

The idea of the Holy Trinity is one of those doctrines that sounds dry and “3in1” is bad math!. It is, however, the best way we have come up with to express the profound spiritual experiences of millions of Christians, that God, and Jesus and the Spirit are all quite different but are actually all the same.

Most people, for whom the Trinity is not a piece of abstract theology, but an experienced reality, have a step-by-step stumbling into this strange piece of adding up.

Most of us had a sense of God given to us by school, church, family or just the culture we grew up in. What do we know about God? God is in heaven. God made everything. God is in charge. God hands out rules. God spoke to Jews a very long time ago. God spoke to Jesus. God spoke to the prophet Muhammad in the 7th century. God is beyond our understanding. God is dangerous and to be feared (“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”. Thunderbolts, floods, plagues etc). God has plans, but they are secret.

I grew up with a belief in God, a belief in gravity, a belief that the world was round and a belief that green vegetables were good for me. I had other beliefs too that many of you would have shared. It was a sort of “God is in his heaven and all’s right with the world” unquestioned feeling. I still believe most of the above!

Then later, as older children or as teens or as adults **many of us here came across Jesus.**

Do you remember when this happened for you? Do you recall when Jesus emerged out of all the other stories of Robin Hood, or King George, Superman, Captain Long John Silver, or whoever were the characters in the stories you heard told? For many people Jesus remains among that collection of made-up people to be left in childhood when you become an adult.

But for a Christian something happened that let the others deflate as mere stories, and Jesus grew and became solid, historical and more than that, he became real. For some it was a slow evolution of consciousness, for others it was a sudden event or a realizing, seeing with “real eyes”.

The Gospels become the true and mysterious accounts of this man who was so wonderful, so full of life and love and passion, so real and so transformative. We began to go to church not because we were told to, but we went to find out about him, to offer him, like God, praise and worship.

For a lot of Christians, Jesus, the historical man, becomes the most important thing in life. “Jesus Christians” they are sometimes called. Jesus is now the visible, imaginable image of the unseen God. No longer do we worship the ineffable, invisible God, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes, covered by Cherubim, a blinding light or an impenetrable darkness and cloud. No! Now we have Jesus! “God with skin on.” Or, to translate *incarnate*, God “with meat on”.

Jesus now stands alongside God, his father, as the two points of the Trinity that we can attempt to grasp. Jesus becomes the humanly accessible way we have to understand God.

In Jesus, the far away mystery of God comes near. Near enough to touch. Not cloud, thunder and lightning, but Love, and Compassion and Justice and Truth. This is a big step! Then..... there is another.

You see, all of the above can be a bit bookish. It can be all in your head. You can debate it and make theologies about it and get into fights over just how it should be understood.

“My Jesus is better than your Jesus.” and “My God is bigger than your God”. It is a bit like, “My Hockey Team is better than your Hockey Team” or “Canadians are so much better than Americans”.

We have a long, sad history of politicians and the power hungry playing those games with us. In Syria it is “My Islam is better than your Islam” It’s like team colours. The war has very little to do with Allah the compassionate.

The third step is when you find the ideas and theologies and rules, which live in our *Thinking Self*, move down and dissolve and become feelings in the *Heart Self*.

Do you remember being in school and working to get good marks and the approval of the teacher? I hope you also remember when you started to learn because you wanted to find out. When the approval of the teacher of the marks and report cards didn’t matter. You had a hunger to learn, to know, to understand. You were not being pushed by the system with carrots and sticks, but were off and running for the sheer delight of just “getting it”, just understanding and having those inner lights come on.

The Holy Spirit is the step when God and Jesus are no longer ideas outside yourself, but somehow become the driving force in your life. Doing something in school to avoid criticism or to get a reward is what Paul calls a spirit of slavery. A slave is someone whose value is defined by someone outside her/himself. Paul says we have been given a spirit of adoption, we are part of the family, share the same blood and flesh, and inherit the wealth. Elsewhere he calls it a spirit of freedom, so we are no longer ruled by laws or expectations or by authorities, but are drawn onwards in love, in delight, in bubbling joy. Suddenly God is not the school principal, but *Our Father*. It is our joy to try to become so much more like his son, our brother Jesus. We are Children of God just as Jesus is. Everything changes, and it is an “inside job”. **That inside job is the Holy Spirit mingled into our own personal spirit. This is “God within us”.**

The step of finding the breath of the spirit inside yourself is this thing that Pentecostals call “being born again in the spirit.” That is a good description, because it is rather like the shock and new life that you may have felt the first time you fell in love. Everything changes! The world glows! Everyone on the street smiles! A more grown-up love feels less like champagne, and more like warmth and strength and assurance. For many the spirit grows up inside like wheat in a field, or like a long slow dawn moving from glimmerings in to full light over many years.

The Spirit is the life of God, the God we know through Jesus the man. This life becomes a real part of your life. It becomes the key part of your life. And it is marked by peace, and love and joy. By hopefulness and mercy, by compassion and tenderness, by forgiveness and humbleness of heart, by faith and the desire to practice it. It is marked by optimism, by daring, by laughter and by the willingness to absorb hurt and pain, because you know....you know in your bones and skin...that your spirit is mingled with God’s, and so with Jesus’s, so you will be blessed, and even in dying, you will be raised up. There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God your father in Christ Jesus, and this knowing is the Spirit at work in you.

When you have God, who now feels more like a good father than a stone-faced judge, and you have Jesus as a mentor, as a teacher, friend, Lord and Saviour, and the Spirit is turning this into inner truth, not intellectual theory, then..... stuff happens.

Mostly it begins by people wanting to do what Jesus was doing. They want to serve, to help, to teach, to heal, to go out as he did and bring joy and hope and love to those who need it and have no one else to give it to them. And mostly they want to get together with other people who have this same strange inner life and excitement, to support each other, to plan what to do next *and* to keep on turning back to God, to offer thanks, praise, worship and prayer through the Jesus they follow, and let that all be pumped along by the Spirit that is in them.

So, the Trinity isn’t really dry doctrine, it is a best shot at describing the life of faith, because that is how it feels. Father God, Jesus his son, our brother, and Spirit of holiness in our lives and hearts and it is all the same divinity, a one-ness in three expressions. It is only understood when you live it. That is Trinity!