

**Scriptures**

Matthew 28:16-20

2 Corinthians  
13:11-13

# Celebrating the Trinity

# session essentials

**Jesus calls us to share the Good News with the world.**

- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus shares his love for the whole world by empowering his disciples to go to all nations in his name. In the Old Testament story, we first glimpse the divine nature through its most characteristic act: creation.
- ◆ We begin to communicate the mystery of the Trinity to group members as related to the mystery of relationships.
- ◆ In today's session, we celebrate our Trinitarian God through crafts, roleplay and discussion.

**Core Session**

- ◆ Getting Started (*wide brushes*)
- ◆ Today's Gospel
- ◆ Bookmaking (*hole punch, yarn*)
- ◆ Praying Together

**Enrichment**

- ◆ Explore the Good News
- ◆ Art: Rego's *The Dance*
- ◆ Scripture Roleplays
- ◆ Story-Review Comics
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

**Helps for Leaders**

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ Liturgy Link: The Trinity
- ◆ The World of the Bible: The Dome in the Heavens

## ✓ Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Participants paint pictures of ways the Trinity helps them to live.

Gather group members in a circle. Ask:

- ◆ When you hear the name *God*, what does it mean to you?
- ◆ When you hear the name *Jesus*, what does it mean to you?
- ◆ When you hear the name *Holy Spirit*, what does it mean to you?

Offer paints, wide brushes and large sheets of paper on a large work surface. Ask each participant to paint a giant picture in broad, loose strokes of one way that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit—or God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—helps him or her to live a life of love. Encourage participants to brainstorm ideas together before painting. After 5-10 minutes' work ask volunteers to show and talk about their finished paintings.

## ✓ Today's Gospel (15-25 minutes)

Help participants find **Matthew 28:16-22** in their Bibles, explaining that Matthew is the first book of the New Testament. Begin with a shared meditation. Set a prayerful atmosphere by reading the passage slowly: ask them to listen for the words or phrases that catch their attention. Ask:

- ◆ What word or phrase did you hear in today's reading?

Be sure to share your own response, too. Discuss:

- ◆ What does Jesus want his disciples to do?
- ◆ Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. What will the Holy Spirit help the disciples to do?
- ◆ Since we are also disciples, what does Jesus want us to do?
- ◆ If we live a life of love, are we doing what Jesus asks us to do? Why or why not?

Invite group members to invent a mock reality TV show. Distribute a few current newspapers. Ask group members to choose a headline that shows a situation where a life of love could make a difference. Encourage group members to work together to show:

- ◆ the situation chosen
- ◆ people caught in the situation
- ◆ people making good and loving choices in the situation

After the group presents its TV show, discuss:

- ◆ What ways did we find to live a life of love in the chosen situation?
- ◆ Did we choose what Jesus wants us to do? Why or why not?

## ✓ Bookmaking (10-25 minutes)

Participants make a book about living in the love of the Trinity.

Invite participants to use the hole punch and yarn to bind the paintings from today's Getting Started activity together into a book about living in the love of the Trinity. Encourage participants to plan any words, captions or titles for the book.

The finished book can be added to the congregation library or circulated from participant to participant over the summer months.

## ✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Invite participants to use a scripture verse in prayer.

Help participants memorize these words from **2**

**Corinthians 13:13:**

- ◆ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Memorize the verse together by saying it together slowly and rhythmically several times. Then pause and say:

- ◆ Think about this: The Holy Trinity is in each one of you.
- ◆ Use your own words to tell God how you feel.

Pause, then slowly repeat once more the scripture verse above. Close by praying:

- ◆ Dear God, thank you for being in us, loving us and bringing us together. *Amen.*

**Note:** Distribute this week's *At Home with the Good News* to group members (or e-mail it to families).

## □ Explore the Good News

(5-15 minutes)

Group members will find visual symbols for the Holy Trinity on page 1 of today's *Explore the Good News*. Ask group members to discuss the symbols:

- ◆ Are the symbols helpful in remembering the Trinity? Why or why not?
- ◆ Which parts of each symbol could they label with the names of God the Father, God the Son (or Jesus) and God the Holy Spirit?
- ◆ Which part of each symbol could they label with the name of God?

This activity also invites group members to invent their own symbols for the Holy Trinity.

On page 2 group members will find a puzzle that reviews the stories of Spring. Invite group members to complete the puzzle together.

## □ Art (15-25 minutes)

### Rego's The Dance

Gather group members around Paula Rego's painting *The Dance*, attached to this document.

Ask group members, "Who is dancing together with whom? Who dances alone? When do people dance together? When might they dance alone? What happy times do people celebrate with dancing?" (This will vary according to peoples' culture, but most participants have at least seen people dance at a wedding. Other possibilities are birthdays, holidays and school parties.)

Read aloud **Matthew 28:19-20**.

After the reading, discuss:

- ◆ Jesus commissions his disciples to baptize in the name of the *three* Persons of the Trinity:

God the Father  
 God the Son  
 God the Holy Spirit

- ◆ Take a good look at Paula Rego's painting *The Dance*. What in Rego's painting most makes you think of God the Father? of God the Son? of God the Holy Spirit? Why?

