

Paying attention to the sky

A Creation Time service for all ages

Background

Creation Time (1 September – 14 October) has been adopted by many of European denominations, encouraging us to celebrate God as Creator and think about our responsibility for the earth. In this service, Clare McBeath draws on a biblical exposition of the story and poetry in the Book of Job. This story, with its focus on suffering and raging at God, is not an obvious choice for an all-age service, but its honesty in asking difficult questions and not giving in to shallow answers resonates with the natural questions and innate sense of justice that children often express.

FREE TO DOWNLOAD: Download this service, plus all additional material, including the dramatic reading, for FREE from www.rootsontheweb.com

Prepare the space

You will need: a large image of the earth projected on a wall, as seen from space surrounded by the night sky with the moon and stars; dark fabric; a globe; silver paper or glow fabric; stick-on stars or yellow or gold buttons; blue and green Plasticine™ (for more information, see [WEB](http://www.rootsontheweb.com) www.rootsontheweb.com).

Hang or project a large image of the earth on one wall. Alternatively, cover a table with dark fabric and on it place a globe, add a circle of silver paper or glow fabric for the moon and little stick-on stars, or gold buttons. Before the service, give everyone golf-ball sized pieces of blue and green Plasticine™.

Gather

Gathering words

Today we use the story of Job, a man who dares to ask God the difficult questions, to help us think about how we can work with God to care better for creation. Assure everyone that it is fine for people to play with their Plasticine™, as long as they keep the colours separate for an activity later.

Call to worship Job 38.4-7

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements – surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Gathering activity: Why?

You will need: flipchart paper and coloured marker pens.

Ask everyone if they have ever asked the question 'Why?' and draw a large question mark in the middle of the flipchart paper. Think about why we ask 'Why?' then invite everyone to think about the world around us and work out what some of their questions are. Why is the sky blue? Why do we get snowflakes? Why does the tide go in and out? Invite people to share their questions and record some of them on the paper. Explain that today we are going to explore some of the questions about the universe raised in the ancient biblical story about Job, the man who dares to ask God hard questions.

On the [WEB](http://www.rootsontheweb.com) you will find a chant specially written for this service by Graham Philpott that helps us think about asking 'Why?'.

Prayer

Creating God, your universe is incredible:
spiralling galaxies of trillions of stars,
clouds of dust forming nebulae,
birthing new star systems,
gravity's relentless pull forming black holes.

Wow God!

You blow our minds.

Creating God, your earth is incredible:
blazing sunsets painting the sky pink,
the pull of the tide washing the beach
of yesterday's sandcastles,
spiders spinning the most intricate of webs.

Wow God!

You blow our minds.

Creating God, your people are incredible,
finger prints carving out
each person's unique identity,
hearts that beat over two billion times,
bones that knit themselves together,
emotions, falling as tears,
or creating us up in laughter.

Wow God!

You blow our minds. Amen.

Open the Word

Paying attention to the sky: The Story of Job

The dramatic reading [WEB](http://www.rootsontheweb.com) attempts to tell the whole story of the book of Job and relate it to the current issues of environmental destruction, sustainability and justice for the earth. It is designed to be read by a narrator, with one actor miming the actions shown in brackets. It will need to be practised in advance, as the mimed actions will need to be pronounced so that everyone can see them.

On the [WEB](http://www.rootsontheweb.com) you can find a song by Graham Philpott to go with this reading.

Explore the Word

This should not be worked up into a full sermon. Designed to be a reflection that all but the very youngest children will be able to relate to, it needs to be delivered through engagement. Write each bullet point on a postcard and keep it very simple. It should be no more than five minutes long.

- Job is someone who could be any of us; someone who lives a good life, but for whom everything goes wrong.
- His friends try to give him some easy answers. Sometimes we have to ask hard questions and people either fob us off or they refuse to engage with us. It happens to children, and it happens to adults, too.
- Job tells God how he feels: he is angry, he says so and he wants to know why this has happened.

