

God in Trinity

By joining human nature to the Divine, Christ takes us into the Jordan with him. He purifies us and lifts us up by his own actions. When the sky opens and God the Father speaks and the Spirit descends the Trinity is openly proclaimed for the first time. The opening of Christ's public ministry proclaims what will be revealed to the world with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Just as the Spirit comes down from heaven and touches Christ the Spirit at Pentecost will come upon Christ's representatives, the Apostles.

The mystery of God in Trinity sharply divides Christians from both the Jews and the Muslims that also accept the creator God of the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament dealings with humanity God has insisted on being the one and only God of creation. Yet Christians insist that God is three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. The Baptism of Christ in the Jordan is the moment of revelation of this Trinity for Christians. But even in the Old Testament we see God revealed as Trinity for those who care to see with eyes of faith.

When Abraham entertains the three angels we see more than just messengers of God. The angels stand for the Father, Son and Spirit. What was expressed in shadows in the Old Testament stories is now made manifest openly at the Baptism.

Here we reach the summit of the Nativity celebration, God became flesh to reveal the very nature of God to us. God is a community, one God in three persons. We are not simply individuals on a lone pilgrimage to our creator; we are a community of believers, one entity just like our God. Our God is one and many, we are one community with many persons. When we begin to share the life of God we unite ourselves with that community, past, present and future. As sharers in the Divine Nature, we share in each other as well, there is no longer an I but a we. This is the horror of heresy, not an intellectual battle of who is right or wrong, but a tearing asunder of the bonds that bind the community together. Breaking those bonds tears apart the community of God that is one with God. This divide strikes at the heart of God's very nature.

“Today Christ is baptized; He emerges from the waters and uplifts the world with Him. He beholds the opening of the heavens which Adam had closed for himself and his descendants. The Spirit testifies to his divine nature, for He is in accord with his own. A voice is heard from the heavens, giving witness to the One who has descended; for He is the Savior of our souls.”

Litija Great Compline Theophany
Steve Puluka

Phillipian Fast

The Winter Pascha

Week Five



“ An angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds keeping night watch over their flocks. The shepherds were frightened as they saw the glory of the Lord around the angel and heard him say: Rejoice, for Christ is born. Blessed are You, O God of our Fathers. ”

Circumcision

God's covenant with Abraham was sealed with the ritual of circumcision. All the male children of the promise were circumcised and named on the eighth day after their birth with the appropriate sacrifice made to God at the temple. As Christianity grew in the empire many wanted to move away from the Jewish roots of Jesus. Against this trend we see Matthew preserving this story in his Gospel. Jesus was named into the covenant of Abraham on the eighth day with his circumcision. Jesus' parents keep the traditions of their ancestors and follow the law. The law demands that all the male children be circumcised and that the first born male be redeemed by a sacrifice at the temple. We note that Jesus embraced the law of God for the Jewish people. He did not turn his back on the law but lived under it.

“Overcome by feelings of pity, I, the merciful, have come to my creature, holding out my hands that I may embrace you. Do not feel shame before me; it is for you who are naked that I became naked and came to be baptized. Now the Jordan is opened for me, and John prepares the way for me in the water and in the hearts of men.’ Having thus addressed the man—in deed, not in words—The Savior appeared to the Forerunner as the unapproachable light.”

Romanos’
Kontakia

Paul tells us in the letter to the Romans chapter 2 that Jesus is a Jew both inside and out. Here we see that Jesus follows the prescriptions of the law, outside observance in Paul’s parlance. Throughout his life and ministry Jesus is an observant Jew. He follows the Law. But just as important for Paul is the inside observance. The prophets of old scolded the people for keeping the letter of the law but ignoring the spirit by allowing injustice to exist in the land. Paul and other Christian preachers seize on this idea and claim membership in the chosen people for those who are not physically circumcised but are circumcised in their heart. The ritual of circumcision is an empty practice if the heart is not on the path towards God.

We can take this same warning to heart. One of the dangers of the Orthodox and Catholic approaches to God was highlighted by the Protestant Reformation. We can easily take ritual as the end rather than the means to salvation. When we accept communion are we performing an outside ritual or taking the food of God into our hearts? When we attend a Baptism, are we celebrating a new baby or awed by the power of God to reach out and save another life?

The concept of the eighth day connects us again with Pascha. Resurrection Sunday is the eighth day of creation. The first seven days God created this world. On the eighth day, the day of Resurrection God makes the New Creation in Christ. We live a new life that will last forever. On this Feast of the Circumcision the eighth day begins Christ’s earthly life. On the eighth day of the resurrection we begin our new life.

“The One who was ineffably begotten of the Father as the Word and God of God, abiding in the changeless Godhead, now endures circumcision in the flesh. He who is above the Law, now comes under the Law and delivers all from its curse and gives his blessing from above. Therefore, let us joyously praise his most gracious condescension and gratefully extol Him. Let us entreat Him to grant our souls his great mercy.”

Matins at the Praises January 1

“The One who clothes himself with light as with a robe deigned, for our sakes to become as we are. Today He is clothed in streams of the Jordan even though He has no need to be purified. He refashions us through the cleansing that He receives. What a marvelous wonder! He creates anew without fire and refashions without tearing apart; He grants salvation to those enlightened in Him, Christ our God, the Savior of our souls.”

Litija Great Compline Theophany Jordan’s Water

We see Christ our God at the Jordan’s edge. God who we proclaim in Psalm 103 at every vesper service as “arrayed with light as with a cloak”, wears the cleansing water as a man. The contrast is awesome, the incorporeal God that radiates light from the heavens plunges into water that would douse light and dull one’s radiance. Only creatures in need of purification enter the waters of baptism in this way.

The logic of typology allows Christ to act on all of us, just as Adam acts on us all in sin from paradise. By sharing in human nature Adam condemns that human nature. We share in that nature and share in that condemnation. Christ takes on this nature and purifies it in the Jordan. Since Christ does not personally require that purification, He purifies the very nature of humanity in His flesh. By purifying this for us, He grants us access to his saving work. Connecting our nature to Christ’s we are able to suffer, die, enter the tomb with Christ and rise with Him on the third day.

Now that Christ has plunged into the water, the source of light can enlighten us. Rather than putting out the light, the water causes the light to shine forth into the world.

While the logic of typology can sometimes escape our empirical scientific sensibilities, typological thinking was considered the best logic of Christ’s time. Philosophy of this nature ruled the day. We have to reorient our thinking to the world of metaphor to enter into this salvation. The journey is worth the effort for without the effort we cannot connect ourselves to Christ. Without the power of the Spirit to connect our lives to the life of our savior, we cannot be saved. We can’t participate in Christ’s death and Resurrection.

“Seeing the river in the desert, and the dew in the furnace, and the rain shower in the Virgin, John, seeing Christ in the Jordan, was struck with fear, just as his father trembled before Gabriel. But now things were more momentous than ever before, for the Lord of the angels was coming to a servant, wishing to be baptized.

“Stop, Redeemer, let it be enough up to this point; for I know who thou art, the unapproachable light!”

Romanos’
Kontakia