

Sermon: Creed Week 2

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.”

Last week, we heard about a group of some 300 clergy who came together to essentially decide what the church should believe, and despite St. Nicholas slapping another bishop, they eventually agreed on a unified statement of faith.

The Son of God was ‘begotten not made’ much to Bishop Arius's displeasure and the cause of ‘Slapgate’.

That Easter would be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox, no mention of chocolate eggs or bunnies and some twenty other rules of governance for clergy and the church.

It would be remiss of me not to at least consider St Nicholas' feelings, and so, I wonder, have you ever listened to a scientist or someone who says they know science, go on about how astrophysics, cosmology and astronomy can prove once and for all that there was no such thing as creation, or a creator, and thought to yourself, they need a good slap?

I ask this not to promote violence, it wrong and shouldn't be promoted in any form, it's because, for the last hundred years or so, we Christians have been doing a lot of defensive ducking and weaving whenever the subject of the Big Bang comes up. You know the scene. Someone at a dinner party, nearly always the one who uses words like “actually” a bit too much, then leans over and says, “Surely you don't still believe in a Creator? Science has shown the universe began with a bang, not a breath. And with a somewhat smug tone, announcing “No God required.”

And we nod politely and change the subject to house prices or whether the Rector's new haircut is an improvement.

But if you take the time to understand the statement that all those 4th-century theologians, put into the Creed, perhaps you'll be able to say something more definitive in return. Because

contrary to popular belief, 'The Big Bang' is not the atheist's trump card, it is the creationist's opening statement.

The single most important thing the Big Bang tells us is this:

'The universe had a beginning.

And if it had a beginning, it had a Beginner!

There are several versions of the Big Bang theory, from the standard Lambda-CDM model (basically a three-point guide to background cosmic radiation, expanding galaxies, and the moment it all starts) to various inflationary and cyclic universe theories. To be honest, there isn't enough time to even start on them.

Now, if you're anything like me, you're thinking. "This is a sermon, not a physics lecture. I barely passed GCSE science, and I'm still not entirely sure how a microwave works."

The physics of the first fraction of a second, the expansion of space, and the formation of galaxies are truly incredible gifts of science, and you should not fear them. Because every version of the Big Bang describes a process, not a purpose. It tells us about the explosion of matter, but not why it matters.

Science gives us a theory, a timeline, nothing more.

And like our Bishops arguing over the Trinity in Nicaea, the story of how we (scientifically) discovered the beginning of everything is almost as frustrating. It involves many stubborn scientists, just as many arguments, and you'll be glad to hear, no reports of anyone being slapped.

Although I believe it came close.

Let me take you back to 1927. A Belgian priest, named Georges Lemaître, was looking at the maths. Einstein had formulated his theory of general relativity a decade earlier, and most scientists assumed the universe was eternal. Aristotle, some 650 years before 'Slapgate', thought it was Steady. Always there. No start, no end. And who was going to argue with him?

Actually, I know who, a bunch of argumentative theologians fond of aggressive rhetoric, who met in Nicaea, and they said. “Actually, no. There was a moment when God said, “Let there be’ and everything that is began.” Lemaître did the maths and realised that Einstein’s own equations pointed backwards to a single point, a “primaeval atom” he called it, ‘where space, time, and matter all exploded into being.’ Everything that is, seen and unseen, crammed into something smaller than a grain of sand.

And then bang.

Einstein told him, “Your maths is correct, but your physics is abominable.” Which is scientist speak for “I think you need a good slap.”

Why?

Because Einstein didn’t like the idea of a beginning either. It felt too much like Genesis. Too much like religion sneaking in through the back door of science. He, like Aristotle, wanted the universe to be eternal, neat, self-sufficient, no Creator required, thank you very much.

But Lemaître, who was a Catholic priest as well as a physicist, didn’t back down. And over the next forty years, the evidence piled up. The redshift of galaxies moving apart. The discovery of cosmic microwave background radiation, the echo of the bang still ringing through the universe. By the 1960s, even Einstein, had he lived, would have had to admit: the priest was right.

