

**In the Triune God's Presence**

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” Isaiah 6:3b.*

This weekend, we focus on the mystery of the Trinity. The mystery is that Biblical confession that God is three distinct persons, yet one God. It's a true statement of belief only made by faith. The Triune God can't truly be explained by human logic. Human reason can't really comprehend the Trinity. And any and every image or analogy used to help unpack this mystery ultimately falls short.

Acknowledging this reality while having just powered through the Athanasian Creed, I think it's fair to say that our struggle with this longest creed of the Church has even more to do with the wording than the length. This creed doesn't aid our understanding all that much, there's no profound statement about how God works, just many statements about who God is and who He isn't. And those descriptions about who God isn't can be really challenging because we don't usually talk that way and when we hear them they seem tediously redundant just bogging down the worship service.

While the use of the Athanasian Creed as we confess the Triune God certainly does slow down the service and ultimately confesses that the Triune God is a mystery, this creed does force us to consider the fact that we are in the presence of God in a way we often just overlook or speed through. Slowed down by unfamiliar words and concepts beyond our understanding, we have to pause at the glory, power and might of the Triune God that is far beyond anything we have ever known or could imagine. As the mystery of the Trinity is confessed line by line in this creed, we have to wrestle just a little longer with the reality of how much greater the Triune God is than all of His creation.

To supplement our pondering of God's powerful presence expressed in the Athanasian Creed, I want to turn our attention to the reading from Isaiah 6 which highlights two individuals and their experiences in the Triune God's presence. As you may recall, the majority of this first reading this weekend, tells about the vision Isaiah had of God Almighty enthroned on high while still filling the temple with His presence. As Isaiah processes this experience in the Triune God's presence, he recognizes God's holiness and this leads him to humbly recognize and confess his own uncleanness. Isaiah knew he had no business being in God's presence and instead of being destroyed in his uncleanness the Lord God purified him. He removed Isaiah's guilt, atoned for Isaiah's sin and then gave Isaiah a purpose as His messenger.

Now I mentioned two individuals' experiences from our text and the second encounter requires some more context. In the first verse of this Isaiah reading, we are given a time marker of the last year of King Uzziah's reign. Well, in the Bible, King Uzziah also had quite an experience with the Triune God years before Isaiah's vision. For your own reference, you can find the things I'm about to summarize about Uzziah in the Bible in the books of 2 Kings, chapter 15 and 2 Chronicles, chapter 26.

Long after the kingdom of Israel had been divided into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, Uzziah was made king of Judah at the age of sixteen. Early on in his reign, Uzziah was a faithful follower of the Lord who guided his rule into strength and prosperity. Sadly, once Uzziah received these gifts from the Lord, his pride took over. In his pride, Uzziah, decided that he should go into the temple before the Lord's presence there and burn incense – something reserved for the temple priests and not the king. While the temple priests stopped Uzziah from burning the incense, he became angry with the priests. And at this moment of pride and anger, the Lord intervened. He struck Uzziah with a skin disease that forced him to live in isolation the rest of his life and effectively give up his throne to his son.

Isaiah and Uzziah both experienced the presence of the Triune God, but as you heard the outcomes of their experiences were far different from each other. On the one hand, God's presence led Isaiah to humility and honest confession of who God was and who he was. Isaiah was aware of God's holiness as well of his own sinfulness and into this awareness, God brought cleansing and purpose.

On the other hand, Uzziah's prosperity led him to forget the Lord and grow prideful. In this pride, he acted as if he was entitled to do whatever he wanted in God's presence. And instead of heeding the Lord's protective warning through the priests, his pride grew into anger, confirming his ignorance of God's holiness and his own sinfulness. Through this ignorance, Uzziah was left isolated bearing the consequence of his sin and suddenly stripped of the very purpose God had given to him as Judah's king.

So, which experience do you relate to best? Isaiah or Uzziah? I would think all of us would want to say Isaiah without a doubt. Yet, how often is our humility before the Triune God rather insincere exposed by our lack of honest confession about who He truly is and who we really are in light of who He is? Might we be more honest if we confess that we relate more to Uzziah's pride? Do we find ourselves entering the Triune God's presence more confident in our own work than His? Are we also quite ignorant of God's holiness and our own sinfulness? How often do we feel entitled to do whatever we want in God's presence?

Think back to the start of this service or really any weekend worship service here at Emmanuel. After we sing our opening song, we call upon the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In that simple and short language, we're acknowledging the Triune God's presence here in this place. Yet, how easy is it for us to overlook this brief phrase! And so, without a second thought of whose presence we're actually in, we can find ourselves going through the motions of confession lacking sincere humility and honesty and maybe even prideful in ourselves.

Dear fellow sinful sisters and brothers, as we worship here in the presence of the Triune God, I wish that our humility was always sincere and that our pride never got the best of us. But as one experienced sinner to another, we'd be lying if we said those sinful struggles didn't plague us. Woe are we! For we are lost! Sinners surrounded by sinful people in the holy presence of the Triune God!

But instead of seraphim like in Isaiah's vision, Jesus Christ came into our sinful presence and touched us with His sacrificial life and death. In Baptism, Jesus has placed water and the name of the Triune God upon us. We have been cleansed, called out of darkness into His marvelous light, with a purpose to proclaim His excellent deeds to those around us. In Communion, Jesus places His Body and Blood upon our lips removing our guilt and delivering to us His full and complete forgiveness for our sin. In the words of the Scriptures and His pastors, Jesus declares us forgiven, covered by His holy and righteous work, no longer having to bear the wages of our sin, death, for all of eternity.

A humble and honest confession about who God is and who we are, is really what this Athanasian Creed is all about. We are slowed down to be reminded of all that that Triune God truly is and isn't so that we might humbly recognize and confess our present and eternal dependence upon Him. With joy we speak these ancient words that have protected the Biblical confession of the mystery of the Trinity down through the ages and continues to keep us focused on the God of our salvation.

While this Athanasian Creed may never be our preference among the Church's three creeds, it does give us an avenue to do exactly what our Triune God calls us to do as His redeemed children – faithfully proclaim who our God is and His merciful and loving work for us. While we've made it through our annual use of this unique creed, may its words continue to linger in our hearts and minds reminding us of everything our Triune God brings each and every time we call upon His name in our service and may these words continually guide our lives towards humble and honest confession of who our God is and who we are because of Him. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan