

June 4, 2023
Text: John 3:1-17

The Holy Trinity

One of the great blessings of our Lutheran confession of faith is our absolute trust in God's Word, even when our minds and our reason can't fully comprehend what God tells us in His Word. We simply trust that God's Word is true and leave the "how" and "why" to the Almighty.

Perhaps no other Sunday captures this idea quite like today, the Festival of the Holy Trinity. This is a Sunday that focuses on some of the unexplainable mysteries of the faith. We would like to solve those mysteries, but God doesn't give us the complete answer.

Yet as we consider them closer and learn to trust God and take Him at His Word, we find that God blesses us greatly through these mysteries.

The first of the mysteries we'll address today is the Biblical teaching after which this Sunday is named: the teaching of the Holy Trinity. This truth which God tells us about Himself in Holy Scripture is pretty well spelled out in the Athanasian Creed which we just recited.

The basic point is that there is only one God, and that this God is three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not the Father, and yet all three are fully the one God. How does this work? We don't know! The mystery of the Trinity is beyond our understanding, something that is held by faith. God says that this is how He is, and so we believe Him.

If it's something we can't grasp totally, then when do we devote a whole Sunday to it? If it's so abstract, why do we care so much about it? Does the Church really need something so drawn out as the Athanasian Creed?

The reason why we care so much about this is that we care so much about God. God is the source of everything good, and who He is is reflected in the goodness He shows to us. Or to put it another way, many of the blessings God gives to us come out of the reality that He is Triune.

For example, the Father is God, and so from Him come blessings that are fatherly. God the Father, as the perfect father, provides for His children, giving them all they need for body and soul.

A father protects his children, and God the Father defends us from all danger and guards and protects us from every evil. His fatherly eye is always watching over us, and His hand is always holding us, supporting us at every moment.

God the Father also disciplines us, but His discipline comes not out of anger but out of love, that we would walk in the way which He knows is best for us. All this He does out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us.

In addition to being blessed by God the Father, we are also blessed by God the Son. It is the Son who reveals the Father, who lets us see the God who no man can look upon and live.

It is the Son who becomes our Brother, one of us. He takes on our flesh. He endures our temptations. He feels our sufferings. He even dies our death. Because Jesus, the Son, is fully God, the sacrifice He offered on the cross is of infinite value.

His divine life paid for the sins of the entire human race. And as God, risen from the dead, the Son has the authority to give the peace He won on the cross to whomever He desires.

As well as the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is also the God who blesses us. By His divine power, He drives out the spirits of sin and doubt and comes to dwell in the hearts of men.

Just as God first breathed the spirit of life into Adam, making Adam a living being, God the Holy Spirit comes and grants new life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. He works to shatter hearts of stone and bring to life hearts that love.

It is the Spirit who blows throughout the world, granting saving faith whenever and wherever it pleases Him. By His power, we not only know the Word of God, but we believe it, we trust in it, and we are given peace through it.

These are all ways in which God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – blesses us as the Trinity. It's also the fact that God is Triune that explains why He gives us these blessings.

Why does God bless us? Because He loves us! You've probably heard from the Bible that God is love. Love is an essential part of who God is, and because God is unchanging, He has always been love. But for this to be true, God must have someone to love. Love can't exist in itself; it has to have an object – someone who is loved.

Before God created the world, whom did He love? Well, the Father loves the Son and the Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Spirit, the Spirit loves the Father and the Son. Because of the Trinity, God is love eternally.

And so the love that God has for you is eternal. All the blessings He gives you flow out of that love. The Father blesses out of love. The Son blesses out of love. The Spirit blesses out of love. It is that love that caused Him to create you, to redeem you from your sins, and to draw you to Himself.

The persons of the Trinity dwell together in love, and in love God desires to draw us into Himself as well. Again, that's why He made us in the first place.

But we are corrupted by sin, made impure by our decisions to love ourselves rather than God. This sin separates us from God, from His love and life. It cuts us off from that perfect relationship of the Trinity. And since sin cannot exist in the presence of the holy God, we are totally unable to come to Him through anything we might do.

