

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

The Holy Trinity (2021)

Christ, Son of Man and Son of God

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“Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3:9–15, ESV)

The psalmist cries out, *“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.” (Psalm 29:2, ESV)* and again he sings, *“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.” (Psalm 8:1, ESV)* For all who know the Lord are astonished by the wonder of His workings and by the honor He has given our race that He was made but, *“a little lower than the heavenly beings.” (Psalm 8:5, ESV)* Thus, we cannot help but confess with St. Paul, *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33, ESV)*

Ever since the Garden of Eden the hearts of men remain restless until they rest with God. In fact, the history of the human race reveals an ardent and ceaseless quest to find God. But this history also reveals the blind, senseless groping, and degradation of man’s search. There is no doubt the heavens declare the glory of God and the earth shows His handiwork. But *“although [men] knew God,”* as they searched for Him, *“they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:21, ESV)*

Since the creation of the world the magnificence of God are clearly revealed by the things which God has made, but in the darkness of man’s proud and foolish heart, in the vanity of his imaginations, and the moral depravity of his life, men changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, to birds and four-footed creatures. The march of mankind throughout the centuries has been a progressive march away from God toward an ever-viler life, towards idolatry of earthly things, away from the truth and a rush towards lies, away from worship of the Creator toward the worship of the creature. In his search for God, man has not shown an evolution upward, toward finer forms of worship, but a devolution downward, to ever more depraved, self-glorifying, and corrupting idolatry. Never is this seen more clearly than in the theology that insists that on the cross Christ only made satisfaction for original sin, but man, through his effort, his good works can make satisfaction for the sins he commits daily. Here man makes an idol of himself, trusting in his ability to save himself and thereby robs from Christ the merit and glory that is His alone.

Despite such foolish religious enlightenment, man cannot by his own wisdom and strength believe in Jesus Christ or find God or the way that leads to peace with Him. Even though God is not far from us, for we live and move in Him and have our being in Him (Acts 17:27-28), educated and cultured man of the twenty-first century is no different than men of the past,

seeking God through human wisdom and failing in the process. Such seeking is not unlike a blind man groping in the darkness; ever searching, but never finding, and it is even more difficult when the blind, are led by the blind (Luke 6:39).

But into this darkness God has shone His Light to the blind. Into this darkness, God, from His heavenly throne, sent the Light, His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, to take on our flesh, to suffer in our place, thereby revealing the true glory of God through His Son, whose death upon the Altar of the Cross paid the price for our sin and reconciled us to God. Moreover, God the Father and God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit to us, revealing the identity of the Light to hearts that were blinded by unbelief. He came granting the gift of faith to all who heard the word of the Gospel, opening their hearts to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. He came to reveal the Light of God to the lost and wandering children of men.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, shortly after His baptism in the river Jordan, began His public ministry with a reformatory act. Going to the Temple, He drove out the moneychangers and those who sold life-stock, saying, ***“My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.”*** (Matthew 21:13, ESV) By His action Jesus created quite a stir. His actions showed that He was the Lord of the Temple, the promised Messiah, a declaration He proved by His mighty deeds and miracles. However, the people asked, “Who is this Jesus?” They marveled at His preaching and His deeds. But the rulers of the Temple were not so impressed. Indeed, they despised this man from Nazareth and His un-educated disciples. But one member of the Temple court was not satisfied with the slanderous words of his fellow jurists. Fearing the rebuke of his peers, Nicodemus is strengthened by the Spirit to visit Jesus. Hidden by the darkness of night, Nicodemus ventures out. Finding Jesus he says, ***“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”*** (John 3:2, ESV)

The Spirit, because of our Lord’s marvelous works and miracles, has led Nicodemus to recognize Jesus is the One who is to be sent by God: The Messiah. As our omniscient Lord receives Nicodemus, He immediately perceives the question which is troubling his soul, “What must I do to be saved?” “What must I do to see the kingdom of God?” Nicodemus, a Pharisee, is seeking the answer to his question, “From where or from what does salvation come?”

