

The background of the top half of the page is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are several thin, white, curved lines that create a sense of movement and depth, resembling light trails or abstract patterns.

Test of FAITH: **Celebrating God's Creation**

An all-age service resource

Test of FAITH

www.testoffaith.com

B BIBLE
SOCIETY

www.biblesociety.org.uk/testoffaith

Test of FAITH: **Celebrating God's Creation**

An all-age service resource

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Service outline.....	5
Sermon – Psalm 148: All creation sings the maker's praise.....	10
All-age activities.....	15
Videos clips to use during the service.....	19
Hymns and songs.....	20

Acknowledgements

This resource was developed by Dr Ruth Bancewicz and Revd Dr David Spriggs, with help from many others. Revd Dominic Smart wrote the sermon, David Spriggs wrote the service outline, and Ruth Bancewicz wrote the all-age activities. The videos were created by Contrapositive New Media. Sarah Harrison, Adam Kensington and the Test of Faith Facebook group helped with song ideas. Dr Denis Alexander, Revd Dr Rodney Holder, Shirley Holder, Dr Anthony Smith, Dr Nicole Maturen and Dr Margaret Bancewicz provided feedback and advice, while Lindsay Shaw provided much needed editorial support.

This project was supported by Test of Faith, a project of The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, and by Bible Society.

Test of Faith is supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

Introduction

In recent years the relationship between science and faith has seemed a bit strained, most obviously in the secular media. The claim is often made that God is a delusion and science is therefore challenging faith. It is important for us to respond to these claims, but it is even more important to encourage positive engagement with science from within a context of faith.

Test of Faith is a project that helps people to understand the relationship between science and Christian faith, get to know scientists who are Christians, and be encouraged to engage with science-faith issues.

The service

This resource will help your congregation to worship God through looking at his creation and to understand more about how, for Christians, science is a way to worship God with all our 'heart, soul, mind and strength'.

Here you will find ideas for prayer, songs, liturgy and readings; sermon notes, all-age activities, and video clips. This resource is adaptable so you can take ideas from it and create your own service to suit your congregation, whatever your style of worship.

If you have the facilities to use video during your services you can download free videos developed specifically for this service from www.testoffaith.com/resources or www.biblesociety.org.uk/testoffaith.

Continuing the celebration

After the service why not run a Test of Faith short course? This is designed for small groups of adults with no specific scientific training, and uses the DVD, Study Guide and Leader's Guide published in the UK by Paternoster (2009) and in the USA by Wipf and Stock (2010).

Materials for Christian youth groups (age 11–14 and 14–18) are available free on the Test of Faith website. Teachers of GCSE and A/AS level Religious Studies in the UK can purchase a special edition of the DVD with 5 lesson plans from the Stapleford Centre (2009, details on www.testoffaith.com/schools). Children's resources (for ages 8–11) are in preparation.

You may also wish to use some of the resources from the Test of Faith website: for example, you could print out one or two of the papers and briefing sheets and make them available at the end of the service.

Finally, if you are based in the UK and would like the Test of Faith tour to visit your church, you can find details at www.testoffaith.com/tour.

Please contact us if you have any questions or feedback.

Sincerely,



Ruth Bancewicz

Project Leader, Test of Faith

The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion
St Edmund's College, Cambridge, CB3 0BN, UK

Email: rmb67@cam.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)1223 741 282

www.testoffaith.com

www.biblesociety.org.uk/testoffaith

Service outline

This outline is only a guide to help you. Please adapt to suit your own congregation's needs. Normally only 2 to 3 video clips would be advisable in any one service. We do strongly encourage that one of these videos should be a 'Bible reading'.

See page 19 for details on how to obtain the video clips.



Call to worship

Psalm 24.1–2; 7–8

Or

Psalm 33.4–8; 33.1–3 [*these could be read as a responsive Psalm – the reader and congregation reciting alternate lines*]

Or

Voice 1 – Isaiah 45.12; Voice 2 – Isaiah 45.18

Or

One of the three 'Bible readings' videos. [*For the John 1 / Psalm 148 video you might want to explain that the reverse exploding ice globe imagery represents the big bang.*]



Hymns/Songs



Prayers

Adoration

Eternal God, you are truly wonderful and everything you have created fills us with amazement and awe.

When we gaze into the night sky and glimpse moon, stars and galaxies, its brilliance delights us and its immensity inspires us – we worship you its Creator.

As we gaze at mountain ranges, sometimes rugged and majestic, sometimes beckoning and entrancing, we catch a glimpse of your eternal love – we worship you our Saviour.

When we recall the beauty of our world and the rich variety of the peoples, our vision expands and deepens – we worship you, Holy Spirit, who draws all things together and towards Jesus.

Please accept the worship of our minds and hearts. Amen.

Confession

[You could use a series of images to accompany this prayer. The words in [...] below could be said as a response by the congregation, spoken by the intercessor or omitted]

Living Creator God, sometimes we think the whole world and all its resources are simply for our benefit. Forgive us when we forget it is your world not ours. **[Help us to enjoy it as you do and not ravage and waste its resources.]**

Living Creator God, sometimes we are so consumed by our own concerns and wrapped up in our own tiny worlds. Forgive us when we fail to be awed by the beauty and wonder of your creation. **[Help us to respond to your glory.]**

Living Creator God, sometimes we are so driven and busy that we fail to see all the living things around us. Forgive us when we forget to care for and protect all plants and animals as you do. **[Help us to act sensitively to all living creatures.]**

Living Creator God, sometimes we live for what we can get and control then ignore the fact that our greed can damage others. Forgive us when we forget you have provided enough for all and that you call us to share generously as you have been generous to us. **[Help us to live your way.]**

Living Creator God, sometimes we are so busy protecting our own interests and fulfilling our needs. Forgive us when we forget that your justice is for all and your compassionate concern is especially for the most vulnerable. **[Help us to defend the oppressed.]**

Living Creator God, sometimes we think we own the world and can do with it as we like. Forgive us when in our arrogance we fail to acknowledge that you are its source and so fail to worship and adore you as you so richly deserve. **[Help us to practise generosity.]**

Grant us the freedom of your forgiveness through Jesus Christ, the first-born Son, through whom everything is created and by whom you are restoring all things to yourself. Amen.

