



## THE HOLY TRINITY

30 MAY AD 2010

The lessons assigned for today are:  
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31, Acts 2:14a, 22-36  
and John 8:48-59

The Holy Trinity is what we call *HIM*; one God in three unique persons. If you call on any one, have called on them all. To Philip, Jesus said, “*if you have seen me, you have seen the Father... I am in the Father, and the Father is I me...*” (John 14) “*Before Abraham was, I am.*” (John 8) As your bulletin suggests, the biblical roots for the **dogma** we know as *the holy trinity* run deep: Old and New Testament. But it remained for those Christians who followed the Apostles to define the relationship between the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

### *History and scripture teach us*

I believe Tertullian (ca. 160 – AD 220) gets the credit for the term “trinity.” However, following Jesus’ instructions at the end of Matthew, the Didache which mentions the three-fold name under which we live and under which we must baptize. We don’t hear about the Didache very often; it is the oldest Christian writing outside the New Testament. There are some who believe it to be the apostolic teaching stemming from the Council at Jerusalem recorded in Acts. It is enough for us to understand that Christians have always accepted the uniqueness of God—the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit), though they may not have had the fully articulated doctrine which came later.

As early as Genesis 1 we read that the Spirit, the one whom we call “*the Lord and giver of life*” is “*hovering over the face of the waters (deep).*” In the beginning God called all things into existence by the power of his Word—the Word which became flesh in Christ (John 1). Christians are quick to recall the place in Genesis where God speaks to himself in the plural saying, “*let us make man in our image.*” But in regard to the Trinity, most meaningful to me is the visit of God to Abraham by the Oaks of Mamre in Genesis 18. Here, three “men” from heaven appear to the patriarch and his wife, and together they speak with the voice of “*THE LORD.*” Abraham bows to them. They promise to Abraham and Sarah a son.

At a certain point we have to admit that all human illustrations will come up short. Even my “apple demonstration” goes only so far. At a certain point, God is beyond our knowledge. He is infinite, we are finite. The Bible can only tell us so much, In the end God is shrouded in mystery and received by the faithful as paradox. I like it that way. A god that I totally understand, I might be tempted to

manipulate. That just can't be good.

But the faithful can experience God. They might not always understand him but they do know first hand his love (grace), and his forgiveness. I don't have to understand all the electrical complexities inside my computer to use it and depend on it. The faithful know God, if not because of the carefully explained doctrinal formulae then they know enough simply to love and serve him.

### God is not beyond experience

- When we are uplifted by the congregation's singing of a hymn; that's one aspect of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

United in a project to help the homeless, the hungry or needy, that is the work of the Spirit. And when you are filled with peace in the midst of a crisis, that too is the presence of God the Holy Spirit.

- Where we are gathered in the name of Jesus to reconcile one of the lost, or hear the old familiar accounts from the gospels, or to break the bread, there we are participating in the overflowing love of God through the Son.
- Hiking around the top of High Point we can observe the handiwork of God the Father, our Creator. When you, speechless and in tears, hold in your arms for the very first time your own infant son or daughter, you have participated in the miracle of God's creation.

But the thing about any one of these examples is that they seem to fall short. And if you think of God only as Father or only as Spirit, you also fall short. It is hard to speak about the Father without the Son. It is hard (if not impossible or even wrong) to speak about Jesus, the Cross and the on-going work of the Gospel without the Holy Spirit. It's as if (and remember all examples have their limits), but it's as if the three are locked in a divine dance. That dance is for the sake of world, and particularly the men and women who being invited into the dance. We must drop all inhibitions (fears and doubts) to follow.

Abraham and Sarah, their past is shrouded in mystery. We know nothing of them before they step out onto "the dance floor of biblical history" and begin to waltz with God. They leave behind many gods, a way of life, and probably family. Generations later the children of Israel will leave behind Egypt, with its various deities; Horace, Ra, Osiris to name but a few. And just like Abraham they will follow the ONE GOD across the desert, embraced in a dance with God. He will take them to a home they'd never seen before.

Following God in faith has been likened to a dance by more than one person. I didn't invent it just for this morning. When I was a teen we sang of Jesus using an old Shaker melody, to which had been added these new lyrics in the 1960s:

*I danced in the morning when the world was begun  
I danced in the moon, and the stars and the sun.  
I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,  
At Bethlehem I had my birth.  
Dance then whoever you may be,  
"I am Lord of the dance," said he.  
And I lead you all wherever you be  
For I am the Lord of the dance said he. (Sydney Carter)*

There is something right about a dancing God. Our LORD is movement, energy, power and life. How many times are we reminded in scripture that God is not wood, or metal or stone. God goes with you everywhere. God simply *Is*. When the Spirit comes to fulfill Jesus' promise to Nicodemus, to this apostles, to you and me—you can't pin him down. He's always moving, from Jerusalem, to Samaria, to Rome, to the ends of the earth. He's pushing you to new experiences and helping you to grow.

Remember the eighth grade dance? Everyone is so reluctant to get up and move. The girls sit on one side of the gym, the guys are over in a corner talking, no one moving. That's the Church in the book of Acts, in those early days. And then the Spirit arrives and teaches them how to move, how to follow his lead. He pushes and cajoles the church, even when we'd rather sit on the side.

But God is Lord of the Dance. He gets us up and he pushes us beyond the comfort zone; that's where we experience his power, the love of God, in the fellowship of the Spirit. When we move, that's when we are most authentically his disciples, and that's when we know the joy of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Rev. Stephen Vogt Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Hamburg, NJ 0419 Poplc-hamburg.org
---