



The Big Story with extended introduction

Transcript

Introduction:

From the time we are little children, we all love a story, and we never seem to outgrow it. In fact, we not only love stories, we make sense of life through stories. If someone were to ask you, “Tell me about yourself,” what you say will be more like a story than a list of times and places and events.

We also live by bigger stories; scholars call them *metanarratives*. Your family, your church, your country has a story. One could argue that the best historians are really story-tellers. That does not mean they make up the facts, but that they shape the facts in order to make a meaningful story line.

More and more, bible scholars are recognizing that the Bible is a huge meta-narrative. Biblical scholar N.T. Wright calls it “The true story of the whole world”. It is the epic, sweeping, and continuing story of God that stretches from creation to new creation. It tells the grand adventure of redemption in Jesus Christ.

The biblical metanarrative tells that story in a multitude of forms and from a multitude of perspectives. There is theological history, poetry, drama, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, letters, apocalyptic. And it is told by people who are embedded in their own time and place and culture over a period of about a thousand years. But, amazingly, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is recognizably one story.

A large part of the focus of BioLogos is on the very beginning of that biblical story, the first few chapters of Genesis. We are committed to show how widely accepted scientific discoveries about the origins of the world, like the vast age of the universe and the process of evolution, are in fact compatible with God’s revelation in the Bible.

On the BioLogos website you will find evangelical theologians and scientists who offer alternative readings of the early chapters of Genesis that can help us to understand what those original authors actually intended. And they demonstrate that these chapters were not meant to give us a literal historical or scientific description of the creation. They were meant as a counter-story; a counter-story to the creation stories that were around them in ancient near eastern cultures.

In those other ancient near eastern creation stories the Earth was created as a playground for the gods, with humans as their enslaved playthings. The biblical counter-story, the true and inspired revelation of God, tells us that God made all things in an act of love and delight. That the world is God's beautifully ordered temple, and human beings are the image of God, created to rule and care for the world that he made.

Christians today actually live in a situation that is similar to our ancient ancestors in at least one way. Our biblical story now stands as a counter-story to the completely naturalistic story that is built on scientific evidence, but told with no Creator at its center. It is the story of a random, meaningless universe rather than an integrated, meaningful cosmos.

It is a false story, but we cannot simply repeat the biblical story as if today's science of origins were irrelevant. If we remove our story from the realm of scientific understanding we also take it out of the realm of reality and of history, and that is fatal to Christianity. So we need a counter-story that tells the biblical truth about God and humanity and salvation in Jesus Christ, but also includes the scientific truth about God's creation.

But I want to be clear about this: This is not a science lecture. I am not saying that I know exactly how God was involved in the whole billion years long process of evolution. But my faith, guided by the Bible and reason, tells me that God is the creator and sustainer of this universe.

So, what if we told that grand biblical narrative with the scientific knowledge of the origins of the universe that the ancients did not have? And what if we were to tell it in the poetic and imaginative style of Genesis 1, Job 38, Psalm 104, or Proverbs 8. What would it be like? Let's call it The Big Story.

The Big Story

For eternity, there exists one God who is the source and the end of all things, the divine community of all embracing love. This eternal dance of joy, peace, and creativity has been revealed to us in the Scriptures as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: the Holy Trinity.

This only true God does not exist in our time and space, but is its creator. In this triune community, there is no difference between what is to us a nanosecond or billions of years. So, shall we say, “once upon a time...”

Once upon a time, in an act of extravagant, expansive love overflowing from that divine community, there appeared out of nothing a “pinpoint of probability, smaller than a proton, and this was the egg of the universe.” In this egg God packed all the potential for the universe he planned—all matter, all energy, all life, all being, and the laws by which it would unfold.

The egg exploded, only God knows how, and the universe expanded a trillion, trillion times. It gradually cooled into what we call matter, beginning with particles and anti-particles. As they routinely annihilated each other in explosions of light. It looked like it would all self-destruct. But it did not; by just a tiny asymmetry, a millionth of a particle, God caused matter to win out, and God was delighted that it all went just according to plan.

It was all hot gases for a half million or so years until, by the force of gravity, God built within it. The stars began to form, and, they grew in mass, and developed their own thermonuclear reactors, creating carbon and iron.

