

## THE HOLY TRINITY

**1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”**

**4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”**

**8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”**

The man was in the temple in Jerusalem. He saw a vision. In the vision, the Lord was on his throne. Isaiah doesn't tell us this because he is merely recalling the day of his divine call, but for a very specific reason.

Yet God was “high up” above him-- God is separate and distant from man. It's not that the throne of God is super tall, but just that it was high above young Isaiah. The train or hem of God's robe seemed to Isaiah to fill the whole temple. Maybe we would say, “His robe was so vast that it was like a brilliant golden-white carpet that covered the whole floor, everywhere in the temple, not that anyone would dare to step on it!? God's presence, all his majesty, is at the very center of the life of the people, and God's holiness fills everything everywhere.

The man saw angels as well, above or around God's throne. These were angels called Seraphim that appear nowhere else in the Scriptures; only Isaiah has seen them, of all living men on this side of heaven. But he only tells us about them because of the special way they honor God and because of their message.

The Seraphim had six wings each, two to cover their faces to avoid seeing God directly in all his holiness, two to cover their feet (which might really indicate their whole body all the way down to their feet), and with two they were flying. God's angels don't need wings to fly, but they appear with them to help mortals relate better to what they are doing.

Covering their feet and faces, they say: “Holy holy holy is the LORD Almighty.” With these words they reveal God’s holiness, and his Trinity. First: When something is repeated in Hebrew, it is being emphasized. Here, God’s holiness is not just emphasized, but it’s stated three times: that’s a superlative: He is the holiest that holy can be. There is no one more holy than the Lord Almighty!

God’s holiness is also expressed for Isaiah by fire; not only the fire of the altar, but the fire in the angels, since “Seraphim” means “flaming ones.”

But especially God’s absolutely unique quality of being three in one is expressed. This is said different ways in the Bible. For example, when Jesus instituted baptism, he said “Baptize in the name of...” and the word “name” is singular, not plural, as we might say, “in the names of Peter, James and John,” but it’s only the one name: yet Jesus gives three names: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God, three names.

One singular Lord, but three persons who are distinct. Each is uncreated, but there is only one uncreated God. Each is almighty, but there is only one Almighty God. Each is Lord. But there is only one Lord. Yet they are distinct, since the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Holy Spirit. The Son is the Son of the Father alone, and the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, as Jesus says: “I will send the Counselor to you from the Father” (John 15:26). This is the mystery of the Trinity. We do not refer to God as “They,” not ever, for he is only One. But there are three Persons. We do not refer to the Three as “People,” for the three are not many, and do not add or subtract from that number. There are simply and eternally three Persons, one God.

Many have tried to explain this, but the only explanation is that the Bible says it is so, and the Bible is our only authority. Many have tried to illustrate the Trinity, with circles, with Shamrocks, and so on. But each illustration needs to be explained. It’s not as if God the Father was working for a while, then God the Son for a while, and now the Spirit works for a while. No, all three Persons have always been at work. But it seems best to refer to their main work: The Father primarily created and preserves (but so did the Son and the Spirit). The Son alone saved us from our sin (but sent by the Father and proclaimed by the Spirit). The Spirit inspires and creates faith (but is sent by the Father and the Son to do so).

The Old Testament believers had this same doctrine. In fact, the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the clearest doctrines expressed in the Old Testament. They did not have the Commandments until they were given to Moses. They did not have the Lord’s Prayer although they always had prayer. They did not have Baptism or the Lord’s Supper. But they had the promise of forgiveness through the coming descendant of Eve. And they had a short

creed: “Hear O Israel; the Lord our God the Lord is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). But even that creed expresses God’s Triune nature: for three names: the LORD, our God, the LORD are spoken, and revealed to be “one God.” They knew from the beginning that the Holy Spirit had been there at the Creation, hovering over the surface of the deep. And so just as we have the doctrine of the Triune God, so did they. Abel pondered the Trinity as he watched his flocks. Noah pondered the Trinity as the ark quietly rode the waves for a year until the waters set them down again. Abraham pondered the Trinity as he traveled and dug wells for his family and his ever-increasing herds.

As Isaiah pondered this, he realized that he, like all of us, was a sinner. “A man of unclean lips!” he cried out. In fact, Isaiah said more, much more. He said, “I am ruined!” and “Woe to me!” Those aren’t just sad words from poetry. That’s a man who sees the full horror of his status before God.

Consider Isaiah’s confession. “I’m a man of unclean lips. I have a potty mouth. I say profane things, ugly things. I hurt people with words and my thoughts.” Standing there in God’s own temple seeing a vision of Almighty God, the punishing God, the God who will Judge us for our sins, Isaiah realized: “I’m done for!” Not only can’t I serve God, I can’t even hope to be part of the crowd of worshipers. I don’t belong in this holy place! But in the vision, fire is holiness, and a seraph touched his unclean lips with a live coal from God’s altar. “There, your sins are removed. Now go and preach.”

To have sin **r e m o v e d**! To have our guilt taken away! This is what Christ has done. The whole message of our Triune God is about this removal of our sins: Atonement, remission, forgiveness; when God hurls our guilt into the depths of the sea; when God puts our sins behind his back. This is what it is to be forgiven, to be brought into the arms of our Savior.

“There, your sins are removed. Now go and preach.” There is the commission for the prophet, and we can keep that in our pockets, too. Your sins are forgiven by Christ. Do not sit on that forgiveness. Keep running back to it. It’s the motive for everything we do. You and I can shout: I am forgiven! My unclean lips, thoughts, words, hands, feet-- all of me--cleansed and made holy by Jesus, the Son of God. The Triune God loves me, and lays out service for me to do in the world. Who will do it?

Who will do the task set in your path? The triune God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, has forgiven you. Now: you have work to do as a Christian, as a mom, as a dad, perhaps as a soldier or another public servant, or as a spouse, or a student. Make the people around you glad that you’re there. Let the light of Jesus shine through in your life. Amen.