and thoughtful reading of the text (and one that would be more consistent with the Creator God who is love) would read the story figuratively. It is a story with a very powerful moral to it. God will not allow wickedness to triumph on His earth. God is not affected or defeated by human wickedness. God is sickened and disheartened by it and wants to preserve whatever goodness He can find in any of His human creations. God is not powerless in the face of evil. God deals with evil totally and justly and will at the time of His choosing completely wipe out evil and all powers opposed to His goodness. Moreover, by using the powers of the abyss – the cataclysmic deluge – to accomplish His will, the one God of the Bible asserts His Lordship over everything in the universe including darkness, chaos, evil, wickedness, destruction and death itself. The loving and all good God endeavors to protect and save the righteous (even if it is only one man in the whole world) from all the wickedness of the world. This thinking is in fact consistent with the portrayal of God in Genesis. "Then Abraham drew near, and said (to God), "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous

within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:23-25) Genesis is very careful to portray God as Creator and as a God of justice unlike the capricious and violent gods of the pagans. God is not a God who will destroy the innocent with the wicked.

How did the people of the world benefit from this tragedy? In Hebrews 11:39-40, we are told, "And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." The salvation of the world is done as whole for all of humanity – those people living in the past as well as those in the present and who will live in the future. All that happens benefits future generations even if in the present we do not understand the purpose of the events we live through. The suffering of past peoples may not immediately have benefited them, but it does potentially edify and benefit us. In this we can also understand how and why the literary power of the Genesis stories is not in their literal detail and reading, but rather in the lessons and morals of the stories. The stories are a prophetic witness to God's Lordship, will, plan and Kingdom. They reveal to us both the **eschaton** (what God is guiding us to) and the **teleology** by which God guides the universe. When we understand that God loves all His created people, we can understand how events of the past benefit us more than they benefited ancient people – we are the ones who learn the lessons from what they suffered. And our suffering today will benefit our fellow humans in the future. We are all part of the one human race and we all benefit and suffer when any humans anywhere are blessed or suffer. Our sense of absolute individualism causes us to fail to take into account just how connected each of us is to all other humans. We share a common humanity and a union with all other humans. We share a common human nature. St. Paul also uses the image that we are all members of one Body. "For

just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many ... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:12-14,26-27).

Some Patristic writers see in the story of the ark a prototype of the Church, outside of which no one is saved from the deadly flood of sin.

In St. Peter's First Epistle, Peter has Christ upon his death descending into the nether regions to preach salvation to those "... who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." (3:20-21) So though they were blotted out as a result of their wickedness by the deluge, St. Peter claims Christ redeems these people once judged by God. The judgment rendered by God on the wicked in Genesis is thus not a permanent judgment. Those who died in the flood were not condemned eternally to hell, nor were their sins considered unforgivable. In the end, God's own mercy and love overcame even the wickedness of those whom God could no longer tolerate on earth!

Only land animals and birds are included in the destruction. Sea creatures are not destroyed by the flood – in any case Noah would have lacked the technology to build a sizeable aquarium which could save sea creatures and thus preserve their seed..

"And the waters prevailed upon the earth..." When God unleashes the waters from the vaults of heaven upon the earth, He seems to be saying to the people on earth, "You didn't like the order I imposed upon the cosmos and you prefer to follow your own

disorderly and destructive ways, alright then, I will let disorder and destruction reclaim the earth. You can have your way but I will no longer protect you from the chaos, from the randomness of an ungodly universe, from the entropy described by your laws of thermodynamics. You prefer disorder in the world to my divine order, now you will see what happens when I decide not to impose my order on the universe. See if you can survive when the world ignores the divine order." Or, as the Lord says in Deuteronomy 32, ""The LORD saw it, and spumed them, because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters. And he said, 'I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. ... For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. "And I will heap evils upon them; I will spend my arrows upon them... destroying both young man and virgin, the sucking child with the man of gray hairs" (32:19-25).

Genesis 8

8:1 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; **2** the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, **3** and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; **4** and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ar'arat. **5** And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

“God remembered Noah...” We do pray in our church that God will remember us in His kingdom. To be totally forgotten by God is a fate worse than death, for it means non-existence. We also pray that He eternally remember those who have died. We pray that God will remember us but that he will not remember our sins (Psalm 25:7, Isaiah 43:18, 64:9).

“God remembered Noah...” Here is a trivia question: In which Orthodox Sacrament is Noah and the ark explicitly mentioned? Here is the quote from the service: “Preserve them, O Lord our God, as You preserved Noah in the ark.” It is in the Wedding Service of Crowning that we remember and invoke Noah and the ark as we ask God to bless the couple being united in marriage. One may wonder about the connection of Noah to marriage – he was married but his wife’s name is not even mentioned and she plays absolutely no role in the story other than being one of those preserved by God in the ark. She is not known to have given birth to children after the flood so it is really her sons which preserve humanity and repopulate the earth. So does the wedding service imply that marriage is like a devastating storm and flood? The imagery of Noah is invoked purely as someone whom God preserved from evil and destruction which is what we pray He will do for the newlywed. The wedding service in Orthodoxy is very cognizant of the fact that life sometimes throws at every married couple as well as at each of us devastating contingencies. Marriage cannot protect us from these life threatening problems and sudden disasters – only God can help us when one of life’s tidal waves overwhelms us.

Noah is also mentioned in the Service of the Great Blessing of Water, where we might more expect to find his name: “For You are our God, who through water and the Spirit, have renewed our nature grown old through sin. You are our God, who with water drowned sin in the days of Noah.”

“God remembered Noah...” Was there ever a danger that God who had ordered Noah to build the ark and had him work on it for 100 years and had him take his family and the

various species of animals into it, might forget about Noah? Does the story suggest that God was tempted with simply letting the chaos overwhelm the cosmos? Or that the destructive forces of the cataclysm were so appeasing His anger with humanity that it was lulling God to sleep with indifference towards His creatures? The God whose heart was pained by humanity still has room in His heart for the righteous Noah. Whether God “snapped back” to remembrance or whether he remembered Noah all along, when He thinks about one righteous human God is moved to save that person.

Chrysostom tells his flock not to overly think about or try to rationally approach the story which surpasses our credulity. Questioning the literal facts and doubting their veracity obviously occurred to the Christians of the 4th Century. Such questions of faith are not just the result of secular humanism and science. He acknowledges that the story does not tell us how the humans and animals could have survived being shut up in a big box for so many days. He acknowledges drinking water would have been a problem, the unbearable stench would have been a problem, the lack of fresh air would have done them all in, the wild animals would not have reacted peaceably to being housed in the bowels of the ark as this is totally unnatural to them and many don't do well in captivity. He advises his faithful not to focus on the literal details but rather to consider the faith of Noah and Noah's virtuous obedience to God which is what he says the story is mostly about. He admits the facts of the story- what literally happened - remain a secret of God. Chrysostom then argues that since we know the loving nature of our God we simply have to trust Him in His revelation. The story, St. John concludes, teaches us to persevere in obeying God no matter what conditions we have to live under.

The story teaches us that doing God's will and even God's salvation might require patience and suffering on our part as it did Noah. That is something we modern people find hard to accept. We want instant success, not a long protracted struggle. Yet as any farmer/gardener knows there are

many potential threats and disasters from planting until harvest, and one has to meet them all if one has any hope of having a harvest. Even if one does everything just right, the harvest might be ruined by events beyond one's control. For Christians the real harvest though does not occur in this world, but in the world to come. The suffering and problems here, bad as they are, are nothing compared to the harvest which awaits the faithful in God's kingdom.

“God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided” On the first day of creation in Genesis 1:2, God's Spirit/wind (the Hebrew word *ruah* is the same one word used in Genesis to mean wind, breath, Spirit) hovered over the waters of the depths. So once again God's wind/Spirit blows over the waters and restrains and contains them and imposes God's will and order on them. The renewed and purified creation is about to emerge again from the primordial waters of chaos.

“the fountains of the deep ... were closed..” The same abyss which existed at the beginning when God imposed order on the chaos (Gen 1:2), which then burst forth to cause the deluge (7:11), now are closed once again.

“...the waters receded from the earth...” Where did all these waters go? According to Genesis 7:19 covered the entire earth to a depth of 15 cubits (approximately 22.5 feet) above the highest mountain peaks. This would have created quite a problem for draining it off as there would have been no place for it to drain. Chrysostom acknowledges in his own sermons that the story stretches credibility, but asks his flock to accept that there is some kind of mystery here which is beyond human understanding, and again says the story is really about faith and our willingness to follow God to the depths of the earth or to the heights as the case may be. Chrysostom is at a loss for how to account for the story because he does accept it as somehow literally true even though not always reasonable. He appeals to the fact that there are secrets or mysteries of God that we will never be able to understand so we should move beyond the physical details and allow the story to

shape our faith which is what it is supposed to do more than give us a history of the world. The story for him is ultimately about God's love for the world and how we are to learn about this love by reading scriptures. In the end Chrysostom says the right response from us to these stories is thanksgiving to God for salvation.

"At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated..." Noah, family and animals would have been in the ark for 5 months when it hits the top of Ara'rat, if the P-Source story is literally true. They still have another 190 days left in the ark if one is following the details of the story (and the P-Source). They would have needed a huge quantity of food for this duration, not to mention a massive clean up job if that was possible. But if we don't get caught up in the literal details, we do see the story as a typology of salvation. God does what it takes to save His chosen ones. Humans are called upon to be faithful no matter in what conditions we find ourselves. In the end, God prevails as all is happening according to His will, even natural disasters are not outside of God's will, nor can they overcome God's protection for his chosen righteous remnant. Of course for us another lesson is that the Lord did not spare his favored ones from having to endure the suffering and deprivation caused by the nearly year long flood. The story only tells us that in the end – after enduring suffering, after being shut up in the ark (a coffin!) – God triumphs and rescues his faithful, raising them from the dead.

"At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated" When God first made creation, He divided the waters on one day to expose the dry land. The restoration of creation is carrying on for 5 months and then only the mountain tops appear. Is God less eager this time to allow the earth to be inhabited by humans? The Lord seems to be willing to take much more time to allow things to dry out and become habitable. There is no steady movement day by day – now time is dragging and God makes no comment about the goodness of His creation cleansed of violence and wickedness.

"in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month" This is exactly 150 days since the flood began on the 17th day of the second month. Because of the Jewish writer is using the ancient perpetual solar calendar to reference the story scholars tell us that the story has the waters beginning to ebb and then the mountain tops first appearing on two different Wednesdays. Wednesday also happens to be the day when the Exodus from Egypt begins (Exodus 12:40-51, Numbers 33:3). The story places the ark coming to a rest on Ara'rat on a Friday (7th month, 17th day). Coincidentally on a Friday, the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross says, "It is finished" (John 19:30) Seventy three days after landing on Ara'rat the other mountain tops become visible on a Wednesday, as already noted.

6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, **7** and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth.

8 Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; **9** but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. **10** He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; **11** and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.

12 Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more.

No description is given of what life was like on the ark or how the humans and the wild animals could possibly have survived sharing the space of the big box for the year of the flood. But one might speculate. Is it possible that for the year in which the flood was devastating the earth, that humans and animals, lion and lamb, once again lived in peace together as they had in paradise? Is the lack of detail of their lives intentional, to somehow cause us to hearken back to the story of life in the Garden of Eden? Many ancient people in fact felt the entire created cosmos was a big box with the walls of the box keeping the chaos away from the inhabited earth. So the ark was a microcosm of the universe – outside the box the forces of the abyss raged, just as the ancients imagined their potential power raged in the place beyond the world where to God pushed them. The entire world was in a cataclysm, but in the ark there was peace and harmony – a miniature paradise. God may be raging at the wickedness outside the ark, but in the ark all are at peace with each and with God. Such imagery of the ark of salvation as a place of refuge and peace might not work so well if we overly literalize the story and have to deal with the harsh realities of what it would be like to live in a big box with a large number of animals for a year (One need only read the impossibilities which the crew of the ill-fated \$200 million Biosphere encountered, to realize what Noah and crew would have faced in the ark). However, the lack of any description of life in the ark suggests we are not to rationally think about the harsh living conditions the passengers would have experienced, but rather we are to accept their situation as living in another paradise. It suggests that one is supposed to imagine that the story is also symbolic, and when read figuratively it is full of beautiful and godly images as well as having a moral to it.

St. John Chrysostom makes an interesting reference to the raven who leaves the ark but doesn't come back but rather flies about continuously until the flood waters receded from the earth. He compares the raven (his text says crow) to people who show up at church for some special event but then are not interested in coming back to church on a regular basis. "They mimicked not Noah's

dove, but the crow (raven), and this when the choppy waves and that storm still lingered and the surging waves were intensifying with each successive day, and this holy ark was in front of everyone's eyes and calling everyone and drawing them to herself, and providing considerable safety to those in flight. She beats off not attacks of waters or waves but the constant assaults of utterly irrational passions and removes envy and suppresses arrogance" (TCOTS, p 67). Chrysostom portrays the raven as refusing to return to the safety of the ark not because the storm prevents it, but because the raven is consumed by the passion of pride. He apparently thinks many people avoid regular church attendance because of the story of their own passions which they don't want to control, nor even have to acknowledge. His use of the raven to teach a lesson in human behavior and morality is typical of many Patristic writers who believe the Old Testament stories have many valuable lessons to teach. They were not constantly worried that the literal value of the story would be lost. For them the Scriptures are a continuous source of teaching, inspiration, correction and training in righteousness as 2 Timothy 3:16 says.

The story does not tell us exactly why Noah released the raven. A raven is considered an unclean animal in Judaism as it does eat carrion. The restless raven flies about and does not come back to the ark. The raven doubtlessly found plenty of carrion at which to peck. The grim message to Noah was that the flood waters are filled with corpses of humans and the carcasses of animals. Noah would then know the flood was as destructive as God had warned. When Noah next releases the dove he clearly does so "to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground." The dove is able to convey a different message to Noah about the changing conditions of the flood each time it is released – by first returning, by bringing a fresh leaf from its second flight, and finally when it doesn't return at all. Interestingly, the dove is the only bird that was acceptable for sacrificial offerings in Jewish temple worship.

From the Prayer Blessing the Oil of the Catechumen at Baptism: "O Lord and

Master, the God of our fathers, who sent unto them that were in the ark of Noah your dove, bearing in its beak a twig of the olive, the token of reconciliation and of salvation from the flood, the foreshadowing of the mystery of grace, and You provided the fruit of the olive for the fulfilling of Your holy mysteries... Bless also this holy oil..." In the blessing of the holy oil, we see that the church does understand the story of Noah and the ark to have symbolic value to it. It is in its conclusion a story of reconciliation between God and humans. Note also the emphasis in this prayer that the story is about salvation from the deadly, destructive powers of the flood. The prayer does not see the drowning of the wicked as the point of the flood story, but rather focuses on how God saves the righteous from destruction. The implication is clear – there may be a final judgment day, and the prospect of eternal punishment, but God saves those who love Him from this reality. Those Christians, who are quick to pronounce God's judgment on sinners, forget the Gospel is Good News – God saves us from eternal punishment and destroys death. It is not God's hope that any humans spend an eternity in hell; rather He rescues us from such a fate. "The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:18).

"At the end of 40 days..." If we accept the Source Theory, the 40 day flood belongs to the J-Source. In this story, Noah enters the ark 7 days before the flood begins, the flood lasts 40 days, and then Noah releases the raven and seemingly the dove for the first time— his 47th day in the ark. He waits 7 days and releases the dove a second time, and 7 days later he disembarks as the flood is over. In the J-Source Noah and crew are in the ark 61 days, 54 of them while the flood waters were rising and then receding. If we don't accept the Source Theory notion of 2 distinct stories intertwined, it is a little more difficult to establish the time line of the flood. How does the 40 days of 8:6 match up with the 150 days of 8:1-5? The P-source has Noah in the ark for a total of 340 days, nearly an entire year. What part of that total the 40 days represents cannot be easily established. Harmonizing the details of the two stories, if that is what we believe must occur for the Bible to be considered

“true,” is sometimes difficult. It becomes fodder for those who ridicule the literal inconsistencies of the Bible. Source Theory in this case can help unravel the problem and show the significance of the story is not in its literal details but in its prophetic message and in the moral to the story. We accept the fact that our Scriptures do in fact contain several versions of the same story – this is the result of God inspiring a community, an entire people, to remember His story. There is much that God wants us to understand through His revelation and obviously He thinks we will best grasp His purpose by giving us more than one version of a story so that we can get beyond the literal details into the depth of His intended message.

13 In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. **14** In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. **15** Then God said to Noah, **16** "Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. **17** Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh--birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth--that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth." **18** So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. **19** And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.

"In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month" Using the perpetual solar calendar of the ancient world the Jewish writer of Genesis tells us that Noah discovers the dry ground precisely on a Wednesday which happens to be New Year's Day, the first day of the newly cleansed and restored creation. Much later in Jewish history, New Year's Day will also be the same day of the year on which the tent of the sanctuary was consecrated by Moses, which marks another new first day for God's people (Exodus 40:2). In the P-Source, Noah removes the covering of the ark precisely 60 days after the other mountain tops became visible to Noah when the ark struck ground on Ara'rat. In verse :14 the earth is finally dry on a Wednesday, 57 days after the waters had abated. According to the P-Source story, exactly 340 days after Noah, et al, entered the ark, they are commanded by God to disembark and go into all the world. The departure from the ark and processing into the world may be what the Evangelist Mark had in mind when he reports Jesus, after the resurrection, commanding His disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). As all of creation experienced salvation and a resurrection from death when Noah, his family and the animals emerged from the ark, so too after the resurrection, the apostles are commanded to preach the good news to the entire creation – not just to humans, but to all living beings.

"Noah removed the covering of the ark..." This text suggests that Noah and his fellow ark passengers have been below deck, kept in the dark for some 283 days. Perhaps the text is hinting back to the beginning of creation when God said, "Let there be light." For the first time in over ten months Noah is able to see both the light and God's earth again. Noah may be the first human to see a sight similar to Genesis 1:9-10 on the third day of creation when it was God who saw the goodness of the dry land and named it "earth." This also happened on a Wednesday, the first Wednesday of the world's existence as described in Genesis 1.

While God Himself protectively shut Noah in the ark (7:16), Noah has to remove the

covering himself to get out of the ark. Was there some reticence on God's part to let them out? Does God want Noah and all of us to understand He is not going to do for us what we are capable of doing for ourselves? It calls to mind Exodus 14:15 when God confronts Moses for whining about their situation: "Why do you cry to me? You tell the people what they need to do."

