

that the Emperor Constantine summoned a council of all the bishops of the Church to his summer palace in Nicaea to work out their disagreement. The result was the Nicene Creed which condemned Arius' teaching and asserted the full divinity of the Son as being eternal as the Father is.

The Son is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God." Contradicting Arius' denial of the Son's eternity: Jesus is "eternally begotten of the Father." Most important is the statement that the Son is "of one being with the Father." The Greek word, "homoousios" (*homo* = same, *ousia* = being or substance) means: "made of the same stuff." The Council used this word about the Father and the Son to affirm that the Son is fully divine and to provide a way to say that the Father and the Son are distinct and yet one in being or substance. In correcting the distorted teaching of Arius, the early Church Fathers reaffirmed the message of the Scriptures as the Church had always understood them.

What about the Holy Spirit? In 381, the Council of Constantinople affirmed that the Holy Spirit is also "one being" (*homoousios*) with the Father and the Son. All three were now defined as equally divine. And yet, to get to the doctrine of the Trinity, we need to make one more step:

The Heresy of "Modalism" and the Eternal Three-fold Relationship of the Persons in God.

In the Early Church a man named Sabellius taught that Father, Son and Spirit were simply functions, "provisional models" or roles that the one God assumed at different stages in history. That is, the one God merely behaved like a Father, or a Son or a Spirit at different times. This error tries to teach that:

1. In Creation, God assumed the role of the Father.
2. Then God appeared as the Son and entered the world.
3. After the Ascension God took on the role of the Spirit to empower the Church.

In this view, Father, Son and Spirit were three different ways in which God presented himself in History. However, God would then revert to a mysterious Oneness. God wasn't *really* Father, Son or Spirit in essence – these were just temporary ways in which He appeared to humanity. God was like a "shape shifter" in popular science fiction, appearing in different functions or "Modes" when dealing with us, while in His true nature, he was none of them. This is called "modalism." The Church rejected the heretical modalist teaching that God only seems to us to be Father, Son or Spirit from our limited point of view in time and space. Rather, the Councils and the Fathers of the Church affirmed that God truly is Father, Son and Spirit in eternity, just as much as in the history of human salvation.

Two genuine ways of looking at God

So, we can see two ways of looking at the Triune God:

1. We can think about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *in relation so us*.

In the human history of salvation, God revealed himself and acted in the world in three ways, as Father, Son and Spirit. Theologians call this the "Economic Trinity:" that is, the Persons of the one God as they interact with human beings.

2. Father, Son and Holy Spirit *in relation to each other.*

God also has three ways of being God *in Himself – in eternity.* God is always Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Himself. In eternity the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have a relationship *with one another.* Theologians call this the “Immanent Trinity.”

(Your students do *not* need to know the technical terminology; this is to aid your own understanding of the Trinity as their teacher).

The Gospel of John points to this eternal relationship in this way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God....No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. (John 1:1-2, 18)

Where is the Spirit in this intimacy between Father and Son? The Spirit binds Father and Son in mutual Love. In a certain sense, the Holy Spirit personifies the Love between the Father and Son.

St. Augustine described the Trinity as the Lover, the Beloved, and Love Himself:

1. The Father (The Lover) loves the Son (The Beloved).
2. The Son returns the love of the Father.
3. The Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and Son.

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, **C. S. Lewis wrote:**

“The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person....What grows out of the joint life of the Father is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God.”

The relationship between the three persons is so close that they “indwell” on one another, and all share in the distinct work of each. Their mutual indwelling activity has been traditionally described as a kind of “Dance.” The key to understanding the Trinity is to recognize that it is not just a math problem (how can three be one?), the Trinity is a relationship.

Materials Needed

- _ Small slips of paper with the names “Father,” “Son” or “Holy Spirit”
- _ Book of Common Prayer

Opening Prayer (5 min)(“Of the Holy Trinity,” BCP, 251)

Almighty God, you have revealed to your Church your eternal Being of glorious majesty and perfect love as one God in Trinity of Persons: Give us grace to continue steadfast in the confession of this faith, and constant in our worship of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Review of the Previous Lesson (5min.)

- Has God spoken to you over this past week?
- If so how?
- Present to the class your rewritten version of the scripture verse.

Introductory Activity (5-10 min) *(These ideas are intended to ensure a lively and exciting atmosphere at the beginning of the lesson. It is fine for each parish to approach this differently if you wish to make use of your own games or materials. However, do make use of some fun activity to get started).*

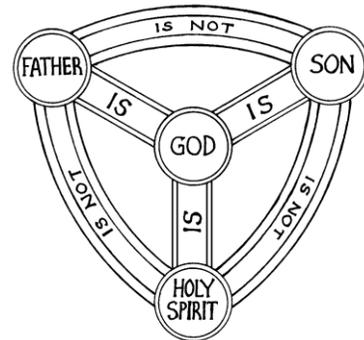
- Put the names, “Father,” “Son” or “Holy Spirit” on slips of paper. Give one to each student. Have each student present a brief pantomime to communicate which name was on his or her slip of paper, and have the students guess. Afterwards, discuss. What images or motions or behaviors seemed best to express the identity of each Divine Person? **OR**
- If you have only a few students or even one student, then have them draw a picture of what they think each name Father, Son, & Holy Spirit means to them.

