

21 WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Early in his life, Paul made a decision about Jesus. He decided Jesus was a fake. So he chose to dedicate his life to hurting the followers of Jesus. He harassed them, put them in prison, and even helped kill some of them.

Jesus had been dead and gone for a few years and it was high time, Paul decided, to kill all the ideas that were still going around about him. With all his heart he was against Jesus.

Paul had made a decision about Jesus.

But Jesus had also made a decision about Paul.

One day as Paul was traveling to Damascus to arrest some followers of Jesus, Jesus appeared to him in a vision of blinding light.

Paul had chosen to be against Jesus, but Jesus chose Paul to become the first Christian missionary. Paul had turned away from Jesus, but Jesus, through sheer grace, started a relationship with Paul.

Paul did not come to Jesus; Jesus came to him. Paul did not believe in Jesus; Jesus gave him faith.

No wonder, years later, Paul wrote to his mission church in Ephesus: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."



3 STATEMENTS

- When God is active and real in your life, that's the Holy Spirit.
- God gives us everything we need—even faith itself.
- God has made a decision about you—God has chosen you.

the *Source*

OUR GOD, THE SANCTIFIER

Who is the Holy Spirit? We know the terms *father* and *son*. But who can understand a spirit? Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Spirit has always been around. The Spirit is God and was there when the earth was made. The Spirit is God and was there when humans first breathed the breath of life. In Old Testament times, the Spirit was there counseling and comforting God's people.

Before Jesus died and rose again, he told his disciples that a "counselor" would come. That counselor is the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide and teach them. The Spirit would be the one to make Jesus known to us after Jesus ascended into heaven.

This is how God kept that promise.

When God is active and real in your life, that's the Holy Spirit.



Soon after Jesus had gone to heaven, the disciples were gathered in a room during the Jewish festival of Pentecost. Suddenly there was a sound like a rushing wind, and tongues that looked like fire appeared on their heads. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then something very surprising happened! The disciples went out into the town, preaching and teaching about Jesus in foreign languages they had never learned. Visitors to Jerusalem from other countries heard the gospel preached in their own language. This gospel was obviously meant for them too! And thousands came to believe in Jesus that very day.

It was the birthday of the church.

That church continues today. If you know Jesus, it is because of the work of the Spirit. If you love the Lord, it is because the Spirit lovingly gave you that love. If you have a relationship with God, guess who started it? The Holy Spirit! You are now part of the church begun by the Holy Spirit.

For most people, the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity that sounds the most mysterious. But in a sense, the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity you know the best. *When God is active and real in your life, that's the Holy Spirit.*

The Nicene Creed calls the Holy Spirit "the Lord, the giver of life." Not only will the Holy Spirit give us eternal life one day, but our Lord the Holy Spirit gives us new life in Christ now. Read Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed (page 174) to discover how active the Spirit is. The Spirit is busy bringing you new life in all kinds of ways.

It is the Spirit who *calls* you into a relationship with God. It is the Spirit who *gathers* you into the community of believers. It is the Spirit who, day after day, *forgives* your sins. It is the Spirit who *enlightens* you so you can see God's love for you.

The Spirit is busy. And there is more!

It is the Spirit who *sanctifies* you, makes you a saint. (That means that the Spirit sets you apart for a relationship with God). It is the Spirit who

keeps you in faith. It is the Spirit who will raise you from the dead on the last day. And finally, it is the Spirit who will give you eternal life.

Our God isn't a passive God. God takes action. God gets involved. That's love!

FAITH IS A GIFT FROM GOD

Remember when Adam and Eve hid in the garden? Who came looking? God. God is always the one to find us. We could never find God on our own.

Luther said, "I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him." Luther was so right! How can you, a human, begin to imagine a God? How can you begin to believe that there is a being who is almighty, eternal, everywhere present, and all-knowing? And even if you could conceive of such a being, how could you, on your own, begin a relationship with such a one? How can you have faith?

You have faith because God uses those hard-to-understand qualities to relate to you. God loves you with an almighty love. God is always there for you. God understands everything about you and loves you still.

You have faith because God has given it to you!

Do you remember that God provides you with everything you need to live? There is more. The Holy Spirit provides you with everything you need to live in relationship with God. *God gives us everything we need—even faith itself.*

You have many decisions to make in this world. But when it comes to faith, God has decided for you. In a world where you need to make choices and are afraid that you might make the wrong choices, God has chosen *you*.

God has chosen you, sought you out, and through the Holy Spirit, keeps you in relationship. If you try to believe on your own, you'll fail and end up in despair.

