

## Sermon for Morning Prayer Trinity Sunday

### Lessons:<sup>i</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the first Chapter of the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis.<sup>ii</sup>

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

“And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

“And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day. And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw

that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

“And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.<sup>iii</sup>

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

“John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the First Lesson: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”<sup>iv</sup> And from the Second Lesson: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”<sup>v</sup>

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### **Introduction:**

Today is the Feast of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity. It is unusual among the festivals of the Church Year in that it commemorates not some notable event in the life of Our Lord and Saviour, not the birth or death of some outstanding hero of the faith, but, instead, serves to remind us of a theological principle. In this case the principle being commemorated is the uniquely Christian understanding of the nature of God as three separate persons bound together in one indivisible Godhead.

Personally, I do not find this form of commemoration to be particularly strange. After all, we have long had numbers of church congregations that have placed themselves under the patronage of the Trinity and that accordingly call themselves “Trinity Church”. I myself spent my third undergraduate year in an overseas institution with a long, sonorous Latin name that translated as “The College of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of Queen Elizabeth Near Dublin”.<sup>vi</sup>

I loved that name but I was never sure about Elizabethan Englishmen’s reaction to the “Holy Trinity of Queen Elizabeth”, suggesting that their great ruler Gloriana was apparently related to the Godhead, or to the “Near Dublin”, suggesting that her divinity was exercised only across the sea, among the wild Irish. Either way, however, it was clear that the Triune Godhead, and perhaps the Tudor one as well, was the true patron of the College.

### **Theme:**

Each of the two Lessons today is a “Prologue”. The First Lesson is the Prologue to the Creation account in Genesis while the Second Lesson is the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel. Another way of looking at them would be to say that each Lesson is the Prologue to an account of the Creation, where the Old Testament account focuses upon the physical reality of Creation and the New Testament account focuses on the spiritual reality of that same Creation.

### **Development:**

We can say that from viewpoint, the Old Testament account concentrates on the creation of the “outer man” and of the environment in which men and women live and have their being. The reality and necessity of divine action is inherent in the account but attention is given primarily to the relationships between mankind, as physical beings, and God, and between mankind and the world around us.

The logical consequence of that physical Creation was that humanity required an extended period of time to “find its feet”, to orient itself to and explore the world in which it lives. Our ancestors needed time to reflect upon what they discovered in the course of their explorations. Only after they had come to some realization of the moral and spiritual significance of their relationships to God, to other men and women, and to the physical world, were they ready for the next stage in their development.

That next stage came with Our Lord's appearance among us as the incarnate God, the God made human while remaining truly God. At this point, God began to unfold to mankind a fuller understanding of the spiritual significance of the original Creation. Note, please, that this was not a second Creation, it was an extended tutorial or seminar on the meanings of the one Creation that had already occurred. St. John refers to this expansion of our understanding from outward things to inward things when he writes, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."<sup>vii</sup>

It is this spiritual exposition that St. John takes as his prime task. Therefore, he goes back to that original Creation and traces the rôle played in it by the Second Person of the Trinity, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Calling Our Lord "the Word" – *Logos* in the Greek in which St. John wrote – was St. John's way of expressing Our Lord's status as a principal actor in the original drama of Creation. The ancients believed that words and names had creative power, so in John's metaphor, God the Father "spoke" as the expression of His Will and God the Son was the "word spoken" that went forth to implement that Will.

St. John makes sure that we cannot overlook the central reality that he is trying to convey when he writes, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."<sup>viii</sup>

But John is not interested in relating some interesting gossip about a long-past event. Instead, he has a serious purpose in thus reminding us of Christ's place in the scheme of Creation. For if Christ was an active agent in the Creation, then Christ must be truly God. Conversely, Christ could not be really God unless He had some active participation in God's great and defining act.

For John, it is essential that we understand and accept this divine aspect of Jesus because without Jesus we cannot have a personal relationship with God. Jesus "was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."<sup>ix</sup> The light that Christ casts illuminates the entire Godhead, including the Father and the Holy Spirit. As John says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."<sup>x</sup>

In other words, it is by seeing and knowing the Son that we are granted knowledge of the Father. Without this personal mediation, we would be no

different than the pagans, whose gods occasionally passed messages through their priests and prophets but which had no personal interaction with their worshippers.

## **Conclusion:**

It is said that every sermon should end with an “application”, that is, with some observation that relates the subject of the sermon to the actual lives of the congregation. This morning, I do not have any wise aphorisms for you; the concept of the Trinity is so majestic, I find myself completely inadequate to suggest any.

So I can only end by asking you the same question I am asking myself: “If God thought it vitally important – literally a matter of life and death -- to send His Son to earth as a human being, in order that we should know God by knowing that Son, what does that mean for us and for how we should be living our lives?”

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister  
June 7, 2009.

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<sup>i</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>ii</sup> *Genesis 1: 1—2: 3 (KJV).*

<sup>iii</sup> *St. John 1: 1-18 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *Genesis 1: 1 (KJV).*

<sup>v</sup> *St. John 1: 1-3 (KJV).*

<sup>vi</sup> *Aristocratic English vagueness about prepositions has persisted. World War II pictures of Sir Winston Churchill often show him wearing the rather plain but clearly nautical uniform of a trustee and director of England's ancient maritime safety agency. It is said that after one meeting with Allied representatives, when he was asked what his dress signified, the explanation that he was “an Elder Brother of Trinity House”, delivered in his idiosyncratic French, convinced them he had just announced his divinity.*

<sup>vii</sup> *St. John 1: 17 (KJV).*

<sup>viii</sup> *St. John 1: 3 (KJV).*

<sup>ix</sup> *St. John 1: 9 (KJV).*

<sup>x</sup> *St. John 1: 18 (KJV).*