

Walking with My Trinity in These Appalachian Foothills

Date: June 15, 2025

Location: Apostles Anglican Church

Readings

Isaiah 6:1–7

Psalm 29

Revelation 4

John 16:12–15

Opening

Here is your part: ‘O come, let us adore him.’ That’s what you say when I give you the cue.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God: *O come, let us adore him.* To experience the Trinity you need a hymn, a doxology, liturgy and prayer, not dictionaries or encyclopedias.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God: *O come, let us adore him.*

That call and response is called an antiphon. Antiphons begin the morning psalm in Morning Prayer and they change with the season. Last year, I ignored the Anglican rules of speaking the antiphon of Ordinary Time once Trinity Sunday ended. I know, great rebel am I. I kept the antiphon, the refrain from Trinity Sunday, for months to deepen the truth of the Trinity in my heart. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: *O come, let us adore him.* The doctrine of the Trinity is not an exercise for the brain, but a melody for the heart to sing. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: *O come let us adore him.*

St Gregory Nazianzus wrote extensive, transcendent theology on the Trinity, yet the more he contemplated the Trinity, the more his passion for intimacy and experience grew with the Lord, such that St. Gregory would speak of ‘My Trinity.’¹

All who are baptized into the threefold Name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—ought to speak like Gregory spoke—‘My Trinity.’ My beloved is mine, and I am his.²

Adoring My Trinity Outside

My Trinity is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: *O come let us adore him.* Let us adore him in the Nave of the Church. Let us adore him also in the Nave that is the world. Let us adore him outside. That was the encounter Isaiah experienced in the throne room of God. He heard the seraphim praise the holiness of the three-personed God, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.’

¹ Quoted from John McGuckin, *Seeing the Glory: Studies in Patristic Theology*, 350.

² Song of Solomon 2.16

Isaiah encounter the awesomeness of the Lord's holiness in his presence, and the angels taught him to look for glory everywhere on earth. The same thing happened to John in the throne room of Revelation. When John was exalted in heaven, he heard the host of heaven talking about God's glory down on earth:

*Worthy are you, our Lord
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.*³

This is the same pattern we have. We come to church to be baptized in the Name of the Trinity, to love and consume Christ, the Son of the Father, the Beloved of the Holy Spirit. But you should also go outside to encounter our Trinity, to love, enjoy, and adore him in his creation.

God gave us two books and one church to lead us to his glory. By the Holy Spirit, the Church gave us the Holy Scriptures, the written testimony of our creation, redemption, and eternal hope. The Church also has believed from her earliest days that the the Lord gave us the Book of Creation, and the Holy Spirit teaches us to read this book to experience God in Three Persons, too.

To the church in Rome, St. Paul wrote

*For God's invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, **in the things that have been made.***

This is the season to sit on your porch during a good summer rain or thunderstorm. Not when the radar is red, of course, only go there when you have light green on the radar. But go on your porch during a gentle storm and read our psalm for the morning while our Trinity speaks through storms. Begin with our antiphon, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: O come, let us adore him.* Make the sign of the cross as a sign of reverence, then read, chant, or sing,

*The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over many waters.
The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.*⁴

Marvel that this voice, powerful in the heavens and thunderstorms, is the same Trinity whose voice speaks in tones of tremendous gentleness:

*The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth,
and strips the forests bare,
and in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'*

And then marvel at the grace that this same voice speaking in the heavens, in the hidden places of the forests, is the same Voice that named you in baptism, that lives within you, speaks to you in the

³ *Revelation 4.11*

⁴ *Psalm 29.4*

depths of your spirit. This is the same voice summons you, counsels you, sings over you. His Name is Father, Son, Holy Spirit: *O come let us adore him.*

When children (and grandchildren) ask you to explain the Trinity, I suggest you take them outside. Go for a walk together. But first you will need to take walks yourself, of course. If you cannot walk far, search for a bench where you can sit quietly beside gently moving water—a lake, stream or river. I know of three such quiet benches close to our church. Wherever you go, look for our Trinity in his creation, especially by the calm waters nearby.

I am looking for the messages of my Trinity wherever I go, whether I am walking, sitting, or driving. The angels are always singing of my Trinity from heaven ‘the whole earth is full of his glory.’ Woe to me if I’m not looking. I’m missing his messages if I’m not looking.

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes, he would lead his Church into all truth. And indeed he lead our church fathers to confess the truth of one God in Three Persons, summarized in our great creeds, the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. In their spiritual and theological pursuit of the Trinity, church fathers like Sts. Athanasius and St. Gregory Nazianzus spoke about the mutual indwelling among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That our Trinity is above all things, a communion of love. That each Person in the Godhead eternally pours out their love to the other Persons. Oh yes, it’s very metaphysical and hard to conceive in our minds.

But the concrete version of these truths are writ into our world, too. And this is what I would say to my children on a walk: ‘Look at the sky. Look at these trees, the greenness of the grass, the flowers, the birds flying about. God did not *haveto* make this. He didn’t need it for himself. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have been completely happy forever because they love one another perfectly. God is a community of love, and that means he’s always looking to pour out the fullness of his love. So the joy of the Trinity spilled over to create the heavens and the earth, all this wonderful world. He made light and dark, land and sea, plants, and birds, and animals *first* because everything he made was going to be a gift—a present—to us! That’s why we were created last. So we would receive everything as a gift. That everything he made—everything we would see, smell, touch, taste, and hear—would be a message that his grace is everywhere. (I borrowed that line from Georges Bernanos; back to my words).

