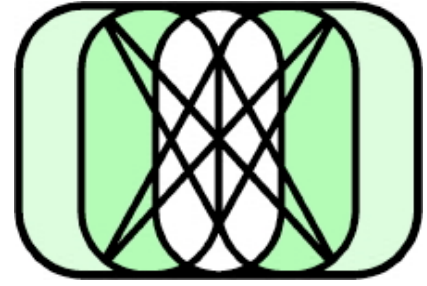


Church of Creation

Order of Service

Sunday, December 28, 2008 8:00 AM

New Year Service



Welcome:

You are always already chosen

Hymn: Blah-Blah

Announcements and sharing

Tales of the Blah-Blah...

This week in Semiotics: **Foundations**

Lost In Space...

Birthday acknowledgment:

Woodrow Wilson (December 28, 1856 – February 3, 1924, 67 yo)

Mortimer Adler (December 28, 1902 – June 28, 2001, 98 yo)

Joseph Ettner (b. December 28, 1987, 20 today)

Process:

Still...

Message:

New Year: Completion and Creation

Dialogue on Completion and Creation

Next week: January 4

Beginnings: Creating Newly

Welcome:

Welcome to the Church of Creation! ‘Welcome’ is one of those everyday words mostly spoken and heard automatically. ‘Welcome’ comes to us from the Old English, *wilcuma*, which means, “your arrival is in alignment with our choice.” This coming together and welcoming is an act of choosing. By welcoming you, we are communicating that you are always already chosen. You don’t have to do anything to be chosen; you already are. Thank you for Being.

There is also nothing to believe or disbelieve. This is a church without a creed or a code. Recognizing that believing or disbelieving may get in the way of living authentically, one of our practices is to suspend belief in favor of inquiries into the unknowable infinity of Being. Notice that I said suspend: you do not have to give up your beliefs. Your beliefs will still be available to you, if you want to take them up again. It is always your choice.

Inquiring into the unknowable produces distinctions that make a difference in one’s experience of life. We promise that an open inquiry will give you power over the matter in question.

The distinction between what and that is a basic example of a distinction. The what-it-is of something (its whatness) describes the properties of the thing: its weight and measure, its content and dimensions, how it shows up in consciousness. That-it-is, or thatness, is the ontological aspect of a subject: the fullness of its existence. While whatness is considered important, it is mostly a matter of preference or point-of-view. Thatness is crucial and primary. **What** you eat is important to your life and health. **That** you eat is crucial. This distinction shows up everywhere. Given the subject of church music, we could say that **what** you sing is merely important. What matters is **that** you are joyfully expressed. In our ongoing experiment on bringing aliveness to our music, we invite you to...

Announcements and Sharing:

Tales of the Blah-Blah...

The ego, the consciousness that refers to itself as “I,” tends to feel rootless and uncomfortable so long as the base or ground of its existence remains unknown. For this purpose, people have been creating gods of various temperaments for many thousands of years. For one’s god creation to be successful, it must be sufficiently unknowable, separate and distinct from oneself, and still somehow connected. One of the most popular ways of maintaining a connection with these self-invented concepts of the unknowable god is through the singing of hymns. When we chartered the Church of Creation as a church without a creed or code, where we invite people to suspend belief rather than to believe in this or that, a question arose for me. If we sing, what would we sing and to whom would we sing? Whether to sing or not was the easy part. Singing is good for you. It requires efficient breathing which provides oxygen to the whole organism. It wakes you up and enlivens you. To whom was also fairly easy: to Everyone and no one, obviously. What to sing? In Hinduism, behind all of the avatars of the gods, there is an unknowable Nothing from which all things come. This is *Brahman*. The Buddhists call it *Tathata*. In China, *Shunyata*. *Brahman* sounds like blah-blah and means the same thing: No-thing. Hence the blah-blah hymn. We used to experiment with whistling, drumming, snapping the fingers and various other methods of noisemaking, and nothing seems to resonate like the blah-blah hymn, sung to the tune of no-thing in particular. This is the story of the Blah-Blah.