It is God not Noah who takes the initiative in having the humans and the animals disembark to repopulate His restored world newly cleansed of sin. God sends Noah and family out of their little paradise (back) into the world. The God who had shut them into the ark and cut them off from the world returns them to the world from which they had been taken. If we remember that the word "ark" actually can mean a "coffin" we have in this scene a prefiguring of the resurrection with the saved people returning to life in the redeemed creation.

Chrysostom says the story of the flood is to remind us that there is a God and there will be a Judgment Day. It is a warning to us to spare us from suffering. "What could be worse than this stupidity if, though hearing every day about the judgment and the kingdom, we imitate those living in the time of Noah, and the people in Sodom, waiting to learn everything by experience? Yet it was for this reason that all those events were preserved in writing, that if one would be incredulous with regard to things to come he might receive, from things that have already occurred, a clear assurance of the future." (HOMILIES ON ST. JOHN 1-47, p. 384) In other words, are we so stubborn and stupid that we will have to wait until we stand before the Judgment seat before we will believe it is happening? God, after all, has tried to warn us! For Chrysostom the story of Noah and the flood is most important because it is a prototype story, a prophecy of what is to come and it should warn us to be prepared for the coming judgment of God.

Some who question the literal value of the story ask how it was possible for Noah to travel the earth and collect species of all the animals. He would have had to travel throughout the entire world including the

artic, Antarctic, North and South America (of which the Bible never once even acknowledges its existence. Remember in 1492 Columbus discovered a "new world", one previously unknown to Jews and Christians). He would have to have been able to build the ark while simultaneously hunting all the species of the animals throughout the world – the bible never mentions his absence from the ark building project while traveling the world. He would have had to somehow keep the animals and tend to them while the ark was being built over the 100 year period which the story says he had to build the ark. And then after the flood he would have had to get all these animals back to their proper habitats in every direction at the same time. While all things are possible for God, Noah still had to operate within the laws of physics and the technology of his day. The story stretches the limits of credulity which is why St. John Chrysostom warned his flock not to be overly rational about the story, but rather to look to the story for its spiritual lessons. The story is a prototypical story about a fallen world awash in sin and a God who continues to work to save some of His creation. God saves even animals in the story not just His favored human beings. He saves the animals because they are supposed to serve humans. The story argues that even when God is totally angry at us, when He is totally grieved by our sins and regrets having brought us into being, that His love trumps His anger, grief, regrets and judgment; He salvages His creation despite how evil humans can be. There still is no mention of Satan in the Genesis story and nowhere does it blame Satan for the evil that humans do. God has no opposite and equal. The LORD is sovereign and all powerful and He is in constant warfare with the powers of darkness and chaos which want to overwhelm the earth. But even these powers, such as the abyss, must obey God and accomplish God's will. Neither chaos, the abyss, nor evil are more powerful than the Lord God, nor do they have any rights over human beings. Even when God uses the abyss to carry out His will, He still does not allow the abyss to totally overwhelm His creatures. God provides and saves some even from the forces He is using for judgment. The story is advocating for the goodness of God as Savior.

In the mid-2nd Century, St. Justin the Martyr (d.165) wrote the following comments on Noah. He follows in the footsteps of St. Peter in his Epistle who looked beyond the literal reading of the story to its meaning as a prototype of baptism (1 Peter 3). St. Justin wrote, "At the flood the mystery of the world's salvation was at work. The just man Noah, together with the other flood personages, namely, his wife, his three sons and their wives, made eight in number thereby symbolizing the eighth day on which our Christ was raised from the dead, that day being always implicitly the first, Christ, the first born of all creation, has become in a new sense the head of another race, regenerated by Him, through water, through faith, and through the wood which contained the mystery of the cross, just as Noah was saved through the wood of the Ark, carried by the waters of the flood... And I mean here those who receive preparation through water, faith, and wood escape the judgment of God that is to come." For St. Justin the story of the flood is a prototypical story that lays down a pattern of how God works so that we can recognize the work of God in Christ. Noah is saved from death as Christ is and becomes the first new man of the new creation just as Christ is the new Adam and creates in us a new human race which lives not by the flesh but by the Spirit of God. For St. Justin the full meaning of the Noah story cannot be fathomed until one understands Christ – only in seeing the fulfillment of the typology does one recognize the prophetic significance of the story.

"So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark." There is no wild rush or chaotic stampede of "cabin fevered" animals to flee the confines of the ark. What we have described here is a very orderly, solemn procession with each family of animals waiting their turn to join the recession from the ark. Rather like a well organized Paschal procession emerging from the church building, the ark's passengers emerge each walking with their own kind from the ark which was their tomb into a world cleansed of sin. With reverence they disembark to enjoy their freedom, going out into the world to celebrate salvation –

God's triumph over sin and death. This is exactly what we experience each Paschal midnight when we process out of the church into the creation renewed by Christ's resurrection from the dead and the ultimate victory over sin and death.

The story of Noah and the ark is used by our Lord Jesus Christ as a prophetic story to prepare those of us still alive on earth to be prepared for the coming judgment of God. It is exactly what use we are to make of the story of the flood, As it says in Deuteronomy 32:29: "This nation has no sense whatever, they lack all discernment all sense were they wise they would realize what happened and learn for the future" (New Skete Translation). We are to use the story of Noah and the ark to learn about the future. If we turn the lesson of the ark into a test case for biblical literalism, we end up lacking discernment and learning nothing from the story to help us deal with the coming yet future Judgment of God.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. **21** And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. **22** While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

Though in the previous verse, 8:19, the animals follow Noah out of the ark in something like a Paschal Procession, the solemn assembly does not end in an agape celebration for the animals who survived the flood. Rather Noah will slaughter a great number of the animals which so calmly followed his lead and accepted his dominion throughout the flood. The new world onto which the ark's former inhabitants step apparently also has a new set of relationships. The humans are going to exercise their dominion over all other creatures and use the animals as a means to approach and worship God. Humans, who were created by God to be an intermediary between God and the rest of creation in Genesis 1, now will use animals in sacrifice as an intermediary between themselves and the Lord God. This situation of animal sacrifice for the people chosen by God to be His light to the nations will continue until the sacrificial death of God's Son on the cross brings an end to such practice as a way to please or appease God. God will choose death, the sacrifice of His own Son, as the means to end humans using the blood of animals as their intermediary with God. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ...

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant. ... But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:15-26). The coming of the Son of God into the world brings an end to animal sacrifice and restores humanity's relationship to God. Humans originally were to be mediators between God and the rest of creation. The human dominion over animals was to be demonstrated by the humans standing before God as the mediators for the entire created order. Animal sacrifice overturned the original order established by God and unnaturally placed the animals between God and humans! The animals in some fashion

became the intermediary to appease God. In the incarnate Christ, once again humanity has the role of mediator between God and creation; human life and action now are what put us right with God. At the proskomedia (when the priest prepares the bread to be offered and sanctified in the Liturgy which follows), the Christian understanding of the Eucharist is presented in prayer by the celebrant: "Sacrificed in the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world for the life of the world and for its salvation." No longer does a flood cleanse the world of sin; no longer will animal sacrifice purify the flesh or the soul. Now the sin and wickedness of the world is taken away by Jesus Christ, who is the first fully human person, and thus can serve as microcosm and mediator and priest.

Noah builds an altar and offers worship to God "for the whole world" as we pray in the Anaphora. In St. Basil's Liturgy the priest in the Offertory Prayer says, "Look down on us, O God, and behold this our service. Receive it as You did the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, and the peace-offerings of Samuel." We ask God to look down on our feeble efforts to worship Him, and to remember the worship of His chosen servants that pleased Him. Not only do we remember all that God has done for us (**anamnesis**), we want God to remember, when viewing our worship, those humans who pleased Him!

We are not told whether Noah is making a thanksgiving or peace offering or making propitiation for the sins of the world. Any one of those offerings might be appropriate. God has not commanded any sacrifice be offered, but perhaps Noah is taking no chances and wants either to thank God for saving him or to appease God so that there will be no more devastation. Noah doesn't say a word, remaining as silent as he has for his entire life.

"took of every clean animal and ... bird... and offered burnt offerings..." God has not commanded animal sacrifice, so what possesses Noah to offer it? He preserved the life of all these animals for a year in the ark only to kill them now. The image of

Noah living in some paradisiacal peace with the animals as companions in the ark is suddenly shattered by Noah slaughtering them. Some have argued that humans by nature are to be priests and kings, so that sacrificial worship is natural to humans. At worship is when we are most human in this line of thinking. However so far in the text there was only one other instance of animal sacrificial worship and that was immediately followed by the murder of Abel!

Nevertheless most commentators feel God was pleased and appeased by the sacrifice whether it had been commanded by God or initiated by Noah. Throughout the Temple period of Judaism the main form of worship for Israel involved animal sacrifice.

Somewhere near 70AD the Romans completely destroy the temple in Jerusalem and the city itself, and then Jewish animal sacrifice and the sacrificial priesthood came to an end. Judaism survived the destruction of the temple as rabbinic Judaism with its emphasis on the Torah was on the ascendancy at the very time Jerusalem was destroyed. Christianity is actually one form of rabbinic Judaism that comes from this time period. Christ Himself downplayed the Temple, but unlike Pharisaical Judaism with its emphasis on the Torah, Christ the Teacher asserts Himself – the incarnate Word of God and Messiah - as more important than the Torah and the Temple. Jesus claims His interpretation of the Torah is the revelation of God. Christianity for its part never practiced animal sacrifice always seeing Christ as the once and for all sacrifice that ended the need for any blood sacrifice.

"when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor...." Though generally it is thought God was pleased by the scent of the roasting meat (as the mention of Noah in the in St. Basil's Liturgy assumes), the story may have some ambiguity to it. For though God decides never to destroy humans again, it is precisely when He smells the burning sacrifice that He also remembers the human heart always inclines towards evil (8:21). The sacrifice has somehow reminded him of this awful truth.

"when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor..." The offering is a barbeque of each

clean animal, and God appreciates the smell. The story suggests that the reconciliation between humans and God is accomplished. God is pleased once again with His human creatures. In what sense God can smell is unknown, but this is the first time in Genesis that this capacity is attributed to God. Orthodox to this day hope to please God and invoke His favor by burning incense in worship. Aaron was commanded to perpetually offer incense to the Lord (Exodus 30:8). In Orthodox services the censor and incense are blessed with the words, "Incense we offer to You, O Christ our God, as an odor of spiritual fragrance. Receive it upon Your heavenly altar, and send down upon us in return the grace of Your all-holy Spirit." As we sing during the Lenten Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, "Let my prayer arise in Your sight as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!" (Psalm 141:2) Noah's offering incense is similar to the description of Aaron in Wisdom 18:21, "For a blameless man was quick to act as their champion; he brought forward the shield of his ministry, prayer and propitiation by incense; he withstood the anger and put an end to the disaster, showing that he was your servant."

"...the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man...'" The last words about God's heart in 6:6 were that God was totally grieved by humanity. Here God is at peace and makes a new resolve – He is convinced that He must learn to live at peace with the creatures whom He knowingly endowed with free will - His stubborn, troublesome and evil-doing humans. He promises not to let the humans provoke Him ever again to such wrath and destruction. The author of Genesis has God speaking to Himself not to Noah in making this promise. However, read Ezekiel 20 in which God describes at least 3 other occasions on which He wanted to pour His fury upon the house of Israel because of their sins and totally destroy them, yet decided against it. The notion of the faithful remnant whom God saves from the midst of an otherwise sinful humanity becomes a common theme in the Old Testament.

"the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" When all is said and done and flood waters have cleansed the earth of violence and wickedness, God expresses a realistic if depressing assessment of human beings - the human heart is still the source of evil in the world. Neither God nor the inspired scribes who wrote Genesis attributed the evil of the world to Satan. No amount of effort on God's part to change the world can apparently bring about the change needed in the human heart. Humans did, do and will at times turn their hearts to the greatest of evils. For those who ask, "Why doesn't God intervene in our world and change everything? Why does God let evil exist?" The answer from Genesis 6-9 is first because He continues to allow humans whose hearts constantly imagine evil to exist. Second, God did intervene once and it was an abysmal failure – for He wiped out all the wicked, but wickedness remains in the human heart. As long as there are humans, evil has a source and a home – our hearts. God wants humans to exist, and so He knows this means evil will exist as well. As long as humans have free will, the potential toward evil must be real and possible or humans are not free. God created humans not automatons. He created beings that He wanted to CHOSE the good. But to do this, He had to give them real and meaningful and dangerous choice. To have the power to choose the good, we must have the power to choose the evil. This also is the only way in which human love is possible. God is love. He created us in His image and likeness. We are capable of love, which means we must be able to choose in order to really love (otherwise it isn't love it is reactive instinct). The flood story reaffirms what we learned in Genesis 3 about human beings and the reality and risks of free will and love. Even the flood which cleanses the world of wickedness cannot take away free will, love, choice and the potential for evil from human beings. And God comes to accept that love also means for Him unconditionally loving humans as they are – faults and sin and all. God's love is not a reaction to us (and our God-likeness and our God-given goodness); God's love is how He chooses to act towards us before we even existed and despite how we behave. God experiences that true love means pain and risk and

rejection. And despite all the sinful, wicked and evil faults of humans, God so loves the world that He will send His only Son to save the world. This is true love. When in the Gospel Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, to love beyond those who love us, He is asking us to love as God realized love demanded Him to love – even those who reject Him and do not love Him back. God doesn't ask more of us than He is willing to do. But He does ask us to do what He does. Jesus taught, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ... You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:44-48).

Noah is the prototype of the man who is to reconcile the fallen world to a holy God. In Ezekiel 14, God is so displeased with the House of Israel that He declares that even if Noah was with them and interceding for Israel, He would not spare them from His pending wrath.

"for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" In Genesis 6:5-6, it is because God realizes that the human heart imagines evil constantly that He become grieved over having created the humans. But after having destroyed His creation in order to rid the earth of sin, God is suddenly pleased with the incense offering of Noah, and appears to remember what He so valued in His creatures when He first looked upon them and saw them as "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The human is capable of doing something pleasing to God, and even if that something is very small – creating scented smoke – it removes from God His grief stricken desire to eliminate humans from the earth.

"...never again..." The Lord's promise to never again destroy all life may also indicate God will no longer judge humanity as one whole but will treat each person as they deserve based on their own life choices. The promise is unconditional – no matter

how wicked humans continue to be God says He will not again curse and totally destroy the earth because of the evil humans do. This may well be the beginning of the notion of hell – a place for the torment and punishment of sinners which does not involve the destruction of the planet. While God's vow to never again destroy the earth and all the wicked on it may be a sign of His mercy, it also means that as long as the earth exists the wicked will always live alongside those who wish to follow God. If God was not able to eliminate the wickedness in humans through His divine punishments and great mercy, it seems that human efforts through correctional institutions, police, armies, legislation, courts and wars will also never bring an end to all evil either. There is no such thing as a war to end all wars! As long as there are humans in whose hearts evil incubates, there will be wickedness on earth. That is a reality we have to live with.

God promised to NEVER again destroy all humanity, and yet also speaks of a coming Judgment Day. What is holding God back? Why does he wait before visiting His final saving judgment on the people of earth? "Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but

had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2
Thessalonians 2:3-12)

The conclusion of the flood

Like Genesis 1-3, the flood narrative of Genesis 6-9 is as much if not more about us today and what it means to be human than it is a story about the past and the history of ancient peoples. The story of the flood is fully empowered by symbolic thinking – symbols that God chose to use and men inspired by God recorded to teach, reprove, correct, and train us in righteousness and to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16). It isn't meant to be read just as past history. The New Testament writers did not limit the flood story to being a record of the deeds of men of old. The story isn't merely about the history of an ancient flood; it is the story about how God relates to a fallen and sinful world. It is the story about God's judgment of humanity, as well as God's impending judgment of humanity. It is a story of prophecy, preparedness, expectation and fulfillment. God has a particular relationship with the world. The story is also about the future, and a Creator God who has expectations for the world and will hold the humans on earth accountable for what they do with their stewardship of the earth. God doesn't interfere with our free will. However He does hold us accountable for what we do. To limit the value of this Scripture to whether the story is literally true and to get bogged down in the literal details to the exclusion of its symbolism and higher meaning is to miss much of the importance of the story. It is to fall seriously short of how Jesus Christ and the New Testament writers understood and made use of the story. The story is a warning – whether it is history, a parable or a prophecy - the end result is the same: we are told by the Lord that He is a God of expectation and judgment and we must conform to His will and His standards. It is not our standards which count. It is not how we judge the story of the flood which matters, but how ultimately the story will be judgment on us if we fail to understand its deepest prophetic meaning.

The point of Genesis 6-9 is: How are we supposed to live as a result of the narrative and the lessons it contains? The point isn't "what kind of science does it teach us?" Rather we are to ask, "What does it mean for our future and for our present?" We don't read it mostly to learn about past history or to learn about science. The story intentionally points beyond itself to a future reality – to the reality of God's purposes, for the story tells us about God even with grief in His heart accepting the role that the sinful humans must play in His plan. If the story's main purpose is to teach ancient history, what difference does it make? God promises in the story never to flood the earth again, so why should we care about something that will never happen to us or the world again? The story is prophecy and revelation, it is a teaching story and it teaches pretty well. The lesson is about how we are to live today in this world and why. Why should we care about what God thinks? How am I to act knowing there is a God who is Lord, Creator, Judge and Savior of the universe? The believability of the story doesn't lie in its literal accuracy of describing past events, but in its revelation that God is Creator, Savior and Judge, and that I am answerable to Him. Belief isn't mostly about accepting the literalness of the text, but is about "how am I to live as a believer?" St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444AD) argued that Genesis does not tell us everything that can be known about the early history of humankind; rather it offers us only that which is "useful for orienting one's life." The story is essential to us because it speaks about how to live today not because it teaches us past history. Belief isn't mostly about what I think about the ancient past, but what I think about the future and therefore how I am to live now. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval" (Hebrews 11:1-2). Belief is the basis for our actions as we move into the future. Belief is not mostly our position in regard to the literalness of the Bible, for the Bible itself never makes a literal reading of scripture the test for whether or not we are believers. The test of our being believers is how we live – are we willing to love God and neighbor as ourselves? Are we willing to live in this world always bringing to bear the Kingdom of God which is to come into our every decision and by our decisions witnessing to our faith in that coming Kingdom? The story of the flood is important because of how belief shapes our daily lives. "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for

what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Romans 8:24-25).