Man has no human way, method, or research for finding God. Our Lord Jesus tells us, ***“No one has ever seen God.”*** (John 1:18, ESV) and ***“No one has ascended into heaven.”*** (John 3:13, ESV) These statements by Christ seem confusing and contradictory when we remember Enoch and Elijah, both were taken into heaven as men. But when we consider His words in the context of His conversation with Nicodemus, we begin to understand what He is saying. When our Lord says ***“no one”*** He means “no unregenerate man.” ***“No one,”*** who is without the Spirit, without faith in Him, without the assurance of the forgiveness of their sin by God for the sake of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. In this statement, our Lord kills the righteousness of the Law and reason. Whoever is born only of a woman possesses nothing more than natural birth, and such will not inherit the kingdom of God. Our powers of reason have not descended from heaven, nor will they ascend into heaven.

Therefore, God cannot be discovered by our powers of philosophy, speculation, mystical reflection, or scientific research. From creation man can make assumptions regarding the existence of God, but man cannot discover who God is or, by his own efforts, discover the secret counsels of God’s heart. These things, our Lord Jesus says, are beyond man’s powers. Therefore, a divine revelation is necessary to give men the knowledge of the nature and power of God.

So how surprised Nicodemus, a man of great faith, yet a faith based on works, must have been when in response to his glowing description of Jesus, our Lord responds, ***“Truly, truly, I say to***

you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3, ESV) What, Nicodemus must have thought, is Jesus talking about? Who can be born again? But our Lord doubles down, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:5–6, ESV)* Notice, this birth is divine, not human. Here, Jesus gives Nicodemus the divine revelation that he needs to be a child of God. Thus, He shows him that which promises him entrance into God’s kingdoms of grace and glory. For Jesus alone is the One who has come down from heaven, and He is the One who is going back into heaven. Thus, He knows of what He speaks. He has seen God and knows God; He is in the bosom of the Father and therefore knows all the secret counsels and purposes of God.

Yet men continue to be proud in the imagination of their hearts, rejecting the revelation which Christ, who came from heaven, gives to men. They continue to follow their own wild guesses and speculations, preferring them to the revelation of God, which out of His mercy He gives us through the One whom He has sent, the One who came down from heaven and who has the only true and reliable information about God and His purpose. What folly, what audacity, what pride!

In the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus lays claim to divinity, a divinity which Nicodemus confesses at the beginning of their discussion. The Son of God, having come from heaven, existed before He was a man. Therefore, even though His body is walking on the earth in weakness and humility, He dwells in the closest and most intimate connection with the two other persons of the Godhead.

From His words to Nicodemus, it is evident that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three separate persons, and at the same time Scripture affirms that they are of the same essence, therefore, one God. Jesus says, *“I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30, ESV)* He also says, *“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.” (John 15:26, ESV)* Moreover, St. John writes, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1, ESV)* and St. Paul affirms, *“God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6, ESV)* Thus, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God but three separate persons, whom we worship as the Triune God. All who refuse to confess this truth are not of the Christian Church, they are not children of God.

Jesus says to Nicodemus, *“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12, ESV)* I am telling you that when you were born, you did not have faith and without faith you can accomplish nothing. If you cannot understand the things of the world, how can you understand heavenly things. Only those born of the Spirit can understand the things of God and this birth is the work of God through the blessings of Baptism, through the application of His Word and water, not the work of man.

Those waters blessed by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, make one a child of God and grant them the promises of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. But misguided theology leads men to trust in themselves and doubt God’s Word and His promises. When tragedy strikes, such men look within themselves and ask, “How could God have done this to me? Have I not prophesied in His name; have I not done the works He commanded me to do, those works which would bring me happiness in this life and the bliss of eternal life? Why, O Lord, do You visit me with tragedy? Have I not been good enough? Why make me or my loved ones suffer?” These are questions from the lips of those who trust in themselves more than God. Thus, God responds, *“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.” (Job 40:2, ESV)* and, to such as these Jesus answers, *“I never knew you;*

depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:23, ESV) Save us God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit from such impenitence, such unbelief. Thus, we pray:

Holy and most merciful God, to know You and Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You sent, and to believe in Your Son’s sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins, is life eternal. We praise and thank You that You have revealed Yourself to us as the God of our salvation through the working of the Holy Spirit who removed the blindness of our soul and poured out Your grace upon us to know You as our Father and to know Your Son, Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Therefore, we ask that You strengthen our faith and trust in You, sanctifying our hearts, deepening our love, and consecrating our lives, bringing us at last to Your heavenly home, where we shall know even as we are known, through the merits of Your Son, Jesus Christ who gave His life to save ours. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.