

## FIRST READING – A TRINITY

A reading from the book of Exodus.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Moses rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai,  
as the Lord had commanded him,  
and took in his hand the two tablets of stone.  
The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there,  
and proclaimed the name, “The Lord.”  
The Lord passed before Moses, and proclaimed,  
“The Lord, the Lord,  
a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”  
And Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth, and worshipped.  
He said, “If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord,  
I pray, let the Lord go with us.  
Although this is a stiff-necked people,  
pardon our iniquity and our sin,  
and take us for your inheritance.”

Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – A TRINITY

A reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters,  
put things in order, listen to my appeal,  
agree with one another,  
live in peace;  
and the God of love and peace will be with you.  
Greet one another with a holy kiss.  
All the saints greet you.  
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with all of you.

Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – A TRINITY

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

*Glory to you, O Lord*

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

“God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish  
but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,  
but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The one who believes in him is not condemned;  
but the one who does not believe is condemned already,  
for not having believed  
in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

The doctrine of the Trinity, as distinct from triadic formulas and the triadic structure of the biblical experience of God, is implicit rather than explicit in Scripture.

What is true of the New Testament, namely, that the Spirit brings believers to faith in Jesus as the one in whom God has acted, is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the Old Testament. We see this in the theophany that is the subject of today's first reading.

### Reading I: Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9

The first paragraph speaks of the theophany itself (YHWH's proclamation of his name), while the second paragraph relates Moses' response to this theophany.

Later Judaism would have boggled somewhat at the suggestion that YHWH himself "descended" and "passed before [Moses]" in making this proclamation. Such crudely anthropomorphic ideas seemed inconsistent with YHWH's transcendence.

Accordingly, various intermediaries were proposed as the agencies of divine revelation—angels, the *memra* (word) or the Logos, the wisdom or the Spirit of YHWH. These intermediaries paved the way for the Christian understanding of the Incarnation and the Trinity.

In revelation—whether the revelation of Sinai or the revelation in the Christ event—the transcendent Deity goes forth in self-communication out of the depths of the Deity's own being. The Deity also creates the response to this self-revelation.

This is the triadic pattern of events that we find in the story of the theophany on Mount Sinai: (1) YHWH in YHWH's own essential being; (2) YHWH going out of himself in self-communication; (3) YHWH creating within the heart of Moses the response to this self-communication.

This triadic pattern corresponds to the New Testament formulation of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. It is important for the Christian understanding of the Old Testament that YHWH is not to be equated with the First Person of the Trinity in Christian doctrine but with all three Persons. Or, in the words of the so-called Athanasian Creed (note that YHWH = Lord!):

The Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet there are not three Lords but one Lord.

### Responsorial Psalm: Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56\*

This canticle, taken from the deuterocanonical portions of the Book of Daniel (and familiar to Episcopalians as the *Benedictus es*) is part of the Song of the Three Young

Men, put into the mouths of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (= Ananias, Azarias, and Misael) as they moved unscathed through Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace.

The second half of the song is the *Benedicite*, *omnia opera*, also familiar as a canticle. It survives only in Greek, and it is impossible to say for certain whether it is of Hebrew or Aramaic origin. In any case, both parts of the song are impregnated with the liturgical language of the Old Testament psalms.

The first stanza picks up the theme of the "name of God" from the first reading. As we sing this song today, we must remember that for us that name is the threefold name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This could be brought out by adding as a final couplet:

Blessed art thou, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
to be praised and highly exalted for ever.

### **Reading II: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13**

The Pauline letters were written to be read out loud at the Christian assembly. Here, as at the end of 1 Corinthians, this intention becomes perfectly clear—the conclusion of the letter leads into the celebration of the Eucharist.

Hence the exhortation to be at peace with one another and to express this by exchanging the "holy kiss" (which, in earlier times, as in some recent revisions of the liturgy, preceded the offertory instead of following the canon).

The triadic benediction would therefore fall naturally into place as the introduction to the eucharistic prayer (like the salutation before the *Sursum corda* in later times).

There are several places in Paul's letters where a triadic understanding of Christian experience is presupposed (for example, 1 Cor 12:4-6), but only here does Paul deliberately use a triadic formula.

Elsewhere (*Anglican Theological Review*, April 1961) I suggested that this triadic formula has its roots in the so-called apocalyptic trinity. Jewish apocalyptic writings sometimes speak of God, the Son of Man, and the angels, and this formula is carried into Christian usage as the Father, the Son (of man), and the angels (see Mk 13:32).

Note, however, that the Pauline formula is not a bald dogmatic statement but keeps close to the Christian experience: the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit. It speaks of the experience of grace, love, and fellowship.

The order—Son, Father, Spirit—is striking and again reflects the order of Christian experience.

It is in Jesus Christ and his gracious life and death that we encounter the love of God, and this encounter leads to our incorporation into the redeemed community, in which we participate in the common life of the Spirit.

### **Gospel: John 3:16-18**

This lesson was traditionally associated with the Pentecost season, having been used (including verses 19-25) in the old Lectionaries on Monday in Whitsun Week.

It is a welcome reform to have this important pericope read on a Sunday at least once every three years, for 3:16 is a succinct summary of the whole Gospel in characteristic Johannine idiom.

Some may feel that its use on Trinity Sunday implies a “binitarian” rather than a Trinitarian conception, for it mentions only the Father and the Son. A similar objection could have been raised against its traditional use on Whit Monday.

But it is impossible to dissociate the gift of eternal life, which is the outcome of the sending of the Son, from the Spirit, who is the Giver of life.

As a concluding comment on this passage, we cite some words from an essay on the liturgical sermon written by Canon M. R. Newbolt in the influential volume of Anglican essays called *The Parish Communion* (1937):

On a spring evening, as I passed through the Abbey gate at Chester, a street evangelist was declaiming his gospel in stentorian tones. “God so loved the world that he gave us His Son, His only Son. That is what I have to say to you people of Chester. I do not know what you are going to do about it. God gave His Son! Eternal life!”—words hammered by the speaker into his audience with rhythmic, persistent repetition.

“Why,” I thought, “can we not get this kind of simple gospel appeal inside the Cathedral? Must this message be given in the street, with an implied challenge to the official Church, outside the House of God, under its very walls?”

Two days afterwards, while we were singing the solemn eucharist in the choir on Whit Monday, the nave of the Cathedral was packed with tourists, casual sight-seers, taking in the Cathedral as part of their day’s outing. It happened that I remembered the street preacher; his words were still running in my head, but I had forgotten the opening of the Gospel for the day.

It came with a shock of surprise when the Deacon from the chancel steps intoned “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.” These very words, surrounded by what may have been unusual pageantry of lights and coloured vestments, may well have rung in the ears of some excursionist from the Potteries on that very Bank Holiday, as the street missionary’s had done in mine.

Reginald H. Fuller and Daniel Westberg