

Sky Sunday

(Australian Version 1)

Introduction

Sky refers to the all the domains of creation above and around Earth. Sky especially refers to the domains close to Earth—the wind, the clouds, the air—the atmosphere.

It is important to note that the term translated ‘heavens’ in the Old Testament normally means sky, not some abode of God far above. It is the sky in Psalm 19 that proclaims God’s glory, God’s visible presence on Earth.

Setting

It is appropriate to create a sense of sky in the sanctuary with various symbols of domains around Earth—stars, galaxies, clouds. Images of sunrise, moonlight and storms can be projected on screens. The special focus below suggests that we string prayer flags or streamers across the sky above the worshippers.

Special Focus

A special focus for this service is the use of prayer flags in all the colours of the rainbow. In a number of cultures, flags with prayers written on them are waved or suspended on cords in the air for the wind to carry the prayers to God. The spirit in the wind aids us as we direct our prayers to the skies. Each person may wish to write his/her own prayer on a standard prayer flag that is suspended on chords above the altar or above the heads of the worshippers. Children may also bring flags and wave them in the procession. These prayers may reflect our concern for creation: “Help us heal creation”. “Help us keep the trees”. “Help us save the birds.”

Themes

In our call to worship we invite all the domains of the sky to worship with us. In our confession we recall how we have polluted the atmosphere. In the readings we become aware that the skies not only announce the presence of God in Earth, but also that the skies mourn/grow dark in empathy when creation below is wounded. More specifically, the sky grows dark with mourning when Christ hangs on the cross. The skies are in tune with the presence of God revealed on Earth, whether in majesty or in misery.

Optional Liturgies

Another sky liturgy, which draws on the traditions of Native Americans, is entitled *Song of Sky* and appears in *Seven Songs of Creation*, published by Pilgrim Press (2004).

Songs

A special song/hymn written for Sky Sunday is located in *Habel Hymns Volume One*. The melody is the well-known hymn *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*. The words follow.

SONG OF SKY

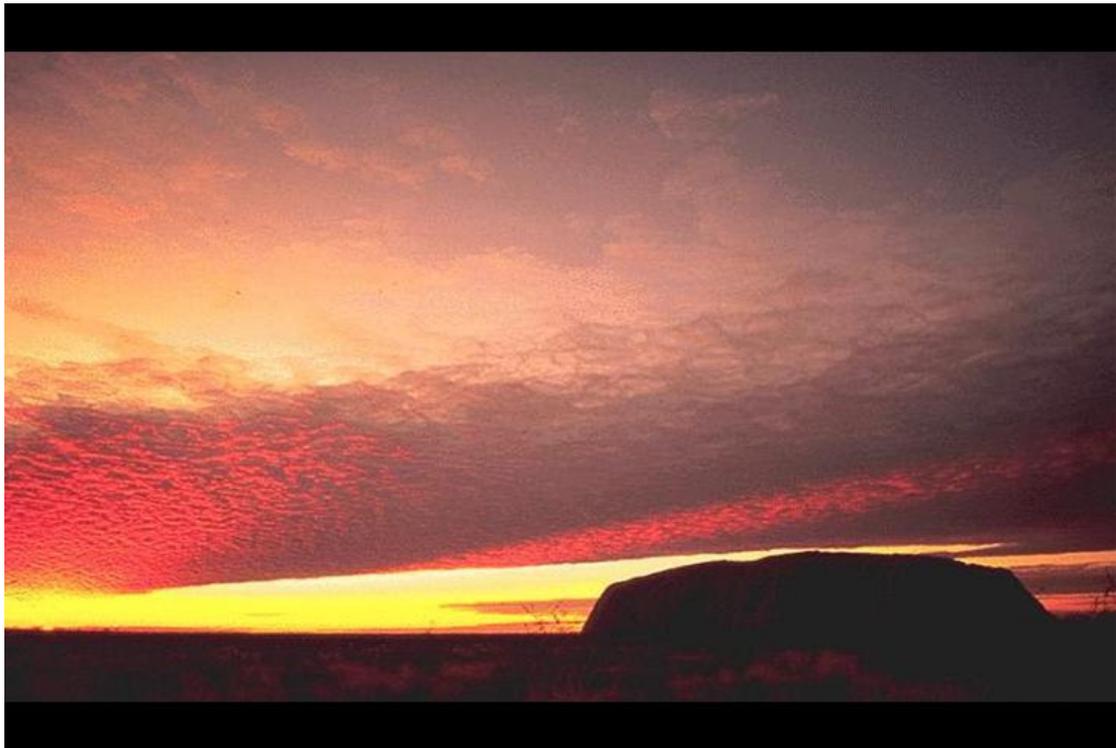
1. Lord of suns and star exploding
Galaxies and swirling skies,
Where you chose to show your glory
Took the heavens by surprise.
Lord of solar winds and wisdom,
Super stars that blow our mind,
Choosing such a fragile planet
Hardly seems a grand design.
2. On this piece of stardust swirling,
On this spinning spot in space,
Life itself was born like music,
When you showed your hidden face.
What an honour to be chosen,
Silent planet blue and green,
Filled with glory, grace and gardens,
Where the breath of God is seen.
3. What is even more amazing
We have poisoned Earth like fools.
Help us change our way of living,
Love the Earth and love her rules.
Help us stem the tide of traders
Leaving Earth an empty store;
Join us now Creator Spirit,
Come renew your Earth once more.

