

FIRST READING – TRINITY B

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Moses spoke to the people saying,
“Ask now about former ages, long before your own,
ever since the day that God created man on the earth;
ask from one end of heaven to the other:
‘Has anything so great as this ever happened
or has its like ever been heard of?’
Has any people ever heard the voice of a god
speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived?
Or has any god ever attempted to go
and take a nation for himself
from the midst of another nation,
by trials, by signs and wonders, by war,
by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,
and by terrifying displays of power,
as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt
before your very eyes?
So acknowledge today and take to heart
that the Lord is God in heaven above
and on the earth beneath;
there is no other.
Keep his statutes and his commandments,
which I am commanding you today
for your own well-being and that of your descendants after you,
so that you may long remain in the land
that the Lord your God is giving you for all time.”

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – TRINITY B

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery
to fall back into fear,

but you have received a spirit of adoption to sonship.

When we cry, “Abba! Father!”

it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit

that we are children of God,

and if children, then heirs,

heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ –

if, in fact, we suffer with him

so that we may also be glorified with him.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – TRINITY B

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The eleven disciples went to Galilee,
to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.
When they saw him, they worshiped him;
but some doubted.
And Jesus came and said to them,
“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
And remember, I am with you always,
to the end of the age.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

The doctrine of the Trinity, contrasted with the triadic formulas and the triple structure of the biblical experience of God, is implicit rather than explicit in Scripture.

By “triple structure” of biblical experience we mean that in both the Old Testament and the New, God is experienced as going forth out of himself (from his “aseity”) in revelation and redemptive action, and also creating in human hearts a believing response to his revelatory and redemptive action.

Reading I: Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40

We can experience this triple experience of God in the first reading. It speaks of God “in heaven above and on the earth beneath,” that is, of his aseity (he is YHWH, God who is); of his transcendence (in heaven above); and of his immanence (on earth beneath). It speaks, too, of God going forth out of himself in his acts of revelation and redemption.

The first revelatory act of God specified is the original act of creation (“the day that God created man upon the earth”); the second is his speaking out of the fire in the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. The redemptive act it speaks of is the Exodus, when God took a nation for himself by signs and wonders, which he did before the eyes of his people in Egypt.

This redemptive act, of course, provides the supreme type for his eschatological redemption in Christ, in which God brought into being a new people for himself by the “signs and wonders” of the Christ-event.

Finally, our passage speaks of the response that God creates in the hearts of his people—their faith in him who is, who reveals and redeems, and their obedience to his statutes and commandments.

Responsorial Psalm: 33: 4-5, 6, 9, 18-19, 20, 22

Today’s psalm highlights the Old Testament concept of the “word of the Lord,” which is one of several concepts that contributed to the Johannine conception of the Logos.

In the priestly narrative of creation ([Gen 1](#)), God brings the universe into existence by uttering his fiat: “Let there be light,” etc. It is to this action that the psalmist is referring when he says that God created the heavens through his word.

But with this formal affirmation the concept of the word is well on its way to becoming hypostatized, thus preparing the way for John 1:1 and forming part of the ingredients for the formulated doctrine of the Trinity.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

When the letter to the Romans was read in course during the early summer of series A, these verses were skipped. They are eminently appropriate today, for they speak of God the Father (Abba); of the Christ, with whom we are co-heirs; and of the Spirit, who leads us as children of God. This supports our contention that the triadic formula is primarily a deposit of Christian experience.

The Christian believer knows that he/she has been adopted through Christ in baptism, and in the Eucharistic liturgy is enabled by the Spirit to invoke the Father (for “Abba” is certainly a liturgical cry, derived from the ecstatic worship of the Aramaic-speaking Church).

Here, as in [Gal 4:6-7](#), Paul assumes that divine adoption is not a natural datum of human existence but an eschatological gift, made possible by the Christ-event and conveyed to believers through the operation of the Spirit (that is, word and sacrament).

In his controversies with the Corinthians, Paul had never denied the ecstatic gifts of the Spirit but always emphasized that the real test of the Spirit was not ecstasy but suffering in the way of the cross—hence the last point in this reading, the proviso that we must suffer with Christ now if we are to finally share his glory.

Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

This was the Gospel for Ascension Day in series A, where fuller comment can be found (See below*). Here, of course, the emphasis rests upon the baptismal command, the clearest instance of the New Testament triadic formula that provided the basis for the later doctrine of the Trinity.

In the earliest Palestinian Church, baptism was administered in the name of Jesus (see Acts and Paul). The triple formula arose only toward the end of the first century, and then outside of Palestine (see the *Didache*).

