

ALL SAINTS ANGLICAN CHURCH  
Springfield, Missouri  
Trinity Sunday  
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RCL, Year B

Isaiah 6: 1 – 6

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sited on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim, each one having six wings. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory!”

4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 So I said: “ Woe is me, for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.”

8 I also heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?”  
Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Psalm 29

- 1 Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, give unto the LORD glory and strength.
- 2 Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.
- 3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders; the LORD is over many waters.
- 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
- 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon.
- 6 He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire.
- 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh.
- 9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth, and strips the forests bare; and in His temple everyone says, “Glory!”
- 10 The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood, and the LORD sits as King forever.
- 11 The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace.

Romans 8: 12 – 17

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors - not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if you live by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body and you will live.

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage to live in fear. You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

John 3: 1 – 17

1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a religious leader of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most surely, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter again into his mother’s womb and be born?”

5 Jesus answered, “Most surely, I therefore say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it will, and you hear the sound of it, but you cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

10 Jesus answered saying, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? 11 Most surely, I say to you, We speak of what We know and testify of what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. 12 If I have told you of earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

**Holy Lord, Three in One in, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be present here that we may know You as You wish to be known, as You have revealed Yourself to us. Be present here in the praise we bring to You, crying with the angels, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts. The whole earth is full of Your glory!” AMEN.**

Two years ago I shared with you an experience I'd had in Israel, how I had a conversation with two young Jewish girls who were studying there. They'd heard their rabbi say that the concept of the Trinity can be found in the Torah. That statement had been shocking to them because they considered the Trinity to be a teaching exclusive to Christians.

After that experience I an opportunity to discuss it with a man at Christ Church in Jerusalem who pointed me to a little book by Rabbi Tzvi Nassi, titled “The Great Mystery,” in which Nassi laid out teachings on the Trinity from Old Testament sources and from the writings of ancient Jewish scholars.

One of the scholars quoted by Nassi, was Simeon ben Jochai, who lived in the second century BC, about one hundred and fifty years before the birth of Jesus. Ben Jochai wrote, “The path of faith is intersected by a wall. In that is a gate which is prescribed by three columns. one on the right, one in the center and one on the left, The column on the right is inscribed, 'Yahovah.' The column on the left is inscribed, 'Ruah.' The column in the center is inscribed with the name of him whom we do not yet know. There are three columns but only one gate.”

So it seems the concept of the Trinity, the One Godhead revealed as three persons, is not original to Christianity at all. It is an ancient truth, known to the Jews long before the incarnation of Jesus, the Messiah, that center column whom ben Jochas, in the second century before Christ, did not yet know.

The concept may be ancient but the understanding of it is, for the Jews, and for us, still difficult. Theologians and apologists have attempted to explain the Trinity. Poets and artists have tried to illustrate the mystery. Great men and women of faith have contemplated its meaning and significance. Yet for all their best efforts, the mystery remains.

How can three be one and one be three?

When I told Doug McGlynn I was speaking today he said the word among the “PCs” (in this context, that's Professional Clergy) is that you can't talk more than nine minutes on the subject without drifting into heresy. I don't want to become heretical so I'm going to try to keep my remarks under that limit. I want to divide that time to three issues: the scriptural basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, the historical importance of the doctrine and it's significance for us as 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. That just allows me three minutes per topic so I'd better get to it.

First, we first here God refer to Himself in the plural form in Genesis 1:26, ““Let us make man in our image.” The word “US,” used there, is “KHABOOLAW,” the plural form, and the word translated “OUR” is “KABA,” the possessive form of the same root. I think you'd agree the first chapter of Genesis is about as early in scripture as you can get.

There are 57 occurrences of one or the other of those two forms in the Old Testament were God is referring to Himself.

The phrase “Father, Son and Holy Ghost,” is first used Matthew 26: 18, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

References to God using plural forms or with multiple names are found in every book in the New Testament.

Skeptics are quick to point out that the term “Trinity” does not appear in Scripture, and they are correct, but it is impossible to argue that the concept of the Trinity is present in the entire scope of Scripture. As the Rabbi at that Jewish girls school rightly said, “the concept of the Trinity is embedded in the Torah. “ It is embedded in the whole of scripture.

