



The Trinity: primary teachers' guide

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Introduction

This guide, produced by Westminster Abbey, contains key information on Christian beliefs about the Trinity, to support the delivery of Religious Education within your classroom.

Westminster Abbey has a distinctive role within the Church of England, which is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It is neither a cathedral nor a parish church, and it stands outside the normal jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. It is instead a 'Royal Peculiar', which was a status granted to it in 1560 by Elizabeth I, under which the Dean and Chapter are directly answerable to the Sovereign. Building upon its origins as a monastery and the Benedictine importance placed on education, Westminster Abbey today strives to be a school of the Lord's service.

This resource discusses the Trinity in broad terms based on Christian teachings. All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

The concept of the Trinity

Christians believe in the one God but that God is known and worshipped as Trinity – three in one and one in three. The persons of the Trinity are Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God the Father created the world and everything in it, and is transcendent; beyond or above the world He created.

“Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6)

In Genesis 1, Christians learn that God created humankind in His image and likeness, demonstrating His role as a parent to all of humankind.

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

Described as the Father, God is a loving parent who cares for humanity.

“As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:13-14)



God's love as Father is also shown in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and throughout the Bible, Christians are taught to love in the same way that God the Father does.

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)

Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the second person of the Trinity. In the Gospel of John, Christians learn that Jesus has always been God's son as the Word who existed before Creation. This Word is eternal.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” (John 1:1-2)

Jesus Christ is described in Philippians as being both fully divine and fully human, and equal to God the Father.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death
- even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:5-8)

Jesus is God in human flesh. During Jesus' earthly life, he taught people how to behave and through his own experience, He understands human suffering.

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” (John 1:14)

Christians believe that at His crucifixion, Jesus offered his life for the sins of the world. God the Son is also known as the Saviour.

“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1:15)



God the Holy Spirit is the immanent presence of God in the world. God the Holy Spirit, known in the creed as “Lord and giver of life”, is a constant source of guidance and inspiration for Christians on earth.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

God the Holy Spirit is often depicted as wind, fire or in the form of the dove, as can be seen in this stained-glass window at Westminster Abbey showing Pentecost. Most prominently, God the Holy Spirit as a dove is present during Jesus’ baptism.

“And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.” (Matthew 3:16)



The relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The belief in one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, can be difficult to understand. It means that all of the following statements are true:

- Christians believe in one God
- The Father is God
- The Son is God
- The Holy Spirit is God
- The Father is not the Son
- The Son is not the Holy Spirit
- The Father is not the Holy Spirit

While the Bible does not explicitly use the phrase ‘Trinity’, there are numerous mentions of the three different persons in the New Testament.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)

The Nicene Creed

Creeds express the most important Christian beliefs and teachings. They were originally written down as Christianity spread to combat the spread of heresy by offering clear doctrinal boundaries of belief. The



creeds were written to be recited during public worship. By saying creeds out loud and together as a congregation, Christians are united as a believing community with those across time and space.

The Nicene Creed, which was adopted at the First Council of Nicaea in 325AD, provides a summary of what the Church believes about the Trinity. It was devised during a large meeting of Christians leaders from across the Roman Empire in order to unify Christian belief, convened by Roman Emperor Constantine.

“We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.”



The Trinity in Christian worship

Christian worship is focused on the Trinity, as Christians worship God through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. For example, blessings are given and baptism is performed “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”, often accompanied by making the sign of the cross in the air using your hand or finger. The Apostles’ Creed is also used at services of baptism and confirmation.

Music is an essential component of much Christian worship, with some hymns focusing on the Trinity. Here are some examples:

- “To Thee, great One in Three,
Eternal praises be”
Come, Thou Almighty King
- “Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and might,
God in three persons
Blessed Trinity”
Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty
- “Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father’s glory,
Blaze, Spirit, blaze,
Set our hearts on fire”
Shine Jesus Shine

In the Christian calendar, Trinity Sunday, falling on the first Sunday after Pentecost, is one of the few examples of a celebration of doctrine rather than event. Following the events of Easter, Ascension and Pentecost, Trinity Sunday is an annual celebration of this fundamental mystery which is at the heart of the Christian faith.

Finding out more

You may also wish to look at our other [Christian beliefs teaching resources](#).