

# KNOW YOUR FAITH

By Lynne Wardach



## The TRINITY

Did you read the Once Upon a Saint story about St. Spyridon? He used a single brick, made with three elements, to explain the Holy Trinity. Did you see the recipe for our Three-Ingredient Shortbread? It illustrates how three distinct ingredients can be so different yet so unified as to be indistinguishable in a single cookie. The theme of this issue is the mystery of the Holy Trinity: Three Persons in One God. We profess this when we make the sign of the cross with three fingers in one point, and when we bless ourselves not once, but three times out of respect for the three distinct and separate persons in our One God.

Don't feel bad if you don't know how such a thing can be. It isn't easy to wrap your mind around such a complicated concept as the Holy Trinity. The fact is, we're not supposed to understand it. It is considered to be THE central mystery of our faith!

As you can see from our cover image, St. Patrick attempted to explain it using a shamrock, which has a three-lobed leaf on a single stem. The triangle is a favorite way to symbolize the concept because it is a single shape with three separate sides. People have also used the Celtic knot, which features three distinct points and is made with a single continuous piece of rope.

Others have used the example of an apple, one fruit, consisting of three parts: skin, flesh, and seed. However, theologians have pointed out that it's not the best analogy because the parts aren't equal and can be separated from each other. God is not like that. It really is a hard thing to explain!

Although the doctrine of the Holy Trinity isn't mentioned explicitly in the Holy Scriptures, you can easily find evidence for the three distinct persons in one God.

In the very first book of the Bible, we see that God refers to Himself with a plural pronoun in the creation story.

**Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..."

And again, more precisely, when He instructs His disciples at His ascension into heaven.

**Matthew 28:19** *Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*

The feast of Theophany brings the topic of the Holy Trinity to our minds because the presence of all three Divine Persons is noted in the scripture account.

**Matthew 3:16-17** *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a Voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

In the years after the apostles died, there were many attempts to solidify an understanding of the nature of God, but all of them proved to be inadequate.

- Some thought that Jesus was truly God but only seemed to be human, and that His suffering and death on the cross were only an illusion. This concept is a heresy known as **Docetism**.
- Some thought that Jesus was a created being like us, whom God "adopted" as His son. This Heresy is called **Adoptionism**. Bishop Arius took this idea and taught it to others, and it also became known as Arianism.
- Some, known as **Tritheists**, even thought there were three separate gods!

One of the early Church Fathers, Tertullian, was the first to use the term *Trinity* in 231 AD. He specifically used it in one of his writings called *Against Praxeus*. Praxeus was a man who believed and taught something called **Monarchianism**, which stresses the Oneness of God (a Monarch is someone who rules absolutely and by himself, without help from anyone else) at the expense of the unique nature of each of the three persons. In other words, each Person of the Trinity was seen as merely a facet or personality trait present in One Divine Person, rather than each being a unique and distinct person.

Why is Monarchianism a false notion? Well, if it were true, then why would Jesus have prayed to His Father? One does not pray to oneself. Why would Christ have told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them when He was already upon them? This would also mean that God the Eternal Father was crucified and died on the cross. As you can see, there is much contradiction involved in this idea.

Tertullian refuted this heresy, and other bishops came to his defense, supporting the concept of three distinct persons united as One God, the Holy Trinity.

After much debate and discussion among the bishops of the day, it was at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD that the doctrine of the Trinity —three distinct Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, united as One God —was formally defined and established.

So if you are still confused and your brain is sore from trying to grasp the concept of how three separate Persons can be considered One God, you are in very good company. No one, not even the most intelligent of theologians, can understand it! It's one of those mysteries that will only be revealed to us when we enter eternal life.



The Students in our ByziClassroom at the Church of St. Basil the Great in Irving, TX had fun with our October lesson on Queen Esther!

They made noisemakers and used them as they read her story from *Once Upon a Saint!*

Thank you to the pastor, parents, and children of St. Basil the Great for sharing your photos with us!!

