

Celebrating a Season of Creation 2011

Background, Themes and Readings

1. Introduction

The annual celebration of a six week Season of Creation has become increasingly common in churches throughout the world. Within the Orthodox tradition 1 September has long been regarded as the first Day of Creation, and over a number of years there have been calls by church bodies for an annual six week celebration of a Season of Creation, beginning on the Sunday nearest 1 September. For us in the South (geographically!) this period coincides symbolically with the start of spring.

In recent years, both within our Province and the Diocese of Natal, there have been Synod resolutions encouraging us to celebrate a Season of Creation.

These themes, readings and internet resources, provided for the clergy and lay ministers of the Parish of St John the Baptist, Pinetown, may be of assistance to other parishes too. They are offered to inspire people to see what may be possible to do during the Season. Rather than providing a set of liturgical outlines, (internet) sources are offered which explain the Season as well as enabling those leading the services to make their own creative liturgical preparations for the Sunday and weekday services.

The Liturgy Committee of our Diocese would welcome receiving copies of any liturgical resources produced by parishes during this Season for future use. (They may be passed on to the Revd Tracy Bell: tbell@netactive.co.za).

Within St John's the Season of Creation has been celebrated for the past three years and so these theme and readings suggested go beyond those provided in the Provincial resource published in 2008 entitled *Season of Creation* (Authorised for use in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa by the Provincial Liturgical Committee and the Synod of Bishops.)

However, this excellent Provincial resource remains invaluable for its various liturgies, background papers, fact sheets, small group material and appendices and should still be consulted in preparing for the Season. It is available from the Diocese of Cape Town website: www.capetown.anglican.org ("Under Resources: Engaging with the Environment"), in its entirety (64 pages) in PDF format and the weekly liturgical suggestions for each week are available in Word format. Copies of this booklet are available from St John's Parish, Pinetown at R30 each (031 702 0712, mornings).

In commending this booklet Archbishop Thabo Makgoba wrote (on the back page):

We worship a creator God. The more we learn about the natural world, the more wonderful we discover it to be. There is a real danger that with all our modern technical discoveries we lose sight of the magnificence and intricacy of creation. We are discovering that creation is seriously under threat.

That there is life on this planet is a miracle in itself. It is the most serious of sins that we humans are threatening this life. For too long we have selfishly misused and abused God's mandate to "have dominion over" creation (Genesis 1:28). Now is the time to recognize that we have a responsibility to God to care for this intricate web of life, acknowledging that "The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Psalm 24).

2. Current Context

In the Diocese of Natal we celebrate this Season this year from 28 August to 2 October (as proposed at the May planning meeting of Diocesan Council). Some churches celebrate the Season of Creation from the first Sunday in September to the second Sunday in October. The Social Justice Season (Diakonia Council of Churches; promoted also by the Diocese) which took place in August and with the Diocesan Stewardship month in October, these dates are most suitable).

With the 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 17), taking place from 28 November to 9 December 2011 in Durban, the overall theme of this Season is climate change. Over the six weeks different dimensions to climate change can be dealt with, with significant environmental dates (both national and international) being used to guide these themes. At St John's we have often tried to link our liturgical celebrations to those current in South Africa as well as globally. (See *A Year of Special Days 2011*, published by the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) for further information on the background to significant dates during the Season, which we mention below).

3. Suggested themes and readings

WEEK 1: 28 AUGUST – GOD AND CREATION

We begin the Season by focussing on the beauty of Creation, and God's presence in it (as well as beyond it). We look too at the threats to it, especially from the changing climate which can lead to erratic weather patterns (with the increase of flooding and droughts), the extinction of species, and the spread of diseases.

Exodus 19:1-9 Wilderness, mountains, eagles, ‘the whole earth is mine’
 Psalm 104: 14-26 Many elements of creation
 Acts 17: 22-28 God who made the world and everything in it
 Matthew 13: 31& 32 God’s kingdom like the processes of nature

WEEK 2: 4 SEPTEMBER - FORESTS

1-7 September is National Arbour Week. While planting trees helps offset carbon emissions, it is vitally important that we preserve forests. Forests provide a habitat for animals and other creatures as well as serving as a source of food and medicine for people. 2011 is the UN Year of Forests.

This Sunday is also ‘Provincial Youth Sunday’; young people are particularly encouraged to participate fully in the services.

Ezekiel 34: 25-31 The trees of the field shall yield their fruit
 Psalm 96 The trees of the forest sing for joy
 Revelation 22:1-7 Leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations
 Luke 13: 6-9 Parable of the fig tree

WEEK 3: 11 SEPTEMBER – OCEANS

17 September is International Coastal Clean-up day.
 [16 September is the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer as well as Recycling Day SA. 12-17 September is National Clean up Week.]

