

Divine Mystery

Testimony of God

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies of the coming Messiah and the New Testament is filled with the preaching and miracles of the Messiah. Israel was in expectation of the Messiah. It is no wonder then that people gathered around Jesus because of his preaching and miracles “and *they* said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’²⁵ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me,²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.³⁰ I and the Father are one.’ ” (John 10:24-30) Unfortunately, most people are not among Jesus’ sheep and do not want to believe in Jesus as the Christ because then they would have to admit they are sinners. If they admit they are sinners, well then, they would have to admit they need a Savior and that would make them they accountable to their Savior. Even though history is replete with proof of Jesus as the Christ, if one’s soul is spiritually dead they are unable to believe.

Both in the Bible and in secular history there are numerous recordings of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ teaching, miracles and his resurrection. But of all the biblical, historical and archeological evidence supporting and testifying that Jesus is the Christ the most significant is the testimony of God the Father. The Apostle

John wrote, “for this is the **testimony of God** that he has borne concerning his Son.¹⁰ **Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.** ¹¹ **And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”** (1 John 5:9b-11) Our passage in Luke, chapter 3, verses 21 and 22 is one of the most critical in the Bible. This account of John baptizing Jesus is also recorded in Matthew chapter 3 and Mark chapter 1 as you just heard. It is not only the testimony of God the Father concerning Jesus, but it is also one of the most important texts on the Trinity. This morning we will examine the Son, the Spirit and the Father. Then I will attempt the impossible – defining the Trinity – fully defining the Trinity is a mystery beyond human ability. Even though it is impossible I hope it will be beneficial.

The Son

Reading verse 21, “**Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened.**” Thirty years of living in preparation and in unnoticed Nazareth are over. Jesus begins his public ministry. It is the height of John’s ministry, the crowds were growing and some were coming forward to be baptized. Jesus comes forward in an unassuming manner to be baptized by John who did not recognize him at first. John the Baptist is recorded as saying, “**I myself did not know him *Jesus*, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.**” (John 1:31)

Although they were cousins they lived in different regions and may not have seen each other in years, so it took a little time for John to recognize Jesus as he came forward from the crowd. Jesus’ ministry is now launched but within 6 months John would be executed. Matthew records that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus. John knew that as the Messiah he was sinless and needed no baptism. Jesus senses

John the Baptist's reluctance and says to John, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15) Jesus was the Christ, but he was also human and even though he was sinless he was committed to do whatever God called humans to do when seeking righteousness. For example Jesus participated in the Passover, which celebrated God's deliverance of people from Egypt and from their sin, Jesus did this even though he was the Deliver. Jesus living a perfect and righteous and sinless life was not only proof of his deity but absolutely necessary for our salvation. As Paul wrote, "For our sake he God made him Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him Jesus we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus atoned for all who believe in him and that he took upon himself humanity's sins on the cross and it was because of the cross that we have "become the righteousness of God."

Only Luke records that Jesus prayed after he was baptized. Continual prayer marked Jesus' life. As Jesus prayed "the heavens were opened." This is true for us, as believers also. When we pray - speaking and listening to God through the gift of the Spirit that lives within us - given as a gift by God through the work of Christ, heaven is no longer some distant place for we are in the presence of the Living God. The prophet Ezekiel came into the presence of God through prayer and he says "the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God." (Ezekiel 1:1) Stephen, as he was being stoned, became "full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

⁵⁶ And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' " (Acts 7:55-56) Is it not to be the same with us? When we pray as Jesus, Ezekiel and Stephen did, is not the goal to separate from this world, to be filled with the Spirit and enter the presence of God? This is the goal. Understanding that this is the goal can make me feel inadequate, but then I realize

it is not about my ability, but the ability of the Holy Spirit with in me and I am encouraged and thankful to God for his grace and blessings.

As Christ comes up from the water and prays to his Father heaven is opened for the most amazing event.

The Spirit

Again reading beginning at verse 21, “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened,²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove.” Let me be clear the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus does not mean up to this point that as the incarnate God on earth Jesus did not have communion with the Holy Spirit. The Triune God has existed from eternity past and has always been in perfect union. Paul wrote as believers in Christ, who is our Lord and Savior, we “are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the **Spirit of Christ** does not belong to him.” (Romans 8:9) Paul says, “**Spirit of Christ**” the Spirit and Christ are one. So, here at Jesus’ baptism the Spirit’s descent is symbolic showing the world Jesus is the Messiah sent by God the Father and empowered by God the Spirit. Going back to chapter 1 of Luke the Spirit is involved in the conception of Jesus as human and remains integral in every aspect of Jesus’ life. In fact for the Pharisees and Sadducees this should **not** have been a surprise, but conformation of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the Messiah, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And **the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.**” (Isaiah 11:1-2) The Spirit’s power was essential; for without it Jesus would not have been able to live sinless or do the

miracles he did or speak the divine words he spoke. As usual the Apostle Paul provides a clear understanding, “Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a *slave or servant*, being born in the likeness of men.”

