

Creation & Salvation

The Creation of the World

Our Orthodox Christian Faith teaches us, "I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible."

God is the Creator of all of the visible and invisible world. That is to say, He is the Creator of the spiritual world (angels); the material world (the sun, the earth, the stars, and whatever exists in them); and also the world of spirit-matter (man).

Everything has been created "by The Father, through The Son, in the Holy Spirit."

Holy Scriptures tells us: "I made earth and man upon it, with My hand I founded the firmament of the Heavens, I order the course of the stars" (Isaiah 44:24). The Psalmist St David and St Paul repeat, "You, O Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth; and the Heavens are the work of Your hands" (Psalms 102:25; Hebrews 1:10).

Why did God create the world?

He created it out of love. He created it to make it a participant in His glory, joy, and bliss. God is not selfish. He wants His creation to have and to enjoy whatever He has. We can say that the cause of the creation of the world is God's Love. The same God Who is Perfect Love.

The purpose of creation is participation in the joy, the glory, and the bliss of God. Naturally, the creation of the world bears witness and gives praise to the Power and the Glory of God. We can even say that this is the purpose of creation; that is to say, the praising of God by His creatures. The one who benefits from it is not God, but we ourselves.

Spiritual World & Angelic Realm

The angels, demons, and the souls of men constitute the known spiritual world that God has created. We do not know whether there exist other creatures in the spiritual world. God also belongs to the spiritual world, as the Holy Scriptures say: "God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), but God is not part of creation. He is above creation and He is Himself the Creator.

Angels are beings: spiritual, immortal, and self-governed. They serve God and protect mankind. They are divided into nine ranks:

Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones
Dominions, Powers, Authorities
Principalities, Archangels, Angels

They were created before the creation of the material world, but we do not know exactly when. We infer this from what God said to Job, "When the stars appeared, all My angels praised Me with a great voice" (Job 38:7).

Although angels are spiritual beings and constantly in motion, they are not present everywhere. **The same angel cannot be in two places at the same time. Only God is present everywhere.** Angels are sent by God, in accordance with His Will.

Angels in Relation to Mankind

In their relationship to men, angels bring to them God's messages. So the Holy Scriptures tell us: the Angel Raphael brought messages to Tobias; Archangel Michael, to Joshua, the son of Nun; Archangel Gabriel, to Zacharias and to the Virgin Mary. No one knows the numbers of the angels. There are, however, many. This is seen by the fact that on the night of the birth of Christ, "Suddenly there was with the angel a great multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:12-14). **The teaching of our Church is firm** in that we have "an angel of Peace, a faithful guide, a guardian (protector) of our souls and bodies." And so, our **angels protect us, guide us, rejoice when we repent, bring us, as messengers, God's messages.** Each one of us has a personal angel.

Fallen Angels

Angels were created free.

But one angel, Lucifer, abusing his freedom, said, "I will ascend to Heaven, above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will make myself like the Most-High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). He said this and attempted it. "I will ascend to Heaven. I will set my throne above the clouds. I will become the same as God." Many other angels followed him in his attempt. We do not know how many. God punished them. **From the righteous spirits that they had been, they became evil. That is to say, they became demons.** They became entrenched in this condition. They will be forever miserable as demons. **They are unable to change.** However, as we shall see later on in another section, **although God punished the man who disobeyed Him, and gave him a second opportunity to be saved by sending Christ to save mankind, He did not offer the demons a second chance.** Why not? Perhaps because the demons had decided on their own to oppose the Will of God. Man himself also exercised his free will, but he had been tempted by Satan in the form of a snake. Maybe that is why God gave mankind a second chance to be saved, but not the fallen angels, the demons.

St John of Damascus writes that angelic beings have free will but are incapable of repentance. It is only through weakness of the body that Man is capable of repentance. One speculation is that angels have a more perfect understanding and direct experience of spiritual reality due to being totally noetic (nous), so a rejection of God by an angel is a perfect/complete turning away from God.

