

Exodus 34.1-8; Song of the 3; 2 Corinthians 13.11-13; Matthew 28.16-20

Matthew 28.16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

So once again, I get to try to explain the unexplainable, define the indefinable, and make sense of the mystery that is God, the Holy Trinity. I hope you haven't got plans for later because this could take a while....!

You won't find the word 'Trinity' in the Bible. The New Testament speaks of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and The Holy Spirit, and of the relationship between them. The term 'trinity', from the Latin word meaning 'three-ness', was coined at least a couple of hundred years after the books and letters of the New Testament were written.

What do we know from what the Bible does say about God? We know that the Bible teaches that there is only one God; and that there are three distinct persons called God, who are usually known Father, Son and Holy Spirit; so therefore the three persons are one God. From this, we can say that God is three in one and one in three.

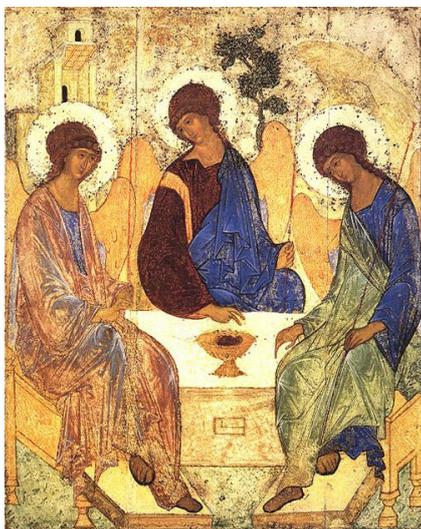
Is your head spinning yet? This is what the theologian Alister McGrath says: 'When we speak of the doctrine of the trinity, what we really mean is the magnificent vision of God that transcends our capacity to understand, describe and explain what is tersely and inadequately summarised by this doctrine.

When confronted with the mystery of God, the human mind struggles to take in something that vastly exceeds its capacity to understand.'

Well THAT makes me feel a bit better!

Many people have attempted to come up with images that might help us to grasp what this all means. They are usually attempts to show that something can be three things and one thing at the same time. An example is water: which can be solid ice, vaporous steam or flowing water. Three different qualities of one substance.

Similarly, we all have different names and different roles. I am a wife, a mother, and a grandmother. Three roles: one me. You might be son, husband and brother; or perhaps you are housekeeper, golfer and gardener; the possibilities are endless. How about domestic goddess, gourmet cook and kid-wrangler? Whatever image or metaphor we might try, the best it can do is give us a glimpse of the reality that is more than we can imagine.



This icon, as I'm sure you know, is known as Rublev's icon of the Trinity. Andrei Rublev was born in Russia in 1360 and painted this in about 1410, and it hangs today in a Moscow gallery.

The three angels are pictured sitting around a table, on which is a chalice. You cannot look into the eyes of any of them because they are looking at each other, and our eyes are drawn around and round in a circle to each of them. Each angel is of no particular age and is neither obviously male nor female.

An icon is intended to draw the viewer in, so we look deeply into and beyond it. They are to be an aid to worship and contemplation. An icon is not a picture, in the sense that a photograph or an artwork is a picture: an icon is said to be written, not painted. To write an icon is to make the word of God present, and worshippers need to learn to read the icon. 'Icon' means 'image', intended to be a gateway to the divine.

All these different ways of trying to imagine the Trinity, through metaphors, icons etc. - remind us that our understanding of God is never finished. We can never in this life say, "Ah yes, I've got it now, I understand." The way we imagine God when we are children must grow and change as we grow and change.

When I was little I used to imagine God as an old man with a flowing white beard, sitting on a cloud, scowling at me. I thought he was stern and grumpy- like a headmaster.

I used to imagine Jesus as a blue-eyed, rather sappy-looking character with wavy hair, wearing a freshly-laundered white robe that looked as if it had been in the Napsan, and a pair of smart sandals. I don't think the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost as we were taught back then, entered into my thinking until much later. My imaginings of God have changed many times over the years- as they should. I no longer imagine God as an old man or Jesus as a wimpy blonde. God is- and is more than- male and female, father and mother. Jesus was probably a short, swarthy man of middle-eastern appearance and as grubby as everyone else who lived in the days before hot showers and washing machines.

And the Spirit? Well, the spirit is the indefinable Someone who gives life and purpose, beauty, truth, love, compassion, selflessness and all those qualities that make us human beings made in the image of God. As time goes on, my imaginings of God will continue to change and develop: so the way I think about God will grow and mature, if I continue to grow and mature in the faith.

Just as young children need to grow and learn and change and understand more and more so that they can grow into adulthood, so our understanding of God needs to grow and mature. This is a lifelong journey, with no final destination in this life.

How do we make sure we continue to grow and mature as Christian people? We need to pray often; read the Bible regularly; and worship with other believers. As restrictions on gatherings ease, more of us can come together for worship- hallelujah!

This is an exciting journey, and we are on the road together.

The Lord be with you.