At the very beginning of the world the earth was a dry and dusty place, where nothing could live and nothing could grow. So God made a mist which watered the ground all over. Then with his great hands, he formed the first man out of the clay of the newly watered earth. Jane Ray's beautiful version of the familiar story takes into account creation myths the world over. The story of Adam and Eve is powerful because it is the story of all children growing up and going out into the world. It also reminds readers of all ages of the need to live in harmony with the earth.

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My Personal Review:
Ray's illustrations are lovely - colorful and luminous, with gilded touches to make everything everything in Eden seem newer, shinier, and more wondrous. Certain pages are framed with smaller, detailed pieces including maps, old-fashioned line drawings from scientific illustrations, and pieces of musical scores - that give them the appearance of sophisticated story quilts. Ray's people and animals are a wonderful example of the naive art style.

The story follows Adam's creation, the formation of the Garden, the creation of the animals as (not entirely satisfactory) companions for Adam, Eve's creation, and then the Fall and exile Adam and Eve's separate punishments are lumped together and made less sexist and more palatable: "Now you will learn what it is to be sad as well as happy," God said. "You will work your fingers to the bone growing food to eat and raising your children. And when you die, you will return to the earth from which you are made."

Interestingly enough, the book's final illustrations make Adam and Eve's eventual fate look not as bleak as traditionally pictured with the two of them
venturing off into a dull, dusty earth and making a respectable home of it for themselves - a garden outside of the Garden or a piece of Home - a redemptive task in and of itself.

Adam and Eve are nude - and funkily enough, tattooed - throughout (except in the final pages), but they blend in naturally with the varied patterns and coloration of the numerous animals surrounding them. Perhaps I myself fall a little on the laissez-faire side as regards nudity, but I think any parent who gets upset at the tiny peek we get at Eve's nipple here has perhaps a few issues to work through.

In any case, my three-year-old son likes it and I think it's beautiful and well told, so thumbs up from us.

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