The words of 1 John 1.9 may be read here.

(The Lord's Prayer)



All-age activity

See page 15 for options



Hymn/Song



Scripture reading

Psalm 148

Or

(If you will be using the John 1/Psalm 148 'Bible readings' video in the second Scripture slot) – Video: One of the Test of Faith Short videos, such as 'How can science and faith work together? (Science and faith)', would work well here.



Offertory

(As the offertory is received, the following prayer could be used)

Lord God, we freely and gladly recognise that all we have comes from you. So the gifts we now present to you express our gratitude for your generosity. Thank you, too, for all your servants who are scientists and all the many ways that their giving through their exploration and discoveries makes our lives better. Please use these gifts that others may experience your generosity, benefit from the good things we enjoy and discover your love for them in Jesus Christ. Amen.

If the children and young people leave, this would be an appropriate time for them to depart.



The witness – of scientists to their faith in God

This is an ideal opportunity for a local Christian to share insight into how scientists relate their faith and work. Invite someone from the congregation or community who is involved in science or technology, or a science teacher to share briefly how their work helps them worship God more fully, how they (and all of us) need God's help to live wisely and well, and why they think science matters to God and all of us. Alternatively, stage this as a brief interview with them.

Video suggestions:

- Bonus video 1.8 David Wilkinson – 'Supporting Christians in science' (you could show this before the live testimony from a scientist in the church suggested above).
- Test of Faith DVD part 1, chapter 1 (start at beginning of part 1 and stop at 7 min, 41).

or

- use one or two of the Test of Faith Interview clips. Any of the following would be particularly appropriate. (You may want to introduce the clip using the short bio given in the interview clips menu for each contributor):
 - Denis Alexander, 'How has your faith impacted on your work?' and 'Do you feel a sense of awe when you do science?'
 - Ard Louis, 'Ard Louis' research' and 'Do you ever discuss science and religion questions with your colleagues?' or 'Personal Story [2] - Did you ever have any problems relating science and faith?'
 - Rosalind Picard, 'Personal story [1] - Coming to faith'

After this, you could invite all of those involved in science and technology to stand, and offer prayers for them, their colleagues and for science in general. These prayers could be led from the front, members of the congregation could be encouraged to pray aloud, or small groups could gather round those standing and offer prayer in this way. This could also be used as The Prayers of Intercession (see below).



Scripture reading

John 1.1–14

Or

Video: John 1/Psalm 148 'Bible readings' video



Hymn/Song



Sermon

See page 10 for sermon notes on Psalm 148 by the Revd Dominic Smart



Time for reflection

Or video. Suggestions:

- One of the three 'Bible readings' videos
- One of the wordless 'Reflections' videos
- Bill Newsome Interview clip, 'An updated version of Job, by Charles Birch'

Or you could use some music. Suggestions: tracks from Haydn's Creation, a choir anthem, or a poem, such as Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'Glory be to God for Dappled Things' read over quiet music.



Hymn/Song



Affirmation of faith

Choose a creed appropriate for your church



Prayers of intercession

In addition to the normal intercessions, topics for prayer could include:

Those involved in science

- For Christians, that their lifestyle, words and relationships would draw people to Christ.
- For all involved, that their work may open their minds and hearts to the love God has for them.
- For all involved in science, technology and business: that all we discover may be put to good use, benefit peoples everywhere, and that we will guard against potential dangers and misuse.

Those who teach science and technology

- That their presentations will inspire many students to seek deeper understanding and, where appropriate a career in these fields.

Those in the media and TV especially

- That their programmes will enrich our knowledge and appreciation of the world and encourage us all to be more responsible in our use of it – whether in our daily lives or on our holidays.

Those at school and university

- That they will learn to delight in understanding the complexities of the world.
- That they will grow in their respect for the world.
- That they will become active in ensuring the world's resources are shared with all peoples.

Those wrestling with the ethical issues that science and technology can generate

- For those considering the termination of pregnancy – for whatever reason – and those who are involved in their decisions, both family and medical staff.
- For those eager to conceive and seeking medical help.
- For those with debilitating illness, longing for medical breakthroughs to set them free.
- For those coping with chronic old age and its impact, whether as carers or elderly people.
- For our lawmakers and judiciary as they seek to discern the lines of justice in uncharted areas of life and death.

[Different people could be invited to lead prayers for each of the main sections, or after each subsection there could be a pause for people to offer their own silent prayers.]

Video suggestion: Bonus video 1.8 David Wilkinson – ‘Supporting Christians in science’

The Lord’s Prayer ***[If not used earlier it would be appropriate to invite all to join in this here – all the above are aspects of praying ‘Your Kingdom come on earth’]***



Hymn/Song



Closing prayer

Read Revelation 21.23–26 and then say,

Gracious and glorious God, we praise you that there will be a welcome in the new heaven and earth for all that is good in human discovery and achievement. We live in hope for those times when all suffering will be over. Help us throughout this coming week to live and work in ways that honour you. Help us through your Spirit to value truth and knowledge and to work with your Son, our saviour, to bring peace and justice to all. And to you be all praise and honour in time and eternity. Amen.

Or

To him who is able to keep us from falling, and to bring us faultless and joyful before his glorious presence – to the only God our Saviour, be glory, majesty, might and authority, from all ages past, and now and for ever and ever! Amen. (From Jude 24, GNB.)

Or

Video suggestions:

- One of the three ‘Bible readings’ videos
- One of the wordless ‘Reflections’ videos
- Test of Faith Short video – ‘The limits of science’ or ‘Caring for the environment’
- Test of Faith DVD part 3, chapter 4 (22 min 11 – end)

Sermon – Psalm 148: All creation sings the maker's praise

About the author

Dominic Smart has been the Minister at Gilcomston South Church of Scotland, Aberdeen, since 1998, and was previously a Minister in Dundee. He is a regular speaker at conferences such as the Keswick Convention as well as universities and other venues. He is a visiting lecturer at the Highland Theological College and was chair of the Board of International Christian College, Glasgow from 2007-2009. Dominic and his wife Marjorie have four children, two dogs and two cats. He has written several books, including *When We Get It Wrong*, on failure; *Grace, Faith and Glory*, on the Bible's antidotes to legalism; and *Kingdom Builders and Kingdom Growth* on the book of Acts (all published by Authentic Media), *40 Days with Jesus* and *40 Days with David* (published by Christian Focus Publications).

