

In the beginning
John 1:1-5
January 7, 2007

ברצשית ברצ צלהים צת השמים וצת הצרץ

ברצשית ... *in the beginning*

That's the first word of the Bible, the first word of the first book of the Hebrew Bible, and the Hebrew title for the first book of the Bible: **ברצשית** ... *in the beginning*. When you tell a story, you have to begin at the beginning!

ברצשית ברצ צלהים ... *in the beginning, God made*

Not: *in the beginning God was made*. We don't start with nothing, with chaos, with a primordial soup, but with God. Nothingness, chaos, some kind of soup of undifferentiated matter may have been there from the beginning or almost the beginning, but whatever was there at the beginning did not give rise to God, because God was already there.

הצרץ ברצשית ברצ צלהים צת השמים וצת ... *in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*

It's the beginning of a story, a story of the ongoing and still developing relationship between God and a people that identify themselves as God's people. But the story needs a stage. This is our stage, the universe is our stage, the stage on which all of life is played out. And God put it here. This is not a story about the mechanics of the origins of life, but about life's meaning, not about how, but about who and why. This is God's doing, God's work of art, God's gift. If you want to know who you are, start here!

εν αρχη ην ο λογος, και ο λογος ην προσ τον θεον,
και θεος ην ο λογος.

εν αρχη ... *in the beginning*

These are first words of the Hebrew Bible and the first words of the Christian gospel. Ours is a story that has its roots ... in the beginning.

εν αρχη ην ο λογος ... *in the beginning was the Word*

"The Word?" What does that mean? We do have an idea what it means, even if we are not Bible scholars or Greek linguists. "The Word" implies intelligence, expression, understanding, intention, relationship. We use words not just to name objects, but to articulate meaning, emotion, and desire. We use words to express our relationship to other things and other living beings. Words make meaning. Words create meaning.

At the beginning, there was not mere silence, not meaninglessness, not an empty vacuum, not an empty slate, but a word, the word.

ο λογος ην προς τον θεον, και θεος ην ο λογος ... *the word was near to God, and the word was God*

This is what God is, not an amorphous, impersonal force, but the Word: Something, Someone, who relates, who communicates, who knows; Something, Someone with whom we can relate, with whom we can communicate, whom we can know.

the word was the source of life

Life is not an accident, fortunate or unfortunate, but a gift, a gift given with intention and purpose and meaning. If you want to know who you are, start here!

We are not now at the beginning, but we are at a beginning, the beginning of a new year. Where will you start? Start here! Start with with God, acknowledging that you come from God, that all life comes from God. Start with the Word, paying attention to the Word, believing the Word, embracing the Word, from the beginning.

Start here, not just enlisting God's help along the way when it becomes necessary, asking God to bail you out, to forgive you, to help you make a difficult decision. Put God at the beginning, in first place, on the ground floor, in the innermost core of your heart and your being.

What else could belong there? Your job, your children, your wife? They were not there in the beginning. They are God's good gifts to you, just as you are God's good gift to them, but they -- and you -- are not God. In the beginning, there is only one place to start ...