

Transcription details:

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Transcription results:

- 00:00 May what I say and what you hear be in the name of God. Amen. Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. You know The Christmas story, it's a good story, right? I mean, it tracks like a story. It reads like a story. It's captured the hearts and minds of people for hundreds of years, hundreds, maybe even over a thousand years, at least as long as there have been Christmas pageants.
- 00:31 Right? And so here's the story of Jesus. And we know enough of the story to know that Matthew and Luke are placing this story inside a larger story. And we may know bits and pieces of it, and we can catch glimpses of what Matthew and Luke are trying to do. Like Jesus is in the line of David. That's linking to some part of the story in the past.
- 00:58 But I think that at least most of the people I know are Episcopalians. So Episcopalians tend to not really have in their head the story, the gist of the story. And of course, the problem is that the Bible doesn't read like a story. And far too many New Year's resolutions to read the Bible fail because they open up the Bible, turn to Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, and here we go.
- 01:30 And they just don't get very far. Parenthetically, if that's your goal, if you have a goal to read the Bible like that, I suggest that it's actually more important to get the gist of the story than it is to actually read the whole thing. I mean, you can read the whole thing, but get the gist of the story. And there are ways to do that. Fortunately for us, we get reminded of the story of the Bible every week at Eucharist.
- 02:03 And when I tell you where it occurs, you're going to go, "Oh, oh, yeah, that's what's going on there." So we have four Eucharistic prayers. And just so you know, the Eucharistic prayer is the prayer that is set over the bread and wine. My wife, Carolyn, will stand back behind the altar and she will pray over the bread and wine, and that's the Eucharistic prayer. There are four of them, simply called A, B, C, and D. And in prayers A and B, the summary of the Bible occurs in the same location.
- 02:34 It follows what's called the Santas and Benedictus. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God almighty, heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest. And what follows immediately after that is the summary of the Bible. Now, each Eucharistic prayer approaches that summary a little bit differently. So for example, prayer A leaves out part of the story. Prayer B puts that part of the story in it but leaves another part of the story out.
- 03:02 Eucharistic prayer C and D, which we don't tend to use very often, generally contain the whole thing. Now, if we put them all together and sort of bring the lens back, we end up with four bullet points of the story of the Bible, creation, fall, Israel, Jesus. There's actually a fifth bullet point, but it's assumed. The fifth bullet point is the church. The story of the church begins in Acts, but it's an ongoing story.
- 03:31 We're still living into that story. So the bullet points of the story are creation fall, Israel, Jesus, and the church. And so prayer A takes us through creation in the fall and then jumps to Jesus. Eucharistic Prayer B takes us through creation and kind of skips the fall. There's a point later in which we acknowledge sin, and that's kind of where it sticks. It's a little bit out of order, if you will, in terms of the flow of the story.
- 04:02 But that's the gist of it. And then there are other times in our worship when we actually read the gist of the entire story. And that occurs in places at times like Lessons and Carols, Advent Lessons and Carols, or the Easter Vigil, where nine readings are read. And the point is to trace the arc of the story leading to Jesus.
- 04:29 And this is important because when you look at the prayer book and the Eucharistic prayers, what they're saying is the Bible is a unified story leading to Jesus. And that's really how the story works. Now, for our purposes, let's think about the Gospel of John. John doesn't tell us the story of Jesus' birth the way Matthew and Luke do.
- 05:01 John is actually giving us a theological understanding of Jesus' birth. And he's very deliberately linking that story to Genesis 1, the very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible in the beginning was the Word. And so kind of like Eucharistic Prayer A, we get creation and fall in Genesis 1 and 2 and 3, and then we jump to Jesus.
- 05:31 And that's kind of what John is doing. So what I want to do is give us a way of thinking about the overall story of the Bible. I also want to show where we as Episcopalians tend to go off the rails and then try to couch the story the way it actually occurs in Scripture. So in Genesis 1 and actually, before I do that, there are a couple of things we need to understand about biblical cosmology.
- 06:01 That's just a fancy way of saying how the Bible understands how things are ordered, like heaven and earth. So in the Bible, heaven is God's space, and the earth is our space. Wherever God is, there is heaven also. And that's important to keep in mind. So in Genesis 1, the picture that's actually being painted is not a literal historical rendering of how things were created.
- 06:29 It's actually a theological description of creation in which creation is a temple. And the clue to the temple is that it's created in six days and the seventh day God rests. The temple in Jerusalem that Jesus knew had six courts. That's not an accident. The temple was meant to be the cosmos, the creation in miniature. Now, in Genesis 1, something amazing happened.