Bullet point notes – For a short sermon

1. Introduction

- a. We look at creation and praise its wonderful Creator
- b. The rest of creation praises him too!
- c. Psalm 148 is creation's song of praise

2. Who should praise the Lord? All that he has made!

- d. Look at the language of the psalm
 - i. Psalm 148 includes everything by referring to the two extremes: heaven and earth
 - ii. It draws on the first chapter of Genesis as it reiterated its days.
- e. The heavens (verses 1–4)
 - i. The 'Sun, moon and stars'
 - ii. The amazing night sky declares the glory of God
- f. The earth (verses 7–12)
 - i. The world around us praises him
 - ii. And so should we: all of us, in all our amazing diversity

3. Why should all things praise the Lord? Because he reigns!

- g. Look at the structure of the psalm
- h. Both parts of the psalm give this reason
 - i. He is the Creator God who creates and rules by his commanding word
 - j. He is the Creator God who is above all things
 - k. He is the Creator God who reigns and saves
 - l. He is the Creator God who reigns and saves and loves his children

4. How can all things praise God? By being what he's made them to be.

- m. All creation praises him by being what he's made them to be
- n. So we praise him by being who he's made us to be, where he's put us and by doing what he's given us to do
- o. We don't need to be someone else, somewhere else doing something else in order to glorify God
- p. It's only as we glorify God with our whole lives that we become more fully ourselves

Full text – For a longer sermon

1. Introduction

Much of what we're thinking about today has to do with the wonderful world the Lord has made: we are celebrating creation.

God's creation is diverse, colourful, microscopic and cosmic. Whether you're a believer or not, you can find it fascinating, inspiring and awesome. It's the ultimate 'Grand Design'.

But for believers, the world we are part of is testimony to the endless inventiveness of the one who made all things, keeps renewing and sustaining all he has made, rules it with boundless wisdom and whose purposes are ultimately served not thwarted by his creation. We look at the world that he made and cannot help but admire our Maker: 'Lord, you're a genius!'

But the Scriptures extend that impulse to praise God and they expand our understanding of the world of which we are part. We humans express our 'Well done, Lord, you're amazing', but in Psalm 148 the worshipping songwriter wants all that God has made to sing the Maker's praise. Fit to burst with wonder and adoration, the praising heart of one believer wants to bring in all voices – like a conductor bringing in first one then another section of a vast choir. For God is so great that all voices are needed to praise him as he ought to be praised. Creation celebrates its Creator.

So for a few minutes today we'll let Psalm 148 expand our horizons. First, we'll look at that vast choir as we ask '**who should praise the Lord?**' Second, we'll look at what it is about God that invites such praises as we ask '**why should they praise the Lord?**' Then we'll end by asking **how can all creation – including all of us here today – praise him?**

2. Who should praise the Lord? All that he has made!

At first the range of voices seems merely wild and exuberant, but the psalmist is thinking and organising as well as feeling. Notice in verses 1–6 how he groups together the things that are over the earth; and then in verses 7–12 he calls on the earthly creation.

There's a Hebrew trick of including everything between two extremes by pointing out the limits – describing the whole bookshelf, so to speak, by referring to the bookends. What the psalmist is doing is embracing all creation, some of which he actually specifies, by referring to the heavens and the earth.

But notice what else he's doing here: he's recalling the days of creation; not by precisely repeating their details but by encompassing their scope and by grouping his psalm according to Genesis 1.1 – '**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**'

The heavens (verses 1–4)

He begins, then, by waving his pen, like a baton, in a skyward direction and brings in the heavens. From angelic beings and the heavenly hosts comes delight in the Maker. The army that, elsewhere in the Old Testament, the Lord of hosts deploys to fulfil his purposes, defend his people and defeat their enemies, is here called to sing adoring admiration to its Creator. The sun, moon and stars are introduced from day 4 of God's first work (Gen. 1.14ff). Then the waters above the skies, from day 2 (1.6ff), are summoned to take their part in the praise concert.

Look out and up on a clear night; get away from the city lights if you can. Let your eye tune in to the darkness so that you can see the stars more clearly. How far do you think you can see? (OK, you can see a lot further if you've got your contact lenses in!). The more you look the more you see.

This is an illustration from my own experience of true wonder. Use this if you want, but it would be better if you used one of your own experiences.

One clear night in England's stunningly beautiful Lake District we – the whole family including the youngest, who loved being outside way past bedtime – were to be seen standing in a field dressed in nightwear, thick coats and wellies all craning our necks as we gazed into up into the sky. (These city folk!) Were we mad? No, we were utterly entranced by the same creation that the psalmist had in mind. That far south we were watching the most dazzling display of the 'Northern Lights', the aurora borealis, as the boffins call them. What had started as a faint, greenish glow in the clear night sky had, over about 20 minutes, developed into the most breathtaking display of multi-coloured curtains of light you could imagine. For nearly an hour, vast sheets of colour, a nocturnal kaleidoscope, rippled, twisted, swirled above Conistone and the fells. It really looked as if the very atmosphere was dancing for joy. And it infected us with joy. Particularly the youngest of us, who gaped in wide-eyed and innocent wonder at what God was doing. If we weren't so British we'd have been dancing too!

What we were seeing that night was the truth of Psalm 19.1–2; 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.'

The earth (verses.7–12)

Now the conductor aims his baton lower – at the earth; days 3, 5 and 6 of the originating work are evoked. The inhabitants of the teeming oceans are called to sing (as whales do so beautifully). The weather starts praising – a curious notion for most of us who live in Scotland, but there you are: faith stretched! All that geologists, botanists and zoologists study joins in the song. Living or inanimate; animal, vegetable and mineral; chaotic stuff and solid stuff: all that we study with our sciences, depict with our arts and occupy with what poet Ted Hughes called our ‘little heat’; all has its place in the Creator’s choir.

