

# ORIGIN of the TRINITY – LESSON 1

## – Introduction, Questions, Our Goal; Old Testament Passages

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*Our Church proclaims a belief in the triune God. Let us as a group, retrace the process of how we arrived at this “theological place” - at least in a limited way.*

**Goals** – *Gather information as to whether the concept of the Trinity is biblically based and a reasonable conclusion to be drawn from the Bible – both Old and New Testaments.*

*Gather information about the necessity of the theological debate, evaluation, “in-fighting”, and even church power politics. Why did it occur?*

*Present and ask critical questions about the resulting theology. Might we have reached a different conclusion or presented it with a different twist?*

### **Normandale’s visible traditions are deeply “steeped” in the Trinity – for example:**

**Normandale’s Mission Statement** (*dramatically presented in the main stairway*) – Normandale Lutheran Church is a community of believers that proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, affirms that the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is fundamental to our faith, and witnesses through worship, education, and ministry.

**Normandale’s Trinity Sculpture** (*exterior, east face*) – The head, which is circular like the sun, represents the God of creation. The body symbolizes the human Christ, which, with its outstretched arms, forms a manger representing the humble birth of Jesus. The bottom section represents the Holy Spirit and the sweeping presence of wind.

**Typical “Prayers of the Day”** – (*we pray these, or something similar, in unison each Sunday*) Almighty God our Father, dwelling in majesty and mystery, renewing and fulfilling creation by your eternal Spirit, and revealing your glory through our Lord, Jesus Christ: Cleanse us from doubt and fear, and enable us to worship you, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, living and reigning, now and forever. Amen .....and another: God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as you sent upon the disciples the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, look upon your Church and open our hearts to the power of the Spirit. Kindle in us the fire of your love, and strengthen our lives for service in your kingdom; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Meaning of Trinity** – The Westminster Shorter Catechism gives a concise definition: “There are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” - Do you have any basic problem with this definition? (*It is important that the term three persons is used here – i.e. this is NOT intended to mean merely three ways of looking at, or experiencing, God.*)

**Review and Discuss** the Old Testament Material Attached.

**Some Questions to Consider:** *(Some won't be discussed until later lessons):*

Is the term “Trinity” ever used in the Bible? *(Hint: No)* But that’s not the essential question we should be asking. Rather: Is the concept biblically based and a logical conclusion?

Is the Trinity a clear concept in the Bible? Is the concept of the Trinity biblically based, or might it be the result of subsequent theological debate, evaluation, necessary explanation, “in-fighting”, and even church power struggles and politics?

Is essential belief in the Trinity a Normandale ”thing”, a Lutheran requirement, a Christian phenomenon, - or all, neither, or some combination in between?

How important is the “three persons” concept? Separate but one? Each person is fully God? Standing separately, equal, but one God? There are three “whos” but only one “what” *(That is actually a quote from a Theologian with too much time on his hands perhaps)*. Is the Holy Spirit therefore fully a person, not a concept, a force, *(like gravity or electricity)*, or anything else any less than the Father and the Son? *(UFF DA – tough stuff!!!)* Again, how/why is this concept really important?

Most sources would say the Trinity is a general Christian concept. But is this true? Are there any churches proclaiming to be Christian but have some serious theological differences with the concept of the Trinity? What are their arguments against the Trinity?

Who created the world/universe we live in? *(the Father? See Isaiah 64:8; the Son? See Colossians 1:15-17; the Holy Spirit? See Job 33:4; or some combination thereof?)*

Jesus says “I am God among you”. Could the Holy Spirit proclaim the same thing? Or would that, somehow, have to be a different claim.

Does the Old Testament “tee us up” for the later New Testament proclamations, and the subsequent long and bitter debates among the factions of the early church?

God is proclaimed as three in one – and “he was, is, and ever shall be” – therefore the Trinity must have always existed. Is there any Old Testament basis for a “plural” God concept – or even a Trinity concept?

What do the Gospels say about a Trinity?