What is the historical importance of the doctrine of the Trinity?

In the fourth century after Christ Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. By that time two major controversies had developed in the church. One was the doctrine of the nature of the Godhead. The concept of the Trinity was held by the bishops of Rome and Constantinople and by most of the western church. Arian, bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, and other leaders of the church in Asia and Africa, however, held to a Unitarian doctrine, stating that the Godhead was one and indivisible. Those holding the Unitarian position believed that Jesus was therefore not divine, or that he was not a physical being but only a spiritual manifestation of the divine presence.

The second controversy dividing the church was the setting of the date for Easter. This issue seems much less divisive to us today, but it was of great importance in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

To address these issues and come to one common, agreed upon doctrine, Constantine called a council of all bishops to be held at Nicaea in Bithynia, modern day Turkey, at which they would be addressed.

From that council, came the Nicene Creed, the first of the three great Trinitarian creeds, the later being the Apostles Creed, drafted at the Council of Constantinople in 381 and the Athanasian Creed, credited Athanasius, a 5<sup>th</sup> century bishop of Alexandria. All three are contained in the Book of Common Prayer, the Lutheran liturgy and the liturgies of the Orthodox churches.

Also at the Council of Nicaea, the rather arcane formula we still use for fixing the date of Easter was drafted. That is another tale, not germane to the topic we are addressing today.

Throughout the whole of church history from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onward the Trinitarian doctrine has prevailed among all orthodox believers. It is historically important and also very relevant to our situation today.

I can sum up the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for us today by referring again to that first reference to the form in Matthew 28.

This congregation has dedicated itself to the fulfilling of the Great Commission. It is the first mission of the Church.

**Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them**

**and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the *Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

Understanding the Trinity also helps us understand how "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Even before the creation of the world, there was love within the Trinity, and it is out of this life and love that creation came to be. It is because of the love which existed between the three persons of the Trinity that human beings came to be, created in God's own image, to know and love Him.

In one sense we can say that all creation is the result of God's love, the nature of the pure love knowable only in God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Our God, our creator, is present in all places and all times. He is not only the author of the material world, but of all that is seen and unseen, the creator of all space and matter and time.

The further reaches of space are His and in Him. He created the most distant galaxies and is as present there as He is here. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have all existed, Three in One, since before time was, before the creation of the worlds. They were all present at the moment of creation, all active in that amazing act when all that is was spoken into being by the Word.

God's nature is love. God is love. It is only in knowing God and His nature that we know true, unadulterated, uncompromising love. It is out of God's love, because of His love, that He created all that is. It is because of His love that He created us, all of humankind and us as individuals. At the moment of creation God, the Holy Trinity, was there! Yet before that moment He knew us. He knew us as individuals, children whom He loved, Before we had physical reality He loved us!

God's love prompted His creativity. God, the Holy Trinity created us to know and love Him, as well as to love one another!

When the creative force of God the Holy Spirit entered the body of Mary, Jesus was conceived. In that infant, from the moment of His conception, God was present. He grew into a baby, born as we were born, but fully divine from the moment of conception. He was cradled in a manger because this world made no other place for Him. Shepherds and Wise Men saw His divinity but few others knew that the

Messiah had come among men. He grew into a boy who astounded the scholars and sages by His knowledge of God's Word. They were astonished because they could not know that that boy, Jesus, was the embodiment of the Word. They did not know that God was there!

As a young man He worked with His human father, Joseph, the carpenter, not a worker of wood as we understand carpentry, but as a builder, fashioning dwelling places in which others would live. Yet Jesus had no place of his own in which to lay His head. He still fashions dwelling places for others - "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." God is there!

On the cross Jesus died, the one perfect and complete sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. God loved us and gave Himself for us. In the moments of Jesus' death and resurrection, just as in the moment of creation, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit was there!

As He ascended, the Son again took His place with the Father and the Holy Spirit. God, the Holy Trinity, yet even during the years of His earthly life, they were always one.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us. The Holy Spirit, whom Paul called the earnest of our inheritance, is with us. We, in Him, are one with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is here!

**Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, three in one, help to live in the mystery of your unity as we endeavor to be one in You. Help us to be one people, one family as we hold one hope. Let us be one light, the light of Christ. AMEN.**