

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen . . . . .

In this way, every time we begin to pray, we proclaim our belief in a Triune God.  
And we plunge ourselves into mystery. . .

We say those words we just heard Jesus say to his disciples -- when we bring our infants or our friends to the baptismal font. We trace the sign of the cross on their foreheads, and before our infants can walk or talk, we teach them to “bless themselves” -- we take their baby hand, we move it for them into the sign of blessing, and we teach them those trinitarian words.

#### WHY?

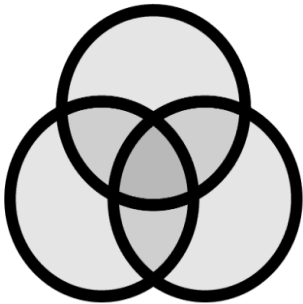
- We want them to know that they belong first to God, whose precious children they are before they are ours.
- We want them to fall in love with Jesus, -- as we have done -- God’s incarnation in our midst.
- We want them to be filled with the holy Spirit. The same Spirit that God breathed upon the chaos to make it into cosmos. The life-giving Spirit, who moves like a mighty wind over primeval waters, bringing them to life. The Spirit who descends like a purifying fire, transforming everything it touches, so that the whole universe pulses with life and glows with divine brilliance.
- We want them to know that every time we inhale, we are gifted with God’s life, and every time we exhale, we offer gratitude. And we want to keep **reminding ourselves** of that deep mystery....

So, the Church over the centuries has been trying to find ways to celebrate these mysteries., --- to draw us more deeply into a greater awareness of the divine milieu in which “we live and move and have our being.” [St. Paul to the Athenians, Acts 17:28.] As early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a feast in honor of the Trinity was celebrated, and gradually this celebration spread, until Pope John XXII, approved it for the entire church in 1334.

Meanwhile, back in the centers of learning, the theologians were at work trying to put into philosophical language the Christian belief in God – to create a creed that would remain faithful to the monotheism of Judaism – there is only ONE God. Yet it needed to reflect the disciples’ experience of Jesus as divine; the disciples also needed to give expression to their felt presence of the Spirit that Jesus breathed on them after his Resurrection. Peter and his companions could see and hear that the Holy Spirit had fallen on Cornelius and his whole household, as reported in our first reading today [Acts 10.]. St. Paul attested to the groanings of the Holy Spirit in the material universe and in us as we await our full redemption [Romans 8:22-27.]

These aspects of God could not be denied. . . . How to express them? A whole theology developed using the Greco-Roman concepts of PERSON and NATURE. It took almost 400 years for the church to arrive at the creeds we still proclaim – no one should think that Father church makes such decisions quickly !! And that theological exploration has continued down the centuries, finding expression in many different ways in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

But words are only one approach to reality, and they always fall short. Our forebears came up with symbols -- first a simple triangle; but that is kind of pointy and flat, not so good.



So let's try a trio of intertwined circles, called Borromean ring. . . . A three -dimensional puzzle has been made, in which the rings cannot be separated.

Or a combination triangle, triple circle with a different symbol in each circle -- the Creating Father -- the triumphant Lamb of God, a symbol for the Risen Christ -- and the Pentecostal spirit ---does this help?



Simplify this into the Celtic knot: imagine it in three dimensions, globe-like; then imagine it in 3 different precious metals – platinum, gold, silver? then: put it in motion, almost like a wind spinner you might place in your garden, always moving with the slightest breeze. . . . Shining sun-like from every angle. That's a little better. (I'm sorry I couldn't make a slide for that . . . but you could picture it!)

Besides these kinds of symbols, we also have many attempts to depict God as trinitarian in religious art:

Take our Christmas art, where there are often three:

Put Joseph in the Father role, Mary as the Spirit, and Jesus, of course – the Incarnate son.



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OR:



Loving parents embracing a child can give us a sense of a communion of love -- a human experience that points toward the eternal community of divine love at the heart of the universe.

Artists have also put God the Father and the Holy Spirit [dove] in a nativity scene:



ART has also tried to show us God's presence in other scenes from Jesus' life:



The dove appears in depictions of Jesus' baptism – the Father is just a voice, which is hard to paint!

Then, when artists want to picture the Risen Christ ascended to God's right hand in heaven, they have gone to town in murals and mosaics adorning churches all over the world. Here are some samples:



OR, we could get really carried away with cherubs, clouds, etc. Where are the trumpets? And heavenly choirs?





WE just need collections of saints to complete the picture:

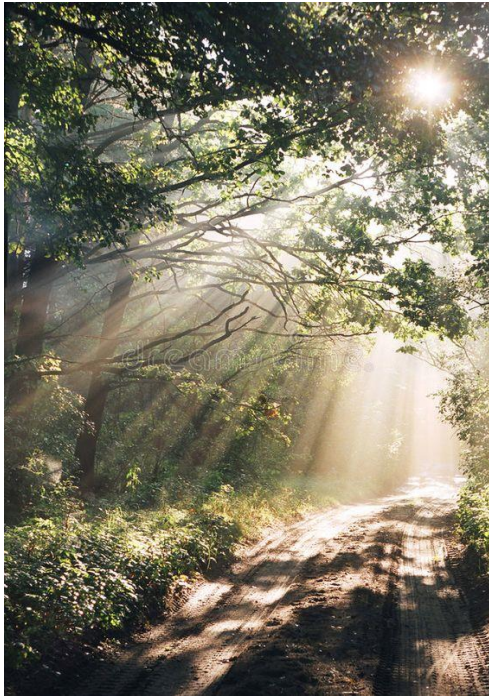


Some contemporary feminist theologians have suggested that these heavenly images are surely inadequate – they could all be boiled down to 2 white men and a bird – in various elaborations . . .