Words: © Norman Habel 1999

*Third Sunday in the Season of Creation
(Australian Version 1)*

Sky Sunday

We worship with the skies above



*“The sky proclaims the glory of God, and the
firmament announces the work of God’s hands.”
Ps. 19.1*

SKY SUNDAY

Welcome!

We worship this Sunday with the skies. We celebrate with the clouds, the winds, the dusk and the dawn. We listen to the sounds of sky proclaiming God's presence. We stand in awe before the vast reaches of space above us and thank God for the fragile piece of stardust we call Earth.

Gathering

Leader In the name of the Creator, who colours the sky,
the name of Christ, who died under dark skies,
and the name of the Spirit, the wind in the sky. Amen.

People **Holy! Holy! Holy!**
Sky is filled with God's presence.

L Christ, we come to into your presence today,
to worship in this sanctuary called Earth,

P **Holy! Holy! Holy!**
Earth is filled with your presence.

Flag Procession and Song

We join in song with the children as they enter the church waving prayer flags on which they and members of the congregation have written prayers to help heal our planet. In several cultures prayers are written on flags. The flags blowing in the wind continually send the prayers through the skies to God. The flags are used to adorn the church, the altar, the sanctuary and the building outside. We join with the children as they wave the flags and sing the following song in front of the sanctuary.

*What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry
Ev'ry thing to God in prayer.
As we wave these flags before us,
Waving them for God to hear,
May the wind take them to Jesus,
In a special wave of prayer.*

Call to Worship

L1 We invite the skies to worship with us:

**P the subtle orange skies at dawn
and the bold red skies at sunset.**

L2 We join the heavens in praising God:

**P proclaiming God's glory across the globe
and hailing God's name with the evening stars.**

L3 We join with the atmosphere in worship:

**P the air, the moisture, the oxygen,
the wind and all the expressions of God's Spirit.**

L1 We call the clouds to celebrate with storms:

**P to carry the life giving drops of rain,
that give hope and healing to Earth.**

L2 We invite the winds to join our petitions:

**P to carry our prayers to God above
and breathe our hopes to Christ in person.**

L3 We celebrate the song of the skies!

P Sing! Skies! Sing!

L1 We invite you to name sky creatures
to join us in worship:

<i>We name, silently or aloud, other creatures or parts of the sky or atmosphere and invite them to join us in praising our Creator.</i>
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L We celebrate the song of the skies!

P Sing! Skies! Sing!

Remembering

<i>As we hold the prayer flag received at the door, we remember painful prayers, tears we have shed and the tears of our kin.</i>

L Take the prayer symbol you received at the door and move it quietly in front of you. Remember your painful prayers, tears you have shed and the tears of other creatures on the planet.

L Remember the tears you have shed over wrongs committed against friends, against animals and against children.

**P We hear creation groaning.
We hear creatures crying out in pain.
And we hear the skies weeping with us.**

L We remember and reflect.

