

We Believe: The Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed

The Rev. Tom Pumphrey, 5/18/14

Part Four: We Believe in the Holy Spirit

We Believe in the Holy Spirit:

- The Holy Spirit is the presence and power of God given to us, poured out on us through Jesus Christ.

New Testament witnesses to both the divinity and the distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit:

- At the Baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove. (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-12; Luke 3:21-22)
- Jesus tells the disciples at the Last Supper “*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you...I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you*” (John 14:16-17; 25-26).
- At the resurrection, Jesus “*breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*” (John 20:22b). Acts and Paul’s letters speak of the gift of the Holy Spirit from God.
- The Risen Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father—to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This is the experience at Pentecost (Acts 1 & 2). Acts recounts the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Disciples, empowering them from fear to boldness in proclaiming the Good News, and in miraculous ministry. We hear the Holy Spirit speak (Acts 13:2), send (13:9), forbid (16:6), and testify (20:23).
- Paul calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of God” (e.g. 1 Cor 12:3).

...the Lord, the giver of Life,

- Remember that “The Lord” is the phrase used by Jews as a substitute for the name of God.
- At creation “*the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*” (Genesis 1:2)

Who has spoken through the prophets:

- The Holy Spirit is said to have spoken through the prophet Isaiah (Acts 28:25). Remember that the Prophets speak “Thus says the LORD...”
- The prophet Ezekiel is stood up on his feet by the Spirit. As he stands before the “dry bones,” God tells him “*Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.*” (Ezekiel 37:9)
- In Greek and in Hebrew, the word for spirit, breath and wind is the same word.

With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified:

- This is a clear statement by the councils that the Holy Spirit is God (only God is worshipped and glorified).

Trinitarian Theology:

- Not Unitarianism or Deism: not one amorphous god with different names
- Not practical Unitarianism, where the Son and the Spirit are left out in conversation
- Not Tri-theism (three gods)
- One God, AND The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God.
- The church developed the word “persons” to describe the three.
“Three persons in one being.” See the Athanasian Creed (BCP, p.864)
- Listen for the prayers in the prayer book: we pray “to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.”

Metaphors for the Trinity are tricky: they help us to envision how God can be both three and one, but they only go so far before causing potential problems. They are only metaphors, and they attempt to describe the mystery of God. “Once you think you fully understand the Trinity, you then need to find out which heresy you have committed.”

- Water: one element, but could be in three forms: solid ice, liquid water, and gas water vapor
BUT: only one mode at a time doesn’t work for God; this is the heresy of “Modalism”
- The Shamrock was St. Patrick’s metaphor: three leaves of the shamrock, but one shamrock.
BUT: this would make each person of the Trinity divisible pieces, like an arm and a leg.
- Augustine used a psychological model: one person but with a mind, an intellect and a will.
BUT: these could be called attributes, and we could add other attributes to the list.

Proceeds from the Father and the Son:

- The phrase “and the Son” was not in the original creed and is not used in the East.
- The Council of Toledo (in the West) in 589 added this phrase, supported by Augustine’s theology. In Latin it is the word “filioque” (pronounced “feel-ee-OH-kway”)
- The West was still fighting Arianism and later Islam (with a different theology of the Spirit), so the role of the Son in the procession of the Spirit was important to assert.
- But the Eastern bishops weren’t part of this council, and were surprised to hear of this addition. ‘How can the creed be changed by only part of the church if the church is one?’ In later centuries, this dispute was a theological reinforcement to the split between East and West.
- The East wants to preserve the distinctive relationships between the divine persons to the Father, so that there is no “confusion of persons.” The Spirit *proceeds*, whereas the Son *is begotten*.
- But the differences are subtle; even the East would agree that the Son plays a role in the gift of the Spirit to us. Note that each view comes from scripture:
See “I will pray the Father and he will send you...the Spirit...” vs. Jesus “breathed on them and said “receive the Holy Spirit”
- Perhaps one creative solution is to say “proceeds from the Father through the Son.”
But this issue has yet to be hammered out.

So What?

See next page...

So What?

The Holy Spirit is God with us. We believe that God is close to us, and that the power of the one who gave life to the universe is close to us, guiding us and empowering us to live into the vision that God has for us as the church—the body of Christ. This is not a profession of a god at a distance, uncaring and unmoved by our lives. Rather we trust in the God who loves us and who has poured his power and presence into our lives.

The Holy Spirit is given to the Church to build up the body of Christ—not simply to individuals for individual edification. The Holy Spirit calls us together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The New Testament describes gifts of the Holy Spirit, including miraculous gifts:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:4-12)

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12:4-8)

And fruit of the Holy Spirit that grow up from lives lived in communion with the Holy Spirit:

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

The Holy Spirit makes us the Christian Community and empowers us to a holy and joyful life together.