The story of the flood invokes in us memory of the opening sentences of Genesis 1 in which God creates dry land from the chaotic abyss of waters. God imposed His order on creation and defied all the other powers of the universe- malevolent or simply chaotic. The order that exists in the universe according to Genesis is the result of God’s own intervention in the abyss when he tames the powers of chaos to produce an orderly universe which allows life to exist. Today some biblical fundamentalists, creation scientists and Intelligent Design adherents want to argue that the order in the universe is the ultimate proof of God’s existence. Interestingly, as historian Robert Wilken noted, the Christian apologists of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries took a different tact when considering the laws of nature which seem to govern the universe. “They did not argue that there is a God because there is order; rather they saw design in the universe because they knew the one God.” (TSOECT) Or as Hebrews 11:6 puts it: “For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” In other words, those who fear that science and evolution disprove the existence of God are demonstrating their own lack of faith; they are not proving or even defending the existence of God. The stories of Genesis are not as much an accounting of the exact history of our human ancestors as they are an exposition of what it means to be human, an explanation for the existence of evil, and a contextualizing of the human dilemma and story within the context of the larger narrative of the universe which is being told by God and still unfolding before us.

A brief final comment about the Source Theory which I utilized in my reflections: Source theory in a very particular way reveals to us that the final editor of our Bible, himself inspired by God, recognized God’s hand in giving him more than one version of a story to include in the Scriptures. The editor is indeed a third human hand in the writing of the Scriptures; he adds his work to that of the J-Source and the P-Source. However, if we unwind the story into its two component parts - J and P - each strand seems to read pretty well by itself, which suggests the final editor didn’t add much material but utilized what he had. He did rearrange a few lines, but if he added anything to what he received it is minimal. Some Source Theorists actually think the same "hand" that recorded the P-Source is the same hand that is the final editor of the text. If that is true, what is amazing is that he kept in the final edited version (our Bible) ideas from the J-source that contradict his own thinking. In that sense he apparently did think the J-source material was in fact inspired by God and so dared not edit it out! Thus Source Theory actually lends credence to the notion of the divine inspiration of Scripture. The human temptation to clean up the story and to get rid of materials contradicting his own ideas were stayed by the hand of God which was guiding what the final editor wrote.

If the story of the ark is one of salvation, what constitutes salvation for Noah? The story certainly is about escaping death, which in the story is an “ultimate” destruction. Though the rest of the world dies, destroyed by the flood, Noah and his family elude death – at least for the moment. However, the story of the ark is not about getting to heaven or about eternal life. There is no discussion in the story about life everlasting or the grandeur of heaven or about anything invisible. The story is about this earth and life in this world, yet it sets the stage for understanding Christ and life in the world to come. The story is very importantly a typology. It gives us a glimpse into what salvation is, and what it means to overcome death. But it still is all about events that happen within the confines of this fallen world. It is only when we understand the story as a typology, do we see how it is but a sketch or model of the real salvation which will be revealed in Jesus Christ. The Noah story is very much like the Exodus story which is also a typology. In the Exodus story the people of God move from captivity and slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. At Pascha in the Orthodox Church we recognize the Passover and Exodus story as a typology of Pascha, the resurrection of Christ. In the final and fulfilled Pascha, the people of God no longer move from Egypt to the Promised Land, but now as we sing at Pascha, we sojourn “from death to life, and from earth to heaven”, for that is where Christ our God leads us. The Exodus Passover is a prototype of the ultimate Passover which is the event to which the original Passover points

and from which it derives its meaning. Similarly, the story of the flood is a typology which helps us understand salvation in Jesus Christ. However, there is a great difference between the Noah story and the Christ story. In the Noah story Noah escapes death – a first time - by being in the ark. Nevertheless, despite being saved from a destruction which kills every other human being except Noah and his family, Noah eventually succumbs to death (Genesis 9:29). Jesus Christ on the other hand does not escape death the first time. He dies on the cross. He however is raised from the dead to live eternally. Noah escapes the death which kills all the rest of humanity, only to die later. Christ does not escape the death which claims all of humanity, but then rises from the dead and destroys death. In Christ we begin to see the symbolic and real importance of the Noah story. The ark story is a type – it shows us the way in which God deals with evil, sin and death. But God's ultimate plan, of which the Noah story was just a preliminary sketch, is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. It is the fulfillment of the plan which ultimately shows us what the sketch was trying to reveal. That is how typology works. Noah's salvation was for the life of the world, but it was a temporary sparing of his life. Christ's life was not spared – also for the life of the world - but His death is an eternal destruction of death and the bestowing of life on all.

Genesis 9

9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. **2** The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.

"Be fruitful and multiply...." God's first words to humankind after the flood are to repeat to them what He had commanded when He first created them in Genesis 1. Does God understand that creation is beginning totally new or just that creation has been renewed? This new world order is not like Paradise, nor even like the world into which Adam and Eve were expelled and exiled; animals will now fear and dread the humans, not live at peace with them. In Genesis 2 Adam named the animals which showed he had power over them, but the animals did not dread the human. After the deluge, the animals which Noah had helped preserve from death in the flood are to be human food. Is this why God wanted Noah to preserve the life of all the animals because He knew in the post-flood world they would be human food?

Except for the brief time when the animals follow Noah into and out of the ark – when Noah was shepherding or rather animalherding all wildlife – never did the humans demonstrate their "dominion" over all other creatures. Now human "dominion over" is to be replaced by dread in the animals themselves. Humanity failed to do God's will, and in the connected world of creation the animals suffer from the failure. Soon in Genesis, humans will practice warfare where not only will animals dread the humans, but humans will dread other humans as they each attempt to lord it over, enslave or eliminate one another.

God blesses Noah and his sons which will present a textual problem later in 9:24-25 when Noah wants to curse his son Ham for lewd behavior but instead curses his grandson Canaan, perhaps because Noah doesn't want to curse one who had been blessed by God. Such tensions in any one human reveal that humans have the capacity for both good and evil. God has learned to work with this fact as is witnessed in the Gospel description of the behaviors and attitudes exhibited by the Twelve Apostles.

"God ... said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply ... Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything." In the

modern world we commonly separate our spiritual lives from all else that we do: We go to church, we do our prayers, we give to the poor, etc. All of these “spiritual” activities are somehow separated from our “regular” lives where we: watch TV, go out to eat at a restaurant, exercise, do housework, have sex. We live a very dualistic life and are quite comfortable with it. The Genesis account knows of no separation between the religious/spiritual and the secular/profane. Everything in Genesis is God’s and everything is part of God’s creation. From the beginning God spoke to the humans about what they could eat, and about their sexual lives, and about work. All that happens to the personages in the story is religious – there is nothing they do which is in any sense unrelated to God and to their spiritual lives. The challenge for all humans today is to reconnect all the disparate elements of our lives so that we experience wholeness in life again. How we behave at work, what we eat at supper, what interests we have, what skills we have, what friends we have, what knowledge we hold, what property we own, who we marry, how we treat our neighbors, are actually all related to God and to our relationship to God. God speaks to the first human beings not about heaven or hell (neither is mentioned in the early chapters of Genesis) but about this world and our relationship to it. Genesis 9:1-17 represents the longest speech from God to any human beings up to this point in the story. God speaks about life, death, eating, law, procreation, environment, and anthropology. Nothing that we humans do is outside of God’s interest. To fail to see ourselves and our daily lives in relationship to God is to live exactly like the people of Noah’s day did before the flood. Jesus taught, “As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man” (Matthew 24:37-39). Have we learned nothing by reading the narrative of Noah and the flood? What are we doing today? How should we be living? What difference did Jesus think the Noah story should make in our daily lives?

“The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth” Humans were created by God in Genesis 1 to have dominion over all of creation. Humans were originally envisioned to live at peace with all animals – none were carnivores. This is very much what Isaiah envisions for God’s Kingdom: “The wolf and the **lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD**” (Isaiah 65:25). But following the flood human rule is accomplished with and through fear and dread. The world though “restored” by God is a different world where carnivores dwell. God has promised never to destroy all of life on earth again, but He will allow the humans to slaughter animals even if He will not. It is no wonder fear and dread have come upon the animals – God has lifted His protection from them and left them at the mercy of the violent and vile humans!

“...into your hand they are delivered.” The lives of the animals are placed at the mercy of the humans. God who saw the wickedness and violence of the humans before the flood, now entrusts the lives of all his creatures to these same humans. One has to wonder, Why? Has God seen a change in humanity which makes Him think humans can be entrusted with behaving responsibly toward the rest of creation? Or, is it possible that God is revealing a deistic tendency and is simply withdrawing from creation? Or is God putting full responsibility on the humans to make us fully accountable for all we do? The story is perhaps preparing us for the great and awesome Final Judgment. It does not offer a very satisfactory explanation as to why humans have delivered into their hands the lives of all other animals. Humans have not proven themselves very good stewards of God’s generosity. God seems determined to place ever more responsibility on the humans.

3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. **4** Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

The world after the flood is not a return to Paradise, nor even a renewal of the world immediately after the Fall. No longer are humans to be vegans, for God now puts into their hands the lives of every animal to be used as food. Humans have a new relationship with all other animals, not a renewed one. The Flood story in the P-Source did distinguish between clean and unclean animals; no such distinction is made at this point in the text. The ideas of kashrut (kosher) are not here established by God. However, God does place a serious limit on human blood lust. The permission to eat meat comes with a very controlling law. Humans are not to eat meat with its blood in it. Humans are not to eat raw meat, nor eat an animal while it is still alive. Unlike carnivorous wild beasts which tear flesh and limbs from their victims, humans must prepare their meat and show all due respect to the blood. The life of an animal is in its blood. The direct connection of each animal to the spiritual world is in its blood. Once again dualism is rejected. The physical blood is life – it is the very point of connection with the non-physical (spiritual) world. The text clearly shows that the physical world is sacred; the physical blood is life not mere cells, but is life. The distinction between the physical and the spiritual is intentionally blurred by God.

God's very first command to the people of the new world cleansed of sin deals with food just as it did in the original creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2. His first prohibition endeavors to get humans to respect life. We may eat meat, but the permission to do so is connected to a command to respect life. Wasteful slaughtering of animals is not blessed. Humans are to show appropriate recognition and respect for life, even animal life. The idea of the sanctity of life was never mentioned in Paradise, though probably assumed as all in Paradise was holy; only now when the killing of animals is permitted does God pointedly reveal the truth of the sacredness of all life.

Eating animal flesh while approved by God belongs only to the world after the flood. It did not belong to Paradise nor to the world before the flood; Biblically speaking, it is not completely natural to us. Eating meat is not

an eternal value but belongs to the world which is passing away. Many find it a delicious pleasure to eat a good steak, yet eating meat is not an ultimate good but one approved originally for this fallen world only. It is a pleasure of the fallen world. Fast periods acknowledge that meat eating belongs to this world, and really will not and cannot commend us to God or bring about our salvation. There is nothing wrong with eating meat, but in fasting we deny that flesh eating is of eternal value and we admit it belongs only to this fallen world – and we do not live for this world alone. Man does not live by bread alone (Luke 4:4) and neither does he live by and for the eating of meat! Our roots and our true home are in paradise and our goal is God's heaven. We acknowledge in fasting that we belong to another world, a world beyond this fallen, carnivorous world; the ultimate values and good in the world-to-come do matter in this world. Fasting challenges our love for flesh eating – our "blood thirstiness" and says these carnivorous pleasures belong to this world. We can enjoy eating meat with thanksgiving, but we also must realize that this is part of our appetite in and for the fallen world. Despite our Paschal feasts with their lambs and hams, the foretaste of the Kingdom is the bloodless sacrifice we receive in the Holy Eucharist. Denying ourselves in the present world is a good that can lead to life in the world to come.

"...as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." In Genesis 2:16-17, God gave permission to the humans to freely eat of any of the trees of the Garden of Eden – with the firm exception of one tree. In doing this God imposed on the humans the one and only rule of Paradise. This one law we understand to be spiritually promoting self-control, self-denial, abstinence or fasting. God saw that it was good for humans to have access to the abundance of the fruits of the earth, to enjoy the abundance, but also for the humans to learn a limit, to learn that discipline is an important aspect of being "not God", of being human. Now in Genesis 9:3-4, God is vastly expanding the food supply for humans. No longer are humans limited to eating the earth's harvest of fruits and vegetables, now every animal is added to

the food supply. The end result of being expelled from Paradise because of our sin, of having the world being overwhelmed with destructive sinfulness, is that God increases the food supply! Humans are now far less "deprived" than ever, at least when it comes to edible resources. The world is no longer paradise, but God opens up to humans an entirely new food source in which many humans will delight and for which many will crave to enjoy. However, while increasing the palatable pleasures for people, God once again in the midst of abundance imposes a rule of self-control and abstinence. We can eat meat to our heart's content, but we are not to eat it with its blood still in it. Certainly in the over sated and over fed modern existence, this should give us pause. What does God know that we don't understand? Why does God offer abundance and then tell us to practice self control? Medical doctor Peter Whybrow in his book, AMERICAN MANIA: WHEN MORE IS NOT ENOUGH, offers a health warning to Americans: "In times of material affluence, when desire is no longer constrained by limited resources, the evidence from our contemporary American experiment suggests that we humans have trouble setting limits to our instinctual craving... there is considerable evidence suggesting that unchecked consumption fosters our social malaise, eroding our self-constraint and pulling the cultural pendulum toward excessive indulgence and greed" (pp 7-8). In other words, abundance does not seem to satisfy, it seems to increase the craving for more. We seem to need some external reminder that enough is enough and too much is too much. No wonder America is dotted with so many fast food places and diet and weight loss clinics.

"...lifeblood..." Right after Abel made his animal sacrifice; he is murdered by his brother Cain. Here after Noah's animal sacrifice God speaks to Noah about the sacredness of blood. Each person's blood – life is sacred. This law for all mankind demands an absolute adherence to the sanctity of human life. God lays down a rule that if anyone or even if any animal sheds a man's life, the murderer shall be put to death. God does not want Cain's sin to be down played or accepted. Murder is punishable by death. But this certainly

reflects the fact that everything has changed on earth and none can live together in peace. God has accepted that the human heart apparently cannot be washed clean of its wickedness, but now He lays down a law forbidding murder. God does not prevent murder from happening (and His Son will suffer the consequence of His decision!), but His law demands that humans must control themselves. And if a human can't control himself and kills another human, the rest of the humans by God's command are to deal with the killer. This will become the foundation for Old Covenantal civil society. God does not offer nor promise to deal with human wickedness such as murder. Humans are to practice self control. But if they can't control themselves, then humans must band together and take control of the person who refuses to practice self-control. This is God's expectation of humanity – humans must begin to police themselves because God has ordered it. In the New Covenant, in the new order, in the new world instituted by Jesus Christ however, on the cross He does not demand Old Covenantal justice, rather He prays, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). He inaugurates a new Kingdom not of this world, nor of its values, not even of the ones from the Torah.

"Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." God forbids the eating of flesh with blood still in it even before Moses exists and he is given the law from God to teach to the people. Genesis puts this law as one of the first laid down by God for all people – not just for observant Jews, for the law is given before Abraham or Moses lived. It is interesting that in Acts 15 when the Apostles are considering what religious laws Gentile converts to Christianity must keep, they adopt only three rules mandatory for all Christians and one of them is the Genesis 9:4 prohibition against eating meat with blood still in it: "abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:20). They do not require all 613 laws of the Torah, nor even the Ten Commandments! This same set of rules is repeated in Acts 21:25. To be a Christian, you do not need to be an observant Jew – no requirements for keeping Torah nor kosher. But Gentile

Christians were expected to recognize the universality of certain moral laws.

"Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." One lesson God may have wanted to convey to the survivors of the flood is that life is still sacred. They get out of the ark and witness the mass devastation which has taken place – all flesh has been destroyed. But God doesn't want the survivors to misunderstand the events. All flesh was destroyed because of the distortions brought about by wickedness. The destruction of all flesh was not a pronouncement that life has no value, nor that God favors ethnic cleansing or endorses mass murder. God affirms the value, the sanctity of life by telling the humans the blood is holy, life is sacred. God wanted the survivors of the flood, and all who read their story to learn that sacredness is still part of creation. They may no longer be living in the Holy Paradise of Eden. They may no longer be residing in the antediluvian world of Noah's forefathers. This however has not changed the holiness of life itself. Meat eating is allowed, but humans must recognize the sacredness of all life and the sanctity of every human life. God wants the humans He has saved to understand this most significant lesson. The significance of the story is not that there is now law governing human behavior; the importance of the story is that life is holy, and in the face of the destruction of all life by the flood, humans must be told that God still sees life as sacred and He expects His chosen humans to do the same. God will say that He will never again destroy all human life to rid the world of evil and sin; nor does He command His humans to try this method to perfect their world.

5 For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. **6** Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. **7** And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it."

"...I will surely require a reckoning..."
Though God's heart was grief stricken by seeing the wickedness in humans, God had not before the flood laid down many laws for the humans to follow. If He hoped they would use their free will solely for the good of one another, the humans had totally disappointed Him. But when God was totally distraught with the humans, He suddenly brought judgment on them and wiped out all by His chosen remnant. In this text God clearly lays down that there are rules to be followed, and that humans will be held accountable for their behavior. If the humans before this law were held accountable for what they did, now God clearly warns of consequences for human behavior – His judgment. "All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (Romans 2:12-13).

"...of every man's brother I will require the life of man..." The prohibition of killing one's brother comes too late to save Abel. It also is the first suggestion that brotherhood means responsibility for one's brother, and that all men are brothers.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed..." This is the first retributive justice law prescribing the death penalty for those who commit murder. Was murder in fact a common form of violence that God so hated before the flood? Is it possible that God realizing that the human heart is full of evil concludes that murderers must be stopped or they themselves will wipe out humanity even though God has decided never to wipe out the human race again? God sees the need for greater restraints on humans – more laws, more severe punishments. God respects human free will, but imposes more consequences for the choices humans make. God rejects Lamech's 77 fold law of vengeance (Genesis 4:24) and imposes only one death for each murder committed. Because this law is given long before there was the 10 Commandments, some commentators feel this is a universal law established by God,

and not the Law of Moses which is obligatory only for Jews.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed..” It is up to humans to cleanse themselves of murderers. God’s command shows that we do share a common humanity and are social beings. Whatever happens to any one individual is the concern of all humans; we are social beings and have social responsibilities. Humans must enforce this law and execute the killers. We each have a responsibility for and to all other humans – to protect life, to maintain the peace, to enforce order. We are not simply individuals – we have a relationship to and responsibility for all other humans and for human civility. We have a responsibility to establish and enforce justice. We have a responsibility to rid ourselves of violent evil. Humans must police themselves to maintain order and to punish killers. God’s commandments do impose on humans a social order for the common good. In Genesis discerning right and wrong arises not from democracy but from revelation.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.” The rationale for the death penalty somehow is related to our being in God’s image and likeness. “... for God made man in his own image...” The rationale for not killing other humans is an issue of human dignity – each of us is made in the image of God. We are not to deface the image of God on earth. There is an intrinsic value in every human being. The prohibition on killing is not only a matter of self restraint; it is a matter of recognizing the God-established value that each human possesses. Genesis rejects a purely utilitarian evaluation of humans. The value of a human is not determined by his or her net worth, nor by how much he or she contributes to society, nor by what value society attributes to them. Each human conceived has value because each is in God’s image and likeness.

