

The Most Holy Trinity 2021
Genesis 18: 1-10; Psalm 29; Romans 8: 12-17; Mark 1: 1-11

There is a problem with preaching on Trinity Sunday: The temptation is to start by saying the Trinity is indefinable and then for the preacher to do just that. I hope this morning I will not fall into that trap!

I did think that I would share with you two of the texts that helped give rise to the Doctrine of the Trinity. We heard both of them this morning when we came away from the traditional Lectionary and heard about the Hospitality of Abraham in Genesis 18 and the Baptism of Christ in Mark's gospel! We could have had a text from Isaiah or others but these texts were chosen as the one is three and three are one paradox or mystery are more obvious. There are three visitors or angels who visit Abraham and in the Marcan passage God the Father speaks and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove upon Christ/Jesus.

What is your understanding of the Trinity? Or should I ask: 'have you ever thought about the Trinity?' I must admit it is not a usual topic of conversation. I have recently been totally lost during a lecture entitled *"One of the Trinity was Crucified" On the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as Revelation of the Trinity*¹ the title of this year's Pentecost Lecture at Pluscarden Abbey.

So rather than using words, I thought it might be interesting to look at some representations of the Trinity. In doing this though, we must remember that the Trinity is indefinable so all these images will fail in the end. They do however carry a message for the age in which they came to life!



Here we see Abraham welcoming some ungendered angels. The depiction is anthropomorphic or has human characteristics. Some would call this representation as the 'identical triplets'. In the third century there was no dominant trinitarian opinion. The angelology (study or doctrine of angels) or Christology (the understanding of Christ as a person and His work in the role of Salvation) were present within the Faith at this time.

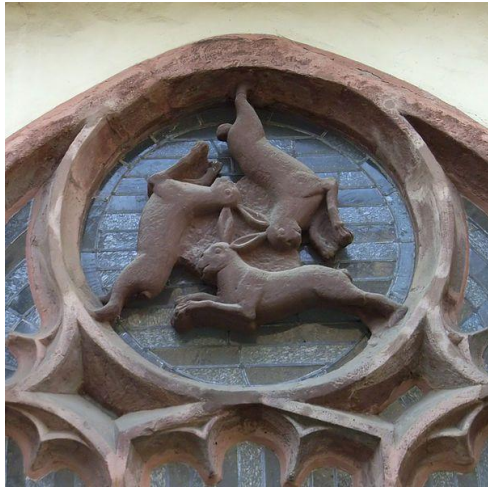
¹ <https://www.pluscardenabbey.org/newsandevents/2021/3/23/2021-pluscarden-pentecost-lectures-one-of-the-trinity-was-crucified>



If we move to the 6th century and the Syriac Rabbula Gospels. Here we see a high doctrine of the fiery association of the Spirit alongside the dove at Jesus' baptism. The fiery trait of the Spirit was unusual during this period. The fiery nature of the Spirit was lost after Nicaea and the dove was a more usual representation of the Spirit with the exception being Pentecost. In this depiction we see just the hand of God the Father at the top of the picture. The hand represents God the Father's active intervention but without any direct visualization of the Father.



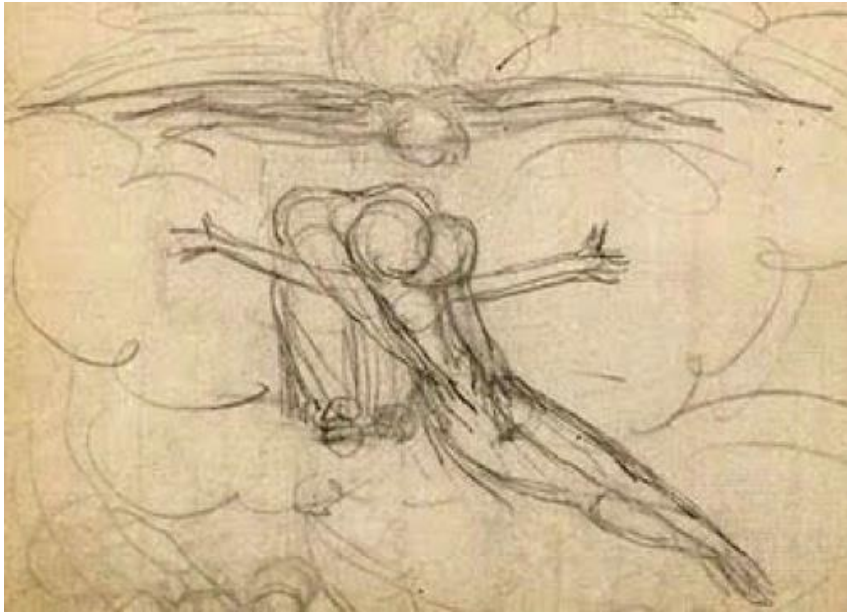
So to the 13th Century and the Throne of Grace at the Wieskirche Altar, Soest known as a *Gnadenstuhl*. Here we see the Cross and the sufferings of Christ emphasised. The emphasis is on the works of the Trinity and the life and death of Jesus. This period in history was a time of great suffering in Europe with famine, war, plague and political strife – perhaps not unlike our own. Perhaps, the wounded and suffering people who saw this image felt secure that God would welcome them. My thought is that God the Father looks rather fierce. This stern father accepts the sacrifice of the Son for our sins. I cannot see any representation of the Spirit here.