New Year...

For some, the new year just brings more bills to pay: the rent is due, the utilities, the excesses of the holiday season perhaps. Here at the Church of Creation, we think it is a dandy time to complete anything that has been left incomplete in 2008 and to create 2009. That is the theme and message of today’s service, and I do not want to give the impression that completion and creation are actions to be taken at any particular time of year. Anytime is the perfect time to complete and create.

Hanukkah...

Tonight is the eighth and last night of Hanukkah. As the candles are lit a brukkah is sung...

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה: (אָמֵן)

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe

asher kidishanu b'mitz'votav v'tzivanu

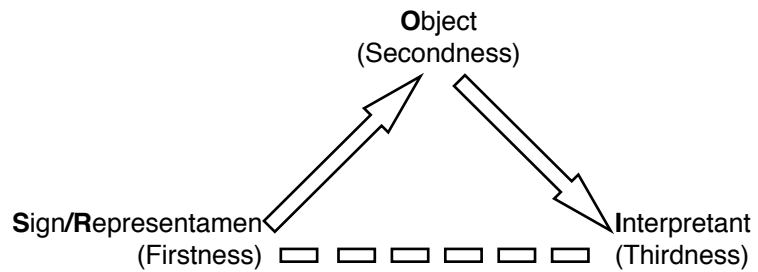
Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us

I'had'lik neir shel Chanukah. (Amein)

to light the lights of Chanukkah. (Amen)

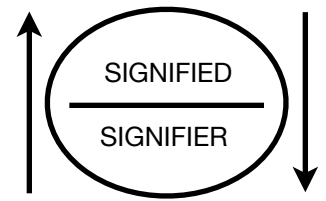
Meanwhile, in Palestine, the Israelis have dropped over 100 tons of bombs on Gaza, killing about 400 civilians so far. Israeli officials say that this is the beginning of days, weeks and perhaps months of attacks aimed at deposing the democratically elected Hamas leaders of the Palestinian nation.

Semiotics is a general term for the theory of sign systems. It is an inquiry into the way human beings signify their world in language and derive meaning. Through the study of semiotics, we can see how sign systems are used by media, politics and popular culture to manipulate reactions and manufacture consent. It provides us with a valuable look behind the curtain, and insights into how it works and how it doesn't. Beyond what is merely important and interesting about semiotics, we find that language is the medium in which human beings create the Universe. Using language rigorously and precisely supports complete communications and the fulfillment of possibilities.



This week in Semiotics: Foundations

The word 'semiotic' comes from the Greek root 'seme-' meaning 'sign' leading to the Greek word *semeiotikos* "observant of signs," which is the adjectival form of *semeiosis* "indication," from *semeioun* "to signal."



Simply put, semiotics is the study of sign systems. The idea that sign systems are important to the functions of communication, on which our whole society is based, is easy enough to grasp. Surprisingly, the study of sign systems is relatively new. My Uncle Frank was three years old when the first book on the subject was published.

That's not to say that the subject never came up. It just wasn't studied. Myths about the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel are older than writing. Plato pondered the origins of language and Aristotle wrote about the origins of nouns. 2,300 years ago the Stoics equated the medical symptom with the sign: the symptom was a sign that indicated something about the body. The medical symptom remained the model for the sign until Augustine developed the theory of *signa data* — the conventional sign, distinct from natural sign — and promoted the study of them. Unfortunately he narrowed the focus of attention on the correlation between spoken words and the unspoken 'mental' words. It was not until the late nineteenth/early 20th century that the Modern study of semiotics broke free of Augustine, and began to study sign systems as such. These studies had two founding fathers: Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 - 1913) in Geneva, Switzerland, and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 - 1914) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. For these linguists and philosophers, the structure of language held the key to understanding the structure of reality.