And so do we. All Adam’s offspring, from across every divide, from ‘every nation, tribe, people and language’ (Rev.7.9) and every other group you could think of: all our voices are called upon to sing God’s praise. No voice is ruled out by social status, race, age, or gender. Every one of us here today is included somewhere in verses 11–12.

You might include here a reference to the ethnic diversity within your own fellowship on the day that you preach; put that in the context of the size and diversity of the community that you’re in. Alternatively, you could use slides of people’s faces from different races and in different countries. Slides of ‘the blue planet’, of different landscapes and ocean views and of different animals and plants might be helpful here too. A random, fairly fast-moving assortment is perhaps best.

Around 6.8 billion of us, in 13,000 linguistic people groups are scattered among 193 countries. We occupy 13 different climate zones with, between land and sea, 910 different eco-regions spread out over 510 million square kilometres; and we’re only one numerically small species among at least 10 to 20 million others. We live on the third rock from the sun and the rock weighs 6 kilograms – with 24 noughts after the 6! This rock is moving around that sun at 30km per second; not that fast you might think, but that’s 108,000 km/hour, which would get you to Tesco and back quite quickly really!

3. Why should all things praise the Lord? Because he reigns!

Each of the two sections – heaven and earth – is called to praise and the reason is given for each at the end of its particular section. The way that the Psalm is laid out in some Bibles makes it look as though it has three sections, with the third beginning in verse 13. But that’s misleading. You can see the way that the Psalmist is thinking from the repeated phrases that show the structure of his thoughts. After an introductory ‘Hallelujah!’ verse 1 opens with ‘Praise the Lord from the heavens’. That section closes with the ‘Let them praise the name of the Lord, for ...’ of verse 5. The same opening and closing phrases are used in verse 7 for the next part of the choir: ‘Let them praise the Lord from the earth’ and then in verse 13 ‘Let them praise the name of the Lord, for ...’. Two matched sections, each composed of the call to praise and the reason to praise.

The interesting thing is that both the heavens and the earth are called to praise for the same reason: they are governed by the Lord who reigns.

In verses 5–6, the heavens, which praise God, were created by his command. (Hear the echoes of the phrase by which each day’s creation is introduced in Genesis 1: ‘And God said ...’) His word expresses his will and who can thwart that? None, so he just had to say and it was done. His word is creative: it both originates the heavens and sustains them.

You might want to include this, which connects the Psalm with Christ as he is spoken of in the New Testament, but weigh carefully whether or not it might distract your listeners.

The same point is made in the New Testament with reference to Jesus in Hebrews 1.2–3 and it lies behind John’s reiteration of Genesis at the opening of his Gospel: the new-creating Word is spoken not in audible sounds but in living flesh (John 1.1–14).

The place and behaviour of the sun, moon and stars, the angels and the waters above the skies are also given by his command. The Lord set them in place, like a jeweller setting diamonds, by his decree. His voice of authority gives the heavens their continuing existence. He is their governor, their ruler, for ever. All that we now understand about the ‘laws’ of nature is testimony to the Creator’s wise governing of his creation. From the predictable orbits of planets to the magnificently unpredictable discovery of new stars, all that we see testifies to the continuing creative word of the ruler of all things.

In verses 13–14 the theme re-emerges as the reason for the earth to extol him. His is the highest name, which is another way of saying that he is the highest being. None can match the brilliance of his glory: his splendour is greater than the splendour of all that he has made and overarches it.

But the theme of sovereignty receives a crucial development. The people who were to sing this song in the temple together, calling on all created things to worship their Creator, have a special reason to praise him: he has raised up a king (as many understand the ‘horn’ of verse 14) who will reign for him over them. So the king that he has raised is inherently praise-worthy. And

those who lavish their praise upon him will be called his saints: they will belong to him. Here, 'saints' means 'set apart from one master and for another'.

It's a way of saying that they are his by virtue of being made by him and by virtue of being redeemed by him. Double the volume of praise, then; and it's praise that is directed to the Father and to his anointed King-Messiah, to Jesus the Saviour and Lord, the one who has supremacy over all things (Colossians 1.15–18).

That theme of a particular, appointed king over saints is itself developed as the saints are defined: they are his offspring. 'Israel' in verse 14 is not to be understood as a political thing but in the way that God describes it: as his son. When the Lord was saving his people from Egypt – taking them out from under a tyrannical master so that they could live under his loving, kind rule – he commanded Moses, 'Say to Pharaoh, *'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused.'* (Exodus 4.22–23a)

The relationship between everything else in the Psalm and the Lord is that of creature to Creator. But the relationship between God's people and the Lord is unique. It is also that of the covenant (chosen) children to their Dad. Everything else exists by creative command and wise decree. We are here by creative command, by wise decree and by covenant love. Everything is lower than him, but we are 'close to his heart'. Nothing quite matches the place that God's children have in his life. Praise him who reigns over you with love!

Again, you should adapt this for your own situation, but the words of the song are worth quoting. If you don't feel they are, you might think of quoting another children's song (for the sake of preserving the surprisingly adept simplicity): 'Our God is a great big God' covers the same ground, though you probably wouldn't want to quote all its repeats! 'Who's the King of the Jungle?' isn't bad; ditto 'You can't stop rain from falling down'.

In dim and distant days I did summer missions with United Beach Missions. One of the staple songs – with actions! – was 'He made the stars to shine'. It's one of the ultimate golden oldies and has been replaced by gazillions of other songs. But what a brilliantly simple and child-friendly summary of Psalm 148! Come down memory lane and listen to the words afresh in the light of what we're learning from the Psalm. Do the actions if you must!

- He made the stars to shine,
- He made the rolling sea,
- He made the mountains high
- And he made me.
- But this is why I love him:
- For me he bled and died.
- The Lord of all creation
- Became the crucified.

