

**Liturgical Materials Honoring
God in Creation and
Various Rites and Prayers for
Animals**

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Introduction to the Propers for the Honoring of God in Creation

When we see the great abundance, diversity, and intricacy of God's creatures, we are awestruck by life on our planet. We are amazed by the God who has created all that is, and who is the engineer or crafter of the cosmos, designing and assembling all the details. But we also know from science that the details of organisms change through time according to their situations, that is, that they evolve through adaptation and natural selection.

Some people take this to mean that there is no role for God in the evolution of life on our planet, but they miss the point that it is through God's love and humility that the processes of nature operate, bringing growth and adaptive change. God's love grants creation the freedom to make and remake. Scripture is clear that the divine mercy is over all God's works. The material world is not something to be simply disregarded and destroyed as unimportant to God, whose love is unwavering.

Just as we do not read scripture literally, so we must resist reading nature literally, but instead search for the big themes and the evolving stories, exploring a deeper and more sweeping narrative. It is in Jesus Christ that we see God's humility most particularly, and gain insight into what theologian John Haught has called the "extravagant generosity" of God. In the ancient hymn of Philippians 2 we gaze at Christ, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself to take the form of a servant, not simply on behalf of humankind, but on behalf of the whole cosmos which is redeemed in him.

Just as we are called to consider the lost and the least among our human brothers and sisters, so we may say that we are called to consider the dignity of all God's creatures. Science currently is working on several fronts to discover more about kinship. There are both genetic/hereditary and ecological relationships among earth's creatures. We share much of our DNA with plants and animals we do not usually consider as having much in common with us, and the air we breathe requires the healthy function of organisms far less complex than we are. For many people honoring the dignity of every creature involves thinking about threatened species of birds and mammals and large fish, environmentalism's poster children, but for those who study life on earth, whether professional biologists or backyard naturalists, it means considering the insects and the plankton, the mushrooms and molds, the plants that bring us joy and the ones we call weeds, the algae and the bacteria. It means considering the dignity of even those species which bring humans disease, such as mosquitoes and viruses. It means pondering the relationships among creatures which are not always pretty: predation, parasitism, scavenging.

Each creature's uniqueness is neither individual nor fixed. Living things develop their characteristics in their contexts in relationship to other creatures, other members of their population, and other species in their community. As the resources in their habitats change, and pressures from their fellow creatures shift, they change. Death and even extinction of populations and species are a natural part of this process of change. But that reality does not mean that humans should accelerate extinction through our activities.

Our understanding of God as One, yet three persons, is a divine picture of diversity in community. Each person of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, gives to and receives from the others, in a community of exchange we call love. What is true of God may then be seen to be true of the community of life which God has loved into being and sustains through love. While each creature has its dignity, in life and death, in struggle and in beauty, all creatures in their diversity, including human beings, are held in community with one another.

There is no doubt that human beings have changed the earth's cycles, surface, and creatures by our activities. We have managed and bred for our use and enjoyment some plants and animals, and destroyed the habitats of others. We have extracted minerals, fossil fuels, and soils, and have been careless with our use of extracted water. We have preserved some biomes for their scenic beauty, but

ignored the ecological services provided by others. We have trawled the bottom of the seas and used them as a trash repository. A growing and increasingly urban population's hunger for food, clothing, shelter, and fuel is taking its toll, despite ongoing efforts to slow the loss of traditional rural wisdom about conservation and creation care. Human migration has fostered the spread of invasive species that displace native species, just as human migrants have often displaced indigenous peoples.

Scientists and activists may disagree about what is the greatest threat to human survival on the planet. Should the scarcity of water for drinking and sanitation be our biggest concern, or the challenge to feed a hungry world in an ecologically sustainable way? And which of our excesses put the whole planet in the greatest peril? Is it climate change or the loss of biodiversity that poses the greatest threat to the resilience of life on earth?

Ecologists understand that while entry points for concern and action vary, all these issues are interrelated. In agriculture, to take an example from our managed environment, resilience in the face of climate change will depend on better stewardship of water and increased preservation of the diversity of seed stock available for developing improved crops, while those engaged in agriculture continue to assess their contribution to greenhouse gases, polluted waste water, and soil erosion, and how all these negative impacts on the environment can be decreased.

There have been and will continue to be unintended consequences for our environment due to our choices and behaviors, but study and prayer can help us to become more conscious of the human impact on our planet. As we consider the risen and ascended Christ drawing all things to their perfection in himself, indeed drawing the cosmos into the heart of God in that process the Eastern Church calls "deification," we find reason for hope and an impetus for the renewing and reconciling of our relationships within the creation of which we are a part.