DAVID BALCARRAS/SHARP IMAGES



But the Holy Spirit is calling you into relationship, giving you faith, giving you hope, giving you love. These are God's gifts for you. Now we're talking *grace!*

God loves you so much that God starts up your relationship and keeps it going. You haven't done anything to deserve it, but *God has made a decision about you—God has chosen you.* And God is never going to let you go.

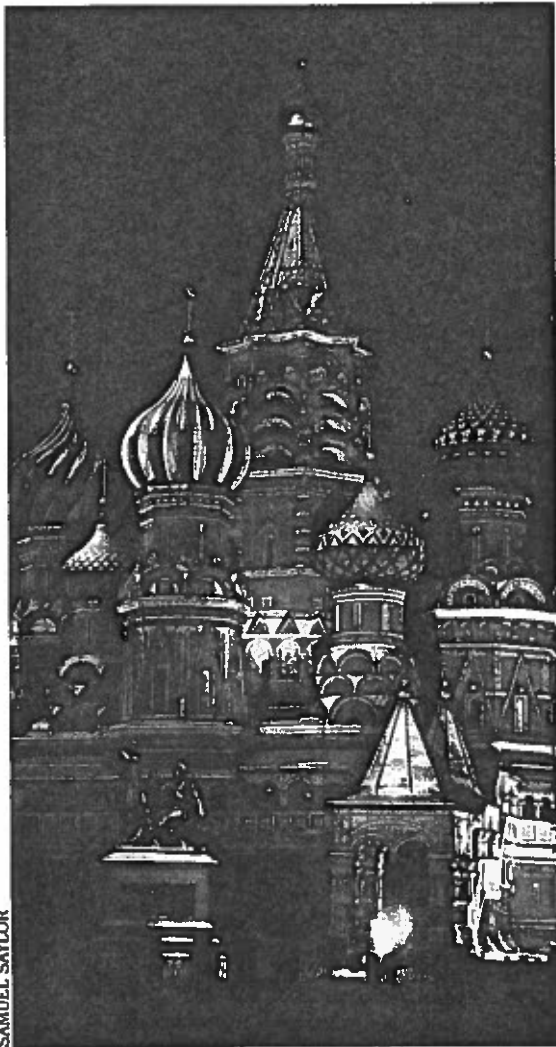
*God has made
a decision
about you—
God has
chosen you.*

UNDERSTANDING THE THIRD ARTICLE

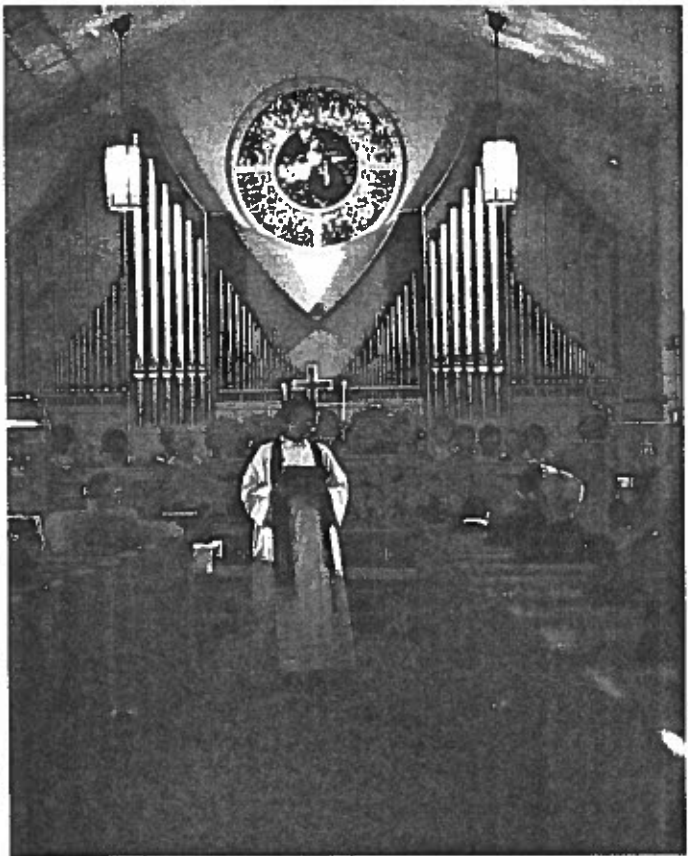
The following questions will help you understand more about the Third Article of the Creed (p. 174).

1. What does *catholic* mean? (Read "Focus" on page 116.)

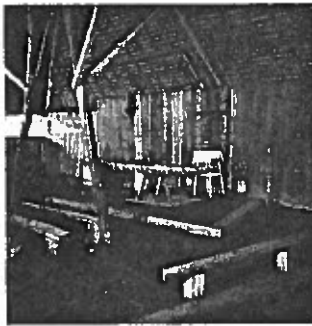
What is a *saint*?