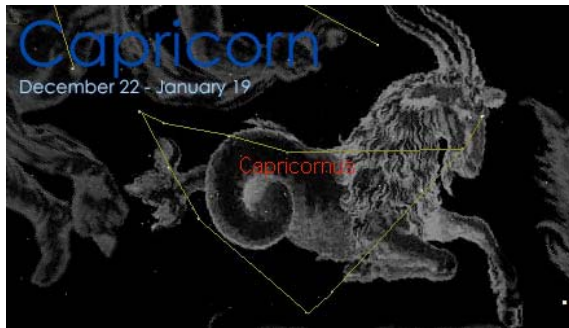
Paradigm and Syntagm

One of the structures of language is the way in which words relate to each other. The words in a sentence flow from one to the next in an orderly way. Different languages use different word orders, but within the language there are orderly structures. In English, for example, you can say, "The cat scratched the dog," but not "Scratch catted dog the the," unless you've had a stroke. The order of words in a sentence are governed by the rules of **syntax**, and the relationship between words in a sentence or phrase is **syntagmatic** and the individual words are **syntagms**.

Words in a sentence have syntagmatic roles: subject, verb, object, modifier, article and so on. Each of the words in each of these syntagmatic roles can be substituted for any other word that fulfills that role. All the words that can be subjects have a **paradigmatic** relationship, just as all the words that can be verbs are **paradigmatically** related. Said another way, words that can be subjects are in the same paradigm, as are verbs and objects and so on. You can envision a horizontal axis as the syntagmatic axis and a vertical axis as the paradigmatic axis. This will be useful next week when we distinguish the **paradigm shift**.

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|------------|----------|
| Paradigmatic Axis | elephant | remembered | hunter |
| | typewriter | ate | homework |
| | asteroid | smashed | city |
| | The cat | scratched | the dog. |
| | Syntagmatic Axis | | |

The ever-present sky is, in a way, an overarching context for all that happens here on Earth. Reason would doubt that the stars could move us any more than we could move the stars, although it is possible. Even when astrological projections correlate with what is going on with our lives, it is useful to remember that correlation does not indicate causation, and whenever one considers a possibility to be the “Truth,” it becomes a lie. For us of course, it is just inspiring to look upward and see the Universe showing off. Our purpose here is to expand our awareness and explore all inquiries, and so we look outward from this planet to get...



Lost In Space...

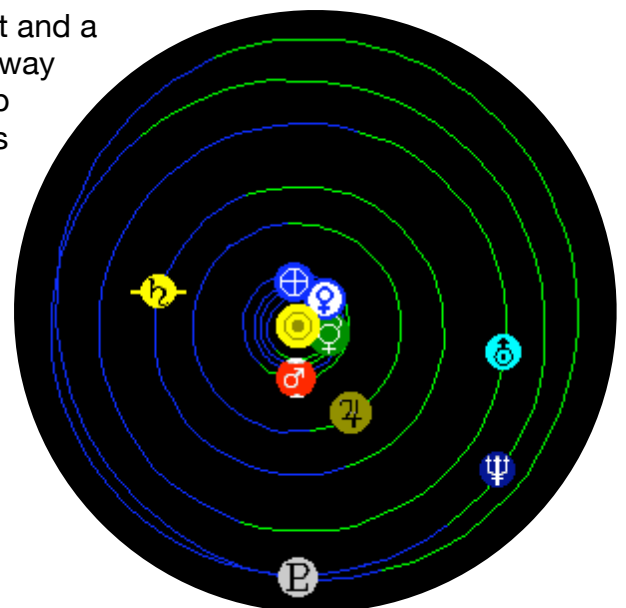
This week, all of the planets in our Solar System are bunched up in one quadrant (quarter) or our celestial circle. Mars and Pluto are lining up right behind the Sun, so we won't be able to see them. However, if you look to the Southwest just after sunset on any clear night this week, you'll be rewarded with a view of Jupiter, the largest planet, getting closer and closer to Mercury, our smallest. Jupiter is an

off-white planet and Mercury appears pink. The crescent moon will be right in line with them, with Venus — the brightest planet — further up and to the left. On Wednesday night, Jupiter and Mercury will be so close as to appear as one large object. Binoculars will help to separate them. Up and to the left, Venus and the Moon will appear to touch as well. We'll be ringing out the old year with a cosmic square dance of planetary conjunctions. But what does it mean?