Propers for the Honoring of God in Creation

1. God, the source and destiny of the cosmos

Author of creation:

In wisdom you brought forth all that is,
to participate in your divine being,
and to change, adapt, and grow in freedom.
You make holy the matter and energy of the universe
that it may delight you and give you praise.
We thank you for gathering all creation into your heart
by the energy of your Spirit
and bringing it through death to resurrection glory;
through the One in whom all things have their being,
Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

Isaiah 40:21-28a

Psalm 136:1-9, 25-26

Revelation 22:1-5

John 3:16-17

2. God of order and dynamic change

Mysterious God, whose imagination and desire embrace all:
We seek to discern you in the interplay of forces,
in the order and the chaos of the universe,
and in the complexities of every living system.
Give us grace to honor your goodness
in what we know and in what we do not know,
in the world's harmonies and turbulence,
and in its promise and change.
For you are in, through, and beyond all that is:
one God, made known to us in Jesus Christ,
through the Holy Spirit, our inspiration and guide. *Amen.*

Job 37:1-7

Psalm 102:25-28

Revelation 21:3-5a

Luke 13:6-9

3. The justice of God and the dignity of all creatures

Holy God, your mercy is over all your works,
and in the web of life each creature has its role and place.
We praise you for ocelot and owl, cactus and kelp, lichen and whale;
we honor you for whirlwind and lava, tide and topsoil, cliff and marsh.
Give us hearts and minds eager to care for your planet,
humility to recognize all creatures as your beloved ones,
justice to share the resources of the earth with all its inhabitants,
and love not limited by our ignorance.
This we pray in the name of Jesus,
who unifies what is far off and what is near,
and in whom, by grace and the working of your Holy Spirit,
all things hold together. *Amen.*

Jonah 3:4-10

Psalm 145:8-10, 16-18

Ephesians 1:8b-10

Luke 10:25-37

4. The kinship and unity of all creation in Christ

God, maker of marvels,
you weave the planet and all its creatures together in kinship;
your unifying love is revealed in the interdependence of relationships
in the complex world that you have made.
Save us from the illusion that humankind is separate and alone,
and join us in communion with all inhabitants of the universe;
through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer,
who topples the dividing walls by the power of your Holy Spirit,
and who lives and reigns with you, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 9:8-16
Psalm 36:5-10
Colossians 1:15-20
John 1:1-5

5. Reading God's goodness in the diversity of life

Gracious God, you reveal your goodness
in the beauty and diversity of creation:
in the circle dance of earth and air and water;
in a universe rich in processes that support growth and coherence,
distinctiveness and community;
and above all in the gift of Jesus Christ,
who emptied himself to serve your world.
And so we offer thanks and praise to you,
one God in three persons:
the Author and Source of all,
Christ the Incarnate Word,
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Genesis 1:11-12, 20-22
Psalm 104:25-32
Revelation 5:11-14
Matthew 13:31-32

6. Called to be God's partners in the care of the planet

Bountiful God, you call us to labor with you in tending the earth:
Where we lack love, open our hearts to the world;
where we waste, give us discipline to conserve;
where we neglect, awaken our minds and wills to insight and care.
May we in all things honor and serve you alongside all your creatures,
for you live and reign with Christ, Redeemer of all,
and with your Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Ezekiel 47:6-12
Psalm 33:3-9, 13-15
Romans 8:18-23
Mark 16:14-15

Prayers of the People Honoring God in Creation

Form 1

Deacon or other Leader

Blessed God, whose love calls the whole creation into covenant relationship with you, and who puts in our hands responsibility for the care of the earth and its creatures: we pray for all to whom you have given life and being, saying:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For the well-being of the earth; for its resources of water, air, light, and soil, that they may be tended for the good of all creatures, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For the waters of the earth; for their careful use and conservation, that we may have the skill and the will to keep them clean and pure, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For the mineral, soil, and energy resources of the planet, that we may learn sustainable consumption and sound care of the environment from which they come, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For the animals of the earth, wild and domestic, large and very small, that they may know the harmony of relationship among them that sustains all life, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For the creatures of the earth who do us harm and those whose place in your creation we do not understand or welcome, that we may see them as beloved creatures of God, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For all who shape public policies affecting the planet and its creatures [especially _____ and our local leaders _____ and _____], that they may consider wisely the commonweal of those who will come after us, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For all those engaged in conservation, in agriculture and ranching, in aquaculture and fishing, in mining and industry, and in forestry and timber-harvesting, that the health, fruitfulness, and beauty of the natural world may be sustained alongside human activity, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For the creatures and the human beings of your world who are ill, or in danger, pain, or special need [especially _____], and for all who suffer from the unjust, violent, or intemperate use of the earth's resources or their devastation by war, that all may one day live in communities of justice and peace, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For the gifts of science and technology and for those who practice these skills, that they may be wise, visionary, and compassionate in their work, we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

For the creatures and the people of the earth whose lives and deaths have contributed to the fruitful abundance of this planet [giving thanks especially for _____], we pray:
Merciful God, keep your planet and people in peace.

