

DATE: August 30th, 2026
SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:1 - 2:3
THEME: God created all things out of “nothing.”
SUBJECT: Creation
TITLE: In the Beginning, God Created (Feast of Creation)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: What does “God created out of nothing” mean?

Prayer: Gracious and loving Spirit, fill our minds with your Word and help us to be curious. Increase our love for one another, and inspire us with a commitment to create a transformed world, starting with ourselves. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:1 - 13 (read earlier in the service)

The scientific law of conservation of mass has been a concept for a long time. Early Greek thinkers and ancient philosophers from Jainism expressed thousands of years ago that matter is neither created nor destroyed. John Ray and Francis Bacon continued to toy with that idea in the 1630s. Then Antoine Lavoisier laid all doubts to rest in 1785 when he concluded: “Nothing is created, either in the operations of art or in those of nature, and it may be considered as a general principle that in every operation there exists an equal quantity of matter before and after the operation.” 120 years later, Albert Einstein joined the conversation with his famous equation $E=mc^2$ which showed that energy and mass can convert into each other. So, we now refer to the law of conservation of mass-energy. And yet, based on Genesis 1, it is foundational to Jewish and Christian thinking that God created the universe from nothing. Not mass. Not energy. Ex nihilo: “out of nothing.”

How? It’s a mystery. But rather than wallow in confusion and doubt, our faith tradition celebrates this mystery that all things were brought into being not from pre-existent matter (or energy) but solely through the free and sovereign act of God (cf.

2 Macc 7:28, Rom 4:17, Heb 11:3). All created reality, for Christians, depends upon acts of God, the absolute source of being. Today and next Sunday, we celebrate that mystery with a growing number of churches around the world who recognize the 1st of September as the Feast of Creation. In the Presbyterian tradition, we don't talk of "feast" days. One typically hears the term "Feast day" in Catholic or Episcopal circles, but we do celebrate them just the same. They refer to holy events like Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter; major moments in Jesus' life like the Transfiguration or the Annunciation. Feast days also commemorate saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Theresa of Ávila. It turns out that today, August 30th, is the feast day of St. Fiacre of Ireland (600-670 CE), the patron saint of gardeners and florists.

Rooted in an ancient liturgy, the Feast of Creation has gained much popularity across Christian traditions since 1989 ... when the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Dimitrios I invited "the entire Christian world to offer every year on this day prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both as thanksgiving for the great gift of Creation and as petitions for its protection and salvation." An ecumenical process chaired by the World Council of Churches in collaboration with thirteen world communions is now proposing to establish [September 1st] as a liturgical feast in [all] church [traditions]. The shared hope is to celebrate more intentionally God's act of Creation as a foundational mystery of faith (<https://www.feastofcreation.com/theological-overview>).

The Feast of Creation is badly needed for our time as the earth convulses under humanity's blind obedience to God's command stated long ago in the book of Genesis - possibly the only command that we seem to have obeyed consistently: "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). As oceans warm and rise, as we land creatures experience

extreme weather events, as we may be in the middle of another mass extinction, our new command is to care for the earth and for all living creatures upon it. I don't mean to overstate humanity's power, however. Scientists believe that there may have been five major mass extinction events in just the last 500 million years. While we fragile, short-lived creatures live and die, the earth continues. Still, it's contrary to our faith to work against God's intent and, as a species, we're currently swimming upstream and against God's creative flow in many ways. (See Creation Care's list in the fellowship hall after church for ways to swim with the flow).

What does it mean that God created all things out of nothing? **First**, we're not talking about time here. The first three words of scripture are "In the beginning," but "time" is not implied in the word "beginning." "In the beginning" doesn't mean that there was a year '0' when everything suddenly got zapped into being. That's part of the mystery. As created beings, we don't understand how things existed before time began; before WE began. For all I know, time began on February 2nd, 1965. I've been told that things happened before I entered the world and I can even rattle off a list of things that I've read about. But how can I be sure? Maybe it's all a clever ruse and you're all in on a grand conspiracy to dupe me (for what purpose I haven't yet discovered). People of faith profess that time is not the ultimate force in the universe — that there is something beyond time that is greater. The words "In the beginning, God created" are actually a confession of our belief that there is a broader reality - call it God - within which time operates. Time is a servant of this God whom we do not understand, but whom we trust is acting out of a much deeper reality in the universe - Love - and it is by this love, and in love, and through love that God has created all things out of nothing.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:14 - 23

[**Second,**] saying “God created out of nothing” is a bit misleading because God is still creating. I think that God is still calling things into being by the breath of God’s Spirit; God is still speaking and singing things into existence today. I understand why people place creation in the past, though. We’re alive for such a short short time and we don’t see how things evolve and change. We just see a brief snapshot of creation and many assume that what we see is the way things have always been and will always be. Until just a few hundred years ago, it was widely believed that the earth was just a few thousand years old. Then a Scottish scientist, James Hutton, cruised the coast of Scotland and concluded that all he saw could not have been created 6,000 years ago at a single point in time, but rather over a period of time starting millions of years ago. More recently, scientists have rounded that number up to the nearest 4.5 billion years. But Hutton’s basic idea seems true: that the earth was shaped by slow, continuous cycles over vast, deep time, and he could find “no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end” (*Theory of the Earth*, 1788). Some people of faith continue to hold that the earth is a few thousand years old and I respect their belief, but I hope that we can agree that the earth continues to change and evolve. Even more, that the Triune God continually sustains the whole universe, holding it and speaking it into being at every moment (Acts 17:28, Col 1:17, Heb 1:3).

John 1:1 starts out the same way as Genesis 1:1 with the words, “In the beginning,” but John adds a new way to think about creation: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God’s presence, and the Word was God.” In my mind, I imagine God speaking things into existence and — perhaps with an actual word — and

as long as God is speaking, all things continue to exist. I exist because God has spoken me into existence and I am utterly dependent on God's voice speaking the Word that sustains me. Creation is not like building a house where one starts with a foundation, then puts up the walls, then the roof, then adds the finishing touches, and finally it's done! Over 1600 years ago, St. Augustine imagined that creation is like a song (*De musica*, Book 6, Section 29). The song continues as long as God sings. I like that. God's song goes on, now changing key, now crescendoing, now breaking into a suspended 4th. On this Feast of Creation, we celebrate the mystery that God's song continues to ring through the cosmos.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:24 - 31

[Third,] "God created out of nothing? Really? Nothing? I have my doubts about that. Scripture tells us that God is love (1 John 4:16). I think that God created, not because God needed or even wanted to, but because Love is naturally self-generating. Love begets more Love, so it necessarily creates and it inspires creativity in those who are created by it. It may have no quantifiable mass or weight, but it definitely has spiritual substance and it absolutely has energy. Can Love be measured? Can abiding commitment to someone or to a whole community over many years be measured? Can sacrifice be measured? Can a lifelong calling to a cause be measured? What if God creates out of the same abiding commitment, sacrifice and passion with which humans create? We know something about creating relationships out of nothing, and in that sense we are co-creators with God. But the building block we use to create — Love — does not originate with us; we are created beings who use that building block, but it

existed long before we came into being, and it has no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end.

What if Love is the reality and all of “this” — the created order — is imaginary: this church, that tree, the sky, the waters under the sky, the dry land, animals, light, you and me? What seems so real now only has form and substance because Love imagined it and created it. On this Feast of Creation, we celebrate Love as the most powerful, creative force in existence. On this Feast Day, we celebrate the mystery that all things have their substance and their being in God.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:1-3

And God is creating still, even as Love continues to ring through the cosmos.