

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD

Genesis 1:1-2:3

The Holy Trinity (Series A)

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The Old Testament lesson comes from *Genesis*, chapter 1, verse 1, through chapter 2, verse 3. Please stand as you are able for God's holy Word. From *Genesis* 1, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so.²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.”³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

I was surprised this week when I looked back through my files and found that I have never preached a sermon on Genesis 1. That surprised me because this is on the shortlist for the most important chapters of the Bible. Chapter one of any book is always important. It also surprised me because I know I’ve referenced it a lot, but I’ve never given it its own sermon. So I thought, *There’s so much here that I have to do it.* But that also means that, after writing for a while, I had too much for one sermon. So I’m going to do something else that I don’t think I’ve ever done before. I’m going to kick part of it to next week. This week we will focus on what Genesis 1 teaches us about the nature of God, and next week we will consider what it teaches about creation.

These two things can’t totally be separated, nor should we separate them. Because what God does, and what he creates, continues to teach us about the nature of God. So if you’re not going to be here next week, at least look up the sermon on our website so you can get the second part of this one. Next week we’ll look closer at God’s creation, but today we’ll focus more on his nature.

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

“In the beginning, God ...” (1:1). Before we even get to a verb, at least in our English Bibles, we learn something about God. This, of course, is what the Bible does. It’s the book about God. It teaches us who he is and what he has done.

And Genesis, more specifically, is the book of beginnings. That’s what the word “genesis” means. It means “beginning.”

“In the beginning, God ...” This is the first thing we learn about God. He was in the beginning. Before the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars ... God. He was there. He does not have a beginning. Rather, at the beginning of all things, he already was. That’s part of the nature of God. No beginning, no end, he just is.

Being that this is Trinity Sunday, our focus will be on what this chapter teaches about the nature of God. And there’s, really, quite a lot here.

We confessed the doctrine of the Trinity in the Athanasian Creed today. It’s the longest of the three creeds. We typically use it just once a year. It focuses on teaching the two great mysteries of the faith: the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the two natures of Jesus Christ. And when we call these “mysteries,” we don’t mean that they are secrets, because God has revealed them to us, but even after learning them, they still remain mysterious and wonderful. We can know them, but we don’t fully understand them, at least, not in this life. We continually sit in wonder as we ponder them.

It’s a marvelous creed. There are some big words, which we might not use in ordinary conversation, so it takes a little while to start to comprehend it. But it’s worth knowing. So I would suggest that you keep your bulletin for a while. Take it home, put it in your Bible, and read through it later today. Maybe read it once a day for the rest of this week.

In summary, it defines the Trinity this way: God is one. There is one divine substance, which cannot be divided. And, yet, God is three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three persons share the same divine nature, so they are coequal in every divine attribute. They are distinct persons, and they share the one divine nature. But it’s not like the Father is one-third of God. Neither is the Son or the Holy Spirit one-third. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And still, there is only one God. That’s the mystery.

Most of Christian doctrine is contained within the doctrine of the Trinity. It’s the truth of who God is and what he does. It’s worth knowing.

There are several common misconceptions about the doctrine of the Trinity. I suppose the first one we should get out of the way is that the doctrine of the Trinity, or just doctrine in general, isn’t very important. But doctrine, quite simply, is the teaching of God. Doctrine is everything that God has revealed to us in the Scriptures. And that makes it important. We have a nasty temptation to think that something is only important if we can see how it impacts us personally. Besides being rather narcissistic, this is also short-sighted. Just because we don’t see how something impacts us does not mean it has no impact. We usually don’t see why something is important until we understand the thing, anyway. So we often learn something first, and then we begin to appreciate the importance of it. And the Trinity is this way. If you think, “So what?” you’re not the first. But we should care about this doctrine, simply because it’s the doctrine of God, and there is no one worth knowing more than God. Simply knowing about God is a good enough end in itself.

But there are also more practical applications of the Trinity. We see one of them when we get to the atonement, where God the Father condemned all sin in the flesh of his Son, Jesus Christ.

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

In order to atone for sin, God must judge sin, and God must also bear our sin and suffer that condemnation. So the Son bears all sin and suffers for it, while God the Father pours out the wrath of God. In order to save mankind through the atonement, God must be at least two persons.

