

God is... Trinity
Matt 3:16-17, John 3:16, John 14:26, Rom 8:2

Well brothers and sisters, over the last five months we have been working to get to know God better by studying and learning more about His attributes. Even our Good Friday, Easter and Ascension celebrations tied into giving us a deeper understanding of who God is.

And I think you will agree that it's been impactful to learn the specifics of what makes God so divine, the vastness of His uncreated infinite being. The categorical difference between His self-existence and our created dependence. The magnitude of His ALL-knowing, ALL-powerful, and ALL-present capacity. The absolute perfection of His Holiness, Righteousness, and Justice and His long-suffering mercy and kindness and the absolutely jaw-dropping extravagant expressions of His grace and love that culminate in Jesus Christ.

I know it has been impactful for me – over the course of the past five months I feel my awe and reverence for God growing

and an ever-increasing desire that He receive glory and honor and a greater willingness to say “It’s ALL about Him!” I pray this is true for you as well.

Because brothers and sisters, the truth is that we as believers, and as the Church... we are at our best when we are gripped by the awesomeness and transcendence of God.

Because our natural tendency when it comes to God... is to be “cats” instead of “dogs.” I’ve told you before about the difference between cats and dogs right... a dog says “*you feed me, you play with me, you take care of me and love me... wow! You must be god!*” but a cat goes “*you feed me, you play with me, you take care of me and love me... hmmm... I must be god!*”

And so it goes with us; the providential care that God blesses humanity with, the message that God loves us and has a wonderful plan for us, the good news that He is willing to forgive us – our sinful nature hears that... and somehow believes this means its all about us – we’re at the center of it all.

But getting to know who God really is, as He reveals Himself in the scripture, flips that around. It's hard to stay focused on ourselves as the center when we realize that the entire universe is dependant upon the will of God to continue to exist... It's difficult to maintain our puffed-up sense of self importance when we realize that everything there is to know, or could be theoretically known or exist –like a multi-verse– comes from God and is already known by God.

And when this flip happens, when we decrease and God increases, we truly appreciate the significance of God drawing near to us, to be in relationship to us. As David says in Psalm 8:4 *“what is mankind that you are mindful of them? Human beings that you should care for them?”*

So let us continue then, to increase our appreciation for God's close and personal relationship with us by digging deeper into His self-revelation about His being, and learn what scripture has to say about His person and His essence.

Now what we have learned about God thus far as we have looked at His attributes, can be divided into two categories; communicable and incommunicable.

Incommunicable attributes are characteristics of God that we can't relate to or know anything about from our own experience; such as God's self existence, being uncreated and eternal without beginning or end, being infinite and so on...

His communicable attributes are characteristics that we do have a degree of experience with; such as goodness, mercy, love, knowledge... even though our experience is sin-tainted and extremely limited in comparison.

And our sin-tainted limited experience of these things illustrates why we need the assistance of Scriptural revelation to learn about God. It corrects our limited, sin-affected experiences and prevents us from incorrectly projecting these understandings on God. The best example of that right now is how scripture corrects our cultural understanding of love so

we don't misunderstand God's love or what it means when the scripture teaches us that **God** is love.

And scripture also reveals things to us about God that we would never be able to come up with on our own, regardless of what we may have personally experienced with Him, or how insightful we might be in drawing logical conclusions about being infinite and eternal creator.

Brothers and sisters, without the assistance of the scriptures we would never know that God is a Trinity, that He is three in one, one in three and this is the defining and unique characteristic of His person and essence.

If you compare what God reveals about Himself in the Holy Bible to what other religions claim about God you'll see that this Trinitarian revelation of His person and essence is unique to the scriptures and the Christian faith and it is one of the reasons why we consider what the bible says about God to be the correct revelation of who He is.

Because every other religion tends to either project human-like characteristics onto the person and essence of their gods like the Greek or Romans gods, or the personality and essence of being god is eclipsed by the reality of how vast and immense being divine truly is and it becomes an impersonal divine force, like Brahman or Nirvana in eastern religions.

