

Knowing and Delighting in God

23rd-24th March 2024

To be a Christian is to know the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But what does this mean? Over this weekend we will think carefully about these questions. The answers will help us to know the one true God better and to worship him with understanding, wonder, and joy.

See also the separate handout of Historic Christian Creeds and Confessions

Why a weekend like this?

Theme Verse:

**And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**

John 17:3

Sessions 1 and 2 God is Three-in-One (= Triune)

Introduction: The Trinity is foundational to Christianity, defines Christianity, and is unique to Christianity

“baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”
(Matthew 28:19)

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Headline 1: The Old Testament insists that there is One God – and this matters!

Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

Deuteronomy 4:35 “there is no other besides him”

What about other gods and goddesses?

Exodus 15:11 “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?”

The One True God is not made up of parts (the doctrine of the “simplicity” of God)

Article 1 (39 Articles)

“There is but one living and true God, . . . without . . . parts.”

Why does it matter that God is one?

1. One God holds the universe together
“And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one” (Zechariah 14:9).
2. One God calls us to one loyalty and love
“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5; see also Exodus 20:3)

Creeds and Confessions

Nicene Creed ‘I believe in one God’

Athanasian Creed ‘we worship one God’

Westminster Confession 2 ‘There is but one only, living and true God.’

Headline 2 The Old Testament shows that there is a richness in God's unity

1. One common Hebrew word for "God" (*Elohim*) is plural.
2. The Word of God
'By the word of the LORD the heavens were made' (Psalm 33:6)
'He sent out his word and healed them' (Psalm 107:20)
3. The Wisdom of God
'The LORD possessed/fathered me at the beginning of his work . . .'
'when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman . . . ' (Proverbs 8:22-31)
4. The angel of the Lord
e.g., Judges 6:12 'the angel of the LORD'; 6:16 'the LORD'
5. The breath/wind/spirit of God
' . . . and by the breath of his mouth all their host' (Psalm 33:6)

Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament: How the Trinity was revealed and how the Gospel was revealed (like pulling back the curtains to shine light on a fully-furnished room).

Headline 3: The New Testament agrees with the Old Testament that there is one God

Mark 12:29-30 (Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 'the LORD our God, the LORD is one')

Romans 3:29-30 'God is one'

Galatians 3:20 'God is one'

1 Timothy 2:5 'For there is one God'

James 2:19 'You believe that God is one; you do well.'

Headline 4: The New Testament demonstrates that Jesus Christ is God

(A) Statements that imply that Jesus is God, e.g.,

1. Jesus claims extraordinary loyalty
Luke 14:26 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his wife and children, his brother and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple'
2. Jesus could abolish the Old Testament if he had chosen to do this!
'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 5:17)
3. Jesus decides who will enter the kingdom of heaven.
Matt. 7:21-23 ('I never knew you')
4. Jesus decides who can know the Father.
'no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27)
5. Jesus never sinned
'Which one of you convicts me of sin?' (John 8:46)
'yet without sin' (Hebrews 4:15)
6. No human being ever taught like Jesus
'No one ever spoke like this man!' (John 7:46)
7. Jesus forgives sins
'Son, your sins are forgiven.'
'Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' (Mark 2:5-7)
8. Paul's authority comes 'by Jesus Christ and God the Father' (Galatians 1:1)
9. Grace and peace come 'from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 1:7)
10. Jesus was alive before Abraham
'Before Abraham was, I AM' (John 8:48)
11. Jesus 'descended from heaven' (John 3:13)
12. Jesus does exactly what God does.
'whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise' (John 5:19)

(B) Direct statements that Jesus is God, e.g.,

1. 'the Word was God' 'the only God, who is in the Father's bosom' (John 1:1, 18)
2. 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20:28)
3. 'to care for the church of God, which he [God] obtained with his own blood' (Acts 20:28)
4. 'the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever' (Romans 9:5)
5. 'the image of the invisible God For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' (Colossians 1:15-20)
6. 'our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:13)
7. 'the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power' (Hebrews 1:3)
8. 'Of the Son he [God] says, "Your throne, O God"' (Hebrews 1:8)
9. 'our God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1:1)

(C) We honour and worship Jesus, e.g.,

1. 'that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father' (John 5:23)
2. 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' (Acts 7:59)
3. 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!' (Revelation 5:13)

