

## Confessing and Worshiping the Holy Trinity through Jesus

Page 1

Holy Trinity A

Pastor Douglas Punke

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

In Jesus' name? Yes, even on this day, a festival to the Holy Trinity, the name of Jesus is honored. The Church bows the knee on this day, too, and confesses at this festival that "*Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2:10-11). Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the God of the Old Testament, the Creator God "by whom all things were made" (Nicene Creed; John 1:1-3). He is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob before whom Moses removed his sandals (Ex. 3:5-6), who shared His Holy Name: "I AM WHO I AM." "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex. 3:14). Jesus is the "I AM" who was before Abraham (John 8:58), a blasphemous assertion, if it were not true. Jesus is the God who descended upon the tabernacle in the cloud (Ex. 40:34-35); He was the Rock from whom the water flowed (1 Cor. 10:2-4).

We proclaim today the Holy Trinity and the Undivided Unity, but as we do, we think even today of the eternal Word of God — who was with God, who is Himself God, who is the only God — who became flesh and dwelt among us, the Lamb of God by whose sacrifice the sins of the world are borne away (John 1:1, 14, 18, 29).

"[T]his Jesus," we heard Peter preach today, was "*delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, ... [was] crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [But] God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death.*" By Him we know God; He, who resides in the bosom of the Father, shows us who God is, that God is One, and yet there are Three persons. Jesus is the Son, who was "*exalted,*" ascending to "*the right hand of God,*" there receiving "*from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,*" whom He "*poured out*" on Pentecost. Jesus has a Father, and Jesus sends a Helper, the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-17).

This is the God we confess; this is the God we worship: God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Peter doesn't state it quite as explicitly as Jesus does in our Gospel: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*" but the Holy Trinity is there in Peter's preaching, as He is there in the opening verses of Moses' creation account, as He is evident in the eternity of the first chapter of John.

Peter was preaching Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, and in so doing, he preached the Holy Trinity. Indeed, in some ways, Jesus is really all you need to know to confess the Holy Trinity. To confess Jesus as Lord is to confess the Holy Trinity. You can't have one without the other. Just as to deny the divinity of Jesus is to deny the Holy Trinity.

That point was driven home to me recently as LSUS hosted Pastries with Pastors day. The students were encouraged to invite their own pastors, and a few came. I don't know all the organizing details of the day. The other pastors met specifically with the

students of their congregation. The other pastors of the association were assigned to classrooms. I was assigned to spend time with the Fourth grade.

We had some instructions on what to do . . . talk with the class about being a pastor, what I did, how I became a pastor, etc. I never did any of them . . . I didn't have a chance. The kids had questions and answering them used the entire time I was with them.

The questions were mostly about Jesus, about His person, like we confess it with Luther in the explanation to the Apostles' Creed. Jesus Christ is "true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary." But if Jesus was born, then didn't He have a beginning? How could He be eternal? How could He be God? These aren't new questions in the Church. The Alexandrian presbyter Arius asked them in the third and fourth centuries. And the answer affects our confession of the Holy Trinity.

Our students didn't have to cite St. Paul's phrase in his letter to the Colossians — that God's beloved Son is "*the firstborn of all creation*" (Col. 1:15) — to wonder about these things. But Paul by this phrase is not suggesting that Jesus was a created being with a beginning, as Arius asserted, that "there was a time when the Son was not." After all if the Son were created, how could He also be the one "*by [whom] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,*" as Paul goes on to say? How could Paul say "*all things* — not all other things, but all things — *were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together*" (Col. 1:16-17)? Obviously, he couldn't.

No, as Lutheran commentator Paul Deterding writes: "With the phrase . . . 'firstborn of all creation' . . . Paul asserts that Christ both preceded creation and is its cause" (Paul E. Deterding, *Concordia Commentary: Colossians*, p. 56). The Church responded to Arius by calling out his false doctrine and confessing the right doctrine of Jesus, what is called the Nicene Creed, where we confess that Jesus is "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (that is, one essence) with the Father, by whom all things were made." The Son is eternal; there was never a time when He was not. Thus the Father is also eternal; there was never a time when He was not Father; and the Holy Spirit is eternal. But not three Eternals . . . one Eternal as we confessed earlier (*LSB*, Athanasian Creed, 10-11).

Our students were not challenging orthodox doctrine; but they were curious. And their questions about Jesus led to talk about the Holy Trinity, eternity, and mortality.

The questions were understandable; you surely have your own. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity truly is one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith. We don't understand how this can be. We only confess it. We are here today acknowledging

## Confessing and Worshiping the Holy Trinity through Jesus

Page 3

Holy Trinity A

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Jesus before men rejoicing that He is “*acknowledg[ing us] before [the] Father who is in heaven*” (Matt. 10:32). We hold to this doctrine as it has been confessed through the centuries, so that we might be saved and not perish eternally. And we worship this God — “one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity” (*LSB*, Athanasian Creed, 4). We don’t explain Him; we confess Him and we worship Him — we “give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us” (Antiphon for Holy Trinity), mercy as the Father loved us and sent His only Son to rescue us from our enemies, mercy as the Son willingly came down from heaven to be lifted up unto death on a cross, an atoning sacrifice for our sins, mercy as the Holy Spirit carries to us the good news of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and brings us to faith in Jesus and in the Holy Trinity.

Pay attention especially today now often we have used or will use those words — confess and worship — about the Holy Trinity: in the collect, in the Athanasian Creed, in the Proper Preface. Pay attention today, but week in and week out, to the Trinitarian character of our Divine liturgy: the invocation, the Gloria Patri in the Introit, the Kyrie, the Gloria in Excelsis, the termination of our collects, the creeds, the Sanctus, the Benediction. Pay attention to the Trinitarian character of so many hymns — you can hardly miss them; we stand for those doxological stanzas. These are meant to keep the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit before our eyes that we might continue to hold to the catholic faith, or as Jude puts it, to “*the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3), that we might be saved.

Therefore, rejoice today. Rejoice in the salvation won for you by the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, especially the Son who came and died for you. Rejoice that you are Christian, baptized into this Holy name. Rejoice that you are Lutheran, ever being taught the truth of our Triune God. Rejoice that we continue to confess, and pray, and sing, and worship, this ancient and catholic way, for in this way we confess the Holy Trinity, we pray to the Holy Trinity, we sing to the Holy Trinity, we worship the Holy Trinity and are saved. O Lord, keep us in this faith; help us always to worship You in Spirit and in truth.

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