St. Isaac the Syrian (d. ca. 700 AD) said that Christians cannot come to understand the teachings of Christ “through the discipline of the justice of the Law. In the latter there is

‘an eye for an eye’ and ‘a stripe for a stripe’, and so forth. But the grace of Christ commands, ‘Overcome evil with good,’ that is, ‘whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also...’ For Christians Christ’s commands and teachings of love supersede the legal demands of justice of the Old Testament.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed..” There is a logical problem in this statement. If we are to take the statement absolutely literally without imposing a rational interpretation on it, wouldn’t this lead to the ultimate extinction of everyone? Every executioner who sheds blood would also have to be executed by another human who in turn would be guilty of bloodshed. This is another lesson in learning that a literal reading of the text is an interpretation of the text. The text itself does not tell us to be reasonable; it simply gives us the Law. We need to interpret the text in order to understand it.

“And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it.” Though the verses preceding this one focus a great deal on capital punishment for murderers, here God turns to what seems to be His real concern – that humans be fruitful and multiply. Despite setting strict laws for dealing with murderers, God’s main focus is not on setting (arbitrary) rules for humans. God is mostly concerned with the humans having abundant life – being life giving and life protecting. As the Lord Jesus Christ said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, **9** "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, **10** and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. **11** I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." **2** And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: **13** I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. **14** When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, **15** I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. **16** When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." **17** God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

In 9:8 God is speaking to Noah AND to his sons which is the first time they too are included in "hearing" the invisible God; so however Noah was able to hear and understand God, now too His sons hear God speaking to them. In 9:17 God appears to be speaking to Noah alone, if the text is to be read literally.

This is the first explicit covenant between God and Noah. A covenant is an agreement that binds together two parties that otherwise would be separated. As a result of the Fall humans had become not only separated from God, but even alienated from Him and had become at enmity with Him. The covenant endeavors to heal the division and to bind God to humanity again specifically through His chosen servant Noah and Noah's descendants. In this sense the covenant is with Noahian humanity, not just with the man Noah alone. (Because a covenant "binds together" two parties who might not share a natural union, we can understand how the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is then a New Covenant). The Genesis 9 covenant asks nothing of the humans and is extended to all of creation (though in the earlier verses :1-7, God promised a blessing to humanity and laid down specific laws regarding not eating the blood of animals and demanding societal punishment upon any who kill other humans). God promises never to destroy humanity or the earth again, no matter what. In Isaiah 54:9, God promises to remember His covenant with Noah and not to entirely annihilate faithless Israel. Noah is the prototype of the faithful remnant who exist in every generation and whom God will remember. "Noah was found perfect and righteous; in the time of wrath he was taken in exchange; therefore a remnant was left to the earth when the flood came. Everlasting covenants were made with him that all flesh should not be blotted out by a flood" (Sirach 44:17-18). As stated in the text, this covenant is also a covenant of hope because it makes certain promises about God's future relationship with all humans. Hope for the humans is also a trust in the unseen future. We will not know if God will stay faithful to His promise to "never again" destroy the earth until time has come to an end. The Covenant for us is thus an agreement of faith. As Hebrews 11:13, 39-

40 attests: "These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ... And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." We await the fulfillment of God's eternal promise.

The Covenant. God makes a covenantal promise to never again destroy the earth and all humans by another flood – the rainbow becomes the sign of that covenant. But did God leave Himself a loophole? He won't destroy the world with a flood, but might He use something else – say fire – to destroy the earth? In Genesis 8:21, "the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.'" God seems to rule out ever again destroying all humankind. He recognizes the human heart is full of evil from the time we are children. But His covenantal promise to never totally destroy the earth again would also seem to apply to whatever God plans for His final Judgment Day. Of course in Genesis 8:22, God may have made conditional this promise when He said, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." The condition being that as long as the earth exists God will not destroy it. He doesn't promise that the earth will always exist, but certainly in the New Testament there is much indication that God plans to transfigure the earth at the end of time, not destroy it. In the Beatitudes for example we read that the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5) – what kind of blessing is that if the earth is to be destroyed anyway? And how is the rainbow an everlasting covenant if "everlasting" means only for a time? Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, Jesus answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed ... for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. ... As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they

married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:20-21,26-27). The Kingdom of God is in our midst – it is not far away "in heaven" nor does it require the annihilation of the earth for it to be established. The promise of God in Genesis never to destroy all life again is everlasting. And while God explicitly promises never to destroy all of life again, He never denies the possibility of someday glorifying humanity.

God's promise to never again destroy the earth and to accept as "inevitable" the wickedness in the human heart means God is willing to accept suffering because of and for His creatures. In deciding to preserve humans rather than annihilate them, God decides to accept having a continuously grieving heart as part of allowing humans to continue to exist. God in effect accepts His own having to suffer as a necessary part of His love for His creation. God can see humans will continue to cause Him pain, and He accepts that as the price He has to pay for having such creatures on His earth. Allowing the continuance of the human race for God means bearing with the wickedness of humanity and accepting the pain which humans cause Him in his heart.

"...and with every living creature..." God's covenant has a global dimension to it. The covenant is not limited to humans for even non-rational animals are included in it. The rainbow reminds God that His covenant extends to all animals too. The protection of life guaranteed in the covenant broadly includes all humans, not just Jews, males, righteous saints, the good, or believers; God's love and concern encompasses every human being without exception and unconditionally. The covenant is not limited to rational creatures, to believers, to the rich, to the educated, nor to those who have reached the age of reason. This divine testament is truly "on behalf of all and for all." And why shouldn't it include animals? In Psalm 148, one of the Psalms of praises, we call upon not only animals but even inanimate objects to praise God: "Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!" (148:7-10)

The Rainbow. Because the ancients tended to believe the sky/heavens was a solid boundary (they had no instruments to examine them closely), they had no modern concept of what the lights in the heavens were exactly (remember they had no electricity so did not and could not see the stars as light bulbs of some sort). The only things they knew created light were the sun and the stars and the moon and fire. But the stars in heaven gave a more perfect light unlike any fire on earth. The moon glowed. The light of the sun was hot – that they could observe. But what the source of the light was, they could only speculate. The appearance of a rainbow in heaven was equally mystifying as it was always above them, and could not be explained by human reason.

"bow in the cloud" Though modern people tend to see the rainbow as something beautiful, the word "bow" is the word for the weapon "bow" which any archer would use ("weapon" in fact is its only meaning in the bible). It was a beautiful bow and a sign of a promised peace, but it was seen as a weapon by the biblical authors – a sign of God's power and anger too. The author of the text has no understanding of the rainbow as a natural phenomenon caused by water droplets refracting light causing the spectrum of light to appear. He assumes that the first appearance of a rainbow was after the flood – thus all rainbows are miraculous signs, not natural phenomenon.

"When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant..." The rainbow is to be a sign to God, not the humans! When God sees the bow, he promises it will remind Him of the covenant He has made. When we see the rainbow in the sky, we might consider we are looking at the very same thing which God is looking at that very moment as well. We both share a common vision of at least one thing in creation. And if every time God sees the rainbow He is reminded of His covenant with humanity, how much more might we expect God to recognize His

peace with us everytime He sees the cross, the sign of God's New covenant with humanity.

Noah and his sons are totally silent and do not respond to God's covenant promise – they ask no questions, make no reciprocal promises; no response of theirs even gets recorded, so we have no idea what they thought about God's speaking let alone His covenant. In verse :18, they already seem to be going about their business as if nothing happened. They do not thank God for His promise and they make no promise themselves to in any way honor the covenant. God had demanded of them some level of civilization before stating the terms of the covenant. God laid down that killing other humans is unacceptable and that humans themselves must enforce the ban on killing by executing anyone who commits homicide. In effect God is demanding them to develop their own police force, judicial system, and executioners. What God precludes is both unlimited vengeance as well as tolerance of murderous violence. God has recognized that the human heart's tendency toward violence is real and will continue. But God is not going to be the one who has to tame the wickedness in fallen humanity. God appoints His humans to this task – this is now to be part of humans having dominion over creation: they must enforce dominion over their own hearts and over any tempted to murder. God places the burden on humans to police themselves. God has promised not to destroy humanity for its violent wickedness, but insists that humans deal with homicide by killing the murderers. Executing justice turns out to be a very unsavory business. Humans now are going to be forced to use the punishment God put upon them for the sin of Eve and Adam – mortality – to establish justice on earth. God has already seen how humans twist around God-given punishment by making mortality a tool of sinful murder. Now God is demanding of humans to use mortality wisely and judiciously to establish justice and to contain violence. God is curtailing the human proclivity to vengeance but is demanding that humans must rid themselves of murderers. If humans are going to live together they must choose to control the homicidal tendencies of their

hearts. If humans want to continue to have a relationship with the divine, God is insisting that the humans must be willing to purify themselves of violent evil. Unfortunately this too humans will distort with the rise of armies and warfare in which killing is sanctioned by human civilization not just in defense but in offensive aggression and pre-emptive warfare. While God sanctioned the death penalty for murderers, He does not demand humans to kill the violent before they sin.

In the Orthodox Prayer Service (Slavonic: *Molieben*) “in the time of inclement weather, and unseasonable rain”, we find the following petition: “That He will remember His covenant which He made with Noah, and will not despoil the land and His needy people with grievous wetness, dark, malevolent skies and gloomy fog, but will mercifully spare His inheritance and will command the sun to shine on the earth with fruit-bearing rays and abundant warmth, let us pray to the Lord.” From that same service there is also this petition (note this prayer asks God to make a new covenant with the petitioners – either assuming God frequently makes covenants with His people and one can petition for a covenant and/or that the covenant with Noah was not eternal but must be remade from time to time): “Save us from mud, O Lord, and from deep mire, and from deep water, that our days not pass in vanity and our years with sighing. But remember Your covenant, which You made with Noah, and make one with us, according to Your mercies, with broken hearts we pray to You, hearken and have mercy.” From the Prayer Service “in time of flood”, we find this prayer: “That He will remember the covenant that He made with Noah and not destroy us with grievous wetness and the stormy breath of winds, but will mercifully spare His inheritance and appease the storm that is laid upon us and the disturbance of the air, and will give a seasonable and peaceful breath to the wind, let us pray to the Lord.”

18 The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. **19** These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled. **20** Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; **21** and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. **22** And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. **23** Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

Shem, son of Noah, holds special honor in both the biblical tradition and in the Orthodox sacramental tradition. In the Wedding Service of the Crowning, we invoke this blessing on the wedding couple: "Remember them, O Lord our God, as You remembered Enoch, Shem, Elijah." Shem is remembered between the two men of the Old Testament who were taken by God and whose deaths are not recorded in the Scriptures. God's remembering His saints is the same as His blessing them and safely protecting them from harm and evil. Somewhat unexpectedly the survivors of the flood are invoked several times in the Sacrament of Marriage. In the Wedding service we want God to bless the wedding couple and to see their righteousness as He saw the righteousness of Enoch, Shem and Elijah. Both Noah and Shem, two men who found refuge in the ark from the cataclysmic flood which destroyed the world, are both invoked in the prayers of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The story of the flood is used in the Orthodox Church to invoke blessings on newlyweds. A good trivia question: In which sacrament of the Orthodox Church are the people on Noah's ark remembered? I wonder how many would guess that Noah and flood are so connected to the sacrament of marriage. What does it say about our understanding of life for newlyweds in this world?

"Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard ..." Genesis 4:2 told us that Cain was a tiller of the ground, so in what sense is Noah the first tiller of the soil? The story has him being the first to have a vineyard, and some think the story only implies that he was the first husbandman. We had not yet been told that humans ate grapes, but apparently they have already learned the art of fermenting the grapes. This is also the first mention of wine and of drunkenness. Prior to this the only wickedness detailed by Genesis was violence. Though no mention of wine occurred before this reference, obviously Noah acted with intention in planting a vineyard – he somehow knew the product he wanted to produce. (Chrysostom excuses Noah thinking Noah was [pleasantly] surprised by the drink he could produce from grapes. St. John assumes Noah was depressed as every where he

looked there would have seen the dead carcasses of humans and animals left by the flood). The text has so far not spoken about or against alcohol nor alcohol abuse (drunkenness). God has not warned the humans of the potential dangers of alcohol abuse just as He had not warned Eve and Adam about the dangers of talking to the serpent. Does God think experimenting, discovery, learning by experience, and mastering desire are valuable for His free willed humans? Has God continued to assume the humans would practice self control? The Bible is circumspect in detailing what happened here but certainly implies that Ham in seeing his drunken father naked perhaps saw something lewd but more likely engaged in a lewd act far beyond voyeurism. Noah upon waking from his drunken stupor immediately knew what his son “had done to him” (:24). Noah wouldn’t have known if Ham had only looked – he felt or could see that something had been done to him. The text modestly avoids detailing what may have been an incestuous and homosexual act.

“he drank of the wine, and became drunk...” According to Psalm 104:14, God gave “wine to gladden the heart of man.” Wine is meant to serve a good purpose, but like the rest of creation it is subject to abuse by fallen humanity.

Chrysostom remarks that after the flood things were totally different for Noah – he is introduced to a carnivorous diet, and discovers wine as a new drink. Chrysostom goes on to say that wine was the first medicine invented by humans – it helped reduce the pain which Noah felt by realizing his world had been destroyed.

Chrysostom says wine is not in itself evil, but intemperance always leads to sin. He also notes that since Noah was the first to get drunk, drunkenness is reported only after the flood occurred and therefore must not have been one of the sins that led to God destroying the world through the flood. “I mean, voluntary intoxication is really a demon, clouding the intellect more severely than any demon, and robbing its victim of any sense of values.... The drunk, on the other hand, does not deserve excuse, no matter what he does.” Chrysostom has no

pity for the drunk who he believes chooses his evil ways. Chrysostom does not have our modern sense of uncontrollable alcoholism but only the person who willingly “surrendered himself to the tyranny of drunkenness.” He does see drunkenness as a tyrant, but drunkenness is still chosen sin. “The fact of sinning is not so harmful as persisting in sin.” Chrysostom was a firm believer in free will and did not hold to ideas of predestination to sin, nor of genetic predetermination toward an illness. He sees humans as making their choices, some of which lead to slavery to sin, but that is the end result of an unwillingness to resist temptation or evil.

“became drunk...” Though Noah is considered righteous by God, this does not mean sinless. Noah commits sin in his drunkenness. Christ alone is said in scripture to be without sin (Hebrews 4:5), and later Christian thinking also attributes sinlessness to the Theotokos. In the Orthodox funeral service the priest says, “there is no one who lives and does not sin, for You (Christ) only are without sin and Your righteousness is to all eternity.” God sees the hearts of each of us and judges our hearts. He works with those who love and fear Him, even if they do on occasion sin against Him. Noah’s moral lapse does not cancel God’s seeing him as righteous. God is realistic in dealing with humans – He knows their hearts are inclined to evil, but He also is able to distinguish between a moral lapse and defiant evil.

“Ham... saw the nakedness of his father.” Ham reveals his true nature – shamelessness. Genesis traces the history of humanity through the relationship of father to son, but it makes comment neither about the role and responsibility of a father nor that of the son. Be that as it may, whatever human wisdom or tradition exists is being handed down through these relationships. Suddenly in the story of Ham, we are confronted with another reality. Cain committed fratricide against Abel. But for the first time since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in Paradise, a son is reported to commit an offense against his father. And the depraved and base offense appears to involve something incestuous and lewd. And whatever it is, Ham is

shameless, for he does not try to hide his offense but rather calls his brothers to see as well. And now the brothers for the first time witness their father having been humiliated. The story shows the collapse of natural relationships, the collapse of respect, and the existence of shamelessness, lewdness, as well as wicked sexual abuse. A new kind of evil has been unleashed within humanity. And Shem and Japheth in shock can do nothing more than cover the nakedness of their father. They are shamed and embarrassed for their father's humiliation. They do not even want to look upon what has happened. And yet they do nothing to their younger brother, but await their father's sobering up from his drunken stupor to discover what has been done to him. Either in respect for their father's authority, or lacking the will to deal with the offense, they leave it up to their father to deal with the evil which has occurred. Is it possible that they were in such shock to realize that though God had saved them from the wickedness of the world by means of the ark and the flood, that they witness and realize Ham has now committed the same old sins in the newly purified world? The darkest abuse and violation in a family has occurred. Natural relationships have been destroyed. Two brothers are called in to be voyeuristic witnesses to the indignation and they are so shamed that they will not even look but want to cover it up – and then let their father deal with it.

Ham looking on the nakedness of Noah - Chrysostom blames him as a total ingrate. Noah saved his life by taking him on the ark, but Ham sees the drunkenness of his father and instead of covering his father's nakedness he brings his brothers to show them how their father has fallen and to mock his father.

"Noah's son Ham failed to conceal his father's nakedness, and even dared to look at him in his shame. And you, O my soul, in your treatment of your neighbor have imitated him." (Tuesday, Canon of St. Andrew of Crete) Do we not do the same when we fail to protect the victims of sexual abuse but have a voyeuristic desire to know the details of the story? Noah was unconscious and defenseless, and Ham does not offer him aid but takes advantage

of his father's weakness. This is the nature of much abuse that goes on in families. The abusers indeed want to cover their offenses, but not to protect the abused, but to enable the abuse to continue. Interesting how shameful and shameless acts are so related.

