

Summer sermon series on the catechism

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Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on various scripture passages & the Third Article of the Creed

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The Holy Spirit is True God

- I. He has divine names
- II. He has divine characteristics
- III. He does divine things

In our Creed we confess, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” Who exactly is the Holy Spirit? Why is he so important? Why is it necessary that we confess our belief in him? The next few weeks we will look at the Holy Spirit and his work and answer those important questions, using the outlines Luther provides in his small catechism of 1529.

I. He has divine names – the Bible calls him God

This is a flashlight. How did you know that? At one time someone told you. If you had never seen one of these before you would not have known what this was. In our creed we confess that the Holy Spirit is God. How do we know that to be true and why is it so important to believe it?

In the early days of the Christian Church in Jerusalem, Christians shared their possessions to provide for the needy among the believers. Individuals sold property and gave the profit as a gift to the Lord for the work of ministry. A husband and wife by the name of Ananias and Sapphira did just that. But, they kept back some of the profit for themselves. There was nothing wrong with doing this, but Ananias and his wife agreed to pretend that they were giving the entire amount of the sale to the Lord. We could speculate and say that perhaps it was out of pride or they were looking for praise. Either way, what they did was wrong. God does not tolerate hypocrisy. He will not be deceived by sinful humankind (Gal 6.7 God cannot be mocked).

When Ananias laid the money at the feet of the church leaders, the Apostle Peter rebuked him and said, **“You have not lied to men but to God, you have lied to the Holy Spirit!** And Ananias fell down and died. A few hours later when his wife Sapphira walked into the room, Peter said to her, **“How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?”** (story is found in Acts 5) And so we believe and confess that the Holy Spirit is true God because here the Bible clearly calls the Holy Spirit God.

This is necessary for salvation... that we know and believe that the Holy Spirit is not some feeling or power or some kind of energy like “the Force” from Star Wars. In the Athanasian Creed which we recited on Holy Trinity Sunday in May, we confessed that there are not three gods, but three persons in one God. The persons of the Trinity are not inferior or greater than each other, but coequal, coeternal, equally almighty and infinite. We confess that the Holy Spirit is not created nor begotten but that he proceeds from the Father and the Son. Well, what does that mean? We typically ascribe specific work to each person of the Trinity. We say that the Father created us and continues to preserve us. The Son redeemed us, that is, he purchased us with this holy precious blood and his innocent sufferings and death. So also, the Holy Spirit

does his own work. He proceeds, that is, he is sent out by the Father and the Son to do his work. We will talk more about his work in the third part of this sermon and in the weeks to come. We believe the Holy Spirit is true God because the Bible calls him God. It's important because in our Athanasian Creed we confess, **“This is the true Christian faith. Whoever does not faithfully and firmly believe this cannot be saved.”**

II. He has divine attributes/characteristics

Let's go back to the flashlight. You know this is a flashlight because someone told you. But someone may have also pointed out its characteristics so that when you saw something similar, you would know it's a flashlight. It has a power source, oftentimes in the form of batteries. It typically has button and when you push the button the flashlight casts a beam of light. How do you know that the Holy Spirit is God? Not only does the Bible give divine names to the Holy Spirit, but the Bible also tells us that the Holy Spirit has divine characteristics. About 15 minutes ago we sang Psalm 139. Do you remember what that psalm told us about the Holy Spirit? If you've forgotten, I invite you to open your hymnals to pg. 116. What does it tell you about the Holy Spirit? It says that no matter where you go, the Holy Spirit is with you. The fancy word for that is *omnipresence*; because the Holy Spirit is God he is present everywhere. Why is that important to know and believe? Let's say your child has high aspirations for their future occupation and they want to be submarine captain or an astronaut. You have the comfort of knowing that if they are in the depths of the sea or in the heavens above, there the Holy Spirit will be with them (Ps 139). If your spouse deploys, you will find comfort knowing that the Holy Spirit will also be there with your spouse, and he will also, at the same time, remain with you here in the States, comforting you with his presence. If you are in a hospital bed, or sitting on a couch at a friend's house consoling a painful divorce, wondering how you will get through parenting your teenager, the Holy Spirit will be there, comforting you with his presence and reminding you of his promises through his Holy Word.

