

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

GOD THE HOLY TRINITY

Isaiah 6:1-7, Rev. 4:6-11; Holy Trinity; May 25-26, 2024

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity has been believed and taught since the founding of the Church, although the term “trinity” itself was created later to label this doctrine. “Tri,” which means three, is combined with a form of the word for “one,” as in “unit” or “unity” to form “Trinity” or “Triune.” The Holy God is One, but this God is also mysteriously three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is a brief summary of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. We will confess the doctrine more extensively later using the Athanasian Creed.

If our focus today were simply to properly define God as One in Three and Three in One, then the focus of this festival would be on a doctrine, a teaching in the Church, which – to be honest – is sort of boring. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity as an idea or concept does not need a special day in the Church. If our primary focus is on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, then today becomes like studying for a test we need to pass in order to go to heaven.

The Athanasian Creed reminds us that, “Whoever desires to be saved, must above all, hold the catholic faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally” (1-2). Unless we believe in this God, we are not Christians and won’t go to heaven. Religious organizations like Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others that deny the Holy Trinity, no matter what they claim to be, are not Christian and are leading their members to hell.

Our salvation is at stake when it comes to who our God is. Only those who believe in God the Holy Trinity are saved. It is good for us to confess this true faith today, especially in the face of those who would deny it, but that is actually a secondary focus for us. What is primary to the Festival of the Holy Trinity?

We are here to worship and adore the Triune God Himself, which is exhilarating, not boring. The Athanasian Creed states: “And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity” (3-4).

Today's sermon is based on the Isaiah 6 Old Testament Reading and chapter 4 of the Revelation of St. John. That the Holy Trinity is the God who is to be worshiped and adored is highlighted in them.

Hear now the Revelation passage: **And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"**

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who is seated on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created." (4:6b-11)

Both Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 describe the worship given to God the Holy Trinity and why He is adored. The "Thrice Holy" God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the **LORD of hosts**, *Yahweh Sabaoth* in Hebrew, the **Lord God Almighty**, before whom His creatures bow down and give **glory, honor, and thanks**.

The first thing we should note is that the Holy Trinity is God, and we are His creatures, the ones God created to worship and adore Him. Two types of creatures are described in the texts: heavenly and earthly. Heavenly creatures include the angel **seraphim** and the **four living creatures** with six wings each. The earthly creatures around God's heavenly throne are the **twenty-four elders**, twelve who represent the tribes of Old Testament Israel and twelve who represent the New Testament people of God. Whether these are visions of after the resurrection of the dead and eternity itself, or of those believers in heaven who are still waiting for the end, is not crystal clear to me.

What is clear is that the **LORD of hosts**, the **Lord God Almighty**, is to be worshiped by His creatures. When we gather here for church, we join those heavenly and earthly creatures around God's throne, as Jesus promised, **"Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am among them"** (Mt 18:20). Though we can't see it now, when we come into the church's Holy of Holies to eat and drink Jesus' glorious body and blood at the Lord's Supper, we join Isaiah and John, the angel seraphim and four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and all other saints in worshiping our Triune God.

The main difference between creatures in heaven and on earth is that the ones in heaven have no sin in them. Isaiah, when he was given his vision of God's glory, realized this and became afraid. **"Woe is me! For I am lost; for 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!"** This reminds me of when Moses was on the Mountain and asked God to see His glory and was warned that would be deadly to him and any other sinners. **"You cannot see My face, [the LORD said,] for man shall not see Me and live"** (Ex. 33:20).

This brings us to the second thing we should note about the adoration and worship of the Triune God. Isaiah, a sinful man, was able to stand in God's holy presence because God took away his guilt, forgiving his sins by atoning for them. John and all the souls in heaven were able to remain alive in God's glory for the same reason: the forgiveness of sins. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity, "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man" (Ath. Cr. 28). John saw this Jesus in heaven as the **Lamb** of God. He worshiped Jesus by confessing, **"You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God"** (Rev. 5:6, 9).

Guilt has to do with sin, and atonement has to do with the forgiveness of our sins. Today we worship and adore God the Holy Trinity because **our guilt has been taken away, and our sin atoned for**. Those who believe in Jesus as their Savior understand what it means to worship God as sinful creatures in this world. Realizing our sin, we say with Isaiah, **"Woe is me!"** When we confess our sins, we admit that don't deserve to stand in God's holy presence and live.

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Consider this illustration: You are driving down the road in your car and you see up ahead some commotion. You had passed by this way a little while earlier going the other direction and saw something out of the corner of your eye but had kept going. Now, as you get closer, you see the aftermath of a terrible accident. And to your horror, you realize that you were the cause of the accident. Arriving at the accident scene, you see up close the wreckage, the blood, and the dead bodies strewn on the road. You say to yourself, “What have I done?”

That is how we should consider ourselves as we confess our sins in our worship of God. What Peter accused the Pentecost crowds of also applies to all of us: **you crucified Jesus** (Ac 2:36). Our sins murdered Jesus. As we come forward to receive the Lord’s Supper, we draw nearer to the crucifixes in church which remind us of Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross because we are God’s sinful creatures. Is that the guilt we feel when we confess our sins? Are the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper just concepts, ideas, doctrines, and teachings to us? Or do we say of ourselves, “**Woe is me!**” when we consider the cost Jesus paid to cover our guilt and atone for our sins?

We worship and adore God the Holy Trinity because the Father sent His Son in the flesh of man to suffer for our guilt and atone for our sins. Risen from the dead, Jesus has sent His Holy Spirit to make us God’s children by the water and Word of Holy Baptism, to give us faith in God, save us from perishing, and give us eternal life. **For God [the Father] so loved the world that He... did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.** That is why we worship and adore our God.

As the Introit for Holy Trinity puts it: “Blessèd be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us” (Introit antiphon). Amen.

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

[Athanasian Creed; Bulletin pg. 6]