My siblings and I were not born like other children. Our mother found us in the linen cupboard one day when she was ironing. And that’s one of our more credible family stories.

Another story establishes our royal blood. It stands alongside the story about the time our grandfather won the World Heavyweight Boxing title and the stories about our uncle, who was a war hero, although he never talked about it.

Every family has these stories. Some have no basis in fact. Some have grown with the telling. Some of them are true.

They are important because they are our stories, passed on from generation to generation, telling us where we came from and who we are.

The stories of our faith family, the Church, are contained in the books of the Bible.

Like most family stories they are a mixed bunch; some have no basis in fact, some have grown in the telling, some are true.

But taken together they tell our story - where we come from and who we are.

God’s story

The stories of our faith family begin in the Book of Genesis.

They tell us about a God who created absolutely everything and who made men and women the crown of his creation.

They tell us that when we were offered the opportunity to work in partnership with God we chose to go our own way - to be something other than what God created us to be.

But most of all, they tell us about God. In the story of Noah and the flood, God offers men and women a new beginning and, in so doing, he reveals a basic truth about himself - that he will never give up on us, no matter what we do.

The people who wrote the stories in these first chapters of Genesis were not writing history. They were trying to answer the big questions; Why did God create the universe? Why did God create us? Why are we here? and What has gone wrong?

Halfway through the Book of Genesis the style of the story changes and we enter the realm of history more or less as we know it. In a nutshell, the story goes something like this -

The story - in a nutshell

The patriarch Abram hears God’s call to leave his home ‘not knowing where he was to go’.

He takes his family and they settle in Egypt but their fortunes suffer a reverse so that they become slaves to the Egyptians.

God reveals himself to Moses who leads the growing family out of Egypt and into the desert where they are introduced to a new high calling.

They come to see that God has chosen them to be a special people with a special vocation and their special relationship with God is given form and substance in a Covenant - an agreement or contract - which they make with God at Mount Sinai.

Moses dies and the new nation of Israel gives up its nomadic life to settle in the cities of Canaan. There they are exposed to other nations and to the ways of those nations. They decide they want to be like those other nations so they elect to be a kingdom under Saul and David and their successors.

But it was not for this that God has chosen them. Samuel and Nathan and other prophets remind them that God has a
special purpose for Israel and that, if they fail him, they will reap the consequences.

Things go from bad to worse. The kingdom splits in two and both factions fall into corruption and immorality. They are overpowered by foreign armies and, in 587 BC, their leaders are taken away to exile in Babylon.

Meanwhile, we are left in no doubt as to why this has happened. Beginning with the Prophet Amos, a succession of inspired interpreters proclaim the cause of Israel's downfall as being their failure to be the people God has intended them to be.

Yet God will not give up on them. Under the guidance of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the unknown author of part of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, they come to see their exile in Babylon as a time of discipline and renewal.

They return to Palestine determined to rebuild the nation under God. But they have forgotten the broad vision of Moses and the Prophets and their 'renewal' finds its focus in petty religious observances and in self-seeking nationalism.

By the end of the Old Testament most men and women are no different from what they were at the beginning. Created to live in partnership with God, they still choose to go their own way and the results are still disastrous.

Yet there has always been a small and faithful minority - a faithful remnant of Israel – and they have never forgotten the God who never gives up.

They are certain that, one day, God will once again intervene to rescue his people. And the conviction grows that he will do this through a deliverer, a Messiah.

Think about it

And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good.
- Genesis 1:29-30

Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel; ‘I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and your cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.’
- Amos 5:21-24

First and foremost, God is the true hero of the story. No matter how captivating the other characters may be, our top priority is to discover what the Bible reveals about God.
- Carolyn Custis James

The Genesis story is symbolic narrative, not history. Like other myths in the ancient world it raises fundamental questions. Why are we subject to such suffering? What is the cause of our misery? Why do we die? Why is our survival so difficult? Why are women subject to male rule? The story, situated in a primordial time and place of perfection, mediates an answer to these questions.
- Tatha Wiley, theologian

Copyright © The Reverend Graeme A Brady 2016