**P Thank you, God, for eyes that weep
and for tears that fall from heaven.**

Confession

L As you remember, you are invited to come forward, share your tears with the tears from the forest, the tears from the skies and the tears of your kin.

Come forward, dip your hands in the bowl of tears.
Share these tears by running your hands over your cheeks,
and feeling the sorrow deep in our planet.

(Music plays while people come forward to bowls of tears located at key points in the place of worship).

L We share the sorrow of our planet.

P We share the sorrow. We share the tears.

Absolution

L Christ, who was deeply grieved in Gethsemane, shares your tears and knows your sorrow.

**P Christ, teach us compassion
for the life that suffers around us.**

L. I speak for Christ:
I affirm your compassion.
Dry your tears and embrace those in pain.

**P Shalom! Shalom!
We embrace those in pain.**

Christ Have Mercy

- L As we come home to Earth.
- P Christ, have mercy.**
- L As we seek to love our home.
- P Christ, have mercy.**
- L As we seek to care for our kin.
- P Christ, have mercy.**

Glory to God

- L Glory to God in the highest!
- P And on Earth peace with our kin in creation!**

Prayer for the Day

- P God, our Creator, as we look into the skies we celebrate the wonders of the worlds that surround us. Help us to see your presence in the evening sky, your spirit in the wind, your mercy in the falling rain. Teach us to hear the good news from the sky celebrating the glory of God in Earth. Rejoice with us as we behold the dawn revealing the mysteries of the skies above and Earth below. In the name of Christ who unites heaven and Earth. Amen.**

Readings for Sky Sunday

Old Testament: Jeremiah 4.23-28 ‘When the heavens mourn’

Jeremiah sees Earth return to chaos and the skies respond with mourning.

Psalm: Psalm 19.1-6 ‘Good News from sky’

The Psalmist declares that the sky announces God’s presence on Earth, and that space proclaims the work of God’s hands.

Epistle: Philippians 2.9-13 ‘Jesus is now the Cosmic Christ’

Jesus Christ, after being humbled in death, is exalted above every name.

Gospel: Mark 15.33-39 ‘Three hours of darkness’

When Jesus hangs on the cross, the sky turns black in sympathy.

Children’s Address: When Drip was Sad!

Prayer: Thank you God for water from the skies. Help us to keep it clean.

Affirmation of Faith

- L Let us affirm our faith together.
- Women We believe that God creates all things,
renews all things and celebrates all things.**
- Men We believe Earth is a sanctuary,
a sacred planet filled with God's presence,
a home for us to share with our kin.**
- Women We believe that God became flesh and blood,
became a piece of Earth,
a human being called Jesus Christ,
who lived and breathed and spoke among us,
suffered and died on a cross,
for all human beings and for all creation.**
- Men We believe that the risen Jesus
is the Christ at the core of creation
reconciling all things to God,
renewing all creation and filling the cosmos.**
- Women We believe the Spirit renews life in creation
groans in empathy with a suffering creation,
and waits with us for the rebirth of creation.**
- Together We believe that with Christ we will rise
and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation.**

Passing of the Peace

L Let us share the peace of the Lord with one another.

P The peace of the Lord be with you

Song

Sermon or Reflection

Song

Offering Prayer

L God, our Creator, through your love you have given us these gifts to share. Accept our offerings as an expression of our deep thanks and our concern for those in need, including our fellow creatures on planet Earth.

P. **With all creation, we bless our Creator.**

Prayers of the People

We thank God for a wondrous creation. We celebrate with all the heavens. We pray for all those in need. We name them now. We close with the following prayer.

Creation Prayer

**Jesus Christ, teach us to empathise with Earth.
Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation,
cries for justice from the air, the clouds and the sky.
Jesus Christ, make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit
in creation, groans of longing for a new creation.
Jesus Christ, make our hearts sensitive to the songs of our kin,
songs of celebration from the stars, the rains and the light.
Christ, teach us to care. Amen**

The Great Thanksgiving

L The Creator be with you and all creation.

P **And also with you.**

L Open your hearts.

P **We open them to our Creator.**

L Let us give thanks to our Creator.