The universe began, the evidence points, inexorably, to a moment when there was nothing, and then there was everything.

The creed says, “God is the maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen”. That means God is not part of the universe. He’s not the biggest thing in the universe. He is the reason there is a universe. He’s the author, not a character. He’s the painter, not the paint.

And the Big Bang agrees with that completely. Because if the universe had a beginning, then whatever caused it cannot itself be part of it. Cause and effect, that’s basic logic, not just religion. The painter isn’t in the painting. The author isn’t on the page. God isn’t floating around somewhere out past Pluto, waiting for the latest space telescope to spot him. He’s the one who said, “Let there be” and the stars obediently appeared.

The God who made everything is the Father. He existed before the first light split the darkness, before time itself began ticking; there was already love.

The Father loves the Son. The Son responds to the Father. The Spirit dancing between them. That's what the theologians call the Trinity.

Now, some people worry that science has pushed God into a corner. The more we understand about physics, biology, and cosmology, the less room there is for a Creator. But that's like saying the more you learn about Shakespeare's vocabulary, the less you believe in Shakespeare. Which is nonsense. The more we discover about the universe, the fine-tuning of the physical constants, the elegance of the maths, the incredible moment of creation, the more reasonable it becomes to say, "Someone started all of this!"

When you learn that the universe is 13.8 billion years old, give or take, that's not a problem for faith. That's a timescale. When you learn that human beings share a common ancestor with bananas about 50% of our DNA, by the way, which explains a lot about some people you meet.

That's just genetics.

When you learn that the stars are made of the same elements as our bones, that's not a threat. If anything, that's poetry. Dust you are, and to dust you shall return, and Genesis knew that long before astrophysics caught up. In short, 'The creed' doesn't demand that you stop thinking. It doesn't ask you to park your brain at the church door. It asks you to look at the universe, at the infinite galaxies spinning in silence, at the fossil in the rock, at the light we see now, that started its journey from the edge of time, billions of years ago and say, "This belongs to someone. And that someone is good."

Now, could God have made the universe in six twenty-four-hour days back in 4004BC? Certainly. He's almighty. He could have done it in a billionth of a second if he'd wanted to. But the evidence suggests he took his time. Thirteen point eight billion years, during which time the universe has evolved without God controlling every detail, one in which God has always allowed His creation to be creative: Galaxies forming and dying, stars exploding to seed the cosmos with carbon and iron. Dinosaurs roaming, glaciers advancing, continents drifting. And then, at the very end of a very long process, you and I. People who argue about Greek letters and microwave radiation, and whether St Nicholas was justified in slapping a heretic. Why take so long? I don't know. Maybe because love takes time. Maybe because a universe that unfolds gradually is a universe that tells a story, not just presents a fact. Maybe because the God who is Father enjoys watching things grow.

So there we have it, the first line of the creed, "One God, Father, almighty, maker of all that is, seen and unseen", it's not a scientific statement. It's a declaration of trust.

It's saying: the same God who brought galaxies into being is the God who catches every tear. The same God who brought light out of darkness is the God who sat with us in the dark. So next time someone tells you that science has disproved God, don't change the

subject to house prices and haircuts, or slap them, just smile. And say, “Really, so what do you think happened before the Big Bang?”

And remember:

Because if there was a moment when the universe began, then there was a moment when it was not. And if there was truly nothing, no space to echo, no time to pass, no dust to stir, then what, nothing gave no command.

The first sound was not a bang, but a voice. The first light was not an explosion, but a breathing. And the same hands that spun the galaxies into their silent choreography, that whispered quarks into existence and flung quasars like seeds, those same hands, steady and sure, made you.

Not in haste.

Not as a distraction.

Not as an afterthought between greater works.

But as a signature. A deliberate, unblinking, tender act of attention.

And in making you, the Maker did not make a mistake.

Amen