



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Midweek Experience Curriculum

The Trinity | John the Baptist | The woman at the well

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to those in the early church to understand the Holy Trinity using the Old and New Testaments.

The mystery of the divine Trinity comes to expression in various ways in the Bible. However, the Bible doesn't mention the term "Trinity." The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated during the first councils of the fourth and fifth centuries really for two reasons. First, the early Christians needed a way to express the interrelated nature of the triune God in words. They used terms such as "person" or "substance". But this doctrine put into words the understanding of the Trinity gained through faith. Second, establishing the doctrine of the Trinity served to protect the faith against heretics who sought to convey an image of God which did not correspond to the testimony of the New Testament.

So what does the Trinity mean for us?

As Christians we profess the one triune God. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are all true God and have always existed. Also, the terms "Father", "Son", and "Holy Spirit" aren't merely names that describe God in three different modes. Rather, they stand for divine persons who are different from one another. The Father isn't the same as the Son, and the Son isn't the same as the Father. The same goes for the Holy Spirit.

God, the Father is the Divine Creator and Sustainer of life. God, the Son is the Redeemer and the embodiment of God's love and compassion. God, the Holy Spirit is the Comforter and Helper that brings God's essence into human lives. The Holy Spirit also brings clarity and divine truth. All three are interrelated and are eternally one.

All acts of God are acts of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but they aren't carried out in the same manner. Think about the creation of the world. You wouldn't say that Jesus or the Holy Spirit created the world. In the same way, it was neither God the Father nor the Holy Spirit, but Jesus, who became incarnate. Likewise, it wasn't God the Father or Jesus who was poured out on Pentecost, but it was the Holy Spirit.

Let's go to scripture now to see where this triune God shows up in the Old and New Testaments. The first is recorded in the creation story where it states: *"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters"* and also: *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness.'" The original Hebrew text uses a word to describe God as plural.*

There are numerous places where the number three alludes to the trinity in the Old Testament, such as:

- The three messengers of God who visited Abraham as recorded in Genesis 18.
- From Numbers 6: 24-26, the priestly blessing *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”*
- From Isaiah 6:3 *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”*

Additionally, the New Testament provides us with evidence of the triune God. One is at Jesus’ baptism as recorded in the first chapter of Mark, when the Father and the Holy Spirit attest to the sending of the incarnate Son of God: *“And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heaven parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’”*.

Other examples can be found in:

- Matthew 28:19 : *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of The Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”*
- In 1 Corinthians 12: 4-6: *“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”*
- In Ephesians 4: 4-6: *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

Facilitator Note

The Trinity in the divine service

References to the Trinity can be found in the opening Invocation (“In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”), in the Consecration (“In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I consecrate bread and wine for Holy Communion...), in the Benediction (“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all! Amen.”) and in the three-fold Amen. References are also made to the different persons of the Triune God individually throughout the service (for example, our focus on Jesus Christ during Holy Communion).

I hope we all come away from this session with a greater understanding of our doctrine and our beliefs. Perhaps most important of all, though, I hope that through your discussions, you will gain a greater understanding of who God is, as the Father, as the Son and as the Holy Spirit. The next two sessions will cover how God reveals Himself through earthly messengers. Please turn now to the questions in your participant guides. Thank you.

Going Deeper

God, the Father

When believers use the term "Father", in connection with God, it is linked to aspects of His creation, authority, and loving care. God is the source and sustainer of everything He has created. In this respect, all human beings are able to address God, who is their Creator, as Father.

In Old Testament times, God revealed Himself as a loving and caring Father to the people of Israel. Jesus Christ opened the way for human beings to become children—and thereby heirs—of the Most High through the rebirth out of water and the Spirit (Ephesians 1: 5; Titus 3: 5-7; Romans 8: 14-17). Thereby the concepts "Father" and "child" have taken on a new dimension.

God, the Son

Professing Jesus Christ as the Son of God is one of the fundamentals of Christian faith. When we talk about "God, the Son", we are referring to the second person of the trinity of God, who lives and reigns from eternity to eternity in fellowship with God, the Father and God, the Holy Spirit. The term "begotten" is not to be understood in biological terms, but rather as an attempt to capture in words the mysterious relationship between God, the Father and God, the Son.

There is absolutely no hierarchical difference between God, the Father and God, the Son. In Jesus Christ, God, the Son became human, and at the same time remained God: God entered into, and became active in, historical reality. Belief in God, the Son, is inseparably bound to faith in Jesus Christ as a person who was present and active in history. Jesus Christ is true Man and true God. He has two natures, a human one and a divine one, which are both present in Him in a pure, unchangeable, inseparable, and indivisible state.

Discussion Questions:

1. Through this study we learn that God Himself lives in community through the Trinity. As we were made in the image of God, what does that tell you about your need for community? What does that mean for the church?

2. Look at the liturgy of the divine service. Where do you see elements of the Trinity?

3. Discuss how you distinguish God, the Father's, God, the Son's and God, the Holy Spirit's activity in your life. How do you experience them differently?

4. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 and Ephesians 4:4-6. Discuss the unique role each part of the Trinity has in the Church of Jesus Christ and in our lives.

