

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Idolatry is sin. *“You shall have no other gods before me”* is the law (Ex. 20:3). It’s the first and greatest commandment. The LORD — He is God; created things are not. The LORD — He is God; carved images are not. The LORD — He is God; wealth or power is not. The LORD — He is God; the government is not. The LORD — He is God; your family is not. The LORD — He is God; you are not. The LORD — He is God; *“there is no other, besides [Him] there is no God”* (Is. 45:5). *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths”* (Prov. 3:5-6).

It’s clear: this is serious business. The Lord is not kidding around. *“I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments”* (Ex. 20:5-6). Yes, *“the LORD, He is God”* (1 Ki. 18:39); *“the LORD is His name”* (Jer. 33:2).

It behooves us, therefore, for our salvation “to know our God aright” (LSB497:2) and to worship Him alone as the only true God. As we just confessed: “Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith” — this catholic faith confesses the true God (Athanasian Creed, 1).

So who is the LORD? First, even though no one has ever seen God in His unveiled majesty, we can know OF Him by what He has done, as St. Paul teaches, *“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”* (Rom. 1:20). Thus, no one has any excuse, at least, for rejecting God. Hardhearted atheists and prideful agnostics are without excuse.

Still, this is not saving knowledge of God, for salvation is only through Jesus. *“[T]here is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). Thus, salvation is only by holding the catholic faith in the one true God; and salvation is only by trusting in Jesus. The conclusion is inescapable: Jesus leads us into this catholic faith. In fact, the evangelist John is clear: Jesus, who is Himself God, *“has made [God the Father] known”* (John 1:18). As Jesus told Thomas, *“If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him”* (John 14:7).

Therefore, second, to confess “the catholic faith,” one must confess that the LORD is Father who has a Son, who is always and ever in the bosom of the Father, and yet who in time descended from the Father’s side in the humility of human flesh, the Son of God becoming *“the Son of Man.”* We reject as crass idolatry that

Jesus came as some demigod, of lesser status than the Father. He is no minor deity; rather “*in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*” (Col. 2:9). “Such as the Father is, such is the Son ... uncreated ... infinite ... eternal ... almighty” (Ath. Creed). There never was “a time when [the Son] was not.”

Thus, third, we bow our knees before the Son and with our tongues we “*confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil. 2:10-11), for “the Father is Lord [and] the Son is Lord” but there is only “one Lord,” for “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*” (Deut. 6:4). Again, “[T]he Father is God, the Son is God” and yet there is “but one God,” for Jesus Himself said, “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30), and that is not simply of purpose, but of “being” — Jesus is “of one substance with the Father” as we say in the Nicene Creed.

And yet Jesus is not playing word games with us. He and the Father are also distinct persons as is clearly shown in Jesus’ baptism: the Father speaking from the heavens and the beloved Son standing upon the earth. And so, we confess “the Father is one person, the Son is another.” We reject as idolatry that these are but “roles” played by the one god in his divine drama, masks that he puts on as he plays the Father at times and the Son at other times. We reject, too, as idolatrous the false god that the Muslims worship who has no Son.

Of course, as we heard in the Gospel, the Father and the Son are both intimately involved in our salvation, God the Father sending His only Son into the world not to condemn it but to save it. Nevertheless, while the work of our redemption is shared, each person has His own role in that redemption: the Father giving and sending; the Son only, not the Father, descending into our mortal flesh and being lifted up unto death for our sins, the Son rising from the dead and ascending back to the Father’s right hand, so that, the person of the Father and of the Son remain distinct and unconfused.

To be sure, this is a mystery! And the Church took centuries to hammer out the dogmatic language with which to express this mystery! Much of it had to do with the relationship of the Father with the Son. But the picture is not complete, for, fourth, the LORD reveals Himself as Trinity, three persons in the one Divine essence, and the third person in the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. Scripture reveals the Holy Spirit as God also, doing Divine things: creating the world, breathing life into dust and into dry bones, breathing new life through faith into unbelievers. But Scripture also explicitly says that the Spirit is God. In the fledgling Church, when Ananias held back some of the proceeds from the sale of his property, acting like he had given it all to the church, Peter said to him, “*Ananias why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to man but to God.*” (Acts

5:3-4). Thus, what we confess of the Father and the Son — such as they are, “such,” we confess, “is the Holy Spirit”: God, uncreated, infinite, eternal, almighty, our Lord.

And just like with the Father and the Son, we do not confuse the Person of the Holy Spirit. The “Holy Spirit is another” distinct Person of the Holy Trinity, not merely a motion or power. This, too, was made plain at Jesus’ baptism as the Spirit, distinct from the Father and the Son, came down from heaven in the form of a dove and anointed Jesus with power as the Christ (Mark 1:10, Acts 10:38).

Moreover, His work in our salvation is to bear witness concerning the Son, as Jesus said: “*when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me*” (John 15:26). So, whether it’s by the words bearing witness to Christ that poured out of the disciples’ mouths on Pentecost that led the multitudes to baptism, or by the Gospel words spoken here or at school that leads to faith and life and being begotten from above by water and the Spirit, or maybe it begins in the baptismal waters in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit followed by ongoing catechesis, regardless, this “Holy Spirit, pow’r Divine” (LSB496:3) is also at work in our salvation, doing what only God can do for people born dead in trespasses and sins. He makes us alive, forgiving our sins; He moves us to worship the “one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity”; He brings us into fellowship with the Father and the Son and leads us to participate in this Divine life.

May this Holy Trinity — Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit — the Lord God of hosts whom angels worship, singing His praises, who has atoned for our sins and takes away our guilt, keep us from idols (1 John 5:21). May this only true God — the Father, the unbegotten One, the Son, begotten of the Father alone, our incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both — preserve us in this faith and life, in true confession and worship, “and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven” (Luther, Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, 7th Petition).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.