- God doesn't always answer our questions in the way we expect. God shows Job the whole of the earth through the whole of time and basically says, 'Job, you are asking the wrong question. Your question only really concerns yourself. I am concerned about the whole of time and the whole of space and the whole of the earth. Instead of asking why, pay attention to the sky! Look at the beauty and the laws of the whole universe!'
- What does this story have to say to us? That suffering is part of life, part of the laws of the universe, part of what makes us human. Suffering is not the fault of the person who is suffering, although our actions do have consequences. For example, we may neglect the earth...but the people who pay the price for this are those who suffer drought and famine in Africa or people in Bangladesh whose livelihoods are destroyed by floods.
- 'Paying attention to the sky' helps us to see the interconnected systems that make up the earth and appreciate that its people are interconnected too.
- Jesus' ministry was rooted in addressing the suffering of people, often caused by the unjust behaviour of others. Jesus, the cosmic Christ, the wisdom of God made flesh, was with God in the very act of creating and he exists in, through and under, creation. It is the cosmic Christ who calls us to live wisely and sustainably on the earth, and he connects us to generations of earth's children who are yet to be.
- Job's suffering ends; Job's life is restored, not in the sense of being the way it was before, but in the sense of moving on. We can't undo the damage that has been done to the earth, but we can work together to stop doing further damage, to ensure the earth has a future for our children and our children's children.

Respond to the Word

Confessional Song Big blue planet (see [WEB](#)).

Creative activity

You will need: 'Big yellow taxi', Joni Mitchell [WEB](#) and the means to play it.

Invite everyone to make a palm-sized globe out of the blue and green Plasticine™ that they were given on arrival. (Provide spare pieces in case anyone already has a creation that they don't want to squash!) You could play Joni Mitchell's 'Big yellow taxi' [WEB](#) as people work and they might hold their finished globe in the palm of their hand as they listen to the music.

Prayer activity

You will need: blocks of flower-shaped and leaf-shaped sticky notes; pens or pencils; either a large circle cut from thin coloured card, or a child's globe; music from the Missa Gaia [WEB](#) and the means to play it.

Hand round the sticky notes and pens or pencils. Invite everyone to write or draw a prayer for the earth and its people on the leaf note and a promise of something we can do to look after earth on the flower note. Put these on a giant circle or globe where everyone can see them. You could play some music while people are writing the prayers and promises.

Prayer

Forgive us, God,
when we are so caught up in our own troubles
that we fail to see the bigger picture
of the destruction of the earth,
and sufferings of whole communities of people.

Help us, God, to pay attention to the sky,
to think about growing things before buying things,
to put saving water and energy at the top of our 'to do' list,
to find creative ways to upcycle
and live sustainably on your earth.

In the name of Jesus, the cosmic Christ. **Amen.**

Send out

Hymn for earth's healing

Tune: The Bard of Armagh/Streets of Laredo 12.11.12.11

We listen with joy to the song of the morning
when angels rejoiced, and the skies came to birth;
when God placed the sun, moon and stars in the heavens,
shaped mountains and rivers and seas on the earth.

We dance in a world that is filled with God's glory,
of green growing beauty and creatures at play;
we laugh with its wonder and cry with its sorrow,
and rest in its quiet at the end of the day.

We weep for an earth that's in need of God's healing,
the oceans that roar and the rivers that cry,
we search for solutions, and shout out our questions,
to God who commands us to look to the sky.

We dream of a world that is living together,
with beauty and goodness and loving to share;
the answer God gives to our hope and our longing:
'The world that I fashioned is placed in your care'.

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Blessing

We bring our questions and our sense of awe and wonder
at a seemingly infinite creation,
beyond the limits of our imagination,
to the living, creating God.

We bring our sense of anger and injustice
that this earth is not as it should or could be,
naming our fears that in the future, it might not be,
to the cosmic Christ, present in, through and under creation.

We bring our hopes and our dreams,
of humanity living in harmony with each other
and with the earth that is restored and life giving,
to the Spirit of wisdom, who breathes life through creation.

May the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
go with us as we entrust the earth into each others hands,
now and into the generations that are yet to be. **Amen.**

For [WEB](#) go to www.rootsontheweb.com