Yet, from the earliest days baptism was understood to mean translation into the eschatological existence made possible by the Christ-event and participation in the gifts of the Spirit.

In a completely Jewish environment it would have gone without saying that if Jesus was the Messiah, he was the one in whom God had acted eschatologically, and if God had inaugurated the messianic age in Jesus Christ, this involved also the gift of the Spirit.

Thus, baptism was always implicitly Trinitarian.

Comments on Matthew 28:16-20 from Year A

As we noted in our introduction to this feast, the earlier Easter narratives saw the appearances as manifestations from heaven of the already risen and ascended Christ. This is still the situation in Matthew’s story of the final appearance in today’s gospel.

It is the ascended One who says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” It is the ascended One who commissions his apostles and sends them out into the world in the great missionary charge (see Eph 4:8-13, where the apostolate appears as the gift of the ascended Christ).

The final appearance takes place on a mountain. This, for Matthew, has theological significance.

The great sermon had been preached on a mountain. The transfiguration took place on a mountain, as in the other Synoptists. And now the great appearance also takes place on a mountain.

This is, in fact, the only appearance that Matthew records, apart from the personal and private one to the women (28:9-10).

All the meaning of the resurrection appearances is, for Matthew, compressed into this single story. Such a device was probably suggested to him by the angel's charge to the women in Mark 16:7 to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, where they would see the risen Lord.

The primary significance of the appearances is that they are revelations of the risen One. Because they are revelations, they can be doubted as well as believed. But those who do believe respond in adoration (v. 17).

In his opening words about his authority, the risen One echoes the language about the Son of man in Dan 7:14 in the wording of the Greek Old Testament, a fact that suggests that this story must have crystallized in the Greek-speaking Church.

The declaration of authority is followed by a missionary charge in three parts:

1. The disciples are commanded to "make disciples" of all nations. This is typically Matthean phraseology (cf. Matt 13:52; 27:57). The longer ending in Mark, which has "preach the gospel" (16:16), probably represents the earlier tradition, which Matthew has reworded to suit his own interests.

The association of the appearances with the command to mission goes back to the earliest tradition, as the word "apostle" itself shows, as do the terms in which Paul speaks of his own call on the road to Damascus (Gal 1:16).

2. As in Mark 16:16, the call to mission includes the charge to baptize. All our evidence agrees that baptism was practiced by the Church right from the outset, and this despite the fact that baptism had not been a feature of the Lord's public ministry.

This remains true even if there was an earlier period when Jesus worked side by side with John the Baptist and during which he too baptized.

There can be no doubt that it was the impact of the post-resurrection appearances that led to the revival of baptism by the earliest Christians. Baptism became the way in which those who had not had a firsthand encounter with the Christ-event were brought into its sphere. The command to baptize given by the risen One in Mark and Matthew (see also the allusions to the forgiveness of sin in the appearance stories of Luke and John) is a verbalization of this experience.

In the earliest community and for some time, baptism was administered in the name of Jesus. It is only in this passage of Matthew and in the *Didache*, a Christian writing probably dating back to the end of the first century, that we hear of the threefold formula.

One may say, however, that the use of Jesus' name alone as a baptismal formula implies the threefold name, for baptism in the name of Jesus implies the confession of him as the Messiah ("Jesus is Lord" was probably the earliest baptismal confession), and in Jewish context Messiah means the agent of God's final salvation, while the bestowal of the Spirit is a consequence of messianic salvation.

Hence, we may say that from the earliest date the Jewish Christians would have understood baptism in an implicitly Trinitarian sense. The development of the threefold formula would have become necessary in Gentile communities, where the implications of the primitive confession of Jesus as Lord were no longer understood and had to be spelled out.

This does not mean that we should now go back to the single formula of earliest times. That would have quite a different meaning now—the repudiation of what was implicit in the earliest use of the single formula.

3. The command to baptize is followed by a charge to teach. It is not clear whether this teaching means post-baptismal instruction. "Baptizing" is a present participle in the Greek, as in the English translation, and this could suggest teaching accompanying baptism, that is, catechetical instruction.

After the charge to teach comes a final promise of the permanent presence of the ascended Christ from now until the parousia.

This is a far cry from the perspective of the earliest community, which thought of the interval between the ascension and the second coming as a period of Christ's temporary absence (Acts 3:21).

The wording of this promise thus verbalizes the experience of Christ's presence, an experience made possible for the Church through the gift of the Spirit and in the cultus during the intervening period.

Reginald H. Fuller