



## Opening Question:

*Why is faith important even in a skeptical world?*

## Christianity as Unique

Christianity is unique among the world's religions. It emphasizes doctrines over behaviors. What we believe is as important as how we act. So, what do we believe about God? We hold there is one God in three divine persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. In the gospels, the baptism of Jesus revealed the image of this Tri-unity.

*Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan river. When Jesus came out of the water, he saw the sky open and the Holy Spirit come down like a dove. The Spirit entered Jesus. There was a voice from heaven that said, "You are my beloved Son. I am very pleased with you!"*

*Mark 1:9-11*

## Three Persons in One God?

The image of the Trinity, however, raises a simple question: How can there be three persons in one God? Think of God as the "What" of the question and the Father, Son, and Spirit as the "Who" of the question.

Consider the sports analogy of three person basketball. The team is the "What" the members are the "Who." Three people are on one team. Every person on the team works together for the same purpose: to win. What position each player takes determines how they play the game.

In the same way, the Father, Son, and Spirit are three different persons who share the same divine nature or substance. And they have the same purpose: to create the universe, to save it, and make it holy. We humans are the focus of their activity. We know the identity of each based upon how they relate to one other and to us. Granted, that's a weak analogy but it gives us a glimpse into the unity of God and its diversity.



## I Believe in One God

When we say we believe in one God we are really describing divine holiness. The word holy means "unique, one of a kind, completely different." There is only one dynamic reality that fits that criteria. It is totally different from our experience and our personal knowledge. And, yet, it is always present to us if we take the time and energy to notice it. We call that reality "God."

The Hebrews acknowledged the unity of that reality.

*Listen, Israel, our Lord is the only one, true God!*

*Deuteronomy 6:4*

Jesus made the relationship with that reality central to his teaching.

*A Pharisee asked Jesus: "Teacher, what is the most important command in the Jewish Law?"*

*Jesus answered, "'Love God with all your heart, with all your soul,' and all your mind. This is the most important command."*

*Matthew 22:36-38 (Deuteronomy 6:5)*

## The Names for God

When God acted in the lives of people, he revealed himself. People reflected on the experiences of his activities and gave him names based upon those experiences. He was the Living God, that dynamic

power of creation and salvation.

When the Persian King Darius saw the power of God save Daniel from the lions, he sent out a decree:

*I command everyone in my kingdom to worship and honor the God of Daniel. He is the living God, the one who lives forever. His power and his kingdom will never end.*

*Daniel 6:26*

When Moses saw the burning bush, he asked God for his name. God replied

*I Am Who Am.*

*Exodus 3:14*

On one level, the name acknowledged the existence of holy reality. As Catechism of the Catholic Church stated:

*God is the fullness of Being and of every perfection, without origin and without end. All creatures receive all that they are and have from him; but he alone is his very being, and he is of himself everything that he is.*

*Catechism of the Catholic Church 213*

The mere thought of such an awesome God might be incomprehensible. God, by nature, is a mystery. And it is hard to wrap our minds about the idea of God. As much as we know about God, we are dumbstruck because we know so little about him.

When God acts, he reveals himself as merciful and gracious. When God passed before Moses, he proclaimed:

*The Lord, the Lord! Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth, keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and disobedience and sin.*

*Exodus 34:6-7a*

The story of Israel and the Church spoke to the forgiveness God offered. The risen Christ addressed his followers with that message:

*Jesus told his followers,*

*"Scripture says the Messiah would suffer death and would rise three days later. It also says his followers would go to people from every nation with a message:*

*'Turn back to God and he will forgive you!'*

*Luke 24:46-47*

If we experience God as forgiving, merciful, and gracious, we know that he loves us. There is no other reason for God to treat us this way. In fact, John's first letter states:

*God is Love.*

*1 John 4:8c*

He loves us so much that he remains constantly true to us. He showed us his love and truth with the gift of his only Son:

*The Word became flesh and lived with us. We saw the glory of the Word; it was the glory of God's only Son. He was full of God's loving grace and faithful truth.*

*John 1:14*

## **I Believe...God Reveals**

When we first entered the Church, we were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit collectively. We begin our prayers with the same words in the sign of the cross. Even when we study the three divine persons, they work together as one to create, save, and sanctify people.

### **The Son Reveals the Father**

Let's consider the person of God the Father. While many of the world's religions call God as Father, Judaism invokes the title in a special way. He is Father as creator of the universe, the king of the nation, and caregiver for the least among the people. However, when Jesus called God his Father, he expressed a unique relationship. He was the only Son eternally begotten by the Father. He expressed an intimacy with the Father that he invited his followers to share in.

*Jesus told his followers: "...I am one with the Father. You will soon know you are one with me and I am one with you.*

*John 14:20bc*

## The Father and Son Reveal the Spirit

The Spirit of God has been active since the creation of the universe.

*When God first created the heavens and the earth...He breathed his Spirit over the waters.*

*Genesis 1:1, 2c*

*God molded the first human from the mud of the ground and breathed his Spirit into the nostrils of the human. Then, the human came alive.*

*Genesis 2:7*

Throughout the Old Testament, authors have spoken to the power of the Spirit in the life of the nation. When Jesus spoke about the Spirit, he promised that very power to his disciples.

*Jesus told his followers:*

*I will send you the Spirit of Truth. It will come from the Father and will testify everything about me is true. It will comfort you, guide you, and advocate for you.*

*John 15:26*

In other words, the Spirit, the very power of God is not just at work in the chosen few. It is at work in every believer. The Church recognizes the Spirit as the third person of the Trinity that the Father sent to the faithful through the Son in order to save and sanctify them.

## What We Believe: The Creeds

Let's return to our first point. Christians hold that what they believe is as important as how they act. Over the last few moments, I've referred to God's activity as creation, salvation, and sanctification. We can see the persons of the Trinity in these three activities. The Father creates us. The Son saves us. And the Spirit makes us holy.

The Church formed its statements of faith around these three activities. We call these statements "creeds." In our worship, we use two such creeds.. The Apostles Creed is a statement of faith that developed from the baptismal worship of ancient Rome. It carries authority in Catholic and many Protestant traditions.

The Nicene Creed is a fourth century statement

that defined the faith in the face of controversies at the time. There were two gatherings of the world's bishops called ecumenical councils to address the issues of the Trinity. This creed is definitive in the Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox traditions.

Both creeds express belief in the activity of God through the three persons of the Trinity.

## Closing Question:

*Why do you believe in the Trinity?*

*Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs 185-267, 357.*

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