Lesson (20-25 min)

I. Basic Terms: Turn in the *Book of Common Prayer* to page 867 (**The Articles of Religion**) and have a student read: *Article I. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity.*
Discussion questions: How does Article I talk about the Oneness of God? (*Write this down on a blackboard, whiteboard or large sheet of paper tacked to the wall*). How does this article describe the three-fold nature of God? (*Write this down also, and discuss*).

Make sure that the basic terminology is clear: One God in three Persons.

Transition: Ask the students if they find this a little confusing. Admit that many people feel the same way. Stress that the Trinity is a Mystery – that is, a Great truth beyond our full understanding. Yet, we can understand something about this mystery from what the Bible has to say about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Share this quote: “It is not possible to tell the Gospel story without referring to God in three different ways.” (Professor Christopher Morse, Union Theological Seminary)



II. The Role of Each Person of the Trinity in History: “First let’s look at the Apostles’ Creed (BCP, page 96) as a summary of what the Bible says.” Assign the three articles of the Creed to three students and have them read aloud.

Discussion: Have the students identify the different activities attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Summarize in terms of creation, redemption and the ongoing work of sanctification.

Transition: “We have seen some of the ways in which the three Persons of the Trinity are distinct from each other, but how are they related?”

III. Jesus Reveals his Relationship to the Father and Son: Read the story of **Jesus’ Baptism** (Mark 1:9-12).

Discussion:

- 1) Ask: “What three things take place as Jesus comes up from the water?” [(1) The heavens are opened, (2) The Spirit descends in the form of a dove, (3) The voice speaks from heaven and declares Jesus to be the beloved Son of God.]
- 2) What happens to Jesus here, and what do we learn from this story about who Jesus is?
- 3) How do you see the Trinity at work in this story? What role does each Person play?

IV. An Eternal Three-fold Relationship

Read John 1:1-3, 14-18.

Discussion questions:

- 1) In what two ways is the “Word” related to “God”? Help the students to see how there is both oneness and distinction in this relationship between the Father and the Word.
- 2) What does this passage indicate about what the Word does?
- 3) Who or what is this “Word”? Point to verse 14 to clarify that the Word is the Son of God, both (a) in his pre-existence in eternity, and (b) in his Incarnation in history.
- 4) Point to verse 18 as a restatement of verse 1, but this time in terms of eternal personal intimacy.
- 5) Ask, “Where is the Spirit in all this?” After student responses, share idea of the Spirit as the bond of Father and Son (see above).

Reflection (10-15 min)

Ask students what they have learned about the Trinity. Stress the theme of *relationship* and point to how we are invited to share in that relationship.

(If you have time, turn to Galatians 4:4-6)

Take-Home Activity (5 min)

*(It is recommended that you make use of this take-home activity to re-enforce the learning experience. You **may** eliminate this exercise if **necessary**. You may also substitute another activity if you find that to be more helpful. You should briefly review this lesson and review the take-home activity at the beginning of the next learning session).*

- *Write (a) a short prayer (one or two sentences) addressed to God the Father, (b) a short prayer to God the Son, and (c) a short prayer to God the Holy Spirit. Each prayer should reflect what is unique about each of the divine Persons. Reflect: when you pray each of these prayers, what feels the same and what feels different?*
- *In the next few weeks, get into the habit of making the Sign of the Cross – (a) when you first wake up, (b) to begin a prayer, (c) before taking communion, (d) when the priest makes the sign of the cross during the Eucharist.*

How do you make the sign of the cross? (1) using the first two fingers and thumb of your right hand, touch your forehead and say silently "in the name of the Father," (2) touch the lower middle of your chest above your solar plexus and mentally say, "...and of the Son, " (3) as you touch your left shoulder, "... and of the Holy ..., (4) and as you touch your right shoulder, "... Spirit. Amen."

Closing Prayer (5 min)

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Ask for prayer concerns for the coming week. Let the students offer their own particular prayers.

All conclude together (You could also make the sign of the cross at the same time):

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen. (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Scripture References

- Galatians 4:4-6
- John 1:1-3, 14-18
- Mark 1:9-12
- 2 Corinthians 2:13
- Colossians 1:15, 19

- Matthew 6:9
- 2 Corinthians 13:14

Additional Resources

- A good explanation of the trinity for teens
<http://www.everystudent.com/forum/trinity.html?gclid=CNqml66kyZwCFRmbnAodVUn4KQ>
- Another web article explaining the Trinity for teens
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/iyf/advice/faithdoubt/7c3080.html>
- Another web article explaining the Trinity for teens
http://www.ymtoday.com/article.php?aid=2112&page=article_list.php