



# 1ST AFTER TRINITY

My aim in this address is to centre on today's old testament reading from Genesis 18 where the Lord appears to Abraham, near the great trees of Mamre, whilst he was sitting at the entrance to his tent at the heat of the day, but also to look at the icon of the Trinity by Rublev which is a representation of this event, a copy of which is on the altar in the south transept

It is always helpful to put any reading in the context of what went before it and here a quick look at the previous chapter in Genesis is beneficial.

Here when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord confirmed his covenant with him and said that he will be the father of many nations, and no longer was he to be called Abram, but Abraham. There was also a name change for his wife Sarai to Sarah, and that she would have a son. Abraham was somewhat credulous in his response.

"Abraham fell down on his face ,but he thought to himself and said will a son be born to a man of a hundred years old and Sarah bear a child at the age of 90."

By Chapter 18 with the name changes and confirmation of Gods covenant, we have the establishment of a new order, and under a new order, things may happen that could not happen under the old order most importantly the promised birth of a son for with God nothing is impossible.

The story in Chapter 18 paints a picture of Abraham just settling down to his midday siesta when 3 men appear before his tent. At first Abraham accepts what his eyes tell him, that there were 3 men to be entertained, but he later realises that it is the Lord who is visiting

him. It is important to note that the appearance is at the most inconvenient time of day and that the hospitality to the strangers would demand considerable personal sacrifice.

The significance of what is known as the hospitality of Abraham, in which angels appear to the patriarch has been regarded by theologians as a symbol of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the God of one nature, yet 3 persons. God the father, God the son and God the holy spirit. In Russia it is known as the Old testament Trinity. If you go into the South transept of All Saints you will find an icon which is a copy of the famous icon of the Trinity painted in Moscow for the St Sergius monastery in the 1420s by Andrey Rublyev.

Some of you will know that I have a liking for icons and about 12 years ago I was fortunate enough to go to Moscow in February on a short visit with the aim of organising a school trip later in the year. By Russian standards it was not particularly cold being somewhere between -4 and -8degrees C. I particularly wanted to see this icon and after getting a little lost we eventually made it to the Tretyakov Gallery. Donning some protective footwear to protect the carpets I made a bee line for the early icons. Being February the gallery was largely empty and I had the gallery almost to myself. The colours of this icon are remarkably bright and vibrant for its age.

There are different interpretations of the icon but according to the most prominent, the angel in the middle represents Christ, the left one God the father and the right God the Holy Spirit..

If you look carefully at the icon in the south transept, you will see above the angel representing the father there is a house. The structure does not have much to do with reality. However it has a deeper spiritual meaning in its reference to the gospel of John(ch 14 v1-6) In my father's house there are many rooms.

The figure of the Holy Spirit, represented on the right of the icon is dressed in blue and green the colours standing for water and vegetation. These colours represent the work of the Holy Spirit especially in baptism.

The angel in the centre dominates the icon with its voluminous and well defined robes which give it a greater prominence than the other figures. The angel also has a gold band running over its tunic in an imperial style. The angel in the centre is Christ and his hands resting on the table are at the centre of an imaginary line connecting all the angels together.

Rublyev also emphasises the unity of the icon by portraying all 3 angels with similar faces and hair styles.

It is also believed that the central angel by showing two fingers pointing towards the chalice is highlighting the two natures of Christ himself.

Icons have had somewhat of a chequered history in the western church but iconographers saw the icon as part of prayer and worship. The art of the icon is essentially a liturgical art. At the second council of Nicea strict guidelines were laid down. The veneration of icons was

upheld as long as they were given a relative love, absolute love was reserved for God alone. So that the honour given to the icon was to pass onto the image it represented

So the next time you light a candle in the south transept, pause for a moment and look at the icon of the Trinity. Think of the icon as a door, a place of encounter and meditation. Remember that in medieval times most people could not read so the icon was the written word of most people who were illiterate. By meditating the worshiper is brought into a living context with the person or mystery depicted.

I hope you will find time to think for a moment before this icon and remember how important hospitality is in the Christian life, because like Abraham you may well have entertained angels.

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