

The Children of Kronos

Greek God Creation Myth



In the beginning there was nothing but chaos in the world, surrounded by unending water, and a god known as Oceanus ruled over all. The goddess Eurynome wished to make order, and so she separated sea from sky from land, and soon three new gods ruled. These were Gaia, or Mother Earth, Uranus, who ruled the heavens, and Tartarus, who ruled the terrible region beneath the ground.

Soon afterward, Gaia and Uranus married, and their children were the Titans, great, hulking giants. The leader of all the Titans was Cronus, and it was he who possessed power over all the creatures -- every creature on Earth and in the sea, in the heavens and underground.

Gaia, Cronus' mother, could see into the future, and she understood that all things change. She tried to teach this to her children, but Cronus just scoffed at her.

"I will rule forever," he said. "That is my wish, and so it shall be."

Gaia shook her head. "One day, one of your own children will take away your power," she said. "That is the way of the universe."

When Cronus heard this, he vowed he would never let a child of his defeat him. Each time his wife, Rhea, gave birth to a child, Cronus stole into the nursery, lifted the baby from its cradle and swallowed it whole.

When Gaia realized what her son was doing, she despaired. She decided she must do something to save the world from such cruelty and vanity, and so when Rhea next gave birth, Gaia was there by her side.

When no one was looking, Gaia lifted the baby out of the cradle and hid him beneath her robes. Then she replaced the baby with a stone she had wrapped in a blanket.

"Where is my son?" Cronus cried, storming into the room. "Give me my son whom you have called Zeus."

Gaia stepped away from the cradle, and Cronus reached in, picked up the blanket and swallowed the stone disguised as his son.

"Now go," Cronus said to Gaia, and she hurried away, carrying the baby to Crete, far from his father's reach.

In Crete, on Mount Ida, Gaia gave Zeus to the nymph Amalthea. "Care for this boy as if he were your own," Gaia instructed Amalthea. "Protect him from Cronus. Though Cronus is his father, he must never find this boy."

Amalthea took Zeus into her arms and into her heart. She hung a cradle from a tree so that Zeus could lie in a bed that could not be found either in heaven or on Earth or in the sea. Then she gathered young men from everywhere and trained them with shields and spears to be the young boy's protectors.

"Whenever the baby makes noise," Amalthea instructed them, "you must be louder still. No one in the universe must hear this child's cries. No one must know of his existence."

Now Amalthea owned a goat that gave the richest, sweetest milk, and it was this milk that Zeus drank when he was only a baby swinging in the cradle that hung from a tree.

One day as the goat was wandering, she chanced to catch one of her horns on a tree limb. When she tried to free herself, the horn broke from her head and fell to the ground. Amalthea picked it up. "I will take this to Zeus," she said, and to protect the horn, she wrapped it in fresh herbs and carried it to Zeus.

When she put it to the lips of the boy, fresh juice flowed from it, and when she removed it from his lips, she saw that it was full of wonderful food -- fruits and nuts and nectars, anything anyone would ever wish to eat.

And that was only the beginning of the extraordinary powers of that magical horn of plenty. No matter how much Zeus ate or drank, the horn was always full, and never was there a treat Zeus wished for that did not appear.

Zeus grew strong and powerful. And although he loved Amalthea and Crete, he began to long for his home.

At last he decided he must go home, and so he did, but as soon as he arrived, he became entangled with Cronus, though Cronus had no idea this was his son. He knew only that he felt threatened by the very sight of this powerful young man.

"Leave my land," Cronus demanded, "or I shall have to wage war against you."

Now Zeus understood Cronus was powerful, and he could never fight him alone. He would need the aid of his lost brothers and sisters, and so he called upon all those who loved him to help him to remain in his place of birth.

The very next day Cronus was tricked into swallowing a potion of herbs that he thought would make him invincible. Instead, the potion caused him to throw up five of his children whom he had swallowed at their births -- Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades and Poseidon.

Emerging from their father's mouth full grown, all the children joined their brother, Zeus, to fight their father.

Just as Gaia had predicted, Cronus was defeated, and so Zeus triumphed over his father and over his father's family of giants, the Titans. And he triumphed, too, over his brothers and sisters, for he was the one who had rescued them.

When the war ended, and the world was theirs, Zeus crowned himself the supreme god of the universe. Then he divided the world among his brothers and sisters, giving each a place to rule. Hestia was made goddess of the home; Poseidon, god of the sea; Demeter was goddess of the harvest; Hera of marriage and childbirth. Hades became god of the underworld where once Tartarus had ruled.

Zeus made a special place for the gods, a place that forever afterward was known as Mount Olympus, and to honor his nurse, Amalthea, and the horn of plenty, he transformed them into stars where, ever since, they have watched over all of us.