



Breath of life

Richard Greatrex *reflects on* Proverbs 8:1-22-31, Colossians 1:15-20 and John 1:1-14

Paul's description of the pre-existing nature of Christ, outlined succinctly yet forcefully in the first chapter of Colossians, reaches sublimity in the masterful prologue of John's Gospel, where Jesus is the Word that spoke creation into being. Proverbs 8 provided inspiration for both writers, offering a much earlier presence that exists with God before the world came into being, namely Lady Wisdom. Depicted as both a person and a cosmic reality, it is she who accompanies God as heaven and earth are created.

A feminine personification of Wisdom recurs throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Wisdom, where she is understood to be interchangeable with the Word of God. These connections meant that Proverbs 8 became a key text in the early Church for the development of the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ. Ambiguity about the Hebrew word in verse 22 which the NRSV translates as "created", but

which has multiple meanings, fuelled some of the debates that led to the formulation of the Nicene Creed in AD 325. Whether "created", "begotten" or "possessed" by God, Lady Wisdom exists before all other creatures and acts as a master worker, breathing order into the new creation. Her delight in God's creation, especially humanity, flows into the love Christ showed for this universe in choosing to be incarnated, to live and die for us. ☺

Living Lord, through Christ's love you renew the face of the earth. Fill us with wisdom, that we might mirror your delight in all creation, treating it with respect and care, nurturing it as part of your holy kingdom. Amen.

Poet in lockdown

Poet uncontained

by Julia McGuinness

A memorial tablet in Chester Cathedral commemorates Mary Lloyd. She died in 1722, but the space for her age has either been left blank or smoothed out.

I realise how I scan memorials for the deceased's age. Somehow it helps me to pin down their life. To wander past those who have died, I write, is an exercise in arithmetic.

Mary will not let me be so calculating. I think of her warm, alive, and am frustrated at not being able to number her days. I almost see her smile as she eludes my grasp. The memorial was commissioned by Mary's sister, Martha. Were they named after the sisters of Lazarus? The Gospels do not record his age, just the day he left his grave at Jesus' call. In a poem titled "Ageless", I wrote "Mary slips the open grave, / uncontained as Lazarus".

The cathedral is in lockdown, tombed in silence. I wonder when it will be called back to life. There is no set time on this season, either. ☺

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

Pruning apple trees is a job I leave until February. After bearing fruit in late summer and then shedding leaves in late autumn these trees take time to go deep and refresh themselves. Pruning is to let in light and take out the overcrowded new branches to

give space for the new year's growth and fruit. After a tree has been pruned properly it looks stunted but the result in the spring and summer shows how it thrives.

Going deep to find new growth is what happens to trees and people at this time of year. So take the time when daylight is short and nights are long to slow and deepen your sense of what is important. Rest and let the God who longs for you take you into the depths to be pruned into new growth. From that depth we will all emerge new-made and new-blessed. ☺

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Job 1:21