4. How can all things praise God? By being what he's made them to be

By this stage in the sermon you might be thinking that it's all very nice talking about how much God loves us, but isn't all this stuff about a cosmic choir a bit far-fetched? Isn't the Psalm really just a product of poetic licence? I mean, how can you really speak of the weather actually praising God when it can't think? OK, so I might sing encouraging songs to the plants in the garden (when the neighbours are out) but you'd have to be really loopy to say that you heard them singing! Isn't the psalmist just expressing his own heart here, rather than saying anything about the rest of the cosmos? How does creation praise God?

The question is worth asking because the answer is so helpful.

As far as God is concerned, all that he has made reflects the fullness of his character, his brilliance, in short, his glory. And it does so by being where he wants it and by doing what he made it to do. Storms glorify God by being uncontrollable. It's the very 'mountainous-ness' of mountains that honours God. The sea, supporting abundant and hugely varied life, glorifies its Maker just by being the sea. It brings God pleasure as it reflects back to God the perfections of his skill and power. Just by being the sun, the sun brings a smile – if we can put it like this – as much to God's face as it does to ours in the UK.

There's a saying: 'Spit on the desert and a flower will grow'. Unseen rain storms fall in desert places. Seeds that have lain dormant for years are moistened. Within days, flowers bloom that no single human being will ever see and be inspired to say 'Praise the Lord for that beautiful flower'. But God sees it. There are short-lived fields of desert sand verbena or of thale cress (Arabidopsis to the biologists in the congregation), for instance, that only God ever sees – they don't make anyone else feel good, but they are a pleasure to their Maker just by being there. It's one of the wonderfully eye-opening features of our times that today's acute observers in our scientific community are revealing to us the amazing diversity of the Creator's work. So now we can picture the dance of cells in the blood stream; biologists continue to plumb the depths of the marvellous structure and functions of our DNA; particle physicists delve into yet more intricacies of the atom or the mysteries of black holes and dark energy.

These astonishingly diverse members of the cosmic choir glorify their Maker by being what he made them to be, where he made them to be it and by getting on with doing what he made them to do. You and I, in the very diversity that the psalmist describes are part of that glorifying creation.

Now here's where the answer to the question about 'poetic licence' really helps us: you don't need to be someone else to glorify God.

Being who you are you can glorify God. But unlike stars, cows or sub-atomic particles you can deliberately, knowingly, consciously, bring pleasure to God. What an encouragement! And how contrary that runs to the way we do culture and, sadly, the way we do the Christian life. Our culture says, 'Become like these people in the adverts or the films and then you'll be fulfilled.' Tragically, we can feel just the same pressure in church. 'If only I/you were more like such and such! Then you'd be a better Christian'. As if God slipped up when he made you: 'Oh if only he'd made me perpetually young/a woman/a barrister or judge/ more socially connected' (delete as appropriate)!

But it is the very fact that we all sing his praise as such different people that brings him so much glory! His excellence can't be told by one social group, or by one age range or by one gender. There aren't enough words in any one language to speak his praises adequately – all the global nuances of the phrase 'well-done' or 'praise the Lord' are needed. Only a choir as large and diverse as the cosmos will do to sing the praises of the Maker of all things. Don't succumb: the pressure to be someone else before you can really bring pleasure to your Maker doesn't come from him!

In this next paragraph, you could include, if not too pointed, some of the things that occupy the people in your own fellowship. Again, if you can use slides of people being busy with a range of activities it might help.

And the same goes for where you are and what you're doing. You won't become more pleasing to God by becoming a pastor or vicar or whatever you want to call them, unless of course he's appointed you to be one. Housewives, students, nurses, old folk; scientists – especially today the scientists; introverts and wild, outgoing extroverts; arty types, engineers and care home managers; in dull places and exciting ones, in humdrum routines and chaotic changes – all bring pleasure to God by getting on with being who they are made to be where they have been put and doing what they've been given to do.

Don't waste your God-glorifying life by waiting for it to become something else before it can glorify him. Caterpillars glorify God before they become butterflies, as well as after. If a hippopotamus can glorify him, so can you!

So why not do so? Indeed, it is only by glorifying God in worship, work, leisure, family and social justice, through scientific enterprise and artistic expression that we become what we are meant to be and share with all creation in glorifying God. Together we can perform in the grand choir of all that he has made.

This bit is highlighted because it gathers together this last main section and helps to 'land the plane', so to speak.

Psalm 148 tells us that ...

- We praise him for his cosmic sovereignty by doing his will.
- Tomorrow morning, you can praise him for his glorious salvation by trusting his Saviour.
- Three weeks next Thursday afternoon, while you're stuck at the traffic lights, you can praise him for his covenant love by loving, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength the one who holds you close to his heart.

Your distinctiveness is not a licence to join in the rampant individualism of our culture; it's a gift from your covenant-making God. Use it to add your praising voice to all creation's song. Join with all that your Father has made to sing praises to his glorious name and to adore, to trust, and to follow Jesus, his glorious, saving King.

All-age activities

These activities will communicate a sense of the size, intricacy and beauty of the universe. The aim is to create a sense of awe and wonder at everything that God has created. Even though the universe is so big and amazing, God cares about each one of us – as we will hear later in Psalm 148.

1. The size of the universe

This will work well in a large building with a long aisle or similar open space, and an enthusiastic presenter.

Preparation

Gather these objects, stick each of them to a separate piece of card with clear tape and write on each the name of the sun or relevant planet:

- Sun – 20 mm – a 1p coin
- 1. Mercury – 0 mm - a speck of dust
- 2. Venus – 0.1 mm - a slightly larger speck of dust
- 3. Earth – 0.1 mm - a slightly larger speck of dust
- 4. Mars – 0 mm - a speck of dust
- 5. Jupiter – 2 mm - a small seed
- 6. Saturn – 1.6 mm – a pin with a small head
- 7. Uranus – 0.6 mm – a grain of sand
- 8. Neptune – 0.6 mm – a grain of sand
- 9. Pluto – 0 mm - a speck of dust

Unless you enjoy the exactness of the exercise, don't worry about being too accurate with the sizes – just make sure the objects look different enough and are roughly the right size, to give an idea of the different dimensions of the planets. They're not very exciting objects, so you will have to use the PowerPoint slides to capture the children's imagination (download from www.testoffaith.com/resources or www.biblesociety.org.uk/testoffaith - numbers are included in the planet slides so you can get the names of the planets right). If you don't have enough room, or you want to be strictly accurate, you could miss out Pluto because it has been demoted and is no longer officially a planet.