Turning around to the Northeast, you'll see Giant Orion the Hunter, one of the most recognized constellations in the Winter sky. He's the one with the belt made of three stars. The asterism known as Orion's belt is comprised of ζ Ori (Alnitak), ε Ori (Alnilam) and δ Ori (Mintaka). Orion's right shoulder (your left) is Betelgeuse, a red giant whose diameter is about the same as Mars' orbit. Lucky for us our Sun is a small star. If you line up Orion's shoulders and sight from right to left, you'll find Procyon in Canis Minor. Lining up the belt and sighting right to left, you'll find Sirius, the brightest star in our heaven.

It's really a binary star made up of a red supergiant and a white dwarf, a mere 2.6 parsecs (8.6 light-years) away from us. Betelgeuse, Procyon and Sirius make up the asterism known as the Winter triangle, and this was important to early navigators.

When you're blessed with a clear night, a rare blessing around here lately, please look up, look around and enjoy the magnificence of the Universe you created.

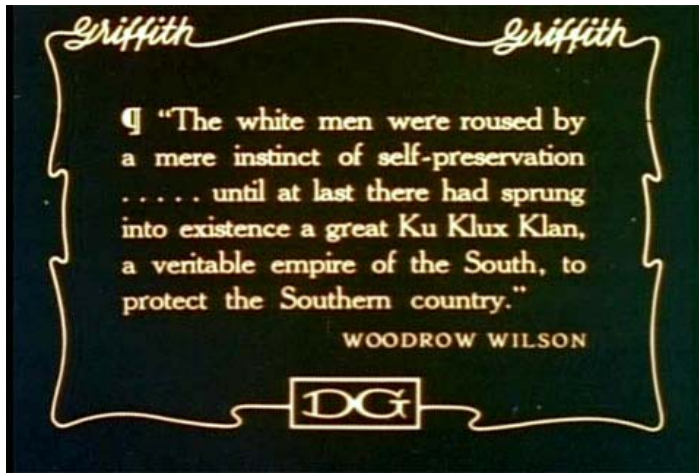


Birthday Acknowledgement: December 28

(Thomas) Woodrow Wilson (December 28, 1856 – February 3, 1924, 67 yo) was the twenty-eighth President of the United States: March 4, 1913 – March 4, 1921. A leading intellectual of the Progressive Era, he served as President of Princeton University and then became the Governor of New Jersey in 1910. With Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft dividing the Republican Party vote, Wilson was elected President as a Democrat in 1912. He proved highly successful in leading a Democratic Congress to pass major legislation that included the Federal Trade Commission, the Clayton Antitrust Act, the Federal Farm Loan Act, America's first-ever federal progressive income tax in the Revenue Act of 1913 and most notably the Federal Reserve Act. Narrowly re-elected in 1916, his second term centered on World War I. He tried to maintain U.S. neutrality, but when the German Empire began unrestricted submarine warfare, he wrote several admonishing notes to Germany, and in April 1917 asked Congress to declare war on the Central Powers. He focused on diplomacy and financial considerations, leaving the waging of the war primarily in the hands of the military establishment. On the home front, he began the first effective draft in 1917, raised billions in war funding through Liberty Bonds, imposed an income tax, enacted the first federal drug prohibition, set up the War Industries Board, promoted labor union growth, supervised agriculture and food production through the Lever Act, took over control of the railroads, and suppressed anti-war movements. He paid surprisingly little attention to military affairs, but provided the funding and food supplies that helped the Americans in the war and hastened Allied victory in 1918. In the late stages of the war, Wilson took personal control of negotiations with Germany, including the armistice. He issued his Fourteen Points, his view of a post-war world that could avoid another terrible conflict. He went to Paris in 1919 to create the League of Nations and shape the Treaty of Versailles, with special attention on creating new nations out of defunct empires. Largely for his efforts to form the League, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919. Wilson collapsed with a debilitating stroke in 1919, as the home front saw massive strikes and race riots, and wartime prosperity turn into postwar depression. He refused to compromise with the Republicans who controlled Congress after 1918, effectively destroying any chance for ratification of the Versailles Treaty. The League of Nations was established anyway, but the United States never joined. Wilson's idealistic internationalism, calling for the United States to enter the world arena to fight for democracy, progressiveness, and liberalism, has been a highly controversial position in American foreign policy, serving as a model for "idealists" to emulate or "realists" to reject for the following century. National women's suffrage and democratic election of the Senate were achieved under Wilson's presidency, although his largely progressive term was tempered by conservative and sometimes regressive policies towards racial equality.