5. Read Mark 1:10-11. How do you see the Trinity displayed in this event in Jesus' life?

Going Deeper

God, the Holy Spirit

Holy Scripture provides abundant testimony of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. It testifies that understanding God is only possible through the Spirit of God: "Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2: 11). Apostle Paul unconditionally links the knowledge that Jesus is Lord with the Holy Spirit: "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12: 3). The Holy Spirit is true God. He emanates from the Father and the Son, and lives eternally in fellowship with Them. He is also active in the creation and in the history of salvation. The Holy Spirit is a divine person who, together with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified as Lord.

For more information, see Chapter 3 of the NAC Catechism.

6. Is there a greater value in understanding God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, rather than only God?

7. PERSONAL STUDY: Take a few moments with your Bible. Find another passage that speaks to you about who God, the Father is, who God, the Son is, and who God, the Holy Spirit is.

Session 2: John the Baptist

Bible References

Old Testament prophecies of John the Baptist's ministry

Ezekiel 36:25-27
Foretells John's baptism

Isaiah 40:3
Foretells about John's ministry in the wilderness

Malachi 3:1
Prophecy of John's arrival to prepare the way for Jesus

Malachi 4:5
Prophecy of John's arrival

Welcome back! In this session we will discuss the role of John the Baptist, an essential figure in the ministry of Jesus Christ. God called John the Baptist to an important role: to testify of the coming of the Son of God and to prepare people to receive Him. His role was foretold by many prophets and he fulfilled his calling in an effective way. As we discuss this man, please think of your own calling and the importance of testifying of Jesus Christ in our words and way of life.

All Christians have been called by God to play a role in the work of the Church of Christ. John the Baptist was born a short time before Jesus and he had a very distinct purpose to fulfill; to prepare the way for Jesus. He was a baptizer, a prophet, a witness, and a disciple, and through his story, believers are reminded to be watchful for their own calling.

John the Baptist's father was Zechariah, and his mother was Elizabeth. According to Luke 1:7, they were both "*righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations.*" Although

Going Deeper

John's doubt

Whatever theological assumptions may have cradled John's doubt, the text indicates he was not having a crisis of faith; rather, he was seeking clarification for his faith... John came to Jesus fully believing what the prophets had written but seeking clarification concerning whether those writing pointed to Jesus. Jesus instructed John's disciples to report what they "hear and see" (v.4), and then paraphrased Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (v.5). John would have noticed what was missing. Jesus' paraphrase of Isaiah 61:1 leaves out the phrase "he has sent me...to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners." This "now and not yet" tension in Jesus' answer affirmed he is the Messiah while clarifying that he would not rescue John from Herod's prison. This royal Son of David would not overthrow the wicked human rulers over Israel. Knowing John could be personally disillusioned by Jesus' reply and lack of action, Jesus offered him a gentle word in the form of a blessing: "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me" (v.6). Jesus did not rebuke John for his doubt or his inadequate theology of the kingdom and its Messiah. In fact, Jesus praised John to the crowd! "Among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist...and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come" (v. 11, 14). Indeed, John is "more than a prophet" (v.9); he is an object of biblical prophecy (v. 10,14). Not even Moses or Daniel holds that honor. Even so, Jesus offered the kingdom perspective: "The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (v.11). In the kingdom, the least are greater than John – the greatest man in all human history.

- Bonnie F. Pattison, *Feasting on the Gospels*

(All Bible ref. from Matthew 3)

3. John's improbable birth to older parents, his call into the wilderness and Jesus' request to have John baptize him were some of the defining moments in John's life. What are some defining moments in your life that led you to serve God?

4. John battled doubt near the end of his calling. Discuss how doubt influences you and your calling from God to serve. How do you personally battle against doubt?

5. Is there a difference between John the Baptist's doubt and the doubt of Jesus' disciples at various times? Why do we look at John's doubt so negatively?

6. Discuss the ways you relate to John the Baptist today.

7. How has this session affected your perspective on John the Baptist? What lessons can we learn for how John the Baptist fulfilled his calling?

In verse 6 of John 4 we see Jesus in His humanness; tired, weary, thirsty. Yet, even in this state, He's willing to reach out to others. We remember from our recent Good Friday service that Christ cared for others, even as He hung on the cross. We may be called in times when we are physically weak, overwhelmed by life, not ready, or just don't feel like it. At the well, we see Jesus, perhaps weak in His humanity, yet always ready to serve others.

Now let's consider the everlasting life that Jesus mentions in verses 13 through 14. Water is an age-old symbol for human deliverance – especially for those who live in the waterless desert. In many places in the Bible, God is referred to as the fountain of living water. This image is deepened further in the person of Christ. The water that He offers leads to eternal life. Christ used the example of water because the woman was coming to the well for water. He understood her way of life and spoke to her in terms she could understand. Christ understands us and speaks to our unique situations as well.

