

Wondering the Trinity (Genesis 1:1-2:4a)

## **Let's not pretend that God hid secret Jesus messages in the Hebrew Bible like Easter eggs.**

by [Greg Carey](#)

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"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." I still sense the wonder 38 years after my first encounter with this verse.

Back then I was doing what I was supposed to do. A high school sophomore and a fresh Southern Baptist convert, I was reading my Bible independently, strolling along, when the words *us* and *our* hit me like a nest of ground hornets. My Mom was a high school English teacher, so I had some interpretive sophistication. *Maybe it's a royal we? Maybe it's some kind of metaphor?*

At that time it wasn't possible for me to imagine the ancient notion of a divine entourage, an idea I'd encounter in college. Or maybe, just maybe, God so inspired a writer, centuries before the arrival of Jesus, to hint toward the Trinity?

Now I'm a professional biblical scholar, guiding seminarians in the public interpretation of scripture. My colleagues and I make a huge point of warning future preachers not to read Christian messages *out of* the Hebrew Bible. It's fine to read our Christian questions back *into* the Hebrew Bible, we say, so long as we recognize their autonomy as the scriptures of Israel. They're not predicting or foreshadowing Jesus.

Let's not pretend that God hid secret Jesus messages in them like video game Easter eggs; it is we who bring our Christian concerns to those texts. Otherwise, we wind up

with the historically ridiculous—and violent—claim that Jews don't fully understand their own Bible. So no Jesus in Isaiah, we insist, and no Trinity in Genesis.

So no, I don't think Genesis 1 is promoting the doctrine of the Trinity. But I do read Genesis as a Christian. As a trinitarian Christian, I see the creation stories, this one and the one about the garden, calling attention to divine relationality.

In both stories the Creator assigns names to things. Why do that in the absence of relationship? In both stories the Creator establishes an intimate interaction between humankind and God's own self. Both stories feature a God who relishes in creation and chooses to share that creation with self-aware mortal partners: us. And remarkably, in both stories the Creator speaks of a self-referential "us," as if relationality occurs at the core the divine mystery.