During the Wilson Administration, a person could be arrested and jailed without trial for criticizing the President or the conduct of the War or for being a Socialist. Black historians call the Wilson years the “nadir of African American history.” In other words, it was worse than slavery. Wilson institutionalized racial segregation and the economic oppression of Black Americans sanctioned by Wilson caused widespread poverty among Blacks. The ongoing poverty among Blacks in many cities is part of Wilson's legacy. Blacks working in the Federal Government were demoted in rank, their pay was reduced, or they were eliminated from their employment entirely. Miscegenation — racial “mixing” — became a Federal crime. Jack Johnson, the first Black heavyweight





D. W. Griffith. *Birth of a Nation* (Silent Movie). 1915.

boxing champion spent a year in Federal prison for traveling across state lines with his wife, who was white.

Wilson was an advocate of eugenics and helped Indiana, and several subsequent states enact a law allowing the state to subject certain individuals to involuntary sterilization. These individuals included those with mental retardation or epilepsy, and other conditions, as well as Black men accused of sex crimes.

Wilson was similarly disposed against immigrants to this country from Europe and Asia. Irish Americans were powerful in the Democratic party and opposed going to war as allies of their traditional enemy

Great Britain, especially after the violent suppression of the Easter Rebellion of 1916. Wilson won them over in 1917 by promising to ask Great Britain to give Ireland its independence. At Versailles, however, he broke his promise and the Irish-American community vehemently denounced him. Wilson, in turn, blamed the Irish-Americans and German-Americans for lack of popular support for the League of Nations, saying, "There is an organized propaganda against the League of Nations and against the treaty proceeding from exactly the same sources that the organized propaganda proceeded from which threatened this country here and there with disloyalty, and I want to say, I cannot say too often, any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic whenever he gets ready."

Wilson refused to meet with the President of Dáil Éireann (Republic of Ireland during the latter's 1919 visit to the United States.

Some scholars of American History rank Wilson as one of the greatest U.S. Presidents. I, however, do not.

Mortimer Adler (December 28, 1902 – June 28, 2001, 98 yo) was an American Aristotelian philosopher and author. He was born into a Jewish family in New York City, the son of an immigrant jewelry salesman.

Dropping out of school at age 14, Adler became a copy boy for the New York Sun.

Originally wanting to become a journalist, Adler took writing classes at night where he discovered the works of men he would come to call heroes: Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, John Stuart Mill and others. He went on to study at Columbia University and contributed to the student literary magazine, The Morningside. Though he failed to pass the required swimming test for a bachelor's degree (a matter that was rectified when Columbia gave him an honorary degree in 1983), he stayed at the university and eventually received an instructorship and finally a doctorate in psychology. While at Columbia University, Adler wrote his first book: *Dialectic*, published in 1927.

He continued to participate in the Honors program (today called the Core Curriculum) which had been started by John Erskine which focused on the reading of the classical texts. His tenure at the university included study with such eminent thinkers as Erskine and John Dewey, the famous American pragmatist philosopher. This kind of environment inspired his early interest in reading and the study of the "Great Books" of Western Civilization. He also promoted the idea that philosophy should be integrated with science, literature, and religion.