But God's love for us isn't stopped by our sins, and so He works to bring us out of darkness and back into His light. He does this by yet another great mystery: Holy Baptism.

When Jesus is talking to Nicodemus in our Gospel lesson, He speaks of this. He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. And again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."

In order to be in the Kingdom, a person must be reborn. And this isn't birth in the sense of coming out of the womb – part of Nicodemus's confusion. No, Jesus is here speaking of birth as in conception, as in the moment you come into existence.

Perhaps a better translation would be the word "begotten," which our Bibles do use elsewhere. Jesus is here speaking of not just going through a process, but rather of being remade, re-conceived, re-created.

This is what really blows Nicodemus's mind. He's stuck asking, "But what do I need to do? What part do I play in getting this righteousness from God?" He, like all people, can't grasp the truth that salvation totally comes from God.

We are flesh, and as Jesus points out, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." In order to be born of the Spirit, begotten in the Kingdom, it must be God the Holy Spirit who acts. That's what Holy Baptism is – a begetting of water and the Spirit, as Jesus describes it.

When Kellin was baptized this morning, he was reborn, conceived anew, by the Holy Spirit. Kellin was born of the Spirit right before our very eyes! Did it look like a glorious, heavenly event? No, it actually looked pretty earthly, pouring water on a baby. But Jesus says it will be earthly! He tells Nicodemus, "If I have told you of earthly things and you did not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" Jesus has been talking about being begotten anew, about the Kingdom of God, about the action of the Holy Spirit, and He describes these as "earthly things!"

Jesus is stating that He – God – will work through ordinary, earthly means to recreate people and bring them into His Kingdom. Holy Baptism is where all this happens. It's a mystery how exactly the Almighty works through water, but again, God blesses us through His mysteries!

The mystery of Holy Baptism is then what ties us to the mystery of the Trinity and the blessings found there in God.

When God conceives us, He becomes our Father. He is not just some powerful God far off, uncaring and impersonal. No, in our Baptisms, He becomes, as we confess in the Catechism, our true, dear Father, and we are His true, dear children.

Kellin now has the best, the perfect Father, the Father who will always watch over him, always protect him, always provide for him, always love him. And that is the Father of all you who are baptized.

Not only did Kellin get a new, perfect Father today, he also was given a new, perfect Brother. Jesus Christ was, as we confess in the creeds, conceived by the Holy Spirit. In Holy Baptism, Kellin was re-conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Of course, he, and all of us, are still sinners, unlike Christ who was born free of sin. But the fact remains that, sharing the same Father, the Son of God is your Brother. He shares in your sorrows, your suffering, your pain. He is the God who knows what you go through.

And He, the perfect Brother, gives up what He has, even His life, for you. He our Brother has gone ahead to prepare a place for us in our Father's house.

And as we wait for the day when we will enter that house, we are sustained by the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts. When Kellin was baptized, the Spirit who brooded over the waters at Creation came through these waters and made Kellin a new creation. Kellin's body is now a temple of the Holy Spirit. The light of faith now shines in his little heart.

How can a baby have such things? Who knows! God has declared it, and so it is! The Spirit blows where He wills! And again, this is true for all who are begotten of the Spirit.

Kylie, treasure the gift the Lord has given your son today. Toni, Brian, seek to feed and guide this faith in your godson. All of you, remember this newest member of the Kingdom of God in your prayers, for he is your brother in Christ, in the family of God that will outlast every earthly family.

And treasure your own Baptisms. Give thanks that God is your Father, that Christ is your Brother, that the Spirit is your life. Don't let the world and its temptations pull you away from your God. Don't forsake His Word or take it for granted and thereby starve your faith.

Look to the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross for you. Hear the testimony of God, that He would cause you to believe both earthly and heavenly things. And rejoice, that our God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – has granted that you should not perish but have eternal life.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.