What else does that Psalm say about the Holy Spirit? It says that he knows our thoughts. In our Second Lesson this morning from 1 Corinthians 2:6-10, we heard that the Holy Spirit also knows the mind of God. The fancy word for this attribute is *omniscience*. Because the Holy Spirit is God he knows everything. Why is that so important to believe and confess?

Do you remember on Good Friday when Jesus stood before the Roman governor, and he said, **“Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”** And then Pontius Pilate replied, **“What is truth?”** (John 18:37,38) Philosophers and scientists continue to amaze us with their great discoveries, but they still cannot figure out God's secret wisdom; the truth that before the creation of the world God elected you to believe, and that he chose to be saved through faith in his Son. In this section of Scripture from 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul even goes so far as to say that we as Christians did not even figure this truth out on our own. Naturally, we are bound by this life. We can know nothing of the life to come. We cannot know heavenly, spiritual things. We cannot know what God demands in order for us to get into heaven. We can only know what human beings desire and want. We are only concerned about the things of this world. Ask someone who does not know the God of the Bible. Do they know what sin is? Do they know the depth of its consequences? Do they know the answers to sickness and suffering? Do they understand why will there always be crime and war? Do they know why death reigns over all people? They don't. Even as Christians we still struggle with these questions because of that

wretched sinful nature that still clings to us. We need the Holy Spirit to share his wisdom with us through the Holy Scriptures.

“Who has known the mind of God?” Paul asks. The Holy Spirit does. Only he knows God’s divine purpose. Only he knows what God demands in order for us to get into heaven. The Holy Spirit “found it out” and had it recorded on the pages of Scripture and revealed it to us so that we might come to know Jesus is our Savior from sin and death and believe it and be saved. Because otherwise, left on our own, we would never have figured this out. The Holy Spirit reveals God’s wisdom to us through his Word, that in his wisdom, he sent his Son Jesus to take care of the consequences of our sins... by dying as our substitute. That in his wisdom he secured our afterlife in heaven by his resurrection. All this the HS has taught us through the Word of God. And so we believe the Holy Spirit is God because the Bible tells us that he has these divine characteristics.

III. He does divine works – he does things only God can do

If you are an avid soccer fan you know that the World Cup just began in South Africa. If you are an avid hockey fan you know that the Chicago Blackhawks just won the Stanley Cup after 49 long years. And if you are an avid basketball fan, you know that the Lakers and Celtics are still fighting out the NBA championship. It’s not difficult to recognize the star players on those teams, because those athletes can do things ordinary men cannot do. In the same way, we believe the Holy Spirit is true God because he does certain things that only God can do.

In Genesis 1:1,2 we read, **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”** The Bible tells us that the third person of the Trinity was also present at creation and had his hand working with the Son and Father to create life on earth. That’s something only God can do. Only God could create a mass of churning dark water and muck and instantly, by the power of his voice, turn it into the beautiful world we have today. The Holy Spirit created life.

In our *Verse of the Day*, Job’s friend Elihu shared with us an important Biblical truth when he said, **“The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”** (Job 33:4) When your life began at conception, there the Holy Spirit was, mapping out your DNA, shaping your personality, forming your physical attributes and creating your soul. You know, for all the scientific advancements, there is something scientists cannot nor will ever be able to do; create life. Only God creates life, and God the Holy Spirit takes a very personal interest in your life because he fashioned and formed you. But he is not only concerned about your physical body, but especially about your spiritually body; your soul...

And it is here, at the font, that he gave your soul new life. The Apostle Paul in his letter to Pastor Titus 3:5ff tells us, **“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.”** Dead people cannot reanimate themselves. They cannot be born again. Once you’re dead, you’re dead. Spiritually dead people cannot make themselves alive to Christ – and that is how each of

us was from conception; dead to Christ and dead in sin. But just as the Holy Spirit gave you life in your mother's womb, he also is the one who made you alive spiritually. Through baptism the Holy Spirit worked his power through water and the Word and shined the light of Christ into your hearts, opening your blind eyes to see Jesus, causing you to have faith that believes Jesus alone saves, that Jesus alone brings life and immortality to those who have been baptized. The Holy Spirit continues to convince you of this truth that heaven is yours, that forgiveness of sins is yours so that you will never wonder, you will never worry, but will always be confident.

Do you see why it is necessary to believe that the Holy Spirit is true God? Because believing is essential for your eternal salvation. I pray that the Holy Spirit will keep you in the one true faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.