

Who Is God?  
Trinity Sunday  
June 16, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

What is your image of God? How do you picture God in your mind's eye? How would you explain God to someone who didn't know Him? Some years ago a teacher received a homework assignment that was written by 8 year old Danny Dutton of Chula Vista, California. His assignment was to explain God. This is what he wrote:

One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die, so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn't make grown-ups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way He doesn't have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers.

God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot to this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray at times beside bedtime. God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this. Because He hears everything, there must be a terrible lot of noise in His ears, unless He has thought of a way to turn it off.

God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere, which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting His time by going over your Mom and Dad's head asking for something they said you couldn't have.

Atheists are people who don't believe in God. I don't think there are any in Chula Vista. At least there aren't any who come to our church.

Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water and performing miracles and trying to teach the people who didn't want to learn about God. They finally got tired of Him preaching to them and they crucified Him. But He was good and kind, like His Father, and He told His Father that they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them, and God said O.K.

His Dad appreciated everything that He had done and all His hard work on earth so He told Him He didn't have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in heaven. So He did. And now He helps His Dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones He can take care of Himself without having to bother God. Like a secretary, only more important.

You can pray anytime you want and they are sure to help you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time. You should always go to church on Sunday because it

makes God happy, and if there's anybody you want to make happy, it's God. Don't skip church or do something you think will be more fun like going to the beach. This is wrong. And besides the sun doesn't come out at the beach until noon anyway.

If you don't believe in God, besides being an atheist, you will be very lonely, because your parents can't go everywhere with you, like to camp, but God can. It is good to know He's around you when you're scared in the dark or when you can't swim and you get thrown into real deep water by big kids. But...you shouldn't just always think of what God can do for you. I figure God put me here and He can take me back anytime He pleases. And...that's why I believe in God.

Not too bad for an 8 year old. People have always struggled with trying to understand who God is. Ever since mankind's fall into sin, God's true nature and being have been hidden from us. Is God kind and good, or is He vengeful and punitive? Is He really powerful and almighty, or is he limited and ineffective, unable to solve my personal problems? Does God love me, or is He indifferent to my needs? Those are the kind of questions that people have asked for ages. And the reason they ask them is because our fallen sinful nature has blinded us from a true knowledge and understanding of God.

And so, God had to reveal Himself to mankind. And He did just that -- to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He showed His awesome power to Moses and the children of Israel when He sent the plagues in Egypt and appeared on Mount Sinai. The Scriptures are the written record of God revealing Himself to His people. He came to them in promise and in fulfillment. He called them to faith — inviting them to believe the promise. And then, in Jesus Christ He fulfilled the promise and vindicated their faith.

In the early fourth century AD it became necessary for the Christian Church to make an attempt to become very precise in their understanding of the nature of God. There were important reasons for this. For one thing, up until that time the church had undergone sporadic and severe persecutions. But with the ascension of the new Emperor Constantine, the Christian Church suddenly became officially recognized and, because Constantine's mother was Christian, the church actually became the favored religion in the Roman Empire. Suddenly many people wanted to become Christians. They were tired of the false religions that fostered self-indulgence and immorality and belief in a multitude of gods, each of which had to constantly be appeased and satisfied. Christianity was attractive because it promoted love for others more than self, because it insisted on a high standard of morality and because of its fervent belief in one true God.

But the people had questions. If there was only one God, then who is Jesus? What is his relationship to God? Is He a second God or was he merely a man who did great deeds of love? And what is this Holy Spirit that the Bible talks about? It all seemed so confusing to the new converts.

Christians themselves were not united in the answer to these questions. Some taught that Jesus was a created being and not true God. Others denied that he was truly a man, but God disguised as a man. Some taught that the Holy Spirit was not a personal being, but merely a spiritual force or “divine energy” of God.

So, in order to teach correctly about God to new converts and in order to teach the truth with a unanimous voice, it was necessary for the church to come to an agreement on the nature of God. This happened over a period of about 100 years through various ecumenical councils that were held. Through this discussion theologians and church leaders were forced to go back to the source of our information about God — the place where God has revealed Himself most clearly to mankind, the Holy Scriptures – the very testimonies of those eyewitnesses who had encountered God.

And when they searched the Scriptures what did they find? Well, the Scriptures very clearly teach that there is only one true God. The faith of God’s people, Israel, was clearly a belief in one God who had made all things and who had acted in history to rescue and redeem His people. The great Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4, was the creed of ancient Israel: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one”. All other gods are the inventions of men who refuse to acknowledge what is clearly seen in nature: “The heavens display the glory of God and the firmament shows forth the work of His hands.”

But as they searched the Scriptures, the church leaders of the fourth century also discovered that the one God had revealed Himself to mankind in three distinct persons. The Bible speaks of God as a Father who created all things and continues to provide for all He has created. Psalm 141 expresses this view of God as a Father who provides for those whom He has made: “The eyes of all look to You, O Lord, and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing”.

God’s greatest self-revelation is seen in the person of Jesus Christ. Who was Jesus Christ? To all who would gaze upon Him, He appeared in every way to be a mere man. Born of poor parents, circumcised on the 8th day as was required of all male Jews, raised in a carpenter’s household in Nazareth, there didn’t appear to be much about Him that was notable. But those who came to know Him saw something more. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He cast out demons. He forgave sins. He walked on water. He calmed the storm. He changed water into wine. Again and again they discovered that there was something extraordinary about this Man.

But it was during their final days with him that they discovered the truth. At first it appeared that He was a good man denied justice, condemned to death at the whim of a cruel mob and a spineless governor. But three days later He came back to life. And they witnessed the greatest miracle ever as He appeared to them and for forty days continued to reveal His true nature to

them as the Son of God. Their testimony in the Scripture is very clear: Jesus Christ is God. He has the attributes of God. He received honor and glory that only God can receive. One week after His resurrection when Jesus appeared again to His disciples and Thomas declared "my Lord and my God", Jesus did not deny or reject what Thomas had affirmed. He accepted that acclamation, for He is indeed true God. St. Paul clearly teaches this same truth in his epistles: "from them (the Jews) is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!" St. John in his first epistle, speaking of Jesus, says: "He is the true God and eternal life."

Likewise, when the theologians and leaders in the fourth century searched the Scriptures for references to the Holy Spirit, they discovered that the Holy Spirit is also God. In the Scriptures the Holy Spirit is given divine names; divine attributes are ascribed to Him; divine works that only God can do are attributed to Him; and divine honor and glory are accorded Him.

So, the clear conclusion from the Scriptures is that there is only one true God who has revealed Himself in three persons. The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God and yet there are not three gods, but one God. The true God is the Triune God — three in one and one in three. God is one in essence, but in this one essence there are three distinct Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, I don't expect you to understand that. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity cannot be understood but only believed as it has been revealed to us in the Scriptures.

But what does that mean for you and me today? It means that I have a heavenly Father who gave me my life and all that I have and who daily takes care of me, providing me with all I need for my life. It means that I have a Savior who came to this world to give His perfect and innocent life for my sinful life, to redeem me, a lost and condemned person, with His holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. It means that I have God the Holy Spirit who has called me into His family by the Gospel, who sanctifies my life and strengthens and keeps me in the true faith through the means of Grace, His Word and Sacraments.

One God in three persons is looking out for you and me. He is on our side now and forever. We don't have to guess about who God is, for God has revealed Himself through the Scriptures and in Christ He has given Himself to us. What an awesome God we have! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.