Which shows, that in spite of all the spirituality, devotion, or charity which these religions inspire, their god(s) are not the one true and living God who reveals Himself in the scripture, rather they are idols and ideals that reflect our humanity and not the true divinity. It's still about us... but God's person and essence being three in one and one in three, that doesn't reflect anything of being human, of our person and essence, its not the kind of thing we'd project on to God.

So the first thing about God being Trinity that we can learn this morning, is that it gives support to the scriptures claim being the one and only authorized revelation of the true God, and the resulting Christian faith as the one true religion.

And the second thing we need to know about God being Trinity is that its revelation in the scriptures is indirect. You won't actually find the word "trinity" anywhere in the scriptures, there is no specific passage of scripture where the entirety of the trinitarian relationship in all its complexities and nuances is clearly articulated.

To quote theologian Louis Berkhof; *"The bible never deals with the doctrine of the Trinity as an abstract truth. But reveals the trinitarian life in its various relations as a living reality; to a certain extent in connection with the works of creation and providence, but particularly in relation to the work of redemption."* (Systematic Theology pg.85)

We see this taking place in the first three verses of scripture as God creates the world. In the beginning GOD... and then in vs. 2 we read and the SPIRIT of God... was hovering over the waters. Then vs. 3 and God SAID *"let there Be!"* This is the Word of God, present at the creation, doing the work of creation as Psalm 33:6 attests; *"By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made..."* So, here we have trinitarian revelation

of God with distinctions made between God and the Spirit and His Word in the work of creation.

Later in the O.T. we are introduced to the Angel of Yahweh, who is on one hand identified on par with Yahweh as His messenger and yet distinguished from Him. An example of this is in Gen 16 the Angel of Yahweh appears to Hagar and instructs her to return to Sarah, and scripture records Hagar speaking of this encounter in vs. 13 saying *"She gave this name to Yahweh who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."*

And Then we have instances like Isaiah 48:12 where the speaker is clearly someone who is God because he says *"I am he; I am the first and I am the last."* But then in vs. 16 the speaker clearly distinguishes Himself from two other divine persons saying *"the Sovereign Yahweh has sent me, endowed with his Spirit."*

These are some clear indications that while the O.T. definitely emphasizes the oneness, the unity of God's essence in

contrast to the multiple gods and idols of the gentiles – there are divine distinctions of personhood in God with regards to His Spirit and someone else who appears as an angel, the Word of God, and a messiah figure.

Now all of this is going to become much clearer in the N.T. because the specifics of God’s redemptive plan are going to become much clearer. We often say that the N.T. is in the O.T. but its concealed, and the O.T. is very much in the N.T. because it’s been revealed, and that’s also how it works with references to the persons and essence of God as well.

And there’s no other passage where transition is more evident than John 1 where the Word is clearly identified as God and in vs. 14 clearly identified as the person of the Godhead who becomes incarnate as Jesus Christ.

And the passages selected for our scripture readings this morning are also illustrative of the increasing clarity that is given to describing the relationship between these divine persons who are all given equal consideration as being God.

In Mathew 3 at the baptism of Jesus, you have the voice from Heaven, the Holy Spirit descending from heaven, and Jesus being referred to as “Son” by the voice from heaven.

John 3:16 clearly connects the persons of Father and the Son and their working together for the purpose bringing eternal life to the world to save people from perishing.

In John 14:26 we have Jesus speaking of the work the Holy Spirit will be sent by the Father to do, and in Romans 8:2 Paul states that Jesus and the Holy Spirit work together to bring freedom from sin and death.

And finally, Jesus himself specifies the persons of the Godhead in Mathew 28:19 when He commands us to work with Him in making disciples – which we do by baptizing people in the name of... the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

These are but a few examples of how the distinctions between the divine persons grow more explicit and specific as God’s plan of redemption is accomplished and carried out by Jesus

and then passed on to the Church to be continued as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

So, even though the scriptures do not give us a doctrinal statement on the Trinity, there is clear evidence from both the O.T. and the N.T. that there is one God who exists in unity as three persons – a Tri Unity.

And from this scriptural starting point it has been the responsibility and work of the Church, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to help believers correctly understand and speak about God as Trinity, which we should all be able to do since we are supposed to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

However, the irony is that while all Christians will say “Yes, of course God is Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” IF you were to asked to explain **how** God is Trinity, you would likely end up doing so incorrectly – perhaps using one of the classic heretical examples of God being like a shamrock, or God being like water which can take the form of liquid, solid or steam.