- 07:00 See, in the pagan world, there were temples, and the people who wrote the Bible understood what went on in there and what was inside those temples. Inside a temple would be an image of the God of that temple. But the story of creation in Genesis 1 is telling us something, at least from a pagan point of view, is very strange.
- 07:24 In Genesis 1:26 to 28, we're told that God makes human beings in His image and, if you will, places them in the temple of creation. See how that works? So we have been created to reflect God's good and gracious rule out into creation and the praises of creation back to God. We are working alongside God, not instead of God.
- 07:53 God is with us in this story. That's clear in Genesis chapter 2, the story of Adam and Eve. And God is present in creation in a way that he's no longer present after the fall. And remember what I said about biblical cosmology. Wherever God is, there is heaven also. So here's God and human beings, His image bearers together, if you will, working and doing the work of creation together.
- 08:24 And because God is present in creation, therefore, heaven is there, and heaven and earth are together. They're not the same kind of space, but they're not incompatible. This is very important if we're going to get the story. So heaven and earth are together. God and human beings are together. And then at the fall, of course, human sin changes all of that. We become separated from God, and heaven and earth becomes separated as well.
- 08:58 And the question that hangs over the story at this point now we're at Genesis chapter 3, the question that sort of hangs there is, "What are you going to do about this, God? How are you going to fix this?" And the answer that comes back in our Eucharistic prayers and I'm going to use Prayer A as an example. Prayer A looks at creation fall and then jumps to Jesus.
- 09:22 So the answer to the question, "What are you going to do about this, God, is I'm going to come myself and I'm going to unite heaven and earth and unite God and human beings to myself." And we know, right, that when we look at the manger and we look at the baby Jesus, we know that we are looking at God in the flesh, right? God in the flesh. That's what incarnation means.
- 09:50 And because God is there and humanity is together. They're all together, all one thing. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Therefore, heaven and earth are also together in Jesus on earth. And that actually explains a lot of what Jesus does. Jesus seems to think of himself as a temple on two legs. And so he forgives sins.
- 10:19 You know Every other Jew in the first century would have said that the only place to get sins forgiven is the temple, the sacrificial system. But Jesus seems to think that that authority resides with him. He's actually taking over. The temple in Jerusalem is out of a job. When we get to Palm Sunday, I kind of imagine sometimes that Palm Sunday is kind of a Western where Jesus is riding in a town on a donkey and he gets off the donkey, he has six guns on his waist, and he marches into the temple and says, "This town isn't big enough for the both of us.
- 10:57 One of us has got to go, and it isn't me." And then he flips the tables over the money changers, right? So the temple is out of a job. God in Jesus Christ has brought heaven and earth together on earth. Now, if we jump to the resurrection and ascension, this is the point at which far too many Episcopalians go off the rails. And it's understandable why it happens.
- 11:27 And I've been around long enough to know that this is a very common way of thinking about Jesus, and it's so common that I'm certain that some of you think this way. And it's understandable. You can be forgiven because we've kind of led the church down the wrong path because we live in a platonic worldview and not a biblical worldview. So this is how people think.
- 11:55 Sometime, either at the resurrection or sometime after that, Jesus stops being human and goes back to being God because God, of course, is spiritual. And therefore, physical Jesus can't be with God because that's some sort of category mistake. But wait a minute. There's all kinds of problems with that.
- 12:23 I mean, namely, in terms of the flow of the story, think about the story. Heaven and earth are together. That's the way they were meant to be. God and human beings are together. They're separated by sin. God comes in the form of Jesus Christ and brings heaven and earth together, brings God and human beings together to then what? Separate them again at the resurrection or sometime after that?
- 12:50 We've completely undone the story in this way of thinking and are now telling a different story. That's not the story that's being told. And it has no connection to this larger story. We've left the larger story behind. And we do it because we think in Plato's closet, if you will, and not in a biblical worldview.
- 13:16 We think of spiritual stuff and material stuff as being separate and that in our point of view, like a chair in heaven is a category mistake. But we've already established, right, in the incarnation, we look at the baby Jesus and we're looking at God in the flesh. So Jesus doesn't have to stop being human in order to be God. He's already God.
- 13:42 And flesh and spiritual stuff, if you will, are already together in Jesus. So clearly, they can be together. It's not a question of that they can't. And we also know from the story that heaven and earth are meant to be together. And because God is in Jesus Christ, heaven and earth are in Jesus Christ.
- 14:04 And so at the resurrection, what we're being told is that at his resurrection, in his glorified, resurrected body, new heaven and new earth are taken up by Christ into heaven to reside in the heart of God forever. That's the story. The incarnation is God comes in the form of a human being bringing heaven and earth together on earth at the resurrection.
- 14:36 God raises human flesh from the dead, and now in Jesus' glorified body, we see new heaven and new earth being taken up into the very heart of God. And because that's true, the New Testament writers say that what we see happening in Jesus or that has

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happened in Him is going to happen to everything. All of creation is going to be restored.

- 15:04 One of the things I love about this story is another kind of mistake we make is we sort of boil down the gospel to be that our sins can get forgiven and we can go to heaven. And that's true. I'm not saying that it's not true, but it's way more than that. It's a lot more than that. God has all of creation in view. God wants to redeem it all. Not just me, not just you, but everything. And that's the image that we get if we fast forward to the end of the story.
- 15:35 In Revelation 21 and 22, John tells us, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." And God makes his home with mortals. And the word mortals doesn't mean that we're going to die again. If you read chapter 21 in Revelation, it's clear that there's no more death. What it means is we're flesh and blood, human beings, living with God, and God is with us. Everything is together again.
- 16:03 In Revelation 22, the first five verses, that's clearly a depiction of a new Eden. So we have this coherent story from beginning to end. It's all created to be together. God and heaven and earth are together with us. It's separated by human sin. God brings it together in the person of Jesus on earth.
- 16:28 God raises it all and makes it new again in the resurrected Jesus and takes it up into his person so that when he comes again, what has happened to Jesus happens to everything. That, my friends, is the story. Keep that story in your head. Live with it. Now, I want to say one more thing before we end.
- 16:53 We make the mistake because we think platonically and not biblically, we make the mistake of basically saying this to ourselves. If I don't understand it, and if it doesn't make sense to me, then it isn't understandable at all. And it can't make sense at all.
- 17:20 Now, if you step back from that kind of thinking just a little bit and think about it, it's kind of arrogant, right? If it doesn't make sense to me, it just can't make sense at all. When something doesn't make sense to me, all it means is it doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't mean that it can't make sense. It just means that we haven't learned to think the way the Bible thinks.
- 17:47 And we live in an age, of course, where changing the story is perfectly okay. I mean, that's the heart of postmodernism. Well, what's the problem with changing the story? Well, I'm not going to argue that point, but I want to say to you, before you change the story, know what the original story was before you change it. Live with it. Let it seep into you.
- 18:17 Don't change the story. Let the story change you. Amen.