

**Isaiah 66:18-21; Ps 116; Heb 12:5-7,11-13; Luke 13:22-30**

Last week, I began to speak about the Holy Trinity. In part this was honour the 1,700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which spelt out our Christian faith in the form of the Nicæan Creed, which we recite every Sunday. But the main reason we are looking at the Holy Trinity is to make sure that our own understanding of God as Trinity is a healthy and vibrant part of our lives. If it is not, we do not truly understand the meaning of the Gospel, the significance of Jesus, or how we are to navigate in the world in which we live.

Last week the focus was on God the Father, whose omnipotence and uniqueness is asserted right from the opening lines of the Creed. *'I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.* This one line acknowledges that there is a single God, and that he is all powerful and creator of everything. This single line roots our Christianity deep within the living springs of the Hebrew scriptures which are a continuous story of God revealing Himself as the only, living, merciful and true God. But, can also appearing rather fierce and unapproachable.

Today we focus on the second person of the Trinity:

*'I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,*

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<sup>1</sup> There are constant identifications of who someone is in relationship to their father or mother, and sometimes both parents: *'Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother name was Jerushah the daughter of Zadok. And he did... all that his father Uzziah did.'* This is a typical example amongst many where parentage is reported. It legitimises the history. 2 Chronicles 27

<sup>2</sup> We can content ourselves with the major prophets: with Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3), Joseph and his dreams (Genesis 37), Jacob wrestling with the angel (Genesis 32:22)

*born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God.*

The incarnation of God the Son as Jesus, opens up to us an understanding of God in a manner that people could not have imagined even in humanity's most enlightened moments. You cannot draw Him out from reading the Old Testament, nor from just reading the New Testament. We only come to know the Son of God through a lived experience.

Jesus' relationship with God the Father is revealed in the Gospels of in a manner which is similar to that of other holy men and women in the Old Testament. Who his parents were, where and when he was born is stated so that we can locate him in time and space.<sup>1</sup> He is set apart from other people by visions involving angels and the words of prophets.<sup>2</sup> He has a destiny, like Jacob or David. He appears to have a special relationship with God – which has been absent from Israel for hundreds of years.<sup>3</sup> He has a particular power in his prayer – healing the sick and raising the dead - that reminds his listeners of the ancient prophet of Elijah, who was swept up to heaven while still alive. Jesus draws people to him by his magnetism, but he also frightens the authorities by his un-compromising words about sin, repentance and mercy.<sup>4</sup> For this Jesus could be just, - if you can use the word 'just' to ever

and Samuel's calling (1 Samuel 3:4-14). Jesus is announced in a vision to Mary, to Joseph and later to shepherds and the kings.

<sup>3</sup> After Malachi, who appears to be the last post-temple prophet from around 500 – 450 BC, the prophetic voice went silent.

<sup>4</sup> A flash of Jeremiah, and Elijah, who also encountered the king's and established power's displeasure.

describe a prophet, - another Holy Man. Exceptional even among the prophets? Yes. Does this mean He is God? Not necessarily.

What takes Jesus beyond the realms of being a holy man is that he appears to be a unique locus of God's actions: 1) He teaches with a unique authority with apparently no higher education: Matthew 22:32 *"He is not God of the dead, but of the living". And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.* 2) Jesus heals continually, not just occasionally, but as an apparent extension of his identity, of his closeness to God. The man born deaf and mute, the Syrophenician woman's daughter, the sick at Gennesaret. He does not even have to be by the sick to heal. Then we have the elemental miracles, such as the transformation of water into wine at Cana, and the multiplication of the loaves at Galilee, the stilling of the storm. He is not just replicating what the prophets of old have done, he magnifies and exceeds them all. 3) He forgives sins without appeal to the Father *'And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son your sins are forgiven.'* This is scandalous and blasphemous: unless there is something about him that his critics do not understand. 4) Jesus is resurrected from the dead: this is not simply a coming back to life, but a death on the cross willingly undertaken, followed by a glorified resurrection which transforms his whole person and his relationship with his disciples. This final fact seems to imprint the seal of his identity upon all that has been said and done.

All of Jesus' life is directed to God the Father. He teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven, as one who is sent and one who commands.<sup>5</sup> He continually emphasises the mercy & judgement of God to be our own model

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:17

of forgiveness and repentance. He directs those he has healed to go and give God thanks in the temple. He himself prays to the Father in the wilderness, in the garden of Gethsemane, and this is how he teaches his disciples to pray. Only on occasions does he make a more direct reference to himself being the Son of God, most notably when he is coming close to his crucifixion: *"But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God."* So, they all said, *"Are you the Son of God, then?"* And he said to them, *"You say that I am."*<sup>6</sup>

Why all this exercise of power and authority and yet a reticence for Jesus to say that He is God, if that is in fact who He is? It must be so that we can either choose or reject him in our own freedom. He will not force us. This is God the Father's gift of the God the Son to us. I can recognise Him or turn my heart away. But I cannot recognise Him on my own merit. I need the Holy Spirit, who is beckoning to us, and whom we will encounter next Sunday.

Jesus says to each one of us today, *'Strive to enter through the narrow door'*. So we pray to enter.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 22:69- 70