If you want to change the sizes but keep them in proportion you can use this online tool to calculate the relative sizes and distances between the planets and the sun:

http://www.exploratorium.edu/ronh/solar_system/index.html

The activity

Try to do this fairly quickly, and leave time at the end to look at the final few slides and enjoy the immensity of it all.

Show PowerPoint slide 1 and explain: We've already been hearing during this service about God who made the universe. It's incredibly beautiful, and it's incredibly big. Have you ever looked at the stars on a dark night? Each of those stars is a huge burning ball of gas like our sun [slide], but they're so far away that they look like tiny dots of light. What we're going to do now is to look at what scientists have found out about just how big the universe is. We will see the size of the earth compared to the planets and then the distances between them.

Show the PowerPoint slides of the planets. Ask volunteers from the congregation to name the planets in order, as each slide comes up.

Ask: How far apart do you think they are? We're going to recreate the solar system inside this building.

Ask for some volunteers – you will need an adult (whose paces will be about one yard long) and 9 children. Distribute the objects between the children and let them know which planet they represent.

Ask the child with the 'sun' to say what is on their piece of card – that is how big the sun is going to be for this exercise – and then to stand at the front of the church, facing the congregation, as near to the back wall as possible to allow room for the rest of the planets.

Ask the child holding 'Mercury' to say what is on their piece of card. Can they see it? What does that mean about how big the earth is compared to the sun? Can they guess how far from the sun Mercury should be? When they have guessed, ask the adult to take 1 pace (each pace covers about 65 million kilometres) from the sun – that is where the child holding Mercury should stand.

Do this in turn with each planet, looking at the object on the card then guessing what the distance is – which is hard because it gets bigger nearly every time! The full list of distances is:

Mercury	–	1 pace from the Sun
Venus	–	1 (small) pace from Mercury
Earth	–	1 (small) pace from Venus
Mars	–	1 (big) pace from Earth
Jupiter	–	8.5 paces from Mars
Saturn	–	10 paces from Jupiter
Uranus	–	23 paces from Saturn
Neptune	–	25.5 paces from Uranus
Pluto	–	22 paces from Neptune
Total	–	93 paces (yards)

If you continue showing the PowerPoint slide of all the planets throughout this exercise it will help people imagine what the solar system looks like over these distances.

Explain: The solar system seems so huge, but that's only the start of it! Our solar system is one of billions contained in the Milky Way galaxy [slide] and would appear on this picture as a tiny dot. Our galaxy is just one of billions of galaxies in the universe [slide]. God made all this – what a big God! But even though the universe he created is so big and we are so small, God cares for each one of us.

2. The amazing universe quiz

Ask the congregation to divide into teams of 4 to 6, and quickly distribute pencils and pieces of paper to each team. Read out the questions. Once the answers are completed, ask the teams to swap their piece of paper with a team next to them so they can mark each other's scores. Offer small prizes for the teams with the most correct answers.

Or you could simply ask each question to the whole congregation and throw a sweet to the first person with their hand up with the correct answer.

Illustrated PowerPoint slides with the questions and answers can be downloaded from www.testoffaith.com/resources or www.biblesociety.org.uk/testoffaith.

The questions are a mixture of very easy, easy and hard, so teams should let the younger members of the group guess the very easy/easy ones!

An 'amazing fact' has been given as well as the answer, so you can use the quiz to create a sense of awe and wonder about everything God has created.

1. What is the biggest planet in the solar system?

Jupiter. It's a gigantic ball of gas two and a half times the mass of all of the other planets in the solar system put together.

2. What is the smallest mammal in the world?

The **bumblebee bat** (also known as kitti's hog-nosed bat, smallest in length) or the **Etruscan pygmy shrew** (smallest by weight). A fully-grown bumblebee bat may be less than 30 mm long, and adult Etruscan shrew weighs as little as 1.3 grams.

3. Which country experiences the highest average annual rainfall?

Hawaii or India. Parts of Hawaii and India both get more than 12 m in a year, although in India most of the rain falls during the monsoon season.

4. What is tallest animal in the world? (That's living ones - dinosaurs don't count!)

The **giraffe.** The tallest recorded male giraffe was almost 6 m tall.

5. What are cirrus floccus, altostratus lenticularis and fractonimbus?

Types of **cloud**. Clouds are made of millions of tiny water droplets a hundredth of a millimetre (0.01 mm) in size.

6. What is the longest molecule?

DNA, the chemical instructions contained in every single cell in our bodies. If you stretched out every DNA molecule in your body and put them end to end they would reach to the sun and back at least four times!

7. What is a rainbow made of?

Different colours of **light** created by the sun shining through raindrops. You can also get moonbows, and fog bows.

8. What is the biggest lake in the world?

The **Caspian Sea**, at 371,000 km². That's over 1.5 times the size of the UK.

9. Where is the biggest desert?

Antarctica, which is a cold desert. It's the coldest, highest, driest and windiest continent, and it has no permanent human residents.

10. What is the tallest mountain in the world?

Mount Everest, at 8,848 m high, and the only creatures that can live near the top are tiny spiders. (Mount Everest is the highest mountain above sea level. Mauna Kea is the highest mountain if you measure it from the bottom of the Pacific Oceans.)

11. In which country would you find the tallest mountain in the world?

It's on the border between **Nepal** and **China**. 7 out of 8 of the world's highest peaks are in Nepal (or on its border with China).

12. How deep is the deepest part of the sea?

- a. 109,160 m
- b. 10,916 m
- c. 1,091.6 m

b) – in the Mariana Trench, which is under the Pacific Ocean south of Japan. If Mount Everest was put inside there would be 2,068 m of water left above it.

13. What do bees make from nectar?

Honey. They have a special honey stomach to keep it in, and can hold almost their own weight in honey.

