

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
TRINITY SUNDAY**

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“In the year that king Uzziah [**uzz-EYE-uh**] died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims [**SAIR-uh-fimz**]: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

“Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims [**SAIR-uh-fimz**] unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.³

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repen-

tance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.'"⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction, Theme, and Development:

Today is a rather unusual Feast of the Church, because it celebrates not some event in the life of Our Lord, and not some departed hero or heroine of the Faith, but, instead, it is dedicated to a theological doctrine, the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Of course, this Doctrine is expressly set out in clear and succinct terms in the historic Creeds, as, for example,

⁷ The words "and the Son" are, of course, the famous *filioque* clause, which is rejected by the Eastern Church and which was retrojected as one putative justification for the Great Schism of 1054 A.D.

⁸ *Ibid.* 15-16.

⁹ *Quicumque Vult*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 21 (CPSA 1954). Like the "Apostles' Creed", this is a Western, not an Eastern formula.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:6-18.

¹¹ St. Matthew 3:16-17 & 28:19; St. Mark 1:10-11; St. Luke 1:35 & 3:21-22; St. John 1:29-30; Acts 7:55; Romans 8; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 9:14.

¹² St. Mark 1:9-11 (RSV). *Cf.* St. Matthew 3:16-17 and St. Luke 3:21-22.

¹³ St. John 1:29-34 (RSV).

¹⁴ St. Matthew 28:19 (RSV).

¹⁵ *The Order for Daily Morning Prayer* and *The Order for Daily Evening Prayer*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 20 & 34 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 13:14 (RSV).

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aegis: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”¹⁶

Conclusion:

In these ways, both in our beginnings as Christians as in the ending of every one of our Daily Offices, we are reminded of this great truth and Mystery which the early Church discovered in Scripture and in its own experience, and which it incorporated into its basic statements of its Faith: We worship one God, whole and indivisible, Who is composed of three separate and equal Persons, God the Father and Creator, God the Son and Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit and Sanctifier.

These Three share the same substance and of them, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father and the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son.

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June 19, 2011.

¹ *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 38 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (CIPBC 1963).

² Isaiah 6:1-8 (KJV).

³ St. Mark 1:1-11 (KJV).

⁴ St. Mark 1:9-11 (RSV).

⁵ Although the so-called “Apostles’ Creed” summarizes the same Faith as does the Niceno-Constantinopolitan one, it is an artifact of the Western Church which is not used in the Eastern Church – including, for this purpose, the Eastern Rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

⁶ *The Order for Daily Morning Prayer*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 15 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

when each one of us attests in the Apostles’ Creed⁵ that “I believe in God the Father Almighty ... And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord ... [and] I believe in the Holy Ghost...”⁶

The Doctrine is set out in more detail as to the internal economy of the Trinity in the Nicene Creed, where each Christian affirms that: “I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, ... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, 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 with the Father; by whom all things were made: ... And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son;⁷ Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spake by the Prophets....”⁸

Notice that the Nicene Creed, unlike the Apostles’ Creed, gives us specific information about the origin of each of the Persons of the Trinity, particularly about the Son -- “the only-begotten Son of God” – and about the Holy Spirit – “Who [at least for Western Christians] proceedeth from the Father and the Son”. We are also given a little information about the three Persons’ specific tasks, such as that the Father is “Maker of heaven and earth,” the Son is one “by whom all things were made”, and the Spirit “spake by the Prophets”.

These details are greatly expanded in the Athanasian Creed,⁹ which is included in the traditional English, African, and Indian Books of Common Prayer, where it is appointed to be used on from thirteen to nineteen specific days of the Christian Year. (Very oddly, but most unfortunately, the American Book of Common Prayer does not contain this important formula of the Faith.)

However, these are all *creedal* statements. That is, they are formulae that the Church has developed out of its ongoing experience as needs have arisen for short, pithy statements of the most elementary principles of the Faith. As such, they are necessarily post-Apostolic in origin. For the raw materials from which Christian theology has formed the lapidary doctrinal statements of the Faith, we must have resort to Scripture itself.

The Old Testament, of course, contains only the foreshadowings of the New and Everlasting Covenant¹⁰ that was inaugurated by Christ's Incarnation among us. Thus that is not where we must look for the uniquely Christian conceptions of God. However, nowhere even in the New Testament is there a single line that expressly declares the Doctrine of the Trinity.

The closest things we have to such an express declaration are at least ten passages¹¹ that refer simultaneously to the Three Persons of the Trinity in their qualities as God. Among these are the verses in which all four Gospels recount Jesus' baptism at the hands of John the Baptist; of those, each account in the Synoptic Gospels includes almost the same version of this statement from today's Second Lesson:

“Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came heaven, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.’”¹²

Interestingly, St. John's account does not relate that baptism directly but refers to it in a “flash back” by John the Baptist. Also, as we might expect from the most theologically-inclined Evangelist, the Evangelist goes even further than

did the Synoptics in relating the Baptist's mission, as witness to the Messiah, to Jesus' divine role:

“The next day [after John implied that he was the herald of the Messiah] he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.’ And John bore witness, ‘I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.’”¹³

Undoubtedly, it was these accounts of Jesus' baptism, with their association in that one act of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, that led to their association in Christ's own definition of Christian discipleship, in which Baptism is the rite of entrance into the Church, His Body:

““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
....”¹⁴

And where Christians were accustomed to enter the fellowship of the Church through a rite that expressly invokes all three Persons of the Trinity, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the earliest Christians likewise adopted the habit, which still persists in our liturgy,¹⁵ of taking a temporary departure from that community under the same triune