Is that the best insight into the great mystery of God?



Let's go back to earlier centuries, and NATURE DEPICTIONS OF TRINITY. TERTULLIAN -- was a third century Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa, a highly influential theologian, a predecessor of St. Augustine. He used nature metaphors that are still helpful:



If the great, unknowable mystery of God is pictured as the glowing sun, and God incarnate as a ray of that same light streaming to the earth (Christ the sunbeam), then the Spirit is the point of light that arrives and affects the earth with warmth and energy. And it is all the same light. -- God is the source, God is with us, God is within us.

Again, the transcendent God is like an upwelling spring of water, and a river that flows outward from this source [the Word], and the place where the water meets and moistens the earth, sustaining its life [life-giving spirit.] And it is all the one water.

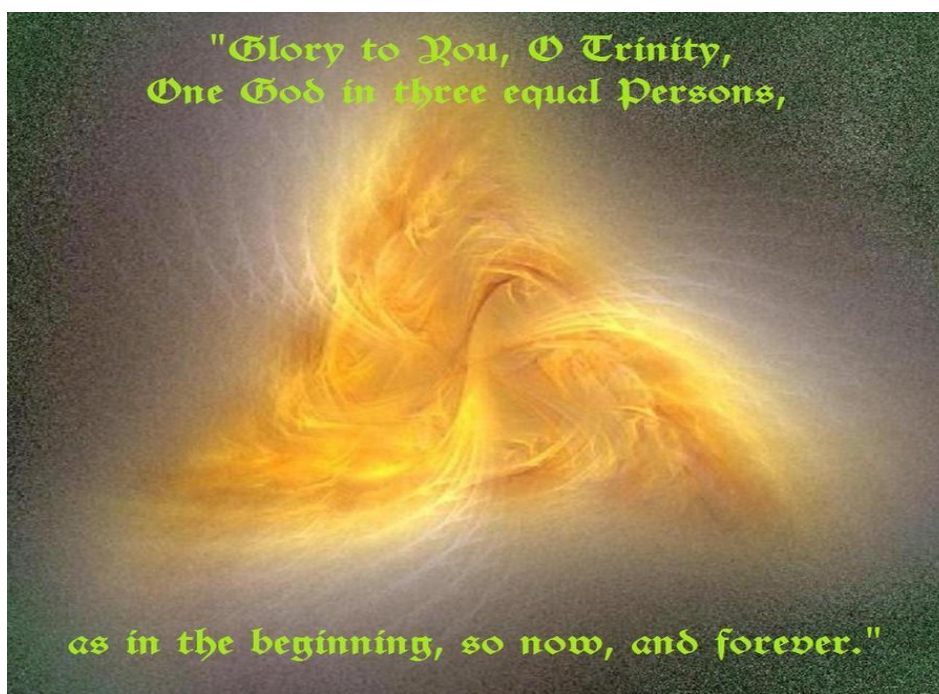


Yet, again, the triune God is like a plant with its root, shoot, and fruit; deep, invisible root, green stem reaching into the world, and flower that opens to spread beauty and fragrance and to fructify the earth with fruit and seed. And it is all the one living plant.

The Spirit signifies the presence of the living God active in our world – the unceasing, dynamic flow of divine power, continually creating all that exists. These metaphors give us something to meditate on . . . but we must realize that they are only metaphors, and this side of heaven, we cannot know fully the One on whom we depend for everything.



Here is another contemporary effort at an image/symbol: Sister Violet, a Dominican who lives at the Franciscan Villa has created this image: Does this speak to us?



Human as we are, how could we image the great majesty-mystery that is infinite, inexhaustible, all -encompassing, all-enveloping, all-enlivening, all-penetrating? God who is **FOR** us, and **WITH** us, and **WITHIN** us? WE cannot image God adequately; nor can we speak of God adequately.



Would it help to SING? -- how do we sing of God? With what instruments and words and melodies to we proclaim: Holy, holy, holy . . . Praising, rejoicing, adoring – perhaps sometimes dancing – our appreciation of the One we cannot adequately name, or picture?

The more important questions perhaps, go something like this:

Can we draw close to the divine fire? Absorb its warmth; and spread its flame in a cold world?

Can we turn to the River of Glory and drink deep of its life-giving water and so refresh ourselves and a thirsting world?

Can we reach deep into the roots of the tree from which we grow, and flowering and bearing fruit into a desert, feeding the life that depends on us as well as on God?

Can we ourselves undergo a deifying transformation so that God can transform the world through us?

Can we, sent forth by the Risen Christ, somehow communicate that God is an eternal community of love, embracing all that exists? May it be so! Amen!