Headline 5: The New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit is God

Some indications that the Holy Spirit is God:

1. In Christian baptism and 'the Grace' the Holy Spirit stands alongside the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)
2. The Holy Spirit is a person
'do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God' (Ephesians 4:30)

3. The Holy Spirit takes the place of Jesus to be with believers
 'And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper/Advocate/Counsellor [that is, to take the place of Jesus] to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth' (John 14:16)
4. Believers are the dwelling place of God because the Holy Spirit dwells in them (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)
5. To lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God
 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to man but to God' (Acts 5:3-4)
6. The Holy Spirit speaks to churches.
 'let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches' (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)
7. The Holy Spirit stands in parallel to God the Son in various places.
 (Acts 9:31; Romans 15:30; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Philippians 2:1; Hebrews 10:29)
8. The New Testament says that some Old Testament texts that speak about God are referring to God the Holy Spirit.
 Acts 28:25-28 'The Holy Spirit was right in saying . . . ' (quoting Isaiah 6:9-10 'the voice of the Lord')
 Hebrews 10:15-17 'And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying . . . he adds . . . (quoting Jeremiah 31:33-34 'declares the LORD')
9. The Holy Spirit is eternal
 'the eternal Spirit' (Hebrews 9:14)
10. The Holy Spirit knows all things
 'the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God' (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
11. The Holy Spirit washes, justifies, and sanctifies (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Creeds and Confessions

Nicene Creed 'I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life';

'who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified'

Athanasian Creed 'the Holy Spirit is God'

Conclusion: 'Three Persons in One God'

What the doctrine of the Trinity looks like

Wrong Solution 1: there are now three Gods or three parts to God

Reasons these are wrong:

1. The New Testament agrees with the Old Testament that there is One God
2. This would involve a change in God, who never changes
'the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change'
(James 1:17)
3. The universe would disintegrate!

Wrong Solution 2 One God appears in three ways

Reasons this is wrong:

1. The bible tells us that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are eternally distinct persons
2. When Jesus is baptized (Luke 3:21-22) all three persons appear together!

Wrong Solution 3 The Son and the Spirit are on a lower level than God the Father

Why this is wrong:

God is absolute. There are no divisions in God and no senior or junior Gods.

The doctrine of the Trinity simply stated

1. There is one God (and this matters!)
2. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are eternally distinct persons
3. The Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God



P = Pater (Latin for 'Father')
S = Spiritus (Latin for 'Spirit')
'NON EST' = 'is not'

F = Filius (Latin for 'Son')
D = Deus (Latin for 'God')
'EST' = 'is'

Each is 'in' the others

'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' (John 14:10-11)

Words for the 'one-ness' of God: being, essence, substance, nature

Word for the 'three-ness' of God: person

How this is different from human nature or human beings, human persons:

Christian baptism again:

‘in the name [*one name*] of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’

Creeds and Confessions

Athanasian Creed ‘one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confounding their persons nor dividing their essence’

Athanasian Creed ‘one eternal being’

Article 1 ‘in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance . . . ’

Article 2 ‘of one substance with the Father’

Article 5 ‘of one substance . . . with the Father and the Son’

Westminster Confession 2 ‘three persons . . . of one substance’

The Inner Life of the Trinity

Walking on holy ground

The Father and the Son

1. Mark 1:10-11 ‘You are my beloved Son’
2. Matthew 11:27 ‘no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’

How Father-Son in the Trinity differs from human father-son relations

The Holy Spirit

1. ‘the Spirit of the Father’ (Matthew 10:20) and ‘the Spirit of the Son’ (Galatians 4:6)
2. ‘the Spirit of God . . . the Spirit of Christ’ (Romans 8:9)
3. ‘But when the Helper comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father’ (John 15:26) and breathed out by the Son (John 20:22)
4. The Spirit is sent by the Father (John 14:16, 26) and by the Son (John 15:26; 16:7)

Creeds and Confessions

Nicene Creed ‘And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son’

Athanasian Creed ‘the Holy Spirit . . . proceeds from the Father and the Son’

Article 5 ‘proceeding from the Father and the Son’

Westminster Confession 2 ‘the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son’