SAMUEL SAYLOR



JEFF GREENBERG



BETTY GROSCHIN



TONY LA GRUTH

What does *holy* mean?

2. "The holy catholic church" and "the communion of saints" are two ways of saying the same thing. What do they mean?

3. We believe in the resurrection of the body. Why do Christians think the body is so special?

Read the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed on page 174. The following questions will help you understand more about Luther's explanations.

4. What six things has God done for you already?

5. What two things will God do for you in the future?

6. Why does God do this for you?

I THINK

All Christians have had doubts at one time or another. There are times when God seems far away and times when God doesn't seem real. And it's okay to talk about those times. You should know that you aren't the first to feel that way.

Read Mark 9:17-27. Jesus says he will heal the boy if the father believes. The father prays a strange prayer: "I believe; help my unbelief!" It's like saying "I believe—sort of; I have a lot of doubts, so help!" And Jesus healed the boy. Jesus counted that prayer as faith.

What is your relationship with God like? Who is the giver of your faith? How will God keep you in faith?

Shaping life

WHOM CAN YOU TRUST?

Cochise was born around the year 1815, the son of a Chiricahua Apache chief. Cochise eventually became chief himself and was one of the most respected Native North American leaders in history.

As chief, Cochise was initially friendly to the white settlers and tried to be peaceful. But war broke out because of a lie.

A white rancher falsely accused Cochise of attacking his ranch. A second lieutenant in the United States Army believed the rancher and took Cochise's family as prisoners. When the lieutenant refused to release them, a war broke out that lasted more than a decade.

Clearly, there were many people Cochise could not trust. Cochise did, however, come to trust a white man named Thomas Jeffords, who helped bring an end to the war.

If you read the history of any people or any nation, you will find lies and cruelty. But you wouldn't have to go to the history books to find mistrust.

In your own life, you have probably found people who are not worthy of your trust. You trusted them, then they let you down. They turned on you. They told others a secret you had shared.

Trust is so basic to a relationship that once trust has been broken, the relationship suffers terribly. And once trust has been broken, it is painfully hard to build trust and the relationship up again.

You know how important your relationship is to God. God is never going to let anything harm that relationship. God is never going to let you down.

Here is a friend who never gives up on you. Even if you prove to be untrustworthy, God will never let go of you. The Holy Spirit stands by your side, never leaving, ever present. The Holy Spirit stands with gifts in hand, ever providing. All for you.

Think about a really good friend. List three things about that person that make him or her trustworthy.

List three qualities you have that make you a trustworthy friend.

Now review those lists and choose the three most important qualities for a trusting relationship. Rank them from 1 to 3, with 1 being most important.

God gives us everything we need—even faith itself.

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

The New Testament was written in Greek. The Greek language has several words for *love*. There is sexual love, love of friends and family members for each other, and *agape* love. This is the kind of love that God has for us and that God wants us to have for each other.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27–13:13. In this passage, Paul lists some of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to the people of God. Not everyone has the same gifts, but everyone should desire the “higher gifts.” What are the three higher gifts? How has God given those gifts to you?

Memory

Memorize Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed. As an additional challenge, memorize one or more of the following: John 15:16-17; Romans 5:3-5;

Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 John 4:19, “Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound” (LBW 448).

Activity 1

Read and study Psalm 71:17-19. Then interview several older people. Discover how God has been trustworthy in their lives. Tell your classmates what you discovered.

Activity 2

“Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound” was written by John Newton (1725-1807). Find out more about him and why he wrote this hymn.

Activity 3

Since building trust is so important to relationships, work on becoming more trustworthy yourself. For instance, you may want to keep a diary for a few months. Make observations about yourself. What have you done to help people know they can trust you? How have you broken trust? Once trust has been broken, what can you do to build it up?

FOCUS

ON “CATHOLIC”

The word *catholic* means “universal.” The catholic church is the community of believers everywhere. When the word *catholic* is capitalized, it refers to the Roman Catholic denomination.

Since the early church, whenever the Apostles' Creed was confessed, Christians confessed their belief in that universal, catholic church.

Until Luther. In Luther's German translation of the Apostles' Creed, he used the word *Christian* instead of catholic. He made it clear that he thought the two words were the same,

but he chose to use *Christian* instead. Most denominations that say the Apostles' Creed use the word *catholic*. Lutherans,

following Luther's preference, had used the word

Christian until 1978.

That year *Lutheran Book of Worship* came out with the word *catholic* once again in the Creed. That word is more traditional. We now once again confess the Creed using the same word that the other creed-confessing denominations use.