"...covered the nakedness of their father..." Shem and Japheth demonstrate a degree of modesty, human decency and filial love that is totally lacking in Ham. They are not drawn into their brother's sin and have nothing to do with him either. Shem and Japheth reveal something of their own character and nobility. Though they are aware of their father's drunkenness, they do not take advantage of their father's sinful weakness, nor are they willing to expose him to ridicule, but are moved to cover the sin of their father. Their action may be in agreement with the Apostle Peter's own words, "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). They are not ashamed of their father but are embarrassed for him and will not hold him up to ridicule. Despite the total depravity they have witnessed – their father's drunken stupor and their brother's lewdness – they endeavor to do the right thing to protect their father's reputation and to remain in a proper and respectful relationship to him. They do not exploit the sinful weakness of their father and endeavor to protect him from the son/brother who is quite willing to take shameful and sinful advantage of Noah's weakness.

"...covered the nakedness of their father..." Though the text seems to indicate that Ham did something to his father Noah, it is possible that the text is implying not a homosexual liaison, but that Ham defiled his mother. The clue for this interpretation comes from Leviticus. First we read in Leviticus 18:7: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother. Then, Leviticus 20:11 reads: "The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness" (Leviticus 20:11). Because the wording of the Leviticus texts are identical with Genesis 9:23, it is possible that what is suggested is that Ham invaded his father's tent, while his father was intoxicated and he committed incest with Noah's wife (who we

would assume is his own mother since Genesis has not indicated that Noah had more than one wife). This explanation is made more intriguing because just before the Law is laid down forbidding uncovering the nakedness of any relative, God said this: "you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan" (i.e., the land of Ham's son). The Leviticus Law against uncovering the nakedness of a relative (another biblical euphemism for "have sex with") is offered in contrast to what they do in the land of Canaan. Leviticus connects such incestuous sin with Canaan. Whether homosexual or heterosexual, the Genesis account of Ham connects him to incest and a total breakdown of morality and a family code. And Leviticus clearly connects this behavior to the land of Canaan, not to Ham. While this explanation has some merit, other events in the story tend to indicate Ham did something directly to Noah.

24 When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, **25** he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." **26** He also said, "Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave." **27** God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave." **28** After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years. **29** All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

"When Noah awoke from his wine..." Many a drunk and alcoholic awakens from his alcohol induced stupor to discover to his/her shame and horror all manners of sin, evil, destruction and loss that he/she has caused or suffered. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1). "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine, those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. 'They struck me,' you will say, 'but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink'" (Proverbs 23:29-35).

"...knew what his youngest son had done to him..." Noah has been violated in an awful way. He knows it – can feel it. No one tells him about it. He knew immediately upon waking from his drunken stupor that he had been violated not just viewed. Noah may have been drunk, but Ham was sober when he violated his father. While drunkenness is not an acceptable excuse for sinning, sin intentionally committed by a person in their right mind is a much more offensive fault. Additionally he commits the heinous act upon a person who is unconscious. Can it get worse than that? Yes, the person was his own father.

"Cursed be Canaan..." Ancient curses were never understood as mere words, but are always active and have a powerful (negative) effect on the cursed.

For the first time in Genesis, Noah, God's righteous one, speaks, and his first words are a curse! He curses his grandson, in what seems to be an egregiously unfair act. It is possible the Noah's curse on his grandson stems from the fact that when Noah sobers up and can feel what his son Ham did to him, he curses Ham's son, Canaan, so that Ham can know what Noah

feels – what it is like to have a son who is wicked and cursed. Even the Patristic writers recognized Noah’s curse as being patently unjust. As mentioned in the comments on Genesis 9:1, Noah perhaps felt he could not curse Ham because Ham had been blessed by God. But so outraged was Noah that he strikes angrily at Ham by cursing Ham’s son. Many a parent would rather be the one blamed and cursed for a fault than to let that curse/punishment fall on their child. Ham listens to his own son being cursed for what he himself had done. Would this not have sickened and crushed him? He may have thought it clever and funny to “expose” his father’s failure and drunkenness; now, the table is suddenly turned and his own failure as son is exposed to the detriment of his own child. He must have felt severely punished by such a curse so unfairly falling on his own son. Canaan is unfairly cursed and handicapped due to no fault of his own. Canaan truly suffers for the sin of his father. Chrysostom thinks Ham would have felt more punished by having the curse fall on his son rather than falling on himself. Ham is given no opportunity to repent or seek forgiveness. What horror he must have felt when he realized his child was doomed to servility and slavery. Chrysostom writes, “...consider the grave evil sin is... behold the man sharing the same birth pangs as his brothers, born of the same womb, yet made their slave by the onset of sin, robbed of his freedom and brought into subjection—hence the origin of his subsequent condition of servitude. Before this, you see, there was not such indulgence, people being pampered in this way and needing others to minister to their needs; rather, each one looked to his own needs, there being great equality of esteem and complete absence of discrimination. When sin entered the scene, on the contrary, it impaired freedom, destroyed the worth inherent in nature and introduced servitude so as to provide constant instruction and reminder to the human race to shun the servitude of sin while returning to the freedom of virtue.” Slavery and discrimination are not part of the natural order of God’s world. Humans were not created to be servants of other humans but all were created equal – to be helpers to one another not servants and slaves to others. It is interesting that Chrysostom talks of

equality and that servitude is the result of sin. Apparently he did not think women were originally created to be servants of men either. The Fall has corrupted every human relationship. Power and control over others is a result of sin, not a normal part of God’s order for humanity. Still, God will not allow the humans to suffer something that He is not willing to take on Himself. God’s Son also takes on the role of servant when He comes into the world. “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5). The incarnate God, Jesus Christ, becomes a servant in order to save us. He also models for us the way of life which is the way of God’s love. “When (Jesus) had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:12-15). “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Human slavery and servitude is the result of the Fall. God however, will use servitude to accomplish the salvation of the human race just as He uses death, another result of the Fall.

“Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be...” Though Noah curses his grandson, Canaan, to be a slave to his brothers, in Psalm 105:27, Egypt is referred to as the land of Ham where ironically it will not be Canaan who will be enslaved, but where the descendents of the blessed Shem will be enslaved by the descendents of Ham.

Genesis connects slavery to sin, a theme picked up by St. Paul: “Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to

righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ...But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:16-18,22-23).

Chrysostom did not believe that the **original sin** doomed us all to sin. "If, however, we are on the alert, these evils that came into life as a result of the sins of our forbearers will in no way be able to harm us, going no further than the level of terminology." We are not somehow predetermined to be sinners by what Adam or any of our ancestors have done. Humans can resist sin, but it requires great vigilance and determination. We are not predestined to sin. In his thinking St. John follows the wisdom of Sirach: "It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him" (Sirach 15:14-17).

"Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem..." Noah's second sentence is not so much a blessing on his two other sons, but an acknowledgement that God has blessed them (9:1). Canaan, Ham's son is cursed to become slave to his uncles. He is not to be treated as kin but as chattel. He is disinherited from the family tree. What did Ham feel when he realized what effect his sin had on his son's life and fate? No reaction is recorded of how the sons responded to their father's blessings and curse.

When Noah dies, Abram the next major hero of Genesis is already born. Noah is the 10th generation from Adam, and Abram is the 10th generation from Noah. Noah's was the

first birth recorded after Adam's death. So Noah's life stretches virtually from the time of Adam's death until the time of Abram's birth. He is thus a key figure in the genealogy connecting the father of mankind Adam who was a man of great promise to the father of the people of God's promise Abraham. Adam, Noah and Abraham thus each in their own way become the father of us all.

Genesis 10

10:1 These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; sons were born to them after the flood. **2** The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. **3** The sons of Gomer: Ash'kenaz, Riphath, and Togar'mah. **4** The sons of Javan: Eli'shah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Do'danim. **5** From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations. **6** The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. **7** The sons of Cush: Seba, Hav'ilah, Sabtah, Ra'amah, and Sab'teca. The sons of Ra'amah: Sheba and Dedan. **8** Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. **9** He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." **10** The beginning of his kingdom was Ba'bel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. **11** From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nin'veh, Reho'both-Ir, Calah, and **12** Resen between Nin'veh and Calah; that is the great city. **13** Egypt became the father of Ludim, An'amim, Leha'bim, Naph-tu'him, **14** Pathru'sim, Caslu'him (whence came the Philistines), and Caph'torim.

Since according to the Genesis story of the flood all humans except Noah, his wife, his sons, and his daughters-in-law drowned, it really is through Noah that all the nations of the world come to exist as was noted in Genesis 9:19. All other lines of humans – including Cain's were destroyed by the flood. So whatever accomplishments they did, or skills they learned or cities they built, would have died with them. Here in Genesis 10 comes the story of the nations – of populating the world with different people all of the same stock. This chapter does offer a family tree for all of the known people of the ancient Jewish world.

Japheth's descendents include those people who occupy Asia Minor and territories to the East.

"...each with his own language..." This text seems to suggest the occurrence of diverse languages and nations was simply a natural process of expansion. The text seems unaware of the tower of Ba'bel story which explains the confusion of tongues among humans as a result of human arrogance and sin. Here at the beginning of Genesis 10 the multiplication of language has nothing to do with punishment but with the diversification of humanity as it spread throughout the world.

The list is fathers and sons. Wives/mothers are not even mentioned let alone named. No sisters are mentioned either making one wonder where the women who gave birth to all of these sons were coming from.

Ham gives birth to the founders of many great nations and kingdoms which included Arabia, Egypt and Africa. Because Ham defiled Noah, is there some sense of prejudice indicated in the fact that Ham's descendents include Arabs and Africans? The "Land of Ham" will become in the Old Testament another way for the Israelites to speak of Egypt. Canaan who is cursed into servitude to his uncles has plenty of brothers to witness his enslavement. Ham's other sons are not cursed by Noah and show great promise and success in starting great nations.

“Nimrod a mighty hunter” This is the first mention in Genesis of a hunter and the first indication that humans are killing animals for food. Hunting would by implication also suggest the development of hunting tools to capture and kill animals, which would be the precursor to weapons of war. Nimrod the hunter begins the Kingdom of Ba’bel, which is the ancient Jewish reference for Babylon. Indeed one day the Babylonians will hunt down the Jews.

The genealogies. Scholars have noted that Americans (with their disinterest in history and their constant striving for what is new, ever looking hopefully to the future) have a hard time grasping the biblical sense of time. In the Old Testament one is always facing the past. The past is what is before us, it is the only thing that we can see for it already exists and is known. The future on the other hand does not exist yet, so it cannot be seen; the future in this thinking is thus always behind us, out of our vision, the unknown, waiting to catch us by surprise. The genealogies help keep the past right in front of us. The Old Testament keeps us looking to the past in order to help us see truth and to give us hope for the future. The genealogies put before us what we can see – that which already exists/existed. They connect us to all that is real and known, and we learn from history about ourselves and our mistakes. In this thinking what can be seen is what we can remember, and what we can remember is what we can truly see. Remembrance and seeing are thus the same thing. The Divine Liturgy is the Christian remembrance (**anamnesis**). When we remember as Christians we see what we remember, we make Christ present before us – Christ crucified and Christ risen. The priest prays at the Liturgy: “Remembering this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming.” We remember in order to see the reality of God in the world. We remember what God has done so that we can have hope that God will act again as He has done in the past. The future does not yet exist for us ephemeral beings, so we cannot see what God will do,

but we can see clearly what He has done and from this know where He is leading us. Remembering the past is thus the firm foundation for hope and faith. We call to remembrance salvation, which means we can see salvation – what God has done - for it is real, even if it is but the tip of the iceberg, the foretaste of the kingdom which is to come. The Christian Liturgy, especially that of St. Basil the Great, is a true calling to remembrance all that God has done for us so that we can see salvation, see God’s hand in the world, see the breaking into the world of the Kingdom of God. Knowing what God has done is the firm foundation for our hope in what God is going to do. Yet it is happening in time, and so we often experience it as happening way too slowly. But the reality of salvation is that we need to fit eternity and divinity into our world, into that which is “not God”, into our lives, into our hearts. That takes time – not because God needs time, but we do and we can only receive things in time. God enters the world through the incarnation – it took the history of humanity to bring about the Theotokos, the one who could receive God into her womb. Then it took nine more months for the Incarnate Word to be born and a lifetime for him to mature; it now additionally takes the time of the Holy Spirit to allow God’s Kingdom to be revealed in the world. Each Liturgy reminds us of what has happened, so that we can see it, and understand it is coming. We are to be thankful for what we know is coming even if it also requires infinite patience on our part. We remember the past not to recapture some Golden Age, but rather as Fr. John Behr says, to help us envision the future. What we can see of what God has done speaks to us about how much more glorious is what He is doing. “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). As St. Paul has it, “one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

Genealogies are often skimmed through by modern readers of the Bible because they are somewhat boring and not particularly

pertinent to life. St. Jerome (d. 420AD) saw the writers of Scripture as “the inspired vehicles of the divine mysteries” and so felt it important for us to pay attention to all of the historical details and peculiarities of their written words as they offer us insight into the person who is God’s chosen vessel for the sacred mysteries. It is an interesting concept for it emphasizes that the authors of Scripture are more the vehicle of the divine mysteries (as they are who is inspired by God) than are the written words themselves. Their written words are almost a feeble attempt to record the inspiration which is really contained in humans not mostly in a book. The written words thus in their details offer us insight into the inspired saint who wrote the text. This is a common idea found in the Christians of the early centuries: the Scriptures are mere signs which point to the spiritual reality, the real substance, God’s revelation. Thus they don’t equate God’s revelation to the words themselves but to the reality to which the words direct our attention. This very subtle and nuanced approach to the Bible helps prevent them from reading the text in a wooden or overly literal way. It is not the words which are so important – they point to the truth which we are seeking. In a certain sense it prevents what happens sometimes to modern fundamentalist and biblical literalists – Bibliolatry. The text contains the revelation but is not to be equated with it, for the revelation is always beyond the limits of the written word.

Genealogies help establish an orderly succession of fathers to son in civil society, and become the basis for tradition – that common knowledge and wisdom which humans pass down from generation to generation. But in early Christianity they also were the source of controversy and argument. In Titus 3:9, we are warned, “But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile.” A very similar warning is found in 1 Timothy 1:3-4: “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith.” Genealogies which for the modern reader often appear boring and uninteresting were obviously at one time

the seedbed for speculation which led to quarrels and dissension in the Church. Interests in and emphases on different passages of Scripture do change over time and in different cultures. This does give witness for the importance of understanding how Christians in previous times read and used the Bible – it helps us avoid being limited by or trapped in our contemporary culture and thinking. Aspects of the Scripture which were important, even critically, in ancient times are often glossed over by our modern sensibilities and lack of historical depth.

No matter how diverse the people are in terms of nations, geography, languages, what is stunning in the genealogies and the first 11 chapters of Genesis is the absolute monotheism of this ancient text. There is only one God. Satan is not mentioned, neither are demons. The gods of the nations are not mentioned. Angels are not mentioned. Idols are not mentioned. There is no other spiritual being but the Lord God. There is no celestial hierarchy in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The text establishes absolute monotheism – there are no other beings even close to God and not cosmic battle between God and evil. Chaos exists which God is able to shape, contain and control for His own purposes. Chaos is impersonal, not an evil one. The only indication in these early chapters of Genesis of something other than the One God is found in Genesis 1:26 and 11:7 in which God speaks in the plural, “let us...” Christians have understood this to be a clear reference to the Trinitarian nature of God within the Jewish scriptures. All the peoples of the world no matter how diverse have only one God. This is another way in which the genealogies tie all of humanity together. Our oneness with Adam is not so much a genetic thing; it is an issue that we all were created by the one God who is Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. There are no other gods or spiritual beings. There is none of the heavenly mythologies that are so common in virtually every other ancient religion. There is no mention of astrology or any form of the worship of the heavenly bodies. The entire opening chapters of Genesis are focused on this one God and His particular interest in and relationship with a very select group of

people – a lineage that is completely tied in with the God of the universe.

Genealogies especially confront one of the most tenaciously held entitlements of modern capitalistic man: self interest. Adam Smith felt the very thing that will drive capitalism for the benefit of each person is self interest. And we now assume our personal self interest to be a main reason why we would participate in anything. The self is king and god with each person living in an egocentric universe. The genealogies tell us God has chosen certain individuals other than ourselves to be His chosen people and to serve the unique requirements of the Kingdom. We read the genealogies to realize how many people God has chosen and worked with, and that not everything is governed by self interest. Even Christ told us the two main laws were to love God and to love neighbor. It is not always about me. Salvation is learning about something greater than my self and my self interests. It is learning that my story is but a sentence is a bigger chapter in a much larger book whose author is God. Scriptural genealogies offer to all humans the meta-narrative which ties every single human together in one grand story with God being the narrator. Postmodernism denies the existence of one meta-narrative, but the Bible – and the science of DNA and genetics supports the Bible on this issue – offers that there is in fact a narrative which unites all of humanity and human nature itself. For the believer the Bible is the meta-narrative in which our own story is unfolding while in science it is DNA which provides the thread connecting all humans and all living things.

15 Canaan became the father of Sidon his first-born, and Heth, **16** and the Jeb'usites, the Amorites, the Gir'gashites, **17** the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, **18** the Ar'vadites, the Zem'arites, and the Ha'mathites. Afterward the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. **19** And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomor'rah, Admah, and Zeboi'im, as far as Lasha. **20** These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. **21** To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. **22** The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpach'shad, Lud, and Aram. **23** The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. **24** Arpach'shad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. **25** To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. **26** Joktan became the father of Almo'dad, Sheleph, Hazarma'veth, Jerah, **27** Hador'am, Uzal, Diklah, **28** Obal, Abim'a-el, Sheba, **29** Ophir, Hav'ilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. **30** The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. **31** These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. **32** These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

Despite Canaan's being cursed by his grandfather Noah, it is not clear that his fate to be enslaved to his uncles actually happens. Rather the text shows Canaan's descendents will include many of the people who stand in the way of the Jews being able to enter into and conquer the Promised Land and also many of the traditional enemies of the Jewish people. His descendants "spread abroad," suggesting not forced slavery but freedom of movement. These people will prove to be a trial to the Jews as they will be involved in testing their faithfulness to God, and they will also be a curse to the Jews as they serve as stumbling blocks to the Jewish aspiration for keeping God's law and inheriting God's chosen land. In Exodus 3:8, God promises to liberate the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and "to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Per'izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites." The Promised Land by the time of the Exodus is in the hands of the very people (Canaan and his descendents, see Genesis 10:15-17) whom Noah had cursed to be slaves to Shem and his descendents, the Hebrews. It is an odd turn of history that Shem's descendents become slaves, while Canaan's descendents inhabit the Promised Land. And the Israelites are going to have to fight Canaan's descendents to receive the Promised Land.