The last question is meant to ask for imaginative answers. Although Rego herself is a Christian, her painting was not a deliberate painting of the Holy Trinity but a painting in honor of the human life and love she shared with her husband.

Some possible prompts might be:

- ◆ God the Father might be most like the mountain in the background. We can count on mountains to be strong and solid!
- ◆ Jesus (or God the Son) might be most like a person dancing.
- ◆ The Holy Spirit might be like the smiles on the faces of all those who are dancing with joy.

**Note:** Learn more about Paula Rego at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paula\\_Rego](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paula_Rego).

## □ Scripture Roleplays (15-30 minutes)

Participants discuss Paul's messages to God's people.

Help participants find **2 Corinthians 13:11-13** in their Bibles. Ask participants to follow along as you read the passage aloud.

Write the phrase *strive for perfection* on a board or newsprint. Discuss:

- ◆ What does this phrase mean to us?
- ◆ What are ways we can strive for perfection at home? at school? with our friends (*Write all suggestions under the heading strive for perfection.*)

Write the phrase *agree with one another* on a board or newsprint. Discuss:

- ◆ What does this phrase mean to us?
- ◆ What are ways we can agree with one another at home? at school? with our friends (*Write all suggestions under the heading agree with one another.*)

(cont. on p. 4)

Write the phrase *live in peace* on a board or newsprint. Discuss:

- ◆ What does this phrase mean to us?
- ◆ What are ways we can live in peace at home? at school? with our friends (*Write all suggestions under the heading live in peace.*)

Divide participants into three groups. Ask one group to roleplay a hurtful situation at home, a second group to roleplay a hurtful situation at school and a third group to roleplay a hurtful situation with friends.

Invite groups to discuss what caused the hurtful situations. Now invite groups to reenact the roleplays with one difference: members include behaviors based on Paul's messages to God's people. Ask groups to show how we can change situations by acting on God's love.

Then invite participants to look at the paintings made in today's Getting Started activity, and decide which message from Paul their picture best illustrates. Ask volunteers to explain their choices.

## Story-Review Comics (15-30 minutes)

Participants make comic story banners to review stories from previous sessions.

**Before the session** write each of these sentences on a separate slip of paper:

- ◆ Jesus is tempted (Matthew 4:1-11).
- ◆ The first humans are tempted (Genesis 3:1-7).
- ◆ Jesus raises Lazarus (John 11:1-3, 17-44).
- ◆ Jesus is crucified (Matthew 27:32-33, 35-56).
- ◆ Jesus rises from death (Matthew 28:1-9).
- ◆ Thomas doubts (John 20:24-29).
- ◆ Jesus' disciples wait (Acts 1:12-14).
- ◆ The Holy Spirit comes (Acts 2:1-11).

In the session, put the slips into the sack. Divide the group into pairs or trios. *Directions to the group members:*

- ◆ Draw a slip.
- ◆ Tape a strip of mural paper to the floor or a work surface.
- ◆ Use markers to make a giant comic strip showing the main events of your story. You can use your Bibles to look up details.

Give participants 10-25 minutes to create their comics. Make a display of the finished strips on the wall of the room or on a wall in a public part of the building.

## Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
  - The last in a series of optional *Faith Skills* activities, this time exploring family.
  - A helpful article looking at *Older Children and the Gospel*.
  - Rego's *The Dance*, to be used in today's Art activity.
  - A family paper, *At Home with the Good News*, to print and distribute *or* to e-mail to families for use at home.
- ◆ Open your Spring-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
  - Information on Spring-A's *Models of the Faith*.
  - A printable article titled *First Impressions*, which offers practical helps for the use of fine art in your classroom.
  - A printable article taking a closer look at *The Trinity*.
  - The *Introduction for Intermediate* for **Living the Good News**.

## More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings affirm the sufficiency of our Triune God. In Genesis, God's Spirit moves—and creation comes into being. Alluding to all three Persons of the Trinity, Paul concludes his letter to the Corinthians with a familiar blessing. In today's gospel, Jesus commissions his disciples to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

### Genesis 1:1–2:4a

Today's reading is the first of the two accounts of creation in Genesis. In solemn liturgical cadences, the writer shows how darkness and chaos give way to light and order as the waters part at God's command. In contrast to a strongly dualistic interpretation of creation in some other religious traditions, where chaos always threatens to overwhelm the world again, here God's sovereignty over creation is affirmed.

God says, "Let us make humankind" (v. 26). The "us" was taken by early Christian writers to be an allusion to the Trinity. For the ancient author, however, it most likely refers to God's heavenly court. "Humankind," in Hebrew a collective singular noun without any indication of number or gender, is created in God's image and likeness to enter into relationship with God and be God's representative on earth, especially to share in God's dominion.

### 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Paul exhorts the rebellious Corinthian community to test itself. Since Christ is in those who believe and who act according to that belief, the believers in Corinth should be able to evaluate their own situation if they don't want to take Paul's word for it.

Although they only damage their own standing by rejecting Paul, since it was through him that they came to faith, nonetheless Paul's concern is for them and their eventual perfection, not for his own reputation in their eyes. He is glad to be weak in their eyes if they are strong in faith. He prefers them to recognize the truth themselves and not force him to exercise his authority.