Demons in Relation to Mankind

The demons work to tempt people. They feel guilty and seek others to share their guilt. They cannot tempt God. Nor can they tempt the angels, because angels are eternally entrenched as righteous spirits. Therefore, they turn to mankind. They tempt them. They lure them. **They want to lead them into eternal Hell.** But if people have faith in God, the demons cannot succeed in their attempts. God does not permit this.

Man

God created Mankind last. Mankind is both spiritual and material. Soul and Body.

God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit said, "Let Us create man. And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of Life. And man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). God gave man soul and body and made him sovereign upon earth, to have authority over all earthly things.

The soul of man, as the spiritual component, is of great value, so much so that Christ tells us, "What profit is there to a man if he gain the whole world and loses his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). And the body, too, has great worth, because the soul acts together with it. The body is the temple of the spirit that dwells in it. "Do you not know that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you that you have from God?" (I Corinthians 6:19) St Paul asks. And the body, which is material, is not destined to be lost. It is sanctified by the Spirit of God that dwells within it. It receives the Body and Blood of Christ at the time of Holy Communion. With death it will return to the earth, but at the Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of all, it will be resurrected. Reunited with the soul. Incorruptible and immaterial, to live forever with the soul near God. The two, body and the soul, will comprise for all of eternity each man's personal identity.

Man Created in the Image & Likeness of God

When God created man, He said. "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). But what does that mean, "image and likeness?" "Image" does not mean the body of man. As totally spirit, God is not related to a material body. "Image" means that which is sovereign, and independent. It is the freedom and the power of man to choose and do what he wishes. Man's basic element is his freedom and his power of choice. Without this freedom and power, man would not have been created whole and with the potential to strive for perfection.

"Likeness" is the image in action. It is the good use of man's free will to improve himself spiritually and morally so as to come closer and closer to the Divine, to God. This movement toward holiness and perfection of the first created man and woman was not a steady and irrevocable condition. It depended on man's free will and his own authority, which was designed to have a tendency towards goodness. Man had the possibility of being perfected. With their fall, the first man and woman "blackened" the "image" and distorted the "likeness" to such a degree that they could no longer walk towards justice, holiness and perfection by themselves. They needed a savior and redeemer.

The Fall of Mankind

God creates Adam and Eve, sets them in Paradise to live and rule. He gave them a commandment, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:15-16). Why did God do this? What exactly does "the tree of knowledge" mean? What kind of tree was it? We do not know. Nor do we know why God gave this command and the punishment of death. God said, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Genesis 2:17).

Importance of Fasting from the Beginning of Mankind

It seems that this command was the first form of fasting, to strengthen the character of mankind. Therefore we can see that God created mankind to strive for perfection. Mankind was not already perfected.

On the way to perfection, but not perfect.

Mankind was created with the potential to strive for perfection and therefore as a sovereign being, created in the image and likeness of God, had Free Will. To choose and judge between right and wrong, good and evil...etc.

This is a major difference compared to other Christian traditions. Orthodox Christianity has always taught that mankind was created with the potential to strive for perfection. Other denominations teach that mankind was created already perfect.

Ancestral Sin

The cause for the expulsion from Paradise was not the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The real cause was that they disobeyed and rejected the commandment of God. The attempt of man to disenthroned God and to enthrone himself in His place, to become God in the place of God. It is not merely that he ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This then is the Original Sin. The Orthodox Church does not accept the doctrine of original sin as espoused in the West. Orthodox Christians believe that we inherit only the results of Adam's sin, not his guilt. What are these results or consequences? The inclination towards sin, sickness, and death (mortality). But we ourselves, are not guilty of the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. But as their descendants, we too are born fallen and mortal now. That includes the Theotokos who was also in need of the salvation of her Son and God.

Salvation

Mankind was able to be saved because God gave him a second chance, since he had not sinned on his own initiative. He was influenced by Satan. The salvation of fallen mankind was promised by God when He said to the Devil inside Paradise, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). The essential phrase here is "He shall bruise your head." He will crush your head. Who is He? Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the only-begotten Son of God, the seed (descendant) of woman.