Now this is understandable in one sense because there is nothing in ALL of the creation that is similar to God’s persons and His essence – because God is set apart from the creation, and while it is good and wonderful and amazing because He made it, He is absolutely beyond it and all it can do is simply point to Him – but it can’t give us anything that is actually analogous to Him.

So the truth is that God’s persons and essence are mind boggling and difficult to get our heads around – and even though its arguably the central defining feature of the Christian faith – most of us find it practically irrelevant in our daily Christian lives (apart from our three colors of spirituality tool) and some would even say that the effort required to speak of God correctly is better focused on something else like loving our neighbors.

Perhaps you’ve heard people say something to the effect of *“What does it matter if you can’t accurately explain how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all God and yet three persons? Isn’t it just more important that I love God and believe in*

Jesus?” Or perhaps this summarizes how you feel about trying to understand God as Trinity...

Well brothers and sisters, here's the third thing we need to learn about the Trinity. Knowing and understanding and being able to speak correctly about how God reveals Himself to us in the scriptures pleases and honors and glorified God!

Being concerned that God is spoken correctly of - shows that you truly desire to honor Him, that he's not an abstract concept, but that He's real, and you understand its pleasing to Him when we have spent time learning about Him, to understand what He reveals to us about Himself, and it is respectful of us to get it right when we talk about Him.

We need to realize how dismissive and arrogant it is to say things like *“don't bother with all that theology stuff about God, all those doctrinal details about the Trinity – what's most important about God is that He's Love! What's more important is that I love God...”*

Brothers and sisters, I think you've learned enough about how great God and how expansive He is in ALL of His attributes... to know how offensive it is to reduce all of God's magnificence down to just one of His perfections like His Goodness, or to gloss over how much incredible detail is contained in each of His perfections and blur it all together with a vague notion such as love, that reflects more of our own sinfulness than it does God's perfection.

Put yourself in God's shoes for a moment – if that is even possible... but just consider for a moment; how would you feel if someone was speaking about you in such a simplistic dismissive reductionist way?

We're all unique people, complex and multi-faceted, fearfully and wonderfully made as Psalm 139:14 says. So we're more than a pretty face, we're more than just a worker on the job, we're more than a paycheck, we're more than the clothes we wear and the cars we drive right?

And we expect that those who are in a relationship with us would take the time to get to know all about us and be able to speak correctly about us to other people.

You would not be impressed with me as your pastor if someone asked me about you what you were like and I replied *“Oh, yes I know so and so - they seem to be nice, glad to have them fill up a seat and put a donation in on Sundays!”* that’s simplistic and reductionistic and it completely dismisses all the unique interesting things about you – and you’d be offended.

Brothers and sisters, its no different with God. Do you **want** to have a relationship with God? Then let’s make it all about God, spend the time and put in the effort that is required to get to really know Him and be able to show that you know Him in how you talk about Him. He’s definitely worth it!

So, let me share what we confess about how we know God’s person and essence and how make sure that we’re speaking accurately about Him.

There is in the Divine Being, one indivisible essence. As Deuteronomy 6:4 says *“Hear o Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one!”* and Isaiah 45:5 proclaims *“I am Yahweh, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God”* The very nature of God as self-existing and infinite means that the essence of God is one – for there can only be one such being.

Additionally there is no contradiction or conflict with God, there is no struggle to be faithful to Himself as is the source of all Law, He is one.

Anything that suggests there is another divine being apart from the One God is false, anything that would divide or separate the divine essence is false, God is one – unified in His essence and the only one who is God.

So, now that we’ve established that. We can say that in this Divine Being there are three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now this state of existence is impossible for us to grasp experientially, and its extremely difficult for us to comprehend logically.

But I think Louis Berkhof explains it well. *“Our experience teaches us that where you have a person there you also have a distinct individual essence. Every person is a distinct and separate individual, in whom human nature is individualized. But in God there are NOT three individuals alongside of and separate from each other – but personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence.”* (Systematic Theology pg. 87)

What we have to guard against is speaking of or describing these persons in such a way that it would separate them so that there are three Gods, we don’t want to do that – rather we need to described them in such a way to keep their distinctions as they share the same essence. So how do we do this?

