

# Pastor Kory's Page

Faith Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, SD  
May 21 & 22, 2016

## Atha-what???

This weekend we celebrate The Holy Trinity, the mystery of our one true God and His unique being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **For centuries, Christian churches have confessed The Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday.**

As Lutheran Christians, we subscribe to the three universal creeds of the Christian Church: The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, and The Athanasian Creed. The Apostles' Creed is an early summary of the Apostles' teaching and probably originated among Roman Christians. The original version of the Nicene Creed was formulated at the Council of Nicea (near modern day Istanbul, Turkey) in 325 A.D. The Nicene Creed focuses especially on Christ's nature as both true God and true man, as this teaching was the primary controversy of the time. Arius, a priest from Alexandria, Egypt, pushed his view that Jesus was less than fully divine and eternal. His motto was, "there was a when He was not."

The original Nicene Creed included an additional, closing statement as a definitive response to Arius' false teaching: "*But those who say that there was when He [Jesus] was not, and that before being begotten He was not, or that He came from that which is not, or that the Son of God is of a different substance or essence, or that He is created, or mutable, these the catholic church anathematizes.*" In other words, the bishops at Nicea confessed that Jesus is true God, equal with the Father and the Spirit, and that any lesser view of Jesus is outside of biblical, Christian faith. (Examples of people today who hold to a *less-than-divine* view of Jesus include Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Muslims.)

**One of the greatest proponents of this Trinitarian teaching was a deacon from Alexandria named Athanasius.** Athanasius was present at the Council of Nicea. He was known for his down-to-earth ways, monk-like discipline, and firm convictions. Athanasius resolutely believed that God's entrance into our world in the person of Jesus Christ was the central event of human history. Theologians call this the "Incarnation"—God taking on our human flesh.

Reluctantly, Athanasius was appointed as bishop of Alexandria in 328 A.D. His life then became filled with opposition. His powerful opponents (including several Roman emperors) banished him into exile on multiple occasions, all for his unwavering support of the decision of the Council of Nicea. Even at the time of Athanasius' death in 373 A.D., the theological battle was still raging between the supporters of Arius' teaching and the proponents of Nicene (Trinitarian) teaching. However, if not for the determined efforts of faithful leaders like Athanasius, the false teaching of Arianism could very well have prevailed!

The Athanasian Creed, which we confess this weekend, was not written by Athanasius himself. It was written well after his lifetime by Christians in modern day France and was named in Athanasius' memory. The Athanasian Creed confesses our Trinitarian faith *even more thoroughly* than does The Nicene Creed. The emphasis of the Athanasian Creed is that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are each *unique* and *distinct* Persons. We don't want to mash them together and act as if there's no difference between the three Persons of the Trinity because this is not what Scripture teaches! At the same time, we don't want to drive the three Persons of the Trinity so far apart in our thinking that we deny God's unity, or elevate one Person above another.

Is God's triune nature a mystery? Absolutely! But should we also confess the mysteries of our faith clearly? Yes! Rev. Christopher Hall, writing on the LCMS website, explains why all of this matters: "*The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is more than an academic principle, more than just a set of facts to be memorized and recited. It is more than something strange and odd and hard to understand. God is the foundation and source of life and being and creation. And God is relationship—one God, three persons, each relating to and loving one another . . . and loving us.*" (From the article "The Holy Trinity and Life Together")

The other thing that might strike you about the Athanasian Creed is its insistence that those outside of the Trinitarian faith are outside of God's salvation in Christ. The Creed uses words such as "compelled" and "must" and "necessary." This might seem harsh to us since we live in an era of "tolerance" and "coexistence" as if many paths supposedly lead to the same eternal destination.

The final statement in the Creed, "*Whoever desires to be saved must think thus about the Trinity*", does not mean that we must have the sort of intellectual, intricate level of faith represented by the Athanasian Creed. It *does* mean that saving faith is *particular* faith, *Trinitarian* faith, faith in the Father, who sent His only Son to save you from sin, and who works in your heart and life through His Holy Spirit. **Everyone has some sort of faith. The question is, in what object are you placing your faith? Saving faith means trusting the one, true, Trinitarian God.**

### A Few Reminders:

- **Senior Pastor Call Meeting:** this Thursday, May 26 at 7:00 p.m. All voting members (18 and older) are asked to attend and participate! Youth are also encouraged to assist with childcare.
- **Sunday Service Squared:** Please sign up to serve! Please let me or Pastor Pete Sestak know if we can answer any questions about this special opportunity to serve our neighbors on June 5<sup>th</sup>.
- **Lutheran H.S. Golf Tournament:** Please also consider supporting LHSSF in the June 5<sup>th</sup> golf outing! Speaking of Pastor Pete and myself, we need two more teammates! Please let one of us know if you'd like to join us!

*Peace in Christ,*

*Kory Janneke, Associate Pastor*