I would mention the sun and how the power of its light gives everything life; how its light is so strong that we can’t look directly at the sun. That’s called reverence because God’s holiness is so intense that we can’t take it all in. His glory could blind us, yet it’s the source of all the life, energy, and beauty for all things. This, too, I borrowed from the Fathers who compared the Trinity to three suns shining a single light. //

This is June, though, and daytime walks may not be comfortable. Well, step outside with your children and grandchildren. Emily is so good at telling me on a starry night, ‘Jack, come outside.’ Look at the strawberry moon and see within it signs of the season God has made.

Read the hymn of praise written by that great Trinitarian father, St. Gregory of Nazianzus:

The stars dance for you, Lord, while seasons laugh and sing. Planets shine for you, announcing your wisdom. Your lights sing to the glorious Trinity. Here below, we too are your glory. We exist to sing your

praises, Light of the world. ⁵

A digression from this Trinitarian walk—physicists of the twentieth century say that the structure of matter is threefold. Bernhard Philberth was an atomic physicist and Roman Catholic priest who saw that the universe was a plurality of trinities in particle, wave, and space. End of digression, back to the walk.

Here's what I would say to the children in my care, whether at home or in on the parish: when the beauty or the loveliness of the world seizes you; surprises you; makes you smile—in a sunset or a rainbow; when milkweed, daisies, and black-eyed susans fill a meadow; teach yourself to make the sign of the cross. In this sign you were baptized. Make the sign of the cross as **a sign of reverence** of God's holiness and glory. Make the sign of the cross as a sign that you **accept this blessing** from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Adoring My Trinity in These Appalachian Hills

This spring I found myself making the sign of the cross as I watched plants and flowering shrubs come back to life in our garden.

Two seasons ago I planted a couple of Sarah Bernhardt peony shrubs in our front yard. Our gardeners know that you don't get any blossoms in the first season of a peony's planting. But in season 2 and thereafter, the blossom is immense, a double flowered tulip. The sweetness of a peony is intense, it transports your soul to another reality.

I could say the same of lavender, which has just begun to flower in Knoxville. The French Catholic poet Paul Claudel said, 'Only a soul that has been made pure will understand the fragrance of the rose.' ⁶ We love the perfume of these flowers, but what do they *mean*? Plants have more than a physical function, to feed us or delight the eyes. They are locations to encounter the grace of God in Three Persons.

My mind may believe the love and grace of God is true, but my heart may not be convinced. My heart may deceive me about the grace of God for me. I can't imagine what grace would be like. Well, step outside and get your face around some peonies, lavender, basil, eucalyptus, whatever. That's what the grace of God is like *for you*.

Go beneath the surface of a pleasing scent that gives you a sensory experience. Look for the messages God has given of himself in his world. Two shrubs over from the peony shrub, I planted hyssop, as a reminder of my call to repentance; that repentance is not burdensome, but produces goodness. 'Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.' And hyssop is a clean scent, like mint. When I turn from my sin, it is a *pleasing aroma* to the Lord.

⁵ *Quoted from Fount of Heaven, 54.*

⁶ Paul Claudel, *L'oiseau noir dans le soleil levant*, quoted in Clement, *Roots*, 222.

I'm looking nearby for the messages my Trinity has for me in this nave we call creation. Knoxville is a small room within God's nave, you know. Preachers and theologians, we love speaking about the cosmos, even love that word 'cosmos.' It's fun to say. The cosmos is the Greek word for universe. Our Trinitarian church fathers spoke not only of the cosmos, but of the microcosm, which is you and me—a mini universe.

Well, Knoxville is a microcosm, too. Knoxville is a small and lovely chamber in God's vast and marvelous nave we call creation. This is the patch of 'the creation' where you and I receive messages *from* and *about* our Trinity in the natural world. We well know from Scripture that the whole earth is full of his glory. How well do we see and know the glory of the Trinity in this microcosm we call home?

Growing up in the foothills of these Smoky Mountains, I didn't know how accustomed my vision became to the presence of mountains on the horizon. One semester of college in the flatlands of Alabama was enough to realize how much these mountains shaped my vision and my soul.

Four years of absence from the sight of our Smoky Mountain horizon was enough for me. I need these mountains not only for a sense of home, but for something more than that. I need these mountains to lead my spirit to my Trinity—to remember how God revealed his glory and the mystery of his Name to Moses on another mountain, Mount Sinai. I need the sight of mountains in my vision not just for a momentary rest. I need the sight of Mt. LeConte, the Chimney Tops, or Clingman's Dome as signs to lead me to the rock that is higher than I, as the psalm says. Every time you drive south in this area, look at that horizon as a sign of the strength and shelter in the Lord that is ours.

Closing: Doxology

St. Maximus the Confessor was fond of speaking about creation as a cosmic liturgy to our Trinity. Well, I want to take my part in the *microcosmic* liturgy happening in these foothills of the Smoky Mountains. For here is where we're living out our baptism in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So come and come often into this nave. And then explore the microcosm, this lovely room of God's nave we call Knoxville where God's glory is written everywhere. Paul Claudel said, 'all of nature is a temple already prepared and arranged for worship.' So go out to meet him. Enjoy him. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God: *O come, let us adore him!* Amen.