God kept His promise. He did not fulfil it immediately. He had to prepare things for our sake, not because He needed time. God prepared the world to accept the "salvation to come." He prepared the nations by the teaching of many wise men for the expected coming from Heaven and the salvation from on high, and by the Old Testament, which "was our custodian until Christ came" (Galatians 3:24). And "when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

The salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ is a basic doctrine of our Church. It is expressed beautifully in the Creed: "I believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-

begotten Son of God... Who **for us men and for our salvation** came down from Heaven and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and became man."

Could not another man save mankind? No. Because every man was and is sinful and cannot save himself. How could a sinful man save all humanity? Impossible. Only someone who was without sin was able to save mankind. And that was and is Christ. **Could not an angel have saved humanity?** Perhaps so, if God wanted it that way. But God decided differently.

Christ's death on the Cross has its power, not merely in an atonement sacrifice, but in the conquering of the power of death. Death is trampled down by the death of Christ, and the permanency of death is destroyed by Christ's resurrection. It is by Christ's resurrection that a way was made for us to be transformed by contact with the Living God, and made His children by adoption.

For this purpose, however, the initiative and effort of Christ is not enough. Man must cooperate as well. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4): "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked might turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). At the same time, Christ says that "if anyone wants to follow Me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me" (Mark 8:34). This means that although with the incarnation of Christ, His crucifixion, His descent into Hades, His resurrection, His ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, the salvation of man is now accessible, **but in order for it to be appropriated by man it must be sought and pursued by man himself. God respects the freedom of man and does not compel, pressure or force anyone, but rather calls.** He asks, if you will. He waits. He waits for man to open his heart and receive divine grace, redemption, sanctification, and glory.

- Man alone cannot accomplish anything regarding his salvation.
- With the cooperation of the devil he accomplishes his condemnation.
- With the cooperation of God he accomplishes his salvation.

Christ Himself said that "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Then what can man do? What can he offer? St John Chrysostom says that man can only offer a **good disposition. It is only this that man can offer: the disposition to open our souls and to accept the grace of God.**

How are we saved?

We are saved not by doing good works alone, nor are we saved by faith alone, nor are we saved even by God's grace alone.

We are saved by God's grace through ascetic struggle. God won't save anyone who doesn't want to be saved in other words. It is not grace alone that saves us, but also man's willingness to repent.

Why do we need to be saved?

We need to be saved because of our fallen state. We became separated from God. Our purpose is to be reunited with Him. The only way that can be done is by God Himself saving us. No one else can do it because they are also in the same fallen

condition. So God became one of us. He united divinity and humanity. He reunited mankind, bridging the gap between fallen humanity and divinity, Himself.

That is our purpose in life. To unite ourselves to God. Theosis or Deification. The process of coming ever closer to God, and in that process becoming god-like at the same time. Not gods by nature but restoring our fallen image and likeness in God.

We are in need of healing, but this healing requires synergy (the co-operation of man's will with divine grace).

Theodoret of Antioch: "There is need of both our efforts and divine aid. The grace of the Spirit is not granted to those who make no effort, and without grace our efforts cannot collect the prize of virtue = salvation."

2 Peter 1: 3 – 4, "His divine power has granted us all that we need to live in godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. Through these things, He has granted to us His precious and tremendous promises, so that having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust, you may become partakers of the divine nature."

There is God's action in and upon us, and there is response and corresponding effort on our part. God works in us, and we cooperate with His grace.

All this is possible because God became one of us, human. He united in one person divinity and humanity. We can now become what He is by grace, since He became one of us, we can become like Him. The culmination of all this is Ascension: Christ sitting at the right hand of God as both God and man. We get to sit at the right hand of God because our humanity is united with His divinity.

Homework:

1st Video: The Nature, Value & Purpose of the Human Person.

2nd Video: Creed: Our Return to God

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