What do Paul, and other New Testament writers, teach us about the Trinity?

What did Martin Luther write about our belief in the Trinity?

Is this merely a study of a developing theology, in all its growing pains, and inevitable human induced imperfections – or much more than that?

Define what you have been taught as to: What does it mean to be a Christian?

Can you be a Christian while denying the Trinity as technically defined by our Christian/Lutheran theology? This does NOT mean denying the entire existence of the Holy Spirit – rather just disagreeing with the concept of “three equals in one”.

What do our three acknowledged Lutheran “creeds” say we believe about the Trinity? Are all three basically the same in their content?

## Old Testament Passages

**Genesis 1:2** – Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

**Genesis 1:26** – Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over..... *(To whom is he speaking – God certainly is not solitary).*

**Genesis 11:7** – Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other” *(This time the plural reference is in regard to the tower of Babel).*

**Genesis 3:22** – And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil..... *(Another plural reference).*

**Genesis 18:1-2** – *(God appears to Abraham in what apparently is human form – and there are three men!)* The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. *(This is the Old Testament’s most vivid description of God appearing in human form)*

**Genesis 32:24-30** – *(In these verses Jacob wrestles all night with a MAN, who renames him Israel, and who Jacob later realizes was actually a human manifestation of God – Is this the earliest implication of Jesus – a human manifestation of God?)*

*(Regarding the last two references, refer to **John 1:17-18** which declares “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” Is this supposed to indicate to us who appeared to Abraham and Jacob?)*

**Exodus 31:1-3** – Then the Lord said to Moses.....I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.....

**Exodus 35:30-31** – Then Moses said to the Israelites, “ See the Lord has chosen Bezalel .....and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill.....

**1 Chronicles 28:5** – He (*David*) gave him (*Solomon*) the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of God and for the treasuries.....

**Job 33:4** – The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

**Psalm 45:7** – .....therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy (*speaking of two distinct persons – both called God*).

**Psalm 110:1** – The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (*Two “Lords” very reminiscent of later references to the Father and Son*).

**Psalm 51:10-11** – Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me (*David, after his adultery with Bathsheba*).

**Psalm 104:30** – When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

**Psalm 139:7** – Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

**Isaiah 6:6** – Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” (*If this event was described in the New Testament, would this “messenger” have been described as “Spirit” or “Holy Spirit”?*)

**Isaiah 6:8** – Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (*Plural reference*).

**Isaiah 9:6** – (*Sound familiar?*) For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (*A prophesy of the birth of Jesus, who is God*).

**Isaiah 11:2** – (*Speaking of the Messiah to come*) The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

**Isaiah 42:1** – (*Speaking of the Messiah to come*) Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

**Isaiah 44:6** - .....I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God (*the scripture repeatedly affirms there is only one God – Isaiah emphasizes this often*).

**Isaiah 45:18** – (*and again*).....I am the Lord, and there is no other.

**Isaiah 61:1** – The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (*this Old Testament writing was quoted by Jesus in the synagogue – He reported then that he is fulfilling this scripture*).

**Isaiah 63:11** – Then his people recalled the days of....Moses and his people – where is he who brought them through the sea....Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them?

**Ezekiel 37:14** – I will put my Spirit in you (*the dead in the valley of dry bones*) and you will live (*The Spirit is seen to be the giver of life*).

**Joel 2:28** - .....I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream, your young men will see visions (*this is implying the role of the Spirit in the New Testament*).

**Micah 3:8** – But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.

**Zechariah 4:6** – So he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty (***Thus, in the Old Testament: The Spirit is God in Man*** – *Therefore, whatever is to be done by God through men is done at the urging and prompting – and empowerment – of the Holy Spirit – and this continues to the New Testament*).

**Zechariah 12:10** - .....They will look on ME, the one they have PIERCED and they will mourn for HIM as one mourns for an only child... (*Foretelling the crucifixion with God saying He/God will be pierced, and they will mourn for Him/Jesus – total juxtaposition*).