The works of the Holy Trinity in the world

1. Indivisible. What one person does, God does.

2. ...and yet associated with particular persons, e.g.,
 - a. Creation by the Father through the Son (e.g., 1 Corinthians 8:6 'there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord [also a word for 'God'], Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.')
 - b. Redemption through the Son
 - c. Sanctification in the Spirit (see John 16:7-15)

Session 3 Some reasons why the doctrine of the Trinity matters

A. What happens if God is not Trinity

- a. What happens if God is one but not three
 - (i) God is high(transcendent) but not with us [deism]
 - (ii) or God is with us (immanent) but not above us [pantheism]

- b. What happens if God is three but not one

‘For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy;
“I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly,
and to revive the heart of the contrite”’ (Isaiah 57:15)

B. How Christian conversion is deeply Trinitarian

The Father

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:3-5)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified (Romans 8:29-30)

The Son

And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18)

The Holy Spirit

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:5-6)

C. How Prayer is deeply Trinitarian

Jesus is the one man who can pray

John 9:31 'We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.'

John 11:41-42 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.'

Ephesians 2:18 'For through him [Jesus Christ] we both [Jew and Gentile] have access in one Spirit to the Father.'

1. Access to the Father ('Our Father')

2. Through the Son ('in Jesus' name')

3. In the Spirit

Galatians 4:6 'And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"'

Extracts from Historic Christian Creeds and Confessions (Trinity)

Apart from the Collect for Trinity Sunday (from the Book of Common Prayer), these texts are taken from *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2022).

I have added some line numbers for ease of reference.

Note that 'catholic' means 'universal' (that is, all the Christian church worldwide) and not 'Roman Catholic'.

The Nicene Creed (extracts)

This Creed was issued first at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) to strengthen convictions about the deity of Christ. At the Council of Constantinople (AD 381) an addition was made about the Holy Spirit. It is sometimes called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

- 1 I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
- 2 And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,
- 3 begotten of the Father before all worlds;
- 4 God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God;
- 5 begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,
- 6 by whom all things were made. Who

- 7 And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life;
- 8 who proceeds from the Father and the Son;
- 9 who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;
- 10 who spoke by the prophets

The Athanasian Creed (first part)

Despite the association with the church father Athanasius (c.296-373), this Creed is considerably later (sometime after AD 400) and contains a mature and full expression of the church's faith.

1. Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic faith.
2. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.
3. Now this is the catholic faith: that we worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity,
4. neither confounding their persons nor dividing the essence.
5. 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.
6. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son and such is the Holy Spirit.
8. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated.
9. The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.
10. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal.
11. And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being.
12. So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.
13. Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty.
14. Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one almighty being.
15. Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God.
16. Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God.
17. Thus, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord.
18. Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.
19. Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually as both God and Lord,
20. so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.
21. The Father was neither made nor created; nor begotten from anyone.
22. The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone.
23. The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son.

24. Accordingly, there is one Father, not three fathers;
there is one Son, not three sons;
there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.
25. None in this Trinity is before or after, none is greater or smaller;
26. in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other.
27. So in everything, as was said earlier, the unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity, is to be worshiped.
28. Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.

There follows an important section about the divine-human person of Jesus Christ. The creed then concludes as follows:

This is the catholic faith: that one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.

Extracts from the Thirty-Nine Articles (with slightly updated wording)

These Articles, foundational for the Church of England, were finalized in 1571. Article 8 affirms the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Apostles' Creed. Here are extracts from Articles 1, 2, and 5.

Article 1 Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

1. There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible.
2. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Article 2 Of the Word or Son of God, who was made very man

1. The Son, who is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance

Article 5 Of the Holy Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son,
2. is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

Extracts from the Westminster Confession of Faith

This was written in 1646 by the Westminster Assembly (pastor-theologians who met in Westminster Abbey from 1643 to 1653 during the English civil war). This became the dominant confession of faith for Reformed Christianity.

Extract from Article 2 Of God, and of the Holy Trinity

There is but one only, living, and true God In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Extract from Article 8 Of Christ the Mediator

the Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father

Collect for Trinity Sunday (Book of Common Prayer, slightly updated wording)

Almighty and everlasting God, who has given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech you, that you would keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who live and reign, one God, world without end. *Amen.*