14. Where is the lowest place on dry land?

The shores of the **Dead Sea**, which is bordered by Israel/Jordan are 420 m below sea level.

15. How many species of beetle exist in the world?

- a. At least 350,000
- b. At least 35,000
- c. At least 3,500

a) – the largest number of known species in the whole of the animal kingdom. (If you're being precise, the largest number in any single 'order' in the animal kingdom.)

16. Where do badgers live?

Underground in **burrows** called setts. Badgers mostly eat worms and insects.

17. What is diamond made of?

Carbon. Some of the diamonds on earth are thought to have been formed in outer space and to have arrived on asteroids.

18. How far away is the nearest star to earth (apart from our own, the sun)?:

- a. 42 trillion km
- b. 4.2 trillion km
- c. 0.42 trillion km

(A trillion is one with 12 zeros after it!)

a) – the nearest star is Proxima Centauri, a red dwarf star, and if you wanted to fly to it in a space shuttle the journey would take thousands of years.

19. What sort of tree does an acorn grow into?

An **oak tree**. They can live for more than 1000 years.

20. What is the longest river in the world?

The **Amazon** or the **Nile**, depending on how length is measured. The Amazon carries the largest volume of water of any river in the world (some people say 1/5 of all river flow in the world) and can be over 190 km wide during the rainy season.

Explain: Isn't the universe an amazing place? God made it, and he made us too. He gave us the ability to explore the universe by travelling, digging, looking, smelling, touching and doing lots of scientific experiments to find out how it all works.

3. To the moon and back

This short object lesson is designed to be suitable for reasonably young children, but interesting for all. You could use the PowerPoint slides that can be downloaded from www.testoffaith.com/resources or www.biblesociety.org.uk/testoffaith to illustrate it.

Explanations or more precise scientific details, should you wish to use them, are given in *blue italics*, and answers to questions are given in **bold**.

Not long ago I bought a new x *[have a gadget, children's construction kit, or even a piece of flat pack furniture if you're feeling adventurous, under a sheet/in a bag. You or one of the children can now pull off the sheet/take it out of the bag in a dramatic way]*.

My *[item]* is made of pieces of *[wood, metal, plastic]* that I had to put together when I took it out of the box. But what is your body made of? Your body is made up of tiny building blocks called **cells**, that are so very, very small that if you had a single cell in front of you right now there's no way you could see it! So you need a lot of cells to make your whole body *[about 50 trillion]*.

When I got my *[item]* it came with these instructions *[hold up instructions]* that told me how to put it together. Inside every cell of your body *[barring a small number of exceptions including the lens of the eye and red blood cells]* is a set of instructions that tells that cell what to do and how to grow. The instructions for my *[item]* are written on paper, and you probably all know that on a computer the instructions that make things happen are called software. But in your body the instructions that tell cells what to do are written in a special code on a long, thin stringy thing called – do you know what?

It's called '**deoxyribonucleic acid**' *[can the congregation try saying it fast a few times!?!]* – **DNA** for short – and it's so very, very thin that if you had a single molecule in front of you right now you wouldn't even be able to see it. And because DNA is so very, very thin it can curl up very, very small. You have about 2 metres (6 feet) of DNA in every tiny cell of your body.

So that's a whole lot of cells in your body, and about 2 metres of DNA in each one. Can you see what's coming?

If you took all the DNA out of your cells, joined it all together and stretched it out, it would be a very long piece of DNA indeed. Some people have calculated that this piece of DNA would stretch to the moon and back. But actually it goes further than that.

Does anyone know how far away the sun is? It's about **150 million miles** from earth.

If you took all the DNA in your body and added it together it would stretch all the way from the earth to the sun and all the way back – four times! *[Estimates vary wildly - from about 4 to 350 – because it's hard to estimate the number of cells in your body and the exact length of a DNA molecule.]* That's incredibly long! What a lot of instructions are needed to make your body, and what an amazing God to make a world where people like you and me are made using instructions that stretch all the way to the sun and back.

Video clips to use during the service

Three 'Bible readings' videos have been created specifically for this service. These can be downloaded in WMV or MP4 format from www.testoffaith.com/resources or www.biblesociety.org.uk/testoffaith. These are dramatic readings of the recommended Scripture passages for the service: Psalm 148 and John 1.1–14, plus Job 38 (Job 38.1–35; 41.11) and Psalm 8. The visuals and music for these videos come from the 'Reflections' videos on the Test of Faith website and DVD.

We have suggested a number of places in the service outline where it may be suitable to use the 'Bible readings' videos, or other relevant video clips from the Test of Faith DVD or website.

Videos available:

1. On the Test of Faith DVD
 - a. **Documentary** in three parts (3 x approx. 30 minutes) introducing science and faith from the perspective of a number of scientists and theologians.
 - b. Bonus features
 - i. **Short videos** – these are 11 extracts from the Test of Faith documentary, totalling 27 minutes.
 - ii. **Trailer** – for the Test of Faith documentary.
 - iii. **Reflections** – these short reflective pieces (with music but no words) were made for the Test of Faith project using the visual material contained in the Test of Faith documentary.
 - iv. **Bonus interviews** – from the contributors to the documentary. [Note: these are *not* included among the interview clips on the website.]
2. Download from the 'Resources' section of testoffaith.com in MP4 or WMV format (also available on YouTube)
 - a. 'Celebrating God's Creation' section
 - i. **Bible readings** – dramatic readings of John 1/Psalm 148, Job 38, Psalm 8.
 - b. 'Test of Faith video' section
 - i. **Trailer** – as on the Test of Faith DVD*
 - ii. **Short videos** – as on the Test of Faith DVD*
 - iii. **Reflections** – as on the Test of Faith DVD*
 - c. '**Interview clips**' section – a series of clips taken from the spare footage from the Test of Faith documentary.

Tips:

- We have chosen a variety of clips from those available which link directly to the topics covered in the service. Alternatively, you could look through the videos available on the DVD and website for yourself and choose those you think your congregation will find most helpful.
- The 'Bible readings' videos, short videos, reflections, and trailer are suitable for a mixed age audience, while the interview clips, bonus interviews and longer extracts from the documentary are suitable for adults.
- For a church service, we recommend using two or three clips of around 3 minutes or less in length.
- No special licence is required to show any of these videos in a public place.

