

March 2008, Article #1
Ex nihilo (from nothing)
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In the prologue to his Gospel, the evangelist John takes up the account of creation given in the first chapter of Genesis, in order to illustrate the story of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, the eternal Son and Word of God. "In the beginning," out of His infinite otherness, with God and as God, the Word comes forth, to create the world and to save it from death and corruption. From the unfathomable remoteness of eternity, the Father utters His Word in order to "make all things," an activity that culminates in the creation of human beings, bearers of the divine Image. That Word, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, enters into the *skotia*, the darkness of this fallen world, just as it entered "in the beginning" into the darkness of non-being. Yet the world rejects Him as well as the revelation He bears in Himself, a revelation He can speak only to those who have ears to hear. To those who do receive Him, who welcome the Word as the source of new, sanctified life, He grants the power and authority to become "children of God" (Jn 1:12-13).

In the beginning, God created. He made the heavens and the earth, not as ends in themselves, but as *prophetic images of the New Creation in Jesus Christ*. The cosmos was brought into being as a sign and a foretaste of the Kingdom to come. Yet through the indwelling of the Spirit, that future, transcendent reality is already accessible, "everywhere present and filling all things." The Genesis account in chapters one through three, therefore, is to be understood as a *promise*. It speaks in material images not only of the origin and destiny of the cosmos, but of the spiritual pilgrimage the children of God are invited to make, from their creation, through their "fall" into darkness, and onward toward the new creation, the new heaven and earth of the prophet's vision (Revelation 21).

We celebrate this pilgrimage with greatest intensity from Holy Saturday through Pascha, the feast of Resurrection that marks the dawn of our salvation. This pilgrimage, however, is first undertaken by Jesus Himself, the eternal Son and Word of God. By His death on the Cross, He fulfills both the work of creation and the work of redemption. "It is finished!" He declares, as He surrenders to His Father His Spirit, the Spirit of Truth that dwelt secretly within Him from all eternity and visibly from the time of His baptism. Then, from the darkness of the tomb, Jesus descends into the primeval darkness of Sheol, the realm of the dead. There, as so poignantly depicted in our Paschal icon, He opens His embrace to welcome Adam and Eve, prototypes of all humanity, and with them David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and all the righteous departed among the people of God, who lived and died awaiting fulfillment of the promise of the Covenant that God made with His people Israel. Finally, by His resurrection from among the dead and His consequent

victory over the power of death, Jesus ascends, bearing with Himself and in Himself all those who long to share in His life and His glory. And by that Resurrection, creation itself is made anew.

Thy life-bearing Resurrection, O Lord
Enlightened the whole universe, recalling Thy creation.
Delivered from Adam's curse, we sing:
O Almighty Lord, glory to Thee!
(Vespers apostikha, tone 3)

That resurrection not only recalled the creation. It fulfilled it and brought it to completion. We begin our Old Testament readings on Holy Saturday with the account of the world's creation, therefore, not to obtain knowledge of cosmological, biological or historical process. We read this passage for what it promises us about our life and our destiny. We read it to be assured that the eternal Word, who brought all things from non-existence into being, has led us out of our own state of non-being – our nihilistic condition of self-willed emptiness, darkness and sin – and by His resurrection has brought us from an eternal void of meaninglessness and death, into the radiance and joy of the New Creation.