Among the descendents of Canaan are those who inhabit Sodom and Gomor'rah – perhaps another clue as to what Ham's sin really was.

Shem is especially recognized as an honorable man in the biblical tradition. According to Sirach, "Shem and Seth were honored among men, and Adam above every living being in the creation" (49:16). In the Gospel according to St. Luke it is through Shem that Christ's ancestry is traced. "...the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Re'u, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Ca-i'nan, the son of Arphax'ad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of

Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Maha'lale-el, the son of Ca-i'nan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:34-38). Shem as noted in a previous reflection is also commemorated in the Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

Shem's son Eber is the one from whom the Hebrews derive their name. Though the text is offering a brief explanation for the Family Tree of Nations, its focus is clearly on one people – the other people are all purely background, though still within the Creator God's purview. The text is completely monotheistic – there is only one God for all of these many and diverse peoples and languages. There is no mention of other gods or of other religions. Humans may be spreading across the face of the earth and their languages may be multiplying, but they share a common life under the one God.

"...Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided..." While the text in general shows the spread and multiplication of humanity in a natural and peaceful way, Peleg son of Eber from whom the Hebrews derive their name, is associated with a division. What was that division? Some believe this is the beginning of the scriptural treatment of the Jews versus all of the other nations of the world who are the Gentiles.

God had commanded the humans from the beginning to be fruitful and to multiply (Gen 1). We have already seen in the story that one way the humans multiplied was the amount of evil they did, which obviously was not what God had in mind. Now the multiplication of humans continues, but with another twist - not only are there increased numbers of humans but there also is a multiplication of nations and languages with each new descendent seemingly creating his own nation and language. The description of a proto-people spreading out across the earth is consistent with current theories in linguistics about how languages develop, morph and evolve through time. The blessing to multiply turns into further separation, divisiveness, and alienation with ever increasing chances for conflict as each human nation develops its own language

and an inability to communicate with the other nations. Humanity is growing but also growing apart.

The genealogies do provide us with the names of the men who were descendents of Adam, Seth and Noah. Despite knowing their names, we actually know very little about most of these people who Scripture wants us to remember. Is there more to the godly life than simply surviving? Does life have a meaning and purpose? What constitutes a well lived life? These are worthy questions for us to ponder when we read the Genesis genealogies. The only achievement of these men seems to be that they "made a name for themselves" – and their names are recorded in Scripture for all generations of believers to remember. It is not bad to be remembered by future generations. It is perhaps a form of immortality. But in the light of Christ who gives us eternal life many of the things that people want to achieve in life seem of little or no value. Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life?" (Mark 8:34-37) On the two Sundays before Christmas we Orthodox remember the Ancestors of Christ and the Forefathers of Christ. We remember them because they played a role in the history which results in the Virgin's birth and the incarnation of the Word. We are given opportunity not simply to recall historical figures, but to recognize that each person is playing a role in a much bigger narrative. Each person's story is not an end in itself, but part of the mosaic or tapestry which is really the big story which God is telling. We remember these men because in learning about them we are learning the story of all humans and every human and any human and thus the story of ourselves. There is a big story which ties all of humanity together: a meta-narrative which puts each of our lives and our stories into the context of one overarching story, the story of humanity. Thus reading the Genesis account as narrative symbolically encompassing all of humanity is a good challenge to postmodern

thinking which denies there is a story which ties all of humanity together or gives humanity direction, purpose or truth. Humanity through history became increasingly fractured and factionalized. We are completely influenced by the extreme and absolute individualism which is the legacy of the Enlightenment and the development of the United States of America. We often feel increasingly isolated from others, alienated from others, and at times in competition with others if not in hostility with others. We live in a world of 6 billion people and yet find it hard to find a thread which ties us all together rather than causing us to bump into each other or to conflict with each other or even to repel one another. Genesis is a story which offers to the world a narrative which says, "this is your story", "this is our story". We all share in this one story and in this one world, created by one God who wishes for us to live in peace with one another, who wants us to work for a common good rather than for selfish and self centered goals. He wants us to deal in common with our mutual problems. He wishes for us to be civilized, to recognize the difference between good and evil, that there is a difference! He wants us to realize that His view of the world is accessible to us – He has revealed it to us, and we can enter into that revelation if we want to overcome that which separates us from His love and from loving Him and our neighbors. The story of Genesis is that not only are we all really neighbors living in proximity to one another but more importantly we are to be neighbors to one another. "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"(Luke 10:36-37). The question "Who is my neighbor?" gets answered by Jesus with "the one to whom you can be neighborly." But in Christ, we are more than neighbors to whom we can show mercy. For Christ is the New Adam in Whom we all become brothers and sisters. Genesis reveals to us what happens when humans forget that we are all related one to another – ultimately we all are brothers. When we forget this, we treat others as enemies. In Christ we lay claim again to that original blood relationship that we all have with one another. A relationship which

was supposed to be love, but which has fallen and been fractured. In Christ we realize the importance of love, forgiveness, service, mercy, repentance, giving, sharing, and caring for one another. When we overcome our selfishness and self-centeredness, we become part of the greater whole of humanity, we become brothers and sisters again, we recognize our shared human nature, and we reclaim our proper relationship with God.

"These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth..." In reality the story of those who survive the great deluge becomes the story of a new flood. This time it is a flood of people which covers the face of the earth. The chapter and its genealogies and expanding new nations is showing how in spite of all of the sin and all of the problems of humanity, humans are in obedience to God filling the earth and attempting to subdue it. The fulfilling of this original command from God to us humans will carry through Western civilization into the European discovery of America and the Westward expansion across North America in the "manifest destiny" vision which drove Americans to fill their new world. When the presidential successors to George Washington began the development of the ill-fated great Potomac canal and waterway, they in fact invoked Genesis claiming America's westward expansion into the North American continent was the final consummation of God's command to fill the earth and subdue it. They believed themselves to be the chosen successors to Abraham and all of his biblical descendants.

Genesis 11

11:1 Now the whole earth had one language and few words. **2** And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. **3** And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. **4** Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

It is not surprising that there is only one language on earth since, according to the story, all the nations have descended from one family – all are children of Noah. One would expect members of a family to speak the same language. But what is surprising is this text contradicts Genesis 10:5, 20, 31 which had already explained the multiplication of languages as a natural process of humans spreading throughout the earth and attributing each language to the familial differences (which also is consistent with current linguistic theory and evidence). Genesis 11 sees the confusion of tongues among humans as God's reaction to a sinister plot by sinfully arrogant human beings. The contradiction does support the Source Theory notion that there were different authors for different portions of Genesis. The final editor of Genesis did not try to harmonize or gloss over inconsistencies and differences but rather accepts the differences as equally inspired by God. It is possible that the "source" who wrote the Tower of Babel story wanting to affirm the omnipotence of God attributes the multiplication of languages to an intentional act of God rather than allowing it to occur by natural human migration and geographic isolation. It may have seemed more pious to explain the many languages on earth as the result of God's intention rather than as an accidental result of random human choices.

"...as men migrated from the east..." The implication of the text seems to envision the entire human population *en mass* migrating and settling in this region. According to 10:32 this is part of the migration of humans following the flood. A trivia note: in Genesis 1-11, the only direction specifically mentioned is "east." This is the direction of the sunrise.

"Come, let us make bricks..." At this point in Genesis humans are determined to use their own ingenuity and technology to accomplish something great for themselves. The making of bricks is a heretofore unheard of technology in Genesis. The emphasis on building buildings is also a startling new occupation for the simplest of homes has not even been mentioned yet and now they are building towers. One noticeable feature

of the early chapters of Genesis is the virtual total lack of reference to any kind of commerce, trade, craftsmanship, skills or industry. There is no mention of clothes, jewelry, furniture, basic tools, cooking utensils, or any of the other common features of human society. Brick making stands out as one of the rare exceptions in the narrative. In Exodus 1:14, when the Israelites are reduced to slavery at the hands of the oppressive Egyptians, they are forced into brick making and brick laying. The industriousness of builders of the tower of Ba'bel is closely related to enforced labor that the Jews suffer – brick work.

“let us build ourselves a city” The humans appear to be acting without any reference to God. God has not directed them in this project, nor have they sought God's blessing and approval for it. Is the story suggesting that not only are humans alienated from God, they no longer even remember their Creator? At this point in the narrative, divinity and humanity are on separate tracks no longer working in sync. Synergy between God and mankind last occurred with Noah. Both God and humans speak in the story but never to each other. Humans speak to each other, and God speaks within Himself. The humans show no awareness of God and do not even mention his existence. Dialogue between the Lord and His intelligent creatures has ceased to exist. God seemingly no longer has a role in the lives of the humans as they make their plans without Him, thus atheistically. From the human perspective their action looks good, but like Eve in Genesis 3 who saw the forbidden fruit as all good, the humans fail to take into account how God might judge their goal. The humans are basing their decision to build the city and a tower which reaches heaven upon their own ingenuity. They obviously believe they have the capabilities to do this thing. What is lacking is a discussion as to whether they ought to be doing this. Maybe this is the first incidence in human history in which technology and morality come into conflict. Because it can be done does not mean it should be done. Albert Einstein had mused that science tells us only what we can do, it can't tell us what we should do – that he felt is the purpose of religion. Humans are capable of doing many things through technology, but well

reasoned discussions about the morality of these “accomplishments” is often lacking. What we are capable of doing and what we should be doing are not the same thing. Humans not only construct their cities and their science, they also decide they are capable of constructing their own ethics while denying God's existence. In effect they declare themselves to be God (or at least not in need of God or beholden to a Creator). Humanity is saying humans alone are able to determine what is good and right based on their own presuppositions, self interests and prejudices. Any people or subgroup which does not allow open discussion of ethical issues blinds itself to its own faults, shortcomings, sins and limits. Truth and goodness are revealed when humans are open to admitting error, wrongdoing, and the limits of our knowledge. Thus we always need the voice of God's word from the past and also the voice of prophets in the present.

“Come, let us..” The humans demonstrate some unity, common mind, and willingness to work together. So far the text has not suggested any strife on a large scale between families, clans, towns, nations, peoples. But human unity, something many modern peoples crave, is not going to produce something of which God approves. Human unity does not lead to unity with God. So it should give us great pause when we hear Jesus say, “that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you hast loved me” (John 17:21-23). Even with the coming of the God incarnate Christ and the Holy Spirit, has humanity progressed enough to be ready for international unity? Apparently God thinks so. Of course then different Christians at different times have tried to realize this unity in various ways – the one cup of the Eucharist with one bishop, or the one empire under Constantine with one God and one religion, or one holy, catholic and apostolic church with one heart and mind which voices one creed, or the

one church under one Papal authority, or the broad and perhaps vague oneness of modern ecumenism.

‘...let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens...’ When God first made the humans, he planted a garden for them to live in (Genesis 2:8). When humans are left to their own devices, they build a city to live in. A city in Genesis is a place of human ingenuity. The first builder of a city was Cain the murderer of a human (Genesis 4:17). God did not command humans to build a city nor did He build one for them, rather He commanded the humans to fill the earth and subdue it and to have dominion over all the other animals. While building a city does not countermand God’s order, city building tends to be done by excluding wild animals and curtailing their numbers within the bounds of city not spending time to develop a dominion over them. Some city building demands that the animals be exterminated within the precincts of the city and once the city is rid of the animals to treat most wild animals as vermin. God’s idea of humans having dominion over animals and subduing the earth seems more related to ideas of farming, being park rangers, or natural resource managers. God did not speak of erecting buildings or fences or walls or barriers or gates. Cities were often built as a means of protecting a population. However, so far in Genesis there has been no mention of war or invasion of enemies. The human vision for what they should be doing is protecting themselves from nature having dominion over them! Humans had been created by God to subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28), and yet the flood certainly showed the humans that they in fact were at the mercy of natural forces and were no better off than dumb animals who were not rational. So perhaps the humans imagined by building a city they could protect themselves from God too. Did they imagine they could wall a capricious and angry God and unpredictable nature out of their city? Genesis 10:32 which leads into the Tower of Babel story says this is where the descendents of Noah spread out after the flood. Is the destructive flood what is on the mind of these men of Shinar? Is building a city the best plan they can come up with as a defense against the forces of

God and nature? Perhaps the tower to heaven is being built so that if another flood occurs they can have a way to remain above the flood, or perhaps even escape into heaven from the flood. Or, is the Tower to heaven being built as a hoped for way to control God? Perhaps if they can control God’s entrance into their city – if God has to come down through the Tower, they can somehow predict where and when God appears and thus control what He sees and does. But the humans’ anthropomorphic thinking about God so limits their understanding of Him and underestimates His real power. God scatters the men in the imaginations of their hearts, bringing their plans to naught. Certainly a theme of Genesis 11 is man proposes but God disposes.

Jesus uses the imagery of the man who plants and vineyard and builds a wall around the vineyard and a tower in it as a parable about God who does all of this work in order to yield an abundant harvest (Mark 12). But Jesus doesn’t see the building of this protected space as a place to live but rather a way to protect the grapes from harm so that they can produce an abundance of fruits. Jesus’ own ideas about building buildings and cities may be best summed up in Mark 13:2 when asked about the great buildings that Herod had recently built, Jesus said, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." Interestingly, John in the Book of Revelations envisions the final abode of all in God’s kingdom as being a city not a garden planted by God. "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelations 21:2). But this city is not built by men, but is established by God. There is no tower reaching up to heaven, for the city itself comes down from heaven as God Himself does in Genesis 11:5.

“a tower with its top in the heavens” The heavens so far in Genesis seem to mean mostly the sky which is envisioned as some form of solid ceiling which stretches above the earth. In Genesis, heaven has not been described as the place where God dwells –

the heavens are part of what God created in the beginning (Genesis 1:1) so they belong to the physical creation not properly as the “place” where God resides. The heavens might suggest the dividing wall which separates the created cosmos from the dwelling place of God. What exactly the builders thought they could reach is not clear. God’s reaction seems to indicate that humanity’s place is on earth, not in the heavens and so the Lord is determined to prevent the humans from realizing their plan. God has to this point not said that humans might attain heaven, even if they are righteous, or even after death. God had made a very orderly universe with separate realms for the appropriate beings – the earth for humans and mammals, the sky for the birds, the sea for the fish, heaven for His angels and Himself. The building of the tower seems to suggest to God that humans do not wish to respect His order, nor His realm. The crossing from one realm to another implies the greatest of chaos and threatens the order of the universe. One need only think of the parable of Laz’arus and the rich man in which Father Abraham explains to the rich man why those in heaven can’t help those in Hades: “And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us” (Luke 16:26). There is an appropriate place for everything under heaven to paraphrase Ecclesiastes 3.

“Come... let us make a name for ourselves...” The Church has tended to see the residents of Ba’bel as being sinfully arrogant, and in the hymns of Pentecost contrasts the confusion of tongues at Ba’bel with the giving of tongues of fire at Pentecost which enabled the disciples to begin preaching to all nations. “The arrogance of those building the tower caused the languages to be confused of old; but now the tongues are gloriously enlightened by the knowledge of God. There God punished the infidels for their sin; but here Christ enlightens the fishermen with His Spirit! There the confusion of tongues was done in vengeance; here they are joined in unison for the salvation of our souls!” (From Matins on Monday of the Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit’s tongues of fire

overcome the polyglot division which has divided humanity since the time of the tower at Ba’bel. There is a time and a good reason for humans to be able to communicate in a common tongue - when it is time to proclaim the Gospel.

“...make a name for ourselves...” Were these men thinking about making themselves immortal? Humans have long aspired for immortality. Did these men imagine by reaching heaven in a tower they could claim immortality for themselves – a lasting name? If so they have failed to understand the very role sin has played in bringing death into human existence. It is not reaching heaven that can give them immortality. Eternal life is related to holiness and requires an entirely different pursuit on the part of humans than building towers and demonstrating human prowess.

“... lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” Strangely the very rationale the men of Shinar use for building the tower becomes the result of their efforts. Whom did they feel threatened by? Why was being scattered abroad such a serious threat? Why did they believe they might be scattered? The story doesn’t explain their fears, but it sets in motion the events that lead to them being separated not only geographically but also linguistically.

“lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” One more indication that perhaps more than one hand wrote Genesis, in 10:32 the story says, “from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.” Chapter 10 envisions humanity spreading naturally across the face of the earth as the population grows. Chapter 11:4 portrays any spreading of the population in a threatening way – something humanity wants to avoid.

5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. **6** And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. **7** Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." **8** So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. **9** Therefore its name was called Ba'bel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

"And the LORD came down to see..." The Lord's descent to earth at Ba'bel results from His awareness of what the humans were doing. We (created, physical beings who are "not God") cannot comprehend how God, a non-physical divine being, knows about His creation or knows anything for that matter. The story introduces some ideas which really will make us stop and think about the Lord's way of knowing. Apparently God is "aware" of what the humans are doing, though the Genesis narrator doesn't tell us exactly how it is that God becomes aware of such things or how God "knows" anything about His creation. God/divinity is not completely transcendent but is immanent and able to interact with that which is "not God", namely creation. The story presents an idea that God had "heard" what the humans were up to but now decides "to see for Himself" (if we want to put it into human terms). The text presents an intriguing scenario – apparently God wants a closer view of what the humans are doing. So can God have a vague awareness of His creation without really being able to see or know what is happening on earth? Is He not able to see so clearly from heaven or are there some things He cannot see clearly from heaven? Why does the Lord need to come down to see? Is there some way in which God's vision is affected by distance? The anthropomorphic imagery of God provides us a basis for contemplating the mystery we know as God. We do not know how God who has no eyes "sees", but these verses would indicate that even God gets a better view of us when He is closer to humanity. (In Psalm 115:5, the Psalmist mocks idols which have eyes but do not see, whereas God, a totally incorporeal being has no eyes and yet sees perfectly clearly – His vision is not limited to or by eyesight!). The story also gives us some things to think about God as Judge. God apparently does not rely on hearsay evidence, He sees for Himself before He pronounces judgment. God is willing to get the full picture of what is happening before coming to a judgment. God is not capricious, nor does He rush to judgment. His judgments are fair, measured and reasonable. God judges not in His transcendent nature; rather, God forms His judgment in his intimate relationship with His "not God" creation, as a personal being.

The Lord does not send “someone else” to look into the affairs and allegations of the humans, but comes Himself in order to know what judgment to render.