(Philippians 2:5-7) Jesus voluntarily surrendered his divine power and the Spirit empowered him as he gave himself completely to the will of his Father. The union of Jesus the Son and the Spirit and the Father were so complete that Jesus said the unpardonable sin was to attribute the work of the Spirit, remembering Isaiah said the Spirit and Jesus are one, it is unpardonable to attribute the Spirit’s work to Satan. Reading Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew chapter 12, “Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32) Woe, to the unbelieving world that blasphemes against the Holy Spirit in their attempt to prove there is no God!

My final thought concerning the Holy Spirit is with the 3 simple words found in verse 22, “like a dove.” The dove has become a symbol of the Holy Spirit and this is all right. But, this does not mean that a visible bird, appearing like a dove descending upon Jesus. What it does mean, is people saw the Spirit descend. Darrell Bock, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, said it well in his Commentary on the New Testament, “What was visible was not a dove, but rather what was seen is compared to a dove, ... The manner of the Spirit’s descent was like the way a dove floats gracefully through the air.” By God the Spirit appearing visibly it gave proof of Jesus’ calling and deity as the Messiah. Here is observed by all present 2 of the 3 Persons of the Trinity; Jesus the Son and the Spirit.

The Father

As the Holy Spirit descended, Luke writes, a “voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” In the Greek this is the main clause or the main idea of this passage. God the Father’s testimony that Jesus is God the Son is the main point of this passage. There are only few times in scripture where the multitudes are able to hear the voice of God. By God saying he “is well pleased” alleviates any misunderstanding as to why Jesus is being baptized. God would not have been “well pleased” with Jesus if he had sin in his life. God the Father wants everyone in attendance to know that Jesus is the fulfillment of his decree found in Psalm 2, “I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.’” (Psalm 2:7-8) The Pharisees and Sadducees took special note of the writings of King David and would have known Psalm 2, yet, their hearts and minds were closed to the truth for they no longer had a relationship with God, but instead their elitist lives had become focused on power and control through ritual.

How could Jesus have launched his ministry with better credentials? John the Baptist recognized by the people as a prophet of God testifies that Jesus is the Christ. God the Spirit descends and anoints Jesus and God the Father verbally expresses his love for Jesus His Son. This should have been enough, but sadly even adding to this Jesus’ mighty works and miracles would not convince most of his deity. But to the believing remnant, John the apostle wrote, “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13) As God’s remnant, called by God the Father

with the power of God the Spirit and through the anointing sacrifice of God the Son we are the “[children of God](#).” May we live up to this holy calling!

The Trinity

I want to close this morning with a brief exploration of the Trinity. For this morning we will define the doctrine of the Trinity, as found in Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology, chapter 14, “*God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.*” In the work of creation the one God who exists in three persons has different functions.

Let me start from the beginning, reading from Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, “[In the beginning, God](#) (which in Hebrew is “**el•o•heem**”. This name is unique for it is plural with singular meaning; true God or only God or the one God. So, by the 4th word in the Bible, God wants us to know he is One God with plural persons.) [In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.](#) ²[The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.](#)”

What we learn from these first two verses, supported by other verses is the persons of God have different functions. It is God the Father who spoke the universe into being. It was God the Son, the eternal Word of God, who carried out the work of creation. Which is made clear by Apostle John, “[All things came into being through Him](#) (In context we know that “Him” is Jesus.), [and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.](#)” (John 1:3) Back to Genesis, it was God the Spirit that “[was hovering over the face of the waters.](#)” It was the Holy Spirit that sustained and manifested God’s presence to his creation. King David wrote, “[By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the ~~breath~~ Spirit of His mouth all their host.](#)” (Psalm 33:6)

So while the 3 persons of the Triune God are equally God they differ in their relationships; the Son and Spirit are equal to the Father but are subordinate in their roles concerning creation. These roles are eternal, since the concept of creation is eternal. Paul helps us understand this in his letter to the Corinthians, “When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:28) So even after the final judgment, when the last enemy of God, which is death, is destroyed and when all things are placed under the feet of Jesus, he will still be subject to the Father who placed everything under Jesus’ feet and in so doing God will “be all in all.” God is unchangeable and the 3 persons of God are unchangeably equal in divinity but subordinate in their roles. God the Father planned redemption. God sent his Son into the world and the Son obeyed the Father to accomplish redemption. God the Father did not come to earth to die for our sins, nor did God the Spirit. This was the work of the Son. When Jesus ascended back to heaven, God the Spirit was sent by God the Father and God the Son to bring redemption into our souls. It is the role of God the Spirit to regenerate people’s souls – giving them spiritual life.

So there you have it a simple explanation of the Trinity, while knowing that it is beyond us to fully understand the Trinity as humans. I cannot wait for heaven, how about you?

Remember: **God is three persons. Each person is fully God. There is one God.** Now you know how to define and think of the Trinity. The Triune Godhead through the Son, Jesus Christ commands us as His ambassadors to go into the fallen world, using the authority of the God the Son given by God the Father and by the power of the Spirit. Jesus commands each of us, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father and the Son**

and the **Holy Spirit**,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20) May we be obedient and bring God glory!

As I close in prayer and you contemplate these thoughts we will begin to prepare to experience the Lord’s Supper.