The Presider concludes the Prayers with this or another suitable collect

Gracious God:
Grant that your people may have in them
the same mind that was in Christ Jesus,
and guide us into harmony of relationship
through loving-kindness and the wise use
of all that you have given;
for you are drawing all things into communion with you
and with each other by the power of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Form 2

During the silence after each bidding, the people offer their own prayers, either silently or aloud.

Intercessor

Let us pray for the revealing of the reign of God in the world, now and always:

Intercessor and People

In the beginning, God was.
Here and now, God is.
In the future, God will be.

Intercessor

Creator of earth, sea, and sky, kindle the fire of your Spirit within us that we may be bold to heal and defend the earth around us, and pour your blessing upon the people and organizations working everywhere for the good of the planet.

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

Breath of life, receive our thanks for the beauty of our local habitat and all its inhabitants, and lend us the wisdom and will to conserve them.

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

Light and source of life, heal and redeem the wounds of your creation, and visit the places and people who suffer from our indifference, neglect, and greed.

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

Lover of all you have made, we thank you for the wondrous diversity of your creatures, and we pray for their well-being.

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

Author of the book of nature, receive our gratitude for the places of restoration and healing, and challenge us to sustain the places that feed our lives and spirits.

Silence

God, Giver of life,

Hear our prayer.

Wise Creator whose works are full of mystery, give us wonder and appreciation for your creatures with whom we find ourselves in conflict.

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

Giver of all good gifts, awaken us daily to our dependence upon your generosity, and make us always thankful for the abundance of your blessings.

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

Joy of human hearts, heal our human communities, especially those where your word is not heard, or where neglect, violence, greed, and warfare increase the suffering and need of people and other creatures.

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

Comforter of all the earth, sustain the people of this *congregation* who desire or need your presence and help [especially _____].

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

Rock and refuge of all your creatures, receive into everlasting mercy all those who have died [especially _____].

Silence

God, Giver of life,
Hear our prayer.

The Presider concludes the prayers with one of the following collects

Eternal God, the light of all who know you,
come and fill our hearts with your love.
Help us speak when many keep silent,
help us stand for what is right when many sit in indifference.
Increase our faith and charity,
until your kingdom comes and heaven and earth rejoice
in everlasting glory;
through your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

(source: Anne Kelsey)

or this

Holy God, you alone are unutterable,
from the time you created all things that can be spoken of.
You alone are unknowable,
from the time you created all things that can be known.
All things cry out about you: those that speak, and those that cannot speak.
All things honor you: those that think, and those that cannot think.
For there is one longing, one groaning, which all things have for you.
All things pray to you that comprehend your plan and offer you a silent hymn.
In you, the One, all things abide,

and all things endlessly run to you who are the end of all. Amen.
(source: Gregory of Nazianzus)

or this

[Gichi Manidoo,] Great Spirit God,
we give you thanks for another day on this earth.
We give you thanks for this day
to enjoy the compassionate goodness of you, our Creator.
We acknowledge with one mind
our respect and gratefulness to all the sacred cycle of life.
Bind us together in the circle of compassion
to embrace all living creatures and one another. *Amen.*
(source: *Native American/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Liturgies*, Prepared for the 76th General
Convention of the Episcopal Church, July 2009, Anaheim, California)

Form 3 (on the theme of water)

The silence after each petition may be followed by an appropriate response, such as "Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer."

The water that God called into being is at the heart of all that lives. Mindful of the many ways water affects our lives, let us pray for our waters and for the life of the world around us.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all people of faith, and for the transformations in their lives that are marked by the sacredness of water: at the Red Sea, in the Jordan and the Ganges Rivers, in ritual baths, in the washing of feet, and in Holy Baptism.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the leaders of nations, corporations, and communities around the world, that they may exercise wise stewardship over the waters of their lands, so that all people may have clean water to drink and live free from waterborne diseases.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the wisdom to shape creative solutions to conflicts over water in the dry places of our planet, and for justice and peace in desert lands.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, watersheds, streams, ponds, deltas, marshes, and swamps of our planet, for the waters beneath the ground, and for all creatures that live in the waters of the earth.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all who travel or work at sea or on inland waterways.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all who suffer from too much water in the destruction of flood, storm, tsunami, and ice; and for those people and creatures who suffer as the glaciers and ice floes vanish.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all who thirst for water, for health, for love, for wisdom, for God, that their cups may be filled to overflowing.

Silence

I ask your prayers for all who have died and for all who mourn, that their tears of grief may be turned to wellsprings of joy.

Silence

Collect

Blessed God, in your wisdom you uphold creation
and renew it again and again.
Help us to see all water as holy water,
and all our concerns as bathed in the living water Christ gives us,
in whose name we pray. *Amen.*