Another misconception is that the doctrine of the Trinity isn't taught in the Bible. Perhaps you have heard someone say, "You know, the word 'Trinity' isn't even in the Bible." And this is true, the word "Trinity" is not in the Bible. It's a man-made word. But that does not mean the doctrine is man-made. We use the word as a shorthand for what is revealed in the Bible.

The biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity is the simple fact that Scripture plainly teaches that there is one God, but it also names three different persons who are God. And the three persons in the Bible who are identified as God are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Any honest reader of the Bible, given enough time, should come up with the basic concept of the Trinity. Read through the Bible and ask yourself this question: *How many gods are there?* Answer: one. There's no way you come with any answer other than "one." But as you read through the Bible, make a list of all the different persons who are identified as God. You will come up with a list of three and exactly three, no more, no less: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There are passages that speak of the Father, and they speak of him as God. There are passages that speak of the Son, and they speak of him as God. And there are passages that speak of the Holy Spirit, and they speak of him as God. And there are also passages that speak of all three of them together. So, while the Word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, the doctrine is clearly seen.

A similar misconception is that the Trinity is just a New Testament doctrine, and that it was not taught in the Old Testament. But this is not true either. It is not seen quite as clearly in the Old Testament, but it's there. There are several Old Testament passages where we see that God is more than just one person. And we get, at least, a glimpse of who those persons are, because we see a relationship between the Father and the Son, and we also see references to the Holy Spirit. And it's not just something we see in hindsight after we see it more clearly in the New Testament. There are a number of examples in the gospels where we see that, at least, some of the Jews understood this, even though all they had for Scriptures was the Old Testament.

One of these Old Testament passages is Genesis 1. In the first verse, we see that God is one. "In the beginning, *God* created the heavens and the earth." But, already by verse two, we start to see a distinction of persons when, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." If God were only one person, it would say that God hovered over the face of the waters. But it distinguishes a person of the Godhead: the Spirit of God.

And in verses 26 and 27 we see both the plurality and singularity of God. In verse 26, "God said, 'Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.'" That's plural. But the singularity is seen in verse 27: "So God created man in *his* own image, in the image of God *he* created him; male and female *he* created them." So we see that God is one, but when he talks to himself, he talks to a different person. There is one God, and this one God is multiple persons.

So we don't get the full doctrine of the Trinity in Genesis 1, but we at least learn that God is one, and he is also multiple persons. It's not the full doctrine of the Trinity, but it's a pretty good start for the first chapter.

And then Genesis 1 introduces us to the work of God. The first thing he does is create. And he's good at it. Everything he created was good. And when he was all done, it was very good.

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD (Genesis 1:1-2:3)

So this also introduces us to the will of God. It shows us what he cares about. God desires for his creation to be good. He desires for his creatures, especially those created in his own image to live in perfect and eternal peace.

It doesn't take very long for things to go sideways. By the third chapter of the Bible, we have disobedience and death. By the fourth chapter, we have murder. But remember how the story started. The Bible, taken as a whole, is kind of like a novel. It's also the history of the world, even the parts that haven't happened yet. But it's not a random, uncontrolled history. It's a history that God is writing. With novels, the first chapter usually sets a foundation for the rest of the book. Sometimes it even dictates how the story is going to end. The first chapter of the Bible introduces us to God and how he desires his world to be. The next couple of chapters introduce the conflict, or the problem. Then, most of the rest of the Bible is the story of what God does to solve the problem until, finally, he restores his creation to the way it's supposed to be.

We already know the rest of the story. We know that God solved the problem of sin and death by sending his Son into the world to suffer, die, and rise again. Through this atonement, we have forgiveness of sins and the promise that we will be raised to that same incorruptible life. That's the rest of the story.

And we get a foreshadowing of it in chapter 1. We don't get the whole story, but it sets a baseline for how the story has to end. Because we see that the will of God is life, and he desires for that life to be "very good" (1:31). This is the same God who can create the everything simply by speaking. With this kind of power, we know that the will of God cannot be stopped. He will get his "very good" again. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.