Over billions more years of our time (who knows what is was like to God), the stars’ nuclear reactors gradually cooled, and stars imploded into themselves until they exploded once more into huge supernovas. These supernovas released colossal amounts of energy into the galaxy, seeding it with stardust of oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen, and all the fundamental elements of life. And the laughter of the Trinity rang through the cosmos. Everything was just right for the next step, life.

What was needed for life was water and organic molecules, and God directed comets to scatter their organic, water-laden stardust through the universe. Then God focused on one small star in one remote galaxy, our sun. Around it particles orbited, collided and congealed, growing larger and larger, gradually gaining spherical shape, all revolving around that huge furnace of the sun.

But God made sure that one planet in our solar system orbited at exactly the right distance from the sun to supply the light and the heat needed for life. And this planet, our future island home began to shine blue and green with water and algae. And heaven and all its hosts danced with joy and wonder.

Plants of all kinds emerged over millions of years, and other life forms sprang out of the primordial soup. Fish crawled out of the ocean depths, sprouting wings and feet. Birds flew, animals ran, as one species after another sprang forth on the Earth, each one a wonder of color, form, and capability. And God was delighted at the vast variety of creatures that he had made.

But from eternity it was the plan of that eternal divine community of love that there be a creature capable of love, and wonder, and praise, a creature ready to be drawn into the joyful dance of love at the heart of reality. But all these living things just existed, there was still no creature capable of knowing and loving the Creator.

Brains grew, capabilities advanced, until finally, a creature appeared with something entirely new: *Human Consciousness*. And God's breath, the Holy Spirit, breathed into these conscious creatures, and they knew God, the creator of all. They stood tall and free, eyes shining with excitement and wonder before their Creator.

This amazing creature was capable of knowing itself, and of delighting in, and naming stars and animals, even painting them on cave walls with artistry and deep understanding. Language developed, and the wonderful creatures could communicate and accumulate knowledge and understanding together.

And God said, "This one is our image on Earth to rule over it and tend it. They are priests who will offer the worship of all creatures. They will know us and reflect our delight at the goodness of all things. And God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit said, "Ah, it is so very good".

What a miracle of love and creativity! After a process of billions of years, from a pinpoint of possibility, from a sprinkling of stardust, conscious human beings stand on the Earth. Over time they begin to discern the motion of the stars and planets, they write poetry, tell stories, build cities, explore space. Made of the same stardust that exploded out of that original egg, they can now sing:

LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the Earth!
When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?[c]
You have made them[d] a little lower than the angels[e]
and crowned them[f] with glory and honor.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands. (Psalm 8)

As the story spills into history, dark shadows of sin spread over the lives of these magnificent free creatures. They rebel, they grasp for more, they envy, they mistrust, even the one who so lovingly created them. The poison of their rebellion spreads like a virus to all their kind bringing alienation and destruction, into the human life and the life of all the creatures over which they rule.

But the Creator will not let go. The Holy One declares: “I will be their God and they will be my people, and I will dwell with them.” God calls Abraham, and out of his descendants, God chooses Israel as his covenant, priestly people, to be a light to the nations, but sin and rebellion continue to rule their hearts.

Then comes the greatest of all moments. God the Son, as Paul says, through whom and for whom everything was made, came to this world, he fully entered the sphere of space, time, and matter. He took on human flesh and blood, our DNA in the womb of Mary. Jesus Christ is the new human, the true image of God, the faithful Israel. By his death and resurrection he opens the door to a new creation.

I want you to notice something important here that often gets lost in telling the Christian story. Salvation is not about leaving behind our broken humanity or the spoiled created order. Salvation is about *becoming human*, and as restored human beings in the image of God, bringing the created order to its full glory. Here is how Paul puts it in Romans 8, “The whole creation stands on tiptoe, waiting for the revealing of the children of God...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8: 18-20).

Jesus Christ is the true and *human* image of the invisible God. By faith in Christ, through his shed blood and victorious resurrection, we are being restored by the Spirit to our true human identity as image-bearers of God. As Paul puts it, “We are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Then one day we fallen broken creatures will shine with the glory of our full humanity in the presence of Christ, our brother. Then, as God intended all along, we will join, with a restored creation, in that eternal dance of Trinitarian love and delight, and all things will be made new.

That is the big, billions of years long story, from stardust to a new creation. That is the story in which, out of which, and toward which we live. It is the true story of the whole world that makes sense of who we are and where we are going. It is the really good news that gives salvation and hope to all who live in its light.