We confess that the whole of the undivided essence of the Divine being belongs equally to the each of the three persons. So, in how we speak and especially in how we act, we must reflect that the Holy Spirit is just as much God as the Son is, and they are both no more or any less God than is the Father. In other words we can’t have a favorite or preferred person of

the Trinity, and treat them preferentially as God – they are all equally God.

However... We would not be taking all the scriptural evidence into account, and we would be blurring the clear distinction and relation of these persons if we did not acknowledge that while all equally God they are marked by certain and definite order. The Father is first, the Son is second and the Holy Spirit third. Thus, we know who are talking about if we are to say the 1st person of the Trinity or the 3rd person of the Trinity.

From scripture we know that the Father is neither begotten nor does He proceed eternally from the other persons. But the Son is eternally begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit does proceed eternally from both the Father and the Son. Yet that does not in any way change their equality in the divine essence.

Thus there are certain personal attributes by which the persons are distinguished from each other within the Trinity in relation to each other. Generation belongs to the Father,

making the Father – Father, belongs to the Son, and proceeding belongs to the Holy Spirit – these are their characteristics between each other that give distinction to their persons – without detracting from the one divine essence.

The work of the three persons of the Trinity also manifests outward, and thus to the Father primarily is given Creation (but through the Word with Spirit hovering over the water) to the Son is primarily given Redemption (but sent by the Father, and conceived by the Spirit) and to the Spirit is primarily given Sanctification (but sent by the Son from the Father) Always three in one and one in three.

Now I know this is a lot to take in and get our heads around, that's why is good to be reminded of it frequently and meditate on it bit by bit to really comprehend it. And I know you are capable of this – not only because The Spirit of God Himself dwells in you – and He knows Himself and can help you understand... but if y'all can tell me all about the MCU and how this whole multi-verse thing fits together and keep

track of all the story lines, plot twists and the heroes and their powers...

y'all can learn the guidelines about how to describe the nature of God and speak correctly about His being One in Three and Three in One.

And speaking correctly about God does not tame God, speaking correctly about the Trinity does not mean we've put God in neat little tidy box that makes it easy to understand Him and put Him in our pocket. In actually, it's the bad analogies about shamrocks, water or three-layer cakes which do that.

Following the guidelines about how speak correctly of God's persons and essence will always remind us and confront us with the truth that God's person and essence remain beyond our comprehension.

The essential nature and experience of God being three in one and one in three is beyond our ability to take it and make

intelligible. It is a mystery that we must humble ourselves and bow before... because its not about us – its about this amazing and mind blowing divine being of whom we confess “You are Father, You are Son, You are Holy Spirit... yet you are One... you must be God!” Amen!

Would you join me in proclaiming the Church’s confession about the persons and essence of God from the Athanasian Creed.

That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence.
For the person of the Father is a distinct person,
the person of the Son is another,
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.
But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.

What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has.

The Father is uncreated,
the Son is uncreated,
the Holy Spirit is uncreated.
The Father is immeasurable,
the Son is immeasurable,
the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

The Father is eternal,
the Son is eternal,
the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet there are not three eternal beings;
there is but one eternal being.
So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;
there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty,
the Son is almighty,
the Holy Spirit is almighty.
Yet there are not three almighty beings;
there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God,
the Son is God,
the Holy Spirit is God.
Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord,
the Son is Lord,
the Holy Spirit is Lord.
Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.

Just as Christian truth compels us
to confess each person individually
as both God and Lord,
so it also forbids us
to say that there are three gods or lords

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.

The Son was neither made nor created;
he was begotten from the Father alone.

The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten;
he proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers;
there is one Son, not three sons;
there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

Nothing in this trinity is before or after,
nothing is greater or smaller;
in their entirety the three persons
are coeternal and coequal with each other.

So in everything, as was said earlier,
we must worship their trinity in their unity
and their unity in their trinity.

Anyone then who desires to be saved
should think thus about the trinity.
Amen.