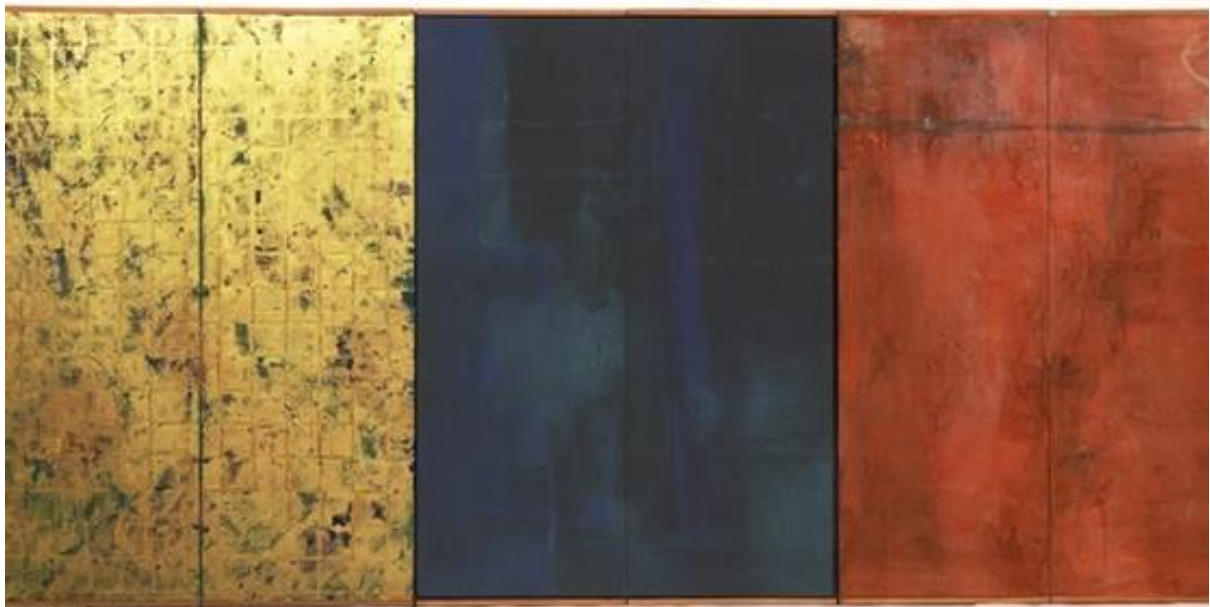
We next have a picture I am rather fond of which ties in with the Dance theme we have been following over the past weeks. This is known as 'The Hare Window' at Paderborn Cathedral, North Rhineland, Germany. Here we have a trio of Mad March Hares cavorting in a circular flurry. An ecstatic dance of delight. Note that their ears form a perfect Trinitarian Divine Triangle. It has been said that this non-human depiction of the divine injects the essence of delight, careless frolicking, and even erotic excess into the life of the Trinity. All held in a circle. A circle of perfection.



Here we see a familiar image of the Trinity by Hildegard of Bingen. At the heart of the Trinity stands the Word. A mysterious figure who holds their hands in a blessing. The figure is not necessarily male though I am told her commentary accepts that the figure is. The silver outer circle represents the Father who is not displayed as a human being and the inner burnished-gold circle is the spirit. Jesus is seen here as gentleness, and welcoming us with humility. It is said that the face of Christ represents the whole of the Trinity. We the viewers are welcomed into this circle by the defenceless and vulnerable being at the centre. There is a paradox present here in the supremely powerful being, being defenceless. Demanding submission and yet representing it in its perfect form.



In William Blake's sketch of the Trinity we see a reworking of the throne of Grace theme that we saw earlier. The Father is not noticeably gendered and He bends to embrace the Son *face to face* who is on an absent Cross. This is one of my favourite depictions of the Trinity. The absent Cross could be the event that is crucifying you and I in life or Jesus atoning for something that we have done and the father accepting Him. The Spirit is huge and mirrors Jesus' crucified arms. Is this image one of the anguished parent holding the child or Christ leaping joyfully up to the father? The movement of death can be seen as a leap of life, renewal!



Our final image of the Trinity is by a Japanese/American Christian Makoto Fujimura. His work appeals to me because the Japanese

Nihonga school technique is not dissimilar in approach to the Eastern Christian Tradition of writing ikons. I imagine you will either love this image or hate it. You can argue it is a flawed image of the Trinity as the Three appear separate whereas from a doctrine point of view the three are indivisible. How would you portray this?

An overused sermon analogy is the three conditions of water; as ice, water and steam illustrate the divisible with the indivisible. I like the mysteriousness of the work. Within the depths you can imagine Biblical stories, Parables, unfold. Perhaps you can see patterns that have emerged through your relationship with the Trinity/God in your own life.

These seven illustrations of the Trinity are best seen as 7 facets of a diamond. One can only truly come to an understanding of the Trinity through Prayer, study and life. A good starting point might be to:

“Learn to exclude no-one from your love.”

Trinitarian life is about entering totally in to the love of Christ, the Love of God, and conforming to His will through the Spirit.