Lastly, we find in verses 16 through 18 God revealing Himself as all-knowing, yet merciful. In this interaction, Jesus shows no interest in the woman's supposed sin. She never expresses repentance, and Jesus says nothing about forgiveness or judgment. Free from accusations, we can see that the conversation about the woman's husbands serves two purposes: it illustrates Jesus' ability to see and know things, thus a prophet, and it gives the woman a revelation of God through Jesus. For us, we see that Jesus' love extends to everyone, even those we might consider on the outskirts of society.

In the first session of July we'll discuss the rest of this encounter at the well and how it applies to worship and testimony. We've covered a lot—from the holy Trinity to the men and women who experience God in their lives. May God reveal Himself to you personally so you can know Him better. Let's finish by turning to the discussion guides to better understand the depth and many facets of this encounter.

Going Deeper: *Relations between the Samaritans and the Jews*

(Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible) The history of relations between the Samaritans, situated in the north around Mt Gerizim (their holy mountain), Shechem, and Samaria, and Jewish populations in Judea and then later in Galilee is one of fluctuating tensions. The ancient tension between the northern and southern kingdoms was revived with the return of exiles to Jerusalem under the Persian ruler Cyrus' edict (c. 538 B.C.). The entire southern area was at the time being governed from Samaria in the north by Sanballat, a native ruler of Palestine under Persian authority. The return of exiles to Jerusalem, particularly with their intentions of rebuilding the Jerusalem temple, posed an obvious political threat to his leadership in the north

(Ezr 4:7–24; Neh 4:1–9). Opposition was at first politically motivated, but became religious as well when sometime later, possibly the 4th century B.C. (toward the end of Persian or beginning of Greek rule), a rival temple was erected on Mt Gerizim.

Poor relations came to a climax during the brief period of Jewish independence under the Hasmoneans, when the Jewish ruler, John Hyrcanus, marched against Shechem and Samaria, conquering and destroying the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim (c. 128 B.C.). Under Herod the Great, Samaria's fortunes improved, although animosity still continued between the Samaritans and Jews in Judea and Galilee. Holding the Jerusalem temple to be a false cultic center and excluded from the inner courts by the Jerusalem authorities, a group of Samaritans desecrated the Jerusalem temple in approximately A.D. 6 by spreading human bones within the temple porches and sanctuary during Passover. Hostility toward Galilean Jews traveling through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem for various feasts was also not uncommon (Lk 9:51–53). This animosity continued in Jesus' day. Both groups excluded the other from their respective cultic centers, the Jerusalem temple and the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim. The Samaritans, for example, were forbidden access to the inner courts of the temple and offerings they might give were accepted as from Gentiles. Thus, although probably more accurately defined as "schismatics," it appears Samaritans were in practice treated as Gentiles. All marriage between the groups was therefore forbidden and social intercourse was greatly restricted (Jn 4:9). With such proscribed separation, it is not surprising that any interaction between the two groups was strained. The mere term "Samaritan" was one of contempt on the lips of Jews (8:48) and among some scribes it possibly would not even be uttered.

The main beliefs of the Samaritans demonstrate both the close affinities as well as obvious divergences from mainstream Judaism. They held in common with Judaism a strong monotheistic faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In contrast, however, there was an elevating of Mt Gerizim in the north as the only holy place for sacrifice, based on several divergent passages in Deuteronomy and Exodus in the Samaritan text. Mt Gerizim came to be identified with the site of Abel's first altar (Gn 4:4), the site of Noah's sacrifice after the flood (8:20), the meeting place of Abraham and Melchizedek (14:18), the site of Isaac's intended sacrifice (ch 22), and many other associations. The Samaritans held only the first five biblical books (Pentateuch) to be inspired and based their dogma and practice exclusively on these books. Such a narrow canon not only determined the direction of Samaritan theology, but further separated them from contemporary Jewish thought. Moses, for example, becomes in Samaritan thought an even more exalted figure than in Judaism. He was considered not only the chief prophet, but in later thought was described as the choicest of men, pre-existing from creation, interceding with God for Israel, and being to man "the light of the world." The messianic hope of Samaritan theology also reflects this narrow canon. A Messiah from the house of David could not be anticipated, as no evidence for such could be found in the Pentateuch. Rather, the Samaritans awaited a "prophet like Moses" based on Deuteronomy 18:15–18. This anticipated prophet was also designated the "Taheb," the Restorer, for he would in the last days restore proper cultic worship on Mt Gerizim and bring the worship of the heathen to that site. It is clear, therefore, that it was primarily the claim of supremacy for Mt Gerizim that separated this group theologically and culturally from their Jewish neighbors.

Discussion Questions:

1. As we know from the story, Jesus chose the more difficult route through Samaria. Can you describe a time when this happened to you. What was the outcome?

2. Who are the Samaritans in your community? What steps could you make to break down those barriers?

3. From the video: *Faithful ministry requires meeting the challenge of the new, the different, and the unexpected. Have we planned out our lives so well that we don't have time for the chance encounter?* What changes in your life or your perspective are needed to be open to an encounter, conversation or experience God may be calling you to?

4. Are our congregations “birds of a feather”? What can you do to make others feel more welcome?

5. Discuss what it means to always be ready to serve regardless of life's conditions.