The exchange of the "holy kiss" (v. 12), a customary Eastern embrace, became a regular feature of the early liturgy, signaling the reconciliation of the community members. The closing triadic formula expresses a threefold understanding of Christian experience: grace received through Jesus leads one to the Father's love, which is expressed through the Spirit.

### Matthew 28:16-20

This reading gathers up the themes that Matthew has woven throughout his work. Jesus' ministry begins and ends on a mountain in Galilee, the place of revelation. There he inaugurates the mission of the Church.

In his "Great Commission," Jesus makes a declaration, delivers a command and gives a promise. He has now received the authority of the exalted Son of Man and gives it to his disciples. He commands them to go and make disciples of "all nations" (v. 19), removing the geographical and ethnic restriction found in Jesus' own ministry and of the disciples' previous mission.

The earliest accounts of baptism mention only baptism in Jesus' name, but the living experience of the baptized assembly led to the trinitarian formula as expressing the full reality of the new life.

To the disciples, Jesus now extends the full task of his ministry to them. Before they had only been commissioned to preach and heal, now they are to teach all that Jesus commanded them. Finally Jesus promises to the disciples his ongoing presence. The pledge of his name, Emmanuel, "God-with-us," is now fulfilled.

## Reflection

Anyone writing a book or piece of music wants it to end dramatically. Matthew, writing a grand finale for his gospel, concludes with important themes. The first is the intriguing phrase, "they worshiped him; but some doubted" (Matthew 28:17). We all encompass both extremes, and as Andrew Walker explains in *Journey to Joy*: "if we are here, it is because on some level at least we believe... In spite of our deafness we have caught something of the song... Faith and doubt, in their different ways, can both lead to God."

Jesus sends the disciples out to baptize and teach, not criticize and condemn. We are to share good news not only with others, but also with ourselves, remaining open to constant conversion.

Through instant communication, a global economy, the internet and environmental issues, we are approaching "one world"—which Jesus envisioned long ago. As Jesus leaves physically, he reassures, "I am with you always." I—not my portrait, book, law, recipe collection or any of the thousand other ways humans are remembered. Knowing that presence gives us confidence for whatever journey lies ahead.

## Liturgy Link

### The Trinity

The Christian belief in God's trinitarian being is extremely difficult for us to explain. We believe that there is one God, one divine Being, one loving nature, expressed in three Persons. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are each fully God and share in the nature and majesty of God, but they reveal themselves differently. This is, after all, our experience of God.

But the main reason that it is so difficult to explain our belief in the Trinity adequately is that the Trinity is a theological mystery so profound that we can never comprehend it no matter how long or hard we try. It has always been and always will be understood only by faith and revelation, not by reason alone.

In the Church's early years, the apostles taught what Jesus taught and witnessed to his deeds. Gradually, as the conflict with Judaism intensified and ideas from pagan religions threatened to dilute its message, the Church began to set forth some formal theological statements that defined its teaching more clearly.

In the 2nd century, Tertullian first used the Latin word *Trinitas* and the word *Person* to talk of God. In 325 CE, in response to various heresies of the time (especially Arianism that denied Jesus' divinity), the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea expressed in doctrinal form the truth about the trinitarian reality of God: God is one in being, yet three Persons share this being. This teaching was set forth in the Nicene Creed and was clarified and reaffirmed in later councils. These councils declared that the reality of the Trinity was what the scriptures proclaimed, even if the word *Trinity* itself wasn't actually used.

The Bible does indeed recognize the Trinity of divine persons expressing the early Church's understanding of the threefold revelation of God. Matthew reports the Great Commission given by Jesus to his apostles: "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" (Matthew 28:19).

Yet the Trinity, and much else about God, remains a mystery to us. We have not fully comprehended God's revelation in Jesus. We still see through the glass darkly! But when we see God face to face, "[we] will know fully, even as [we are] fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

## The World of the Bible

### The Dome in the Heavens

The regional geography of the ancient Near East led the Mediterranean peoples to the reasonable conclusion that the earth was encircled by a sea. Journeys in any direction eventually lead to a body of water: the Mediterranean Sea is west, the Black Sea and Caspian Seas north, the Persian gulf east, and the Arabian and Red Seas south. When they looked up, the sky was blue like water, and rain and snow fell upon the earth from above, so they concluded that there were waters above and waters below the dry land.

But in their understanding of the universe, the waters above and the waters below were separated by a great vault or dome (the sky, older translations called this the firmament). This was something like a great inverted glass bowl, holding the waters apart and creating the open space (the sky) in between earth and the heavens.

This "dome" covers the earth and divides the heavenly waters above it from those below it (Genesis 1:6-7). God's original creative activity was to divide these waters above and below by creating this dome and thus allowing the earth to have dry land. This dome keeps the waters above the heavens from inundating the earth except through windows that, when opened (see Genesis 7:11, 8:2; Isaiah 24:18; Malachi 3:10), allow the rain, snow and hail that is stored in heaven (Job 37:9, 38:22, 37) to fall down to water the earth.