Our diocese is bordered by the Indian Ocean. This week we celebrate our Oceans. As well as sustaining life in abundance, they provide a livelihood for many. Our seas play an important role in the absorption of carbon dioxide and the consequent stabilization of our climate.

Genesis 1: 9 & 10 Creation story
 Psalm 95 The sea is God’s
 Acts 4: 23 – 26 God made the heaven, the earth and the sea
 Mark: 6: 47-52 Jesus and the disciples on the sea

WEEK 4: 18 SEPTEMBER - PEACE WITH CREATION

21 September is International Peace Day.

Preservation of Creation and reversing the effects of climate change require the establishment of God’s peace – *shalom* – which implies harmonious human relationships,

respect for ecological integrity and a just economy. Within the Diocese this Sunday is observed as Vocation Sunday. We consider our role as earthkeepers.

Isaiah 61: 1-11 Freedom and restoration of all
Psalm 85: 8-13 Righteousness and peace kiss each other
Romans 12: 14-21 Live peaceably with all
Matthew 5: 1-11 Blessed are the peacemakers

WEEK 5: 25 SEPTEMBER - HERITAGE

24 September is Heritage Day.

This week we celebrate South Africa's rich biodiversity as well as its wealth in human culture and language.

Deuteronomy 8:1-15 A Land of richness
Psalm 150 Celebration (with a diversity of instruments!)
Acts 2:1-11 The Gift of different languages
Luke 10: 25-37 Compassion across cultures

WEEK 6: 2 OCTOBER – STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH

October is stewardship month within the Diocese. We focus on the broad theme of stewardship of all the resources of the earth. On 4 October we celebrate St Francis Day, when we recall not only Francis' familiarity with animals and birds but also his relationship with all of creation- "brother sun, sister moon". 3 October is World Habitat Day.

[Resources will be provided by the Diocesan Stewardship Committee for this Week's theme.]

4. Eucharist Prayers

There are two 'Eucharist Prayers for Season of Creation' in *Season of Creation (ACSA)*. These two prayers have been made more widely available and have been reproduced in the *Worship Resource Manual, Prepared by the Liturgical Committee, Anglican Church of Southern Africa, May 2008, Authorized for use by the Synod of Bishops*. ('Green File').

5. Resources for confessions, collects, prayers etc

There are a growing number of resources available for churches to draw upon. Below are some of these. While there are numerous sites that provide liturgical resources on the environment (such as for World Environment Day – 5 June), these four sites (A, B, C, D) listed below, are ones that offer material specific to the Season of Creation. A few brief notes are provided on each one. Some contain bible study material that can be used by house groups to follow the themes.

A. Season of Creation (www.seasonofcreation.com)

This is an Australian based site managed by Norman Habel. It contains extensive resources. Very useful are the theological resources underlying the celebration of the Season. A useful list of liturgical guidelines is provided on this site. Also useful is **A Charter for the Season of Creation**

“In our worship during the season of Creation we:

- **Celebrate** Earth as a sacred planet filled with God’s vibrant presence.
- **Unite** with all creation in praising the God of creation.
- **Confess** our sins against creation and empathise with a groaning creation.
- **Embrace** our kin in creation as our extended family.
- **Proclaim** the good news that the risen Jesus is the cosmic Christ who fills and renews all creation.
- **Gather** at the eucharist to receive the healing power of Christ that extends to all creation.
- **Go forth** on a mission to be partners with Christ in the healing of creation.”

B. European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) (www.ecen.org)

For over 10 years ECEN have been promoting the Season of Creation - they call it ‘Creation Time’. They describe their activities as follows: “All around Europe Christians are writing liturgical material with a Creation theme. ECEN collects this material for use in Creation Time and throughout the year. It is now being made available on the website for you to browse and use in your church.” Material is available in PDF and Word formats.

C. Seasons of the Spirit (www.seasonsonline.ca)

This Canadian based site has more recently added a Season of Creation to their materials.

They describe their purpose as follows: “Our aim in the Season of Creation is a joint celebration in which we not only give thanks for creation but also celebrate with creation. Our goal is a mutual ministry in which we are not only called to serve and sustain life, but recognize how creation serves and sustains life.”

D. Web of Creation (www.webofcreation.org)

This is a comprehensive website on environment theology, resources and liturgies, maintained by Lutherans. It contains a section on a Season of Creation.

The Season is explained as follows: “We invite you and your congregations to adopt into your worship life a ‘Season of Creation.’ We observe the seasons of Advent, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter to celebrate the life of Jesus. And we observe the Season of Pentecost to celebrate the Christian life in the Spirit. Now we have an opportunity also of a Season of Creation to celebrate God the creator and to reflect on our human responsibility as creatures of earth to serve and protect all of life. These worship resources enable us to worship along with creation, to acknowledge the human role in the degradation of creation, and to covenant with God to care for the earth.

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