“And the LORD came down...” In Exodus 3:7-8 we read, the Lord saying, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I **have come down to deliver them** out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land...” In Genesis God comes down and scatters the brick makers to prevent them from further sinning against Him. In Exodus God comes down to the brick makers to save them from their slave masters and promises to lead them to a broad plain, just like where Ba’bel is located! In both cases God decides to interfere with human brick making, and to end the labor of which he disproves – in Genesis because He disapproves of the goal of these people free to do as they please, and in Exodus because He has heard the cry and suffering of His enslaved people and intends to free them.

If humans aspired to build a tower to reach the heavens, they have not reached their goal, for the Lord still has to “come down” to see the city and tower which humans are building. The puny efforts of humankind to reach the heavens by human technology and engineering “miss the mark” which is what the word “sin” actually means. The leaden literalism of the humans causes them to think of heaven as a location which they can reach by their own physical labors. A hard lesson is about to be learned – there is more to the cosmos than the physical. Heaven is not a physical place, nor is it located “somewhere” in the universe. The concrete thinking of humans has got to be changed so that they can come to understand the reality of the spiritual. Have the humans totally forgotten that they are spiritual beings, created in God’s image and having a soul where the Spirit of God abides? In the Genesis account, their theology is completely wrong. They have forgotten about their own spiritual nature and their anthropomorphic descriptions of God have caused them to think about God

completely in human and physical terms. God comes down to see their city, but they apparently are incapable of seeing God. God is not communicating directly to any of the humans. The Lord’s thoughts recorded in this passage of Scripture are His inner thoughts. He is saying nothing to the men of the city. Is it possible that not only can they not see God, but they can not hear Him as well? In Isaiah 44, Isaiah warns the people what is the end result of making false Gods: “They know not, nor do they discern; for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their minds, so that they cannot understand” (44:18). The result of making idols and having false ideas about god is that God closes your eyes and mind so that you cannot see or understand the living God. It is an ominous warning – close your mind to the truth about God and God will help close your mind to Him. The text however makes no reference to idols; if they are anything, these humans are portrayed as atheists. They live without belief in God.

“And the LORD said...” God is not talking to the humans, these are His inner thoughts. Some Patristic writers saw God’s musing within Himself as yet another sign of the Trinity. God is not talking to His lonesome self, but rather the Three Persons of the Trinity are communicating. In Judaism God is talking to the angelic hosts. Modern non-traditional scholars see in God’s talking ideas being adapted by the biblical writers from pagan sources, in this case the God talking with the gods. Genesis remains so totally monotheistic, that even if the story is taken from pagan sources, it is completely reworked to keep within the framework of the absolute monotheism of Judaism which knows there is only one God and His Name is YHWH.

God endeavors to stop what He sees as an evil plan. The confusion of tongues is interpreted by some Patristic writers as the way the merciful God prevented even worse sins from occurring. But once again, the humans will turn what is done for their own good, and done to help prevent them from committing even more sin, into another tool for further sin. The many languages on earth will give rise to endless wars and disputes. “So the tongue is a little member

and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, but no human being can tame the tongue--a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so" (James 3:5-10).

"...only the beginning of what they will do ..."
Though God blessed the humans to subdue the earth, there are apparently limits to what is acceptable to Him. The humans appear to be on the verge of again breaching that which distinguishes the Creator from the creation. Eve was not satisfied with being in God's image and likeness and wanted to be like (equal to) God. Here too the story suggests humanity is bent on laying certain claims to that which has not been given them. Eve had all the fruit of the Garden to eat, but the only thing she is recorded taking and eating is the one thing forbidden to her. Here humans have an entire earth to subdue but they are intent on reaching heaven. And God sees this only as the beginning of the trouble. So, as He decided to prevent Adam and Eve taking fruit from the Tree of Life, now too God scatters the plans of humans in building a tower to heaven. The text does not tell us that the humans once more wanted to be like God, but their actions speak of a goal which God condemns as unacceptable in His eyes. Humanity continues to rebel against any limits being imposed on it. Humanity embraces entitlement thinking completely.

"...only the beginning of what they will do..."
Some very modern thinkers reflecting on the Babel story have suggested maybe God is not so much worried about Himself in this passage but is truly as a prescient parent concerned about what the humans might do in the future if one language unites them. Perhaps the multitude of languages helps establish barriers that protect humanity from

the insatiable and uncontrollable grab for power that tyrants and despots might make if language barriers did not limit their pursuit of power and abuse. Hitlers and Stalins and modern terrorists would have found paths open to them to seize control of information and the hearts and minds of untold numbers if they were not hemmed in by people of other languages. So the polyglot created by God is perhaps for human protection not punishment.

"Come, let us go down..." These words in verse :7 seem out of place, in verse :5 God had already come down to see the city. Perhaps this is another sign of more than one source contributing to the story.

"And the LORD said..."let us go down, and there confuse their language..." In a passage very reminiscent of Genesis 3:22-24 (where the LORD unhappy with [afraid of?] what the humans might attempt to do expels them from Paradise), God chooses to come down (some form of [pre-] incarnation"?) and insure that the humans do not accomplish their goal and wreck even more havoc in the cosmos. God speaks, but to whom? Christian tradition has this as another witness to the notion of God as Trinity. Is God afraid of what His creatures might do? "This is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (:6). Is God's sovereignty somehow threatened by what the humans can do? The God of this text is very anthropomorphic – He feels threatened by the puny efforts of a people whose goal could never be attained. But the fact that they thought they could reach the heavens (in a "Jack and the beanstalk" way) incites God to act against them. And this becomes the biblical explanation for why there are many so many different and incomprehensible languages on earth - it too is the result of human willfulness and sin. The fractioning of the human race into different people and languages and nations is portrayed as the continued downward slide of humanity, the effect of sin and the cause of future divisions on earth.

"confuse their language" God is again displeased with what He sees the humans

doing. He has already accepted the fact that humans imagine evil in their hearts from their youth. God acts against the humans, but not against their tower. He doesn't destroy the tower which might simply result in the humans trying again. Instead God decides to introduce division among the humans by confusing their languages. Does God imagine that somehow the confusion of language will curtail the spread of evil which lurks in the humans' hearts? The Virgin Mary sings of God's might and plan to deal with the evil imagination of the heart: "He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Luke 1:51). God has promised never to destroy all the humans again, so He scatters them to prevent them from conspiring to do evil and He divides them by creating many diverse languages for them. But like the heavy metal mercury spilled on the floor this also will scatter the evil throughout the world and with no easy way to reunite the divided humanity.

Kontakion Hymn of Pentecost: "When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations, but when He distributed the tongues of fire He called all to unity. Therefore with one voice we glorify the all Holy Spirit!" Christians traditionally have interpreted Pentecost as a reversal of the evil effects of the many tongues of Ba'bel on humanity.

"So the LORD scattered them abroad" Not only does God create confusion among the humans by creating many different languages, He also scatters them abroad as He did to Eve and Adam by expelling them from Paradise. Now God scatters the human from proximity to each other, moving them far apart so that they are separated both by language and geography which will soon give birth to cultural separation as well. God who originally blessed the humans to fill the earth, now scatters them in such a manner that they will be pitted one against the other. And instead of subduing the earth they will turn instead to subduing each other.

"...the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth..." The scattering of humans across the face of the

earth and the rise of diverse languages will bring an end to the universal nature of the story unfolding in Genesis. Furthermore, humanity will lose its oneness and unity of focus after this event and become scattered not only geographically but also in terms of goals and agenda. Although the story has paid special attention to one lineage of people, it still has generally been the story of all people, of any people, of humanity and of being human. At this point in the story however Genesis will cease being the story of humanity and will concentrate its focus on the man Abram, toward whose birth the narrative was leading. Now the story is to become God working out His plan for the salvation of the world through Abraham and the Jewish people. But the scattered people of the world will be reintroduced into God's story at the Nativity of Christ: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matthew 2:1-2). With the arrival of the Magi, we have the beginning of all the nations and people of the world realizing that they are indeed part of the promise to Abraham and are to be recipients of God's special favor. God promised Abraham, "by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves" (Genesis 22:18). The Magi lead all the nations of the earth to come to worship Abraham's descendent and to enter into the eternal promise of God.

This scattering of people as an act of God in Genesis 11 contrasts with the more natural spread of the growing human population described in Genesis 10. This is certainly indicative of there being more than one "source" contributing to the Scriptures. The final editor of the Scriptures places both stories side by side in the Bible. He doesn't try to harmonize the stories nor did he choose between them. Neither should we. The final editor of the text accepts both versions – contradictions and all – as inspired by God. So should we. But what lesson are we to learn from the fact that texts with contradictions and inconsistencies get accepted into the Scriptures? One possible lesson is not to read these verses purely literally. Perhaps their true

importance lies somewhere other than in the plain reading of the text. As many Patristic writers suggested, the text is telling us to dig deeper beyond the literal – don't reduce this text to a history lesson, it is about God's revelation. Seek out that deeper and more important meaning. Our work is to interpret the scriptures we have received, not to change them or ignore them or to eliminate their challenges and mysteries.

Some speculate that in the modern world there is a new single language which is uniting humanity together. It is the language of mathematics, which is the same in every culture and tongue. It has a logic which is not based in any one language but is universally recognizable. And it is sometimes said that the universal language of mathematics which dominates conversations around the world is closely linked to two other phenomenon. First there is the Internet which is based in computers which are completely based in the language of mathematics. The Internet has made global conversations a reality. The Internet whose foundation is in mathematics makes it possible for the humans to again work for a common language for the world. The other phenomenon related to math is finances and economics. It appears in the 21st Century world that one form of economics – capitalism – dominates the language of commerce. It is the bottom line which determines so much about what we think of things. Will math, the Internet and capitalism – the modern trinity unifying humanity cause some in the world to create a new Ba'bel? God has not forbidden humans from using their brains, but it has been His desire that knowledge will lead us back to Him.

10 These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was a hundred years old, he became the father of Arpach'shad two years after the flood; **11** and Shem lived after the birth of Arpach'shad five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. **12** When Arpach'shad had lived thirty-five years, he became the father of Shelah; **13** and Arpach'shad lived after the birth of Shelah four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters. **14** When Shelah had lived thirty years, he became the father of Eber; **15** and Shelah lived after the birth of Eber four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters. **16** When Eber had lived thirty-four years, he became the father of Peleg; **17** and Eber lived after the birth of Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters. **18** When Peleg had lived thirty years, he became the father of Re'u; **19** and Peleg lived after the birth of Re'u two hundred and nine years, and had other sons and daughters. **20** When Re'u had lived thirty-two years, he became the father of Serug; **21** and Re'u lived after the birth of Serug two hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters. **22** When Serug had lived thirty years, he became the father of Nahor; **23** and Serug lived after the birth of Nahor two hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. **24** When Nahor had lived twenty-nine years, he became the father of Terah; **25** and Nahor lived after the birth of Terah a hundred and nineteen years, and had other sons and daughters. **26** When Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. **27** Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. **28** Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chalde'ans. **29** And Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sar'ai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. **30** Now Sar'ai was barren; she had no child. **31** Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sar'ai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chalde'ans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there. **32** The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

“...became the father... two years after the flood...” The timing of the birth suggests no children were conceived or born during the year in which the flood gripped the earth. Is it possible that the sons of Noah and their wives remained chaste during the duration of the flood? Most of the Patristic writers who also happened to embrace monasticism believed Noah and his children all practiced abstinence from sex while in the ark during the nearly year long time of the flood.

Eber lives to be about half as old as Adam was when he died. Serug lives to be about one quarter as old as Adam was when he died. The longevity of the humans is in a pattern of decline. In verse :28 Haran dies before his father dies, one of the great traumas for any parent. It introduces into the story of the fallen world a new sorrow that mortality causes – the natural (non-violent) death of beloved children. Genesis 25:8 tells us that Abraham led a long and full life and dies at the ripe old age of 175. By the standards of his ancestors his life would have been measured as short, but by his generation that indeed was a considerable age to have reached. When Abraham was born there were 11 generations in his family tree alive – everyone from Noah to himself. When Abraham dies there are 7 generations alive including Abraham's children and grandchildren. Shem, Noah's son according to the genealogy outlived Abraham by 30 years, though after fathering Arpachshad two years after the flood, Shem plays no further role in the biblical history.

A genealogy is just a list of names. That would probably be a common summation of what many modern readers get out of the various family trees listed in Genesis. But in the ancient world, a name is not just a word. The name of any being reveals the very nature of the being. Every name is thus a revelation; every name is a thing, not merely pointing out the object to which it refers. The name reveals the meaning; it is the meaning itself, not just that which gets us to the meaning. Each name thus reveals and represents its reality. This is why the naming of the animals in Genesis 2 was such a significant story. It is why the genealogies are so important thousands of years after they were originally remembered; it also explains why the naming of the

children in Genesis is of such importance. We, who are shaped by the mass industry of interchangeable parts, read the list of names and think anyone of those people could have been replaced by someone else. In the Scriptures however each name is a reality which had to have been present for the coming of the Messiah. This also explains why the Name of Jesus is so significant to the authors of the New Testament. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). In the Gospel, it is not merely His being the Messiah, which makes Him so important, but it is also his very Name which makes Jesus essential to us, to our relationship with God, and thus to our salvation. As Matthew reports the Gospel, the angel reveals of Mary that "...she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

When we read the genealogy in the Gospel According to St. Matthew (1:1-25) on the Sunday before Christmas, we might be tempted as Christians to say that in that whole list of births, there is only one birth that really matters – the Nativity of Jesus Christ. That narrow thinking would certainly miss the point of the scriptural text. The very reason all those names are preserved in Scripture is to show that all the births mattered, even those of nefarious characters, because they each were an essential birth in the history of humanity that led to the nativity of the Savior. In fact all the births are of the utmost importance as the birth of Christ would not have occurred without this exact history unfolding as it did. Of course in Orthodoxy, though Matthew's genealogy traces Joseph's ancestors, it really is the genealogy of Mary the Theotokos which is of genetic and human significance for the incarnate Word of God. All the births in the Scriptural genealogies are thus essential and matter for the salvation of the world. Furthermore in Christian thinking, the birth of every human since the time of Christ also is significant for the life of the world. No human ever

conceived is inconsequential to the world, every single human conceived and ever human who is born matters to God and to the people of God.

Genealogies remind us that each of us, every human being is born into a world which already exists, and is born in relationship to other human beings. We are by nature relational beings. Genealogies place each human in the context of humanity; giving each person a history and a place in the social order. They also serve the purpose of reminding us that in biblical terms, as relational beings, we are beings of love (where love is always directed toward the "other" and is not directed toward self interest). The Scriptures testify that God is love (1 John 4:8,16). For Christians this also refers directly to the fact that God is Trinity – a Trinity of Persons who dwell in love and whose relationship with one another is love. For humans true love then is not an emotion but an encounter with God (and in Orthodoxy we always encounter one of the Persons of the Trinity, never God-in-general). God as Trinity is a relational being and we who are created in His image and likeness are created as relational beings, created to be in God's image, created to love. Genealogies remind us of these truths that we are born into and experience the world through interrelationships with all other human beings, but especially with specific humans, normally our parents and family. We are by our births given context in the world, given a story, given a shared human nature and story.

This section of Genesis brings us to the birth of Abram, whom many consider to be the father of the great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Genesis offers that overarching meta-story which ties all of humanity together. It is a story that helps define our common human nature. We are all part of God's great unfolding narrative, and it is His story which gives our lives and our individual stories meaning. Many think that at the beginning of the 21st Century, the philosophical outlook which shapes our current understanding of the world is "**postmodernism.**" While the ideas of postmodernism are complex, as a philosophy it seems to accept the notion that

there is no real way to “measure” the truth or validity of any story, since each person’s life experience is true to them and can’t be measured against any standard or canon as any one story is as true and valid as any other from the point of view of each person. Postmodernism would say everyone’s story is true and right from some perspective and it would deny there is a shared human nature or shared human story to tie us all together. In some ways this philosophy is a theory of intellectual relativity. As in the theory of relativity in physics, “truth” is limited to the vantage point of the observer – time and space are all relative to the position, speed and direction of the observer. “Perception” of an event is completely shaped by one’s position relative to the event. Any one perception can be true for that observer but others seeing the same event from other positions relative to the event will see the event differently and yet their perception will be true for them. In postmodernism we may all share the same planet, but our lives relative to one another are not all that connected. There is no one perspective that is the correct perspective and so truth, right, wrong, good and evil vary from person to person. A movie which captures this quite well is the 2005 movie, CRASH. In that movie all of the characters live in the same city and their lives are tied together by a series of otherwise random events. However, despite being tied together by these events, none of the characters are aware of their connection to the others – only the viewer of the movie has the perspective of how they are all tied together. But for the characters, their lives are a series of accidental “crashes” into one another. The movie suggests that individuals longing for feeling some connection to others – longing to be sprung from the isolation and alienation of extreme individualism – “crash” into each other, sometimes intentionally just to feel alive or to get some sense that they belong to something greater than themselves. In certain ways this postmodern thinking is an intellectual Darwinism where all events that happen are ultimately random not giving direction to life, not serving any purpose, but definitely shaping present experience and the future of humanity. Like Darwinism, postmodernism, denies teleology (the idea that life purposefully moves toward some

conclusion or end). The Bible certainly accepts teleology – there is a purposeful beginning to humankind and there is a God who is guiding the world and this God has a plan for the world which includes an ending toward which God is guiding things. The Bible offers the beginnings of the story, shapes the direction we are headed in, and offers some specific thoughts about how it all will end. In postmodern terms, the Bible offers a meta-narrative, a story that ties together all peoples, all lives, and all human stories. It is not one person’s story, it is rather the story of everybody, a story that shows our common humanity. It is a story with a purpose, in which it is possible to discern right and wrong, good and evil, beginning and end. Each life is important, not random, and not meaningless. Even the use of typology or a prototype within the biblical narrative (that one story can somehow foreshadow a later story and help us recognize and understand later stories) argues against pure postmodernism. Figurative thinking and symbolic thinking help us recognize patterns in life – they help us make sense of past historical events, they help us to recognize the significance of current events. They help us realize each life is not totally unrelated to all other lives. Each life contributes to the bigger picture, the tapestry or mosaic or narrative. No one life is self contained, no one life can measure the worth of all other things, because every life is part of a bigger whole, which is purposeful. Each life and each person’s story will get measured and evaluated in terms of this bigger narrative, and it is this bigger picture which offers meaning to each life, no matter how great, how long, how short. The important insight of monotheism is that there is a meta-narrative; there is a way to understand all the individual stories, even if we can’t fully grasp that meta-story yet – even if there is mystery, even if there are unresolved contradictions in the Scriptures which contain the revelation of this one God. The Bible contains in a written form the known elements of this revelation, and it gives us perspective on life, gives direction to life, gives meaning to life. The Bible also tells us that the world is confusing, and at times every bit as uncertain as postmodernism would affirm. The Bible does show us that events do occur which from our limited

human perspective do appear to be random, unfair, inexplicable, and ambiguous. The Bible does take perspective – it traces history and humanity through particular peoples' lives, and does not pretend to be neutral or objective, but rather is either biased or ambivalent or both. Perhaps the most postmodern event in the Bible is when God creates light in Genesis 1:3. There was light – it had no source, no direction, it simply was. There existed no perspective in that verse, it is all about simply being. And since nothing else existed it had no direction, no goal, no purpose, and no movement. Even Einstein's relativity didn't exist in that event for light was all. The Bible however doesn't end with this directionless and perspectiveless light. That light serves to connect and illumine all else that exists. The Bible says this is the truth of humanity as well – we each are not merely individuals, but we are communal beings. We are created to be in communion with God and with each other. We are by nature beings of love (meaning we are by nature oriented toward others). Genesis tells us in narrative form the story of each of us and any of us and all of us. It reveals to us our humanness and thus our interdependency on all else that exists. It helps us realize there is a way, a direction, and it tells us we have lost that way, but it is still available for us to find. Genesis helps put us on that right path. Even the ambiguities in the story and the contradictions tell us we need to find a better perspective to understand what is. That gives us purpose, motivation, and direction – we need to move to that new perspective. And the Scriptures will help us find that way.