*The DVD contains the videos in a far higher resolution than the clips online, and includes subtitles in English, Chinese (simplified characters), Portuguese, Spanish, French and Russian, and audio in Arabic and Farsi. (UK: £8.99 from Paternoster, buy from your local bookshop or online at www.authenticmedia.co.uk. USA: \$16 from Wipf and Stock, www.wipfandstock.com.)

Hymns and songs

The following songs and hymns fit in with the overall theme of the service and are reasonably well known. We have given the first couple of lines (in brackets), the songwriter, and number in the relevant books. If you do not have copies of them, an internet search will usually find you the lyrics, guitar chords and a sound sample of the song – as well as any copyright information you need to be aware of when reproducing the song in a worship setting.

Hymns

'All Creatures of our God and King', Francis of Assisi
(All creatures of our God and King, Lift up your voice and with us sing)
Mission Praise 7, *Hymns for Today's Church* 13.

'Beauty for brokenness', Graham Kendrick
(Beauty for brokenness, Hope for despair)
Complete Mission Praise 806.

'From thee all skill and science flow', Charles Kingsley
(From thee all skill and science flow, all pity, care, and love)
Hymns for Today's Church 310, *Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised* 479.

'God in his love for us lent us this planet', F Pratt Green
(God in his love for us lent us this planet, Gave it a purpose in time and space)
Hymns and Psalms 343

'God who spoke in the beginning', Fred Kaan
(God who spoke in the beginning, Forming rock and shaping space)
Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised 135.

'God who stretched the spangled heavens', Catherine Cameron
(God who stretched the spangled heavens, infinite in time and place)
New Century Hymnal 556.

'Great Is Thy Faithfulness', Thomas O. Chisholm
(Great Is Thy Faithfulness, O God My Father)
Hymns and Psalms 66, *Hymns for Today's Church* 260.

'How Great Thou Art', Carl Gustav Boberg
(O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder, Consider all the works Thy hands have made)
Mission Praise 506, *Hymns Old and New* 380.

'I sing the almighty power of God', Isaac Watts
(I sing the almighty power of God, That made the mountains rise)
Mission Praise 293, *Hymns and Psalms* 334.

'Jesus is Lord!', David J Mansell
(Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it)
Mission Praise 367, *Hymns for Today's Church* 17.

'O Lord of every shining constellation', A F Bayly
(O Lord of every shining constellation, That wheels in splendour through the midnight sky)
Hymns for Today's Church 314, *Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised* 78.

'The spacious firmament on high', Joseph Addison
(The spacious firmament on high, with all the blue ethereal sky)
Hymns and Psalms 339, *Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised* 170.

Songs

'Almighty God', Tim Hughes

(The rising sun that fills the sky, The starry host that lights the night)

Holding Nothing Back album, Survivor Records 2007. *Songs of Fellowship* 4, 2064.

'Awesome God (your voice)', Vicky Beeching

(Your voice is the voice that commanded the universe to be. Your voice is the voice that is speaking words of love to me.)

The Journey album, Sparrow Records 2005. *Songs of Fellowship* 3, 1680.

'Everything that has breath', Matt Redman

(Let everything that, everything that, Everything that has breath praise the Lord)

Blessed be Your Name album, Survivor Records 2005. *Songs of Fellowship* 2, 880.

'God of wonders', Marc Byrd and Steve Hindalong

(Lord of all creation, of water, earth and sky)

Spring Harvest 07/08, 53.

'Great in power', Russell Fragar

(Praise him, you heavens and all that's above.)

Songs of Fellowship 3, 1501.

'How Great is our God', Chris Tomlin

(The splendour of the King, Clothed in majesty)

Arriving album, Sparrow 2004. *Songs of Fellowship* 4, 2065.

'Indescribable', Laura Story

(From the highest of heights, to the depths of the sea, Creation's revealing Your majesty)

Great God Who Saves album, 2008. *Songs of Fellowship* 4, 1775.

'My Jesus, my Saviour', Darlene Zschech

(My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord there is none like you)

Songs of Fellowship 2, 935.

'Who paints the skies (river of fire)', Stuart Townend

(Who paints the skies into glorious day? Only the splendour of Jesus)

The best of Stuart Townend album, Kingsway Music 2007. *Songs of Fellowship* 2, 1118.

'Wonderful Maker', Chris Tomlin

(You spread out the skies over empty space, Said 'let there be light')

Not to Us album, Sparrow 2002. *Songs of Fellowship* 3, 534.

'You're the word of God the Father (across the lands)', Stuart Townend

(You're the word of God the Father, From before the world began)

Lord of Every Heart album, Kingsway Music 2002. *Songs of Fellowship* 3, 1669.

Children's songs

'God is great', Martin W Sampson [*This isn't specifically a children's song, but it would work well*]
(All creation cries to You, Worshipping in Spirit and in truth)
You Are My World album, Hillsong publishing 2001. *Songs of Fellowship* 3, 1155.

'God's love is big', Simon Parry
(God who made the universe, The earth, the sun, the moon and stars)
Great Big God album, Vineyard Music 2005.

'He made the stars to shine', Archie Hall
(He made the stars to shine. He made the rolling sea)
Junior Praise 76.

'My God is so big', traditional
(My God is so big, so strong and so mighty)
Additional words at www.stickykids.co.uk/lyric/199-My_God_is_So_Big.aspx

'Our God is a great big God', Nigel and Jo Hemming
(Our God is a great big God, Our God is a great big God)
Great Big God album 4, Vineyard Records 2009.

'Praise the Lord', Lincoln Brewster [*This isn't specifically a children's song, but it would work well*]
(Praise the Lord from the Heavens, Praise Him in the skies)
Amazed album, Integrity Incorporated 2002.

'Who's the king of the jungle?', arrangement by Andy Silver
(Who's The King Of The Jungle? Who's the king of the sea?)
Junior Praise 289.

Ideas for toddlers: www.dltk-bible.com/poems-creation.htm