

Out of the water



Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Genesis 1:1-5

First there was water, Genesis tells us. Dark, stormy, terrifyingly deep, empty and shapeless. Then God speaks: "let there be light". The water is illuminated. Its shape is seen. It is no longer a terrifying nothingness. Now there is hope for something to emerge. In the light, God can set about the work of creation. The water will be separated: some held above the sky, making space for something below; some pushed to the sides, so there can be dry land. Sky, land and sea, spaces for plants, creatures and finally us, the water held at bay by God's will.

The story reflects our fears of chaos, of drowning in uncontrollable water, in the dark. Water without end means death. And into that water today goes Jesus. He goes, like many others, to be baptised by John. For others the ceremony washes away their sins, but for Jesus it is a commissioning. Soon he will indeed go down into the waters of death and spend three days in the cold terrifying darkness of a tomb. But for now, he emerges from the water to the sound of God's voice, a new creation, bringing new hope for all the creatures of God's earth. 🌊

Creator God, in the midst of so many dangers that threaten to overwhelm us, we seek once again the protection of your love. May Christ our redeemer bring us through the dark waters to our place in your kingdom, where all is light and joy. Amen.

The Church Fathers

Part III – biblical truth and heresy

by Richard Gunning

Richard Gunning concludes his series about the Church Fathers.

Irenaeus (c. 130-200) hailed from Smyrna in Turkey. He was one of the earliest of the Fathers to regard all four Gospels as the truth. He believed in the unity and the goodness of God and his best-known work was an attack on Gnosticism.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) was born of pagan parents and converted to Christianity as a young man. His writings draw on Stoic philosophy and, in contrast to Tertullian, he argued for equality of the sexes. He taught that while Christians should be unafraid of death, they should not actively seek martyrdom, because to do so was not respecting God's gift of life.

Origen (c. 185-255) wrote more than two thousand works in Greek, was probably the most important scholar and theologian of the era leading up to the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325. It was called by Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity, and attended by 220 bishops. 🌊

“There is no bad way to pray and there is no starting point for prayer. All the great spiritual masters offer only one non-negotiable rule: you have to show up for prayer and you have to show up regularly.”

Ronald Rolheiser (born 1947), theologian and author

New Year resolutions

Messing things up

by Barbara Mosse

Esau and Jacob were twin brothers, the sons of Isaac. Genesis 28 tells us that at this point in their story, Jacob was running for his life. Although Esau was born first, by guile and cunning Jacob had stolen his birthright and received the paternal blessing that rightly belonged to Esau.

Lying down to sleep at Bethel with a stone for a pillow, Jacob

dreamed of a ladder stretching between heaven and earth, with angels going up and down on it, and then God spoke to him. On waking, he saw things freshly: "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"

Sometimes we too may feel that we have made a mess of our lives and we may be afraid. Perhaps the new beginning God gives us is the grace to realise that, however badly we may have slipped, God is always with us. 🌊