In 1930 Robert Hutchins, the newly appointed president of the University of Chicago, whom Adler had befriended some years earlier, arranged for Chicago's law school to hire him as a professor of the philosophy of law; the philosophers at U of C (who included James H. Tufts, E.A. Burt, and George H. Mead) had "entertained grave doubts as to Mr. Adler's competence in the field [of philosophy]" and resisted Adler's appointment to the University's Department of Philosophy. Adler was the first "non-lawyer" to join the law school faculty. Adler also taught philosophy to business executives at the Aspen Institute.

Adler and Hutchins went on to found the Great Books of the Western World program and the Great Books Foundation. Adler founded and served as director of the Institute for Philosophical Research in 1952. He also served on the Board of Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica since its inception in 1949, and succeeded Hutchins as its chairman from 1974. As the director of editorial planning for the fifteenth edition of Britannica from 1965, he was instrumental in the major reorganization of knowledge embodied in that edition. He introduced the Paideia Proposal which resulted in his founding the Paideia Program, a grade-school curriculum centered around guided reading and discussion of difficult works (as judged for each grade). With Max Weismann, he founded The Center for the Study of The Great Ideas.

Adler long strove to bring philosophy to the masses, and some of his works (such as *How to Read a Book*) became popular bestsellers. He was also an advocate of economic democracy and wrote an influential preface to Louis Kelso's *The Capitalist Manifesto*. Adler was often aided in his thinking and writing by Arthur Rubin, an old friend from his Columbia undergraduate days.

Philosophy

Adler referred to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as the "ethics of common sense" and also as "the only moral philosophy that is sound, practical, and undogmatic". In other words, it is (according to Adler) the only ethical doctrine that answers all the questions that moral philosophy "should" and "can" attempt to answer, neither more nor less, and that has answers that are true by the standard of truth that is appropriate and applicable to normative judgments. In contrast, Adler believed that other theories or doctrines try to answer more questions than they can or fewer than they should, and their answers are mixtures of truth and error, particularly the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Adler was a self-proclaimed "moderate dualist", and viewed the positions of both psychophysical dualism and materialistic monism to be opposite sides of two extremes.

Regarding dualism, he dismissed the extreme form of dualism that stemmed from such philosophers as Plato (body and soul) and Descartes (mind and matter):

Strictly speaking, a human being (as defined by the dualistic theory) is not what common sense supposes that person to be: one indivisible thing. That person is actually divided into two individual things, as different and distinct as the rower and the rowboat in which he sits. If this dualistic theory were true, it would confront us with the most embarrassing, insoluble difficulties should we try to explain how these two utterly different substances could interact with one another, as they appear to do in human behavior. Brain injuries or defects produce mental disabilities or disorders. We also have the reports from neurological surgery that tell of electrical stimulation of the brain producing conscious experiences. How can this be so if mind and brain are as separate as the rower and the rowboat, a separation so complete that it permits the rowboat to be sunk while the rower swims away unharmed?

Mortimer Adler. *"Is Intellect Immaterial?" Intellect: Mind Over Matter (1990)*

Quotes:

- If you never ask yourself any questions about the meaning of a passage, you cannot expect the book to give you any insight you do not already possess.
- In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but how many can get through to you.
- The philosopher ought never to try to avoid the duty of making up his mind.
- In English we must use adjectives to distinguish the different kinds of love for which the ancients had distinct names.
- There is only one situation I can think of in which men and women make an effort to read better than they usually do. It is when they are in love and reading a love letter.
- We acknowledge but one motive - to follow the truth as we know it, whithersoever it may lead us; but in our heart of hearts we are well assured that the truth which has made us free, will in the end make us glad also.
- You have to allow a certain amount of time in which you are doing nothing in order to have things occur to you, to let your mind think.

Joseph Ettner (b. December 28, 1987, 20 today) is the son of Dr. Fred Ettner, with whom I used to work in Family Practice at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston. I first met him when he was three and for several years, until he outgrew it, I got to read his bedtime stories to him. One of his favorite things was the *I Spy* series of books. He's in college now at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Process:

Still...

We are about to participate in a process. The process is a way to bring something that has not been experienced or experienced fully — or even something impossible to experience — into ordinary experience. There is nothing that you are supposed to get from it. There is no way that it is supposed to look. You get to experience what you experience and you get whatever you get.