With the birth of Abram the Bible begins its clear focus on one particular people on earth. That the Bible was moving in this direction becomes all the more obvious in the chapters that follow in Genesis. Just as a Christocentric reading of the Old Testament reveals how the entirety of the Scriptures was moving toward Christ and in Christ finds its full meaning, so too with Abram the direction of the early chapters of Genesis becomes clear and pointed. God's plan for the salvation of His fallen creation is being put into motion and revealed. This becomes clear in the genealogy Matthew placed at the very beginning of his Gospel.

Matthew does not trace Christ back to Adam, the first human, but rather he traces back the genealogy to Abraham, God's chosen servant, who is the father of Israel, the man with whom God makes an eternal covenant that is to be traced through his descendents, or more properly through a particular descendent: "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many; but, referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' which is Christ" (Galatians 3:16). In Orthodoxy we read Matthew's genealogy on the Sunday before Christmas because we do believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. Immediately after Abraham had shown himself willing to sacrifice his son, the God-promised heir for whom Abraham had so hoped, the Lord said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:16-18). Jesus is believed by Christians to be the fulfillment of God's promises and prophecy. All the nations of the world are blessed through Jesus Christ, not just the nation of Israel. God's universal hope for all of humanity which is established with the creation of the first man Adam (the prototype of all humans) and whose fulfillment is promised through Abraham's descendent is accomplished in Jesus Christ (the new universal man, the prototype of the resurrected human). The genealogy of Matthew's Gospel offers the world the sense of the continuity in God's plan – the promise and the fulfillment are traceable through one Holy Tradition which is laid out in the Bible. In the Gospel according to Luke the genealogy is traced in the reverse order of Matthew. St. Luke begins with Jesus, the divine God-man who also is the new universal man and the new Adam, and traces His ancestry through David to Abraham, Shem, Noah, Seth and back to the first Adam who was the first universal man and the son of God. Thus Christ fulfills what God intended His humans to be from

the beginning. The birth of Jesus is not merely the birth of a good or holy man. The birth of Jesus is the beginning of the universal salvation of all humans, the reunion of God and humanity, and the restoration of humanity to their original and God-given role to be mediator between God and all the rest of creation, and the fulfillment of God's promises to His chosen people. The Nativity of Christ is the restoration of humanity to humanity's God-intended role in the universe. Finally a human exists who has Godly dominion over the rest of creation.

"For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one" (Hebrews 2:5-9).

"Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 'For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under him,' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one" (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

An After Word

Genesis opens with words of grandeur and mystery: “In the beginning, God...” God creating the heavens and earth is the beginning of space and time which are necessary for our own existence. Genesis does not begin offering insights into this God apart from His creating and His creation; despite God’s revelation of Himself, He remains a mystery to us, with His essence beyond our capability of knowing. (Fifth Century Bishop Theodoret of Cyrus postulates that Genesis does not begin with dogmatics because the ancient Israelites were not yet ready to understand the depths of such revelation and rather needed to learn about the Creator to refute the false worship of creation the Jews were coming to accept at the time of Moses who is credited with writing the story). The story of God for us commences not in eternity but in His self-revelation. When God chose to reveal Himself, He created that which is “not God,” that to which He can reveal Himself. God’s initial action inaugurating creation is to speak His Word, and in doing so light comes into existence. God’s spoken work is all about illumination and revelation, making it possible for those with eyes to see. God brings forth life, which is to say “not God” into being, and also empowers this “not God” with the ability to perpetuate itself through procreation. That which is “not God”, creation, shares in the life of God and the life-givingness of God. We create and procreate because God shared Himself with His creation.

While we logically read the Genesis story as the beginning of our story as human guests on God’s earth starting with verse 1:1, experientially the story of Genesis begins for us in its last line: “So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt” (Genesis 50:26). This last line of Genesis causes us to stop and ask, “How did we humans ever get to this point, lying dead in a coffin in Egypt?” We started with God creating the heavens and the earth. We started with God breathing His breathe into dust and forming a living being. How did humans created in God’s image and likeness, placed in a perfect garden whose landscape architect and maker is of God, created by God to have dominion over the entire world, chosen by God to be His people and doers of His will, ever end up dead in a coffin in the foreign land of Egypt? Why aren’t we living in a perfect world, in which God clearly reigns over all, and in which humans are clearly regents over every other form of life on earth? Why aren’t we living in paradise or at least the Promised Land? The answer to that question is exactly what the Book of Genesis is about. Genesis is our spiritual sojourn back in time to discover how we became the beings we humans are. More than a historical accounting, Genesis is a spiritual sojourn – the unfolding of human interaction with God and with creation. Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, sums it up this way: “The book (Genesis) commences with, ‘In the beginning God created...’ and ends with the words, ‘...in a coffin in Egypt.’ These first and last words of the First Book of Moses, Genesis, are in themselves a summary of man’s spiritual history, for God is ever saving and man is ever falling; God is ever delivering and man is ever becoming enslaved; God is ever giving life and man is ever choosing death.” (TCAF, p. 3).

We read Genesis to understand our human condition, our human nature, our human plight, and our common human experience. We read Genesis to experience God’s role in the world in order for this to be the foundation for our faith in God and our hope in the future. We read Genesis to understand Jesus Christ. We read the first book of the Bible to learn how to live in this world with faith and hope, and to prepare ourselves for life in the world to come. Genesis is thus much more about our present and our hoped for future than it is about the past. “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

I conclude with the same words with which I ended QUESTIONING GOD: “We could say more but could never say enough; let the final word be: ‘He is the all.’” (Sirach 43:27, NAB)

Glossary

Allegorical An interpretive way to read a text in which things in the text stand for or mean something other than what they literally are. The New Testament uses allegory as one means to interpret the Old Testament. For example St. Paul writes in Galatians 4:22-31, “For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. ... Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. ... So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.” In the text Paul interprets the real women Hagar and Sarah to stand for two types of covenant; he interprets the real persons, Hagar and Sarah, to mean something other than just being two women. This method of interpretation does not deny the literal meaning of the text, but says there is a deeper meaning if you read the text with the right understanding. If you take the time to study Paul’s allegory, you realize it is quite complex, and far beyond that to which the plain reading of the passage leads.

Anamnesis This is the Greek word for “remembering.” In the Divine Liturgy for example we remember all the events of salvation that have happened for us – the cross, the tomb, the resurrection, the ascension and Christ’s sitting at the right hand of the father. This form of remembering goes far beyond recalling a past event, for it is a form of remembering which says we are making ourselves present in these events because they are real, and we are declaring the reality of these events in our life today. The resurrection of Christ is important not because it happened 2000 years ago, but because we also participate in it and it is our salvation. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans 6:3-5). We remember what Christ accomplished for us whenever we liturgically celebrate baptism and the Eucharist. Our “remembering” Christ’s saving actions is the very basis for our faith in God and hope in the future. We do not live by “blind” faith, but by remembering all the things which God had done for us.

Ancestral Sin (see also Original Sin) Ancestral Sin is a terminology many Orthodox writers prefer to use regarding the first sin of Eve and Adam, rather than the phrase “original sin.” Original sin under the influence of St. Augustine and then later Reformation writers took on specific connotations that are not completely accepted by Orthodox writers. “Original sin” in Western Christian thinking often carries with it notions of inherited guilt and an inherited imperfect human nature. The Orthodox tended, despite the Fall, to still see human nature positively – the indelible “image of God” remains natural to humans. There is something naturally good about God’s created human beings despite our having sinned. Generally in Orthodox thinking what is emphasized more than sin is death – it is mortality that we inherit from our ancestors because of sin. A key scriptural passage is Romans 5:12 - *“Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned...”* It is death that spread to all humans, not sin nor the guilt of the original sin.

Antediluvian The word for describing the world before the catastrophic flood of Genesis 6-9. Antediluvians are all the people from Adam and Eve to Noah. All of the antediluvians named in Genesis die before the flood occurs, except of course for Noah, his sons, and their wives, who are the only antediluvians to survive the flood and thus carry the human race into the world that we know. Noah and his family are symbolically prototypes of all Christians who are carried by the Church, another ark, over the power of death into life purified of all sin.

Anthropomorphic The term applied to God when God is described as acting in an almost human way, or when human characteristics are attributed to Him. For example, God is said to walk in the garden in Genesis 2 or He shuts the door of the ark in Genesis 7. We do not have a language adequate to describing God, and so we use human terms and phrases to help us understand His relationship to us. In a certain way it is taking the Genesis teaching that humans are created in God's image, and then reading back into God's deeds human actions, motivations and emotions and making God into the likeness of humans. Theological truth in this case does not have commutative properties – the fact that we are in God's image and likeness does not mean He therefore is in our image and likeness. Anthropomorphic writing is a form of literalism, but exactly because of its literal implication it also becomes a major rationale for needing a higher degree of symbolic, metaphorical or figurative thinking when reading Scripture for full understanding.

Christocentric A way of interpreting the Old Testament in which Jesus Christ is the key that helps us unlock the meaning of the text. Christ said, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39). We believe the main purpose of the Old Testament is to bear witness to Christ. Christ Himself taught the Scriptures to His disciples in this way: "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Whatever other truth the Old Testament contains – moral, prophetic, literal, historic – we believe in Christ the biblical verses are fully expounded.

Eschaton The final ending of the entire universe when all things in heaven and on earth are transfigured by the Lord's final judgment and God's Kingdom is fully established. "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelations 11:15)

the Fall Refers to the original sin of Adam and Eve in eating the forbidden fruit recorded in Genesis 3. At that moment humanity fell from God's grace, we were expelled from paradise and made to live in the world suffering the effects of this sin. Mortality, sickness and suffering are all part of the world as a result of sin.

Incarnation The word literally means to "take on or become flesh." For Christians, this is THE revelation of god found in Jesus Christ who is God incarnate. In John 1:14 we read that Jesus is the Word of God became flesh. God became flesh in Jesus Christ – He was the Son of God, second person of the Trinity and He became human. We believe the great revelation of God in Christ is that God has united Himself to humanity in order to save us.

Literalism A method of interpreting scripture in which one limits one's reading to attempting to discern the "plain" meaning of the text – just reading exactly what it says. While much of scripture can be read literally, a completely literal reading of Genesis 1-11 creates numerous irreconcilable inconsistencies and contradictions in the text, and imposes an absolute anthropomorphic understanding on Theology. Early Christians often felt the "plain" reading of the text was not necessarily the best reading of the text. They believed the scriptures as the Word of God were a deep well with life-giving meaning and that to simply drink of the surface water is to miss the depth that the text held. In America some Christians (known as literalists) assume that for the scriptures to be "true" they must be literally, historically and scientifically

factual. Yet we know that the Scriptures also contain metaphor, poetry, parables and cannot be read only in a literal way. In addition the New Testament is full of examples of interpreting the Old Testament in non-literal ways – as allegory, prophecy, typology, figuratively, metaphorically and symbolically. The Scriptures do not say they have to be read literally. They do say that they are “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16), and sometimes we come to these benefits by reading the text in ways other than only literally. To demand that every single verse of the Scriptures must be read literally is to impose on the Bible a slavish reading of the text. St. John Chrysostom said, “We ourselves are not the lords over the rules of interpretation,” rather we are to discover from the reading of the Bible how the Scriptures understand themselves. Obviously when we read the New Testament we realize the authors of the Christian Scriptures use many and varied methods when they interpret the Old Testament texts.

Original sin The very first sin committed by humans – the eating of the forbidden fruit by Adam and Eve. The major consequences of this sin were that Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise and they became mortal beings as have all of us. Some Orthodox writers prefer to call the first sin “ancestral sin” as they feel the term “original sin” as a result of Western Christian ideas has become completely and wrongfully identified with inherited sin and inherited guilt. Orthodox writers tend to emphasize mortality as the significant result of the first sin, and the trait which all humans inherit from their ancestors as a result of sin.

Patristic Refers to the Fathers of the Church – those teachers universally recognized by the Church as defending and teaching the official dogma of the Church. Most often it refers to writers from about the 4th- 8th Centuries of Christianity.

Postlapsarian Anything that occurs to humans or the cosmos after the sin of Adam and Eve. All of the events of Genesis 4-11 are postlapsarian. The only prelapsarian events are described in Genesis 1:1-3:5.

Postmodernism A philosophical way of understanding the world which emerged in the late 20th Century. Generally postmodernism denies that there is one story (like the Bible) which ties all humans together or which explains humanity. It accepts that everyone’s worldview is equally valid and that there is no one universal truth for all. Good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, all represent ideas completely limited by one’s perspective and perception. Thus postmodern thinking is very much a form of the Theory of Relativity being applied to morality, ethics, theology, and truth. Postmodernism has become a common influence in how we currently understand and relate to our world. This is true whether or not we agree with its basic premises. It is a way of seeing the world that is expressed commonly through the modern media.

Prototype A prototype is the first of a thing that symbolically stands for all other things like it that come after it in time. Often the prototype helps us to recognize the real and significant thing which comes later in history. Adam is the prototype of all sinful humans, but Christ is a prototype of the new human being no longer under the power of sin. Early Christians frequently saw in the Old Testament stories prototypes of Christian ideas. The ark for example is a prototype of the Church. Abel is a prototype of all righteous men who are persecuted by the ungodly and who endure even death at the hands of the violent. Frequently a prototype might be compared to the drawings and models of a thing before the real thing is built. They help us to recognize the reality of which they were but a foreshadowing. Once the building is constructed we fully realize what the drawings were all about.

Septuagint Almost 200 years before Jesus is born the Jews decide to translate their scriptures from Hebrew and Aramaic into the Greek language. They did this to make their scriptures more universally accessible to the people of the world. The Septuagint was accepted

as the authentic and official scriptures of the Jews (not just the scriptures in translation, they believed the Septuagint was inspired scriptures). Early Christians relied mostly on the Septuagint for their understanding of the Old Testament. About 100 years after the death of Christ the Jewish rabbis officially declared the Septuagint was not authoritative scripture for Jews because the Christians made such extensive use of it to explain and defend their own beliefs that Jesus is the Messiah. The Septuagint contains a number of Scriptural passages and even entire books which are no longer found in the Jewish Scriptures. It is important to remember the Septuagint was a translation of the Jewish Scriptures done by Jews themselves long before Christianity existed. The first Christians made extensive use of these Scriptures because they were considered inspired by the Jews of the First Century.

Source Theory A theory of modern biblical scholarship which believes that the some of the variations and inconsistencies in the Old Testament scriptures can be explained by the fact that different authors writing at varied times contributed to the composition of the Jewish scriptures. This doesn't question the inspiration of the text, but says books such as Genesis were not written by one person but are really a compilation of writings that one editor eventually wove into the text we accept in the Bible. Like any form of interpretation, Source Theory is a tool that can help us understand the Scriptures. All tools are good servants and bad masters. If we use them to help us understand the text, rather than have them determine the meaning of the text, they are helpful. A miner's pick can help him uncover gold, but it cannot tell the miner whether the gold is real or iron pyrite, "fool's gold." Source Theory reminds us that much of Genesis originally existed in oral form – stories that belonged to the entire community. As such, they didn't have just one author, but had an entire community which preserved and authenticated the story. It was common in oral communities that more than one version of a story might be told, and yet accepted as authoritative. Source Theory has helped uncover that fact.

Teleology The idea that the entire universe is being directed toward a pre-determined goal or end. This pre-ordained and planned goal to which God is directing all things actually governs what God allows in the universe. Teleology is embraced by Christians, Jews, Muslims. Teleology is rejected by strict adherents to evolution who say the events of the universe are random, not planned, and are not moving toward any particular goal; the fittest survive at any given time, thus there is no particular meaning to the universe. Deists also, although they believe God exists, reject a notion that God is guiding every particular event in the universe or that God intervenes in history. So they too reject teleology, but tend to see God as a benevolent force who isn't imposing His will on all things.

Typology This is one means of biblical interpretation in which events which happen in ancient times are seen as a form of prophecy which help us recognize later acts of God. The original event or person or passage is viewed as a "type" of things to come. Adam is the first man and Christ is the New Adam, so Adam is a type. Melitios of Sardis (d.190) says typology is like the sketches and models that craftsmen make before they make their real product. When they are building the intended product the sketches and models help us realize what the craftsman is doing. The sketches and models may be partial and incomplete but the final and intended product reveals what the sketches and models were all about. The ark is a type of the church, the flood a type of baptism. The Patristic writers frequently made use of typology as a way to understand the scriptures, as did the New Testament writers in their use of the Old Testament. Melitios says the innocent Abel slain by his brother is a type of all the righteous who have been murdered, including Christ.

YHWH The actual Name of God (like any first name) which the Old Testament writers use when referring to God by Name rather than calling Him by the generic word "God." God revealed His Name to Moses in the burning bush. The Name was always considered sacred and was never commonly pronounced. Jewish documents left out the vowels to help keep the pronunciation of God's Name sacred and used only the four consonants (thus the name of God written as YHWH is called the Tetragrammata). In Source Theory there is one particular

“source” – author or editor – the J-Source, who uses God’s Name whenever referring to God.
Not all Old Testament writers used God’s Name when referring to God.

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