

Trinity Sunday, Matins
Exodus 3:1-15, John 3: 1-17
Mother Emma

In September and October, the Church celebrates Creationtide, as around the time of Harvest, we give thanks for our Creator, God the Father, who brought the world into existence and who gives us all the wondrous gifts in the natural world.

From Christmas to Ascension, we follow in the footsteps of the Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, from his birth in Bethlehem, through his ministry to his Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension back into Heaven to reign at the Father's right hand in glory.

Last week we gave thanks for the coming of the Holy Spirit, to comfort and inspire the disciples, giving them the gifts to go out and breathe life, energy and hope into God's Church, and remaining with us in our day to day lives to sustain and encourage us along the path of our Christian journey.

And now, today, on Trinity Sunday and at the start of the long Trinity season which continues all the way to November, we draw the Three Persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit together, as we worship our one, yet Triune God.

The holy mystery of the Trinity is precisely that.

It is an understanding of God, in the different ways Christians have experienced him over the centuries, formulated by human beings into an expression we can (at least to some extent) grasp and proclaim.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was first articulated by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the word Trinity never features in the Scriptures themselves, yet the idea of the Three Persons is clearly visible in our New Testament reading for today, as Nicodemus visits Jesus by night.

Jesus tells him that God sent his Son into the world, so that the world might be saved through him.

But earlier in the conversation, he has also described the essential work of the Holy Spirit, through whose life and breath true Christians are born again.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are most definitely introduced to us through the pages of Scripture.

But perhaps we may share in Nicodemus' quite reasonable question: *How can these things be?*

For centuries theologians and preachers have wrestled with ways to describe the Holy Trinity in terms and illustrations which make sense to us as human beings.

In recent decades, many of them have been drawn to an understanding of the Trinity as a holy relationship, described using the word, "perichoretic", or "engaged in an endless dance".

God himself IS relationship, drawing together different characteristics and purposes, modelling for his Church the holy relationship into which those Christians, born again through water and the Spirit may enter and share, drawn into the endless dance with their God and with one another.

The Scriptures describe the church, as the Body of Christ, as being made up of many different people, whose complementary gifts, skills and callings, should enable them to work together to bring in God's Kingdom on earth.

The term, "endless dance" suggests a fluidity and movement which human beings often fail to see in their limited vision of God.

As Frederick Faber wrote in his hymn, "There's a wideness in God's mercy": *"We make his love too narrow by false limits of our own"*.

The doctrine of the Trinity was put together by the Council of Nicaea to help us to define and explain to others how the one God we worship can in fact be seen as three different Persons.

It is not there as a barrier or a stumbling-block for those who struggle to “get their heads round” its exact metaphysical meaning.

Sunday by Sunday, we recall our faith in the Three Persons of the Trinity at Matins in the relatively simple words of the Apostles’ Creed, *“I believe in God, the Father Almighty...; I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...: I believe in the Holy Ghost.”*

We may personally find that we experience God more often or more instinctively in one of his Persons – in a close personal relationship with Jesus, who made his home among us; in the experience of the charismatic inspiration of the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, or in a deep sense of awe and wonder for the majestic power of the Creator God who made the world in all its beauty and life and intricacy.

As Christians we are asked to open our hearts to belief in each one of these, whilst understanding that they are united in our one true God, but our readings this morning also remind us of the need to maintain above all the sense of holy mystery surrounding our God.

Moses experienced God in a new way, in the bush which burned with fire but was never consumed.

He was reminded, *Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.*

Our encounters with the Persons of the Trinity are always holy and inspirational.

In the past when I have led pilgrimages for children, we have given each child a card with this text: I am a pilgrim on a journey to the place where God is found. Every step upon this journey is upon God’s holy ground.”

We cannot say when or how our next encounter with our Triune God may be, and we likewise may not be able to define the sense of his presence which fills us on our journey.

Jesus tells Nicodemus:

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

In the endless dance of the Holy Trinity, we may experience God in so many mysterious ways, but each one of these calls us, as the Church of God, to model ourselves humbly and lovingly on the Trinitarian relationship of holy unity.