

"What Ever Happened to Adam and Eve?"

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by Father Brian Joyce

After three weeks and a total of twelve minutes about the Bible, "What is it," "How to Read it," and its "Creation Stories," it's a good time to ask "Whatever Happened to Adam and Eve?"

The powerful story of Adam and Eve comes in the earliest part of Genesis, what scholars call the "pre-history" section. So, it is not meant to give an eyewitness report but rather to convey the most profound truths about our humanity and our relationship with God. The story of the Garden of Eden is not an historical account of the days after the dinosaurs and before the era of cave dwellers. It is rather a projection of God's promise for humanity, as one writer puts it "perfection, fulfillment are not behind us in a mythical Golden Age, in the past. They are before us in the the future, when the work of God, in which we are invited to cooperate, will be complete." Another theologian writes, "The 'paradise' of Genesis is rather what awaits us than what we have lost."

Adam, which really means "of the Earth" or the "Earth creature," and Eve, which means "life" or "mother of the living," provide a description of humanity written down about nine-hundred-fifty years before Christ, probably in the court of King Solomon, and based on Israel's experience of God, in order to give a new and inspired understanding of human existence, of sin, of pain, of death, and of the differences between peoples. It also includes insight into human behavior as well as a sly and insulting swipe at ancient pagan belief in fertility cults and in snake worship.

Whether we are all descended from a single original couple or not is something for science, not the Bible, to establish. The existence of a brief golden age, complete with perfect couple and preternatural paradise, is neither a likelihood nor the point the Bible is trying to make. The one central message is that, from the beginning, without God's redeeming love, we fall far short of God's promise and friendship. In fact, "Adam and Eve" is just one of several "Fall stories" in the first chapters of Genesis. The "Tower of Babel," "Noah and the Flood," and the quickly declining ages of the central characters in Genesis are all "Fall stories" that illustrate that, apart from God, humanity and human beings simply cannot make it.

The other day, I spotted a bumper sticker that read, "Eve was framed." To my mind, an old African-American spiritual really captures the homey character of the Genesis story that tells of a God, friendly and near, walking in the cool of the evening with the Earth creatures. It describes, in an almost child-like fashion, how God found out that Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit. "The Lord God came snoopin' around. He spied the peelin's on the ground." The song ends with "Poor Adam's left holding the sack."

He's wishing he had his old rib back." But, here again, maybe Eve was framed!

The obvious question is, "If that's what happened to Adam and Eve, then what about Original Sin?" A good question and a good topic for next weekend....