P **It is right to join creation in thanking God.**

L It is right to give you thanks, loving Creator.
Your word is the impulse for all things to be,
for space, stars and stardust to appear,
for Earth to emerge from the deep,
for life to be born of Earth and

for humans to be born of Earth and the Spirit.

You chose to be born a human being,
to become a part of Earth,
to suffer, die and rise from death
to redeem humankind, renew creation,
and affirm all born of Earth and the Spirit.

Your presence is the living impulse in all things,
the Christ deep among us,
filling Earth—land, sea and air;
filling every element and place;
filling the grain and the grape
we share with you this day.

Therefore with angels and archangels,
ancient voices in the forest,
high voices from the sky,
deep voices from the sea
and the whole company of creation,
we proclaim your presence among us.

**P. Holy, holy, holy, God of all life,
Earth and sea and sky
are full of your presence
and glorify your name. Amen**

Lord's Prayer

Words of Institution

Invitation

C Come, for all things are now ready.
Come to the table with all your kin
and share with all in need:
the gift of healing for those in pain,
the gift of forgiveness for those in sin,
the gift of assurance for those in doubt,
and the gift of hope for those in tears.

**P May we who share these gifts,
share Christ with one another
and all our kin.**

Lamb of God

P Lamb of God, who takes away all sin against God,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away all sin against Earth,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away all sin from the world,
receive our prayer.

Distribution

Distribution Songs

Dismissal Blessing

L Now may the power of Christ's body and blood reach deep into your heart, your mind and your body to heal your wounds and through you to bring healing to Earth. In Jesus' name. Amen

Candles for our Kin

<p><i>As we return from the Lord's Table we light a candle and place it on the sand-filled candle-stand in memory of departed loved ones or one of our kin who has become extinct.</i></p>
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Thanksgiving

L Let us give thanks for this meal.

P *We thank you Christ, for the meal we have celebrated with you and we pray that through your body and blood we may be healed and become agents of healing for Earth. Amen.*

Sending Out

L Christ calls you to be his disciples,
to serve him with love and compassion,
to serve Earth by caring for creation,
especially the atmosphere above
that gives breath to all creatures of Earth.

Hold again the prayer symbol in your hands.

P We will celebrate the winds!
We will plead for creation!
We will flood the sky with prayers!

L Will you care for creation?

P We will care for creation!
We will nurture our planet!
We will celebrate with the sky!

Blessing

L May the Spirit of God, who is above all and in all and through all,
fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in sky and Earth
and the pulsing of Christ within you.

Go in peace!
Serving Christ and loving Earth!

P We go in peace,
serving Christ and loving Earth.

Recession and Song

We join the children in song as they process from the church waving their prayer flags and calling out the prayers on their flags. Flags may then be strung across the gateway to the church.

Alternative Remembering, Confession and Absolution

Remembering

We hold the prayer flag received at the door and use it to stir our memories and connect with creation.

- L Take the prayer symbol you received at the door and move it quietly in front of you. Share with the person next to you a special memory of the sky or a cry you sent into the heavens.
- L We remember the skies
where God chose to reveal God's presence.
We remember the saints of old
who cried to the heavens in pain and hope.
- P We remember as a child, beside our bed,
praying to God in heaven above.
We remember the blue skies,
the wild winds,
and the life-giving rain
falling from the sky onto the dry ground,**
- L We remember and rejoice.
- P Thank you, God, for skies to remember,
and for the winds of life from heaven.**

Confession

- L As I hold this prayer symbol aloft,
we remember and confess
that we have turned the surrounding sky
into a new domain to be conquered
rather than a presence to protect us.
- P We are sorry.
We have polluted the atmosphere with waste,
We have depleted the ozone layer that protects us,
We have filled our skies with floating toxins.
We are sorry. We are sorry.**
- L We are sorry.
- P We are sorry. We are sorry.**

Absolution

L Christ hears your confession from the clouds
and forgives your sins against the sky.

**P Christ, teach us to love the skies that surround
and sustain our planet.**

L. I speak for Christ:
I invite you to come home to Earth
rejoicing under her skies.

**P Shalom! Shalom!
We are coming home!**