Please position yourself comfortably, and close your eyes, if you would like to. Bring your awareness to your breathing and the words you are hearing. Allow your attention to your own thoughts to fade into the background. Create a rhythmic method for your breathing, inhaling through the nose, pausing after you inhale to allow the air to fully enliven your cells, then exhaling completely and pausing for a moment to consider the precious gift of air before receiving it gratefully, inhaling and smiling with joy.

As you breathe and smile, create for yourself the experience of lying on the deck of a yacht on the ocean. The sky is clear and bright, you are feeling warm and safe and Everything is as it should be. The waves are gently rocking you in a rhythm that matches your breathing. As you are lying on the deck, create the experience of the waves slowing down. In fact, everything around you seems to be slowing down. If you can hear the ticking of a clock, detach the sound from the passage of time and create everything slowing down. If you feel your own heartbeat, allow yourself to experience slowing it down and detaching it from any meaning about the passing of time. If you hear the wind blowing, create the experience of the wind slowing. Create your experience of the waves on the ocean slowing even more. The tides are slowing down. The spinning of the Earth is slowing down. The motion of the Earth and solar system through the Universe is slowing down. On a microscopic level, create the experience of your cellular functions, and the cellular functions of all living things, slowing down. Create for yourself the experience of Everything slowing down at the tiniest level of particulate matter. The electrons of every atom in the Universe are slowing in their spinning. The energy waves are slowing in their frequency. The nuclear furnace we call the Sun is slowing and cooling, although in your consciousness, you remain warm and comfortable and safe from any harm.

Now create that all motion and energy coming to a complete stop and there is nothing but stillness. As all atomic reactions cease, the Sun and other stars wink out and there is darkness and silence in the Universe. Everything is still. Completely still. The Universe is at rest. You are at rest. This is a period of restoration, healing and gathering power. In the stillness and silence that you are, allow any stray thoughts to simply come and go without feeling any need to address them or even notice them. Allow your thoughts to become still and silent. Allow all pain and tension to disappear into the stillness. Allow all anxiety about the future or regrets from the past to dissolve into stillness. Allow all conflict to evaporate into the stillness. Rest in the stillness.

...

When you are ready, you can begin to put the Universe back into motion. Restart the atomic engines of the Sun and stars and bring light back into Being. As you reanimate the Universe, create for yourself the experience of recreating the Universe exactly as it is. Perfect, complete, a full-size working model of itself as it is, as you bring yourself, perfect, complete and fully functional, returning to an existence in time. Restore your cellular functions and the cellular functions of all living things with renewed vigor and power. Allow the wind to blow and the tides to flow and experience yourself rocking on the waves again. You are warm and safe and when you are ready to do so, please open your eyes.

Message:

**New Year: Completion and Creation
Sunday, December 28, 2008**

When we speak of creating in the context of the Church of Creation, we are not speaking of creating something from something, like a painting from watercolors and paper. We are talking about creating from Nothing. Completion is what it takes to get to Nothing. Without the nothing, there is no room for creation as an existential act. This is why most people can think of no other creativity beyond “doing art” and essential act. They lack the Nothing that it takes to create existentially, and they don’t know they lack Nothing.

When something is complete, there is nothing left unspoken or hanging over or withheld. Withholding something from someone diminishes that persons aliveness and blocks your own power. Leaving matters incomplete robs one of the capacity to create. When one is complete, there is integrity and ease.

This is an opportunity to complete anything from the past year — with the Church, with your Pastor, with the teachings, with each other — that is incomplete. When we are complete that we are complete, then we can create the New year.

Dialogue on Completion and Creation: What is incomplete from 2008?

Dialogue on Completion and Creation: What are you Creating for 2009?

Completion

Next week:

Next Sunday is the 4th of January, the first Sunday of 2009. The message and theme of next Sunday’s service is **Beginnings: Creating Newly**. Please join us next Sunday as we explore the question of making a difference in the World.