

THREE NAMES OF GOD

God has many names. Within Islam even 99 are used: Most Gracious, Most Merciful, and so on. In the Bible too, God has many names, because one name is not enough to do Him justice. In the Christian tradition mainly three names are used: Father, Son and Spirit. Names in which personal involvement resonates. Today, Trinity Sunday, we celebrate these three names.

God as a person

There are people who say they do not believe in God. Others believe in something, an anonymous power that underlies everything, a power beyond human comprehension. There are also people for whom God is personally approachable. They give Him praise and thanks, or they turn to Him with their supplications and desires. These people are in the tradition of the Bible. Here we read that God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and said to him: I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (Ex. 3:6). When Moses specifically asked for his name, he was told: I am he who is (Ex. 3:14). God's being is not a static, self-sufficient being, but He is personally involved in his people.

We see God as a person because this is the highest being we know. But in fact, in our world we only know persons with limitations and defects. But we have no other word. God is a person in a way that is beyond our comprehension. The mutual personal involvement of God and his people is also expressed in the names Father, Son and Spirit. Let us continue with these three names

Father, Son and Spirit in the Old Testament

God is called father because he created us: He is your father, who gave you being, who made you, by whom you subsist (Deut. 32:6). He is also called Father because he offers protection: you, Lord, are our Father, 'Our Redeemer' is your name from of old (Isa. 63:16), He is Father of orphans, defender of widows (Ps. 68:6).

God as father is 'only' an image. With this name you do not name God adequately. People also saw motherly traits in Him. Because God created man in his likeness - male and female He created them according to Genesis (1:27) - so the feminine and maternal are also present in God. Just before his death, Moses sang a song that mentions the Rock that bore you, and the God who gave you birth (Deut. 32:18). In Isaiah (66:13) God addresses his people as follows: As a mother comforts a child, so I shall comfort you. In the Bible, product of patriarchal culture, God is primarily seen as man, as father, but the idea of God as woman, as mother, is not absent.

When God is called father of Israel, this nation can be called son of God. In Hosea (11:1) we read: I called my son out of Egypt. The word son is also used for individual people, especially for the king. The power, justice and wisdom of the king represent God's power, justice and

wisdom. Finally, everyone is called to be a son of God. Thus we read in the book of Sirach: Be like a father to the fatherless... You will then be like a son of the Most High... (4:10).

When the Bible speaks of sons of God, you also expect daughters of God. Isaiah speaks of the return of God's sons and daughters after the exile (43:6), Paul puts the following words into God's mouth: I shall be father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me (2 Cor. 6:18, cf. Isa. 43:6).

The Bible also speaks of God's spirit. The primary meaning of the word 'spirit' is air in motion, i.e. wind or breath. Whatever breathes, lives. Therefore, 'spirit' also means breath of life, life. At creation, God's spirit, the breath of life, hovered over the primordial flood, the waters of chaos (Gen 1:2). God's spirit also enables certain people to perform miraculous, heroic deeds (e.g. Samson: Judg. 14:6). People like Moses, Joshua, David and Elijah were inspired by God's Spirit.

Father, Son and Spirit in the New Testament

These names are also used in the New Testament. Jesus spoke of God as his Father. At the same time he taught his followers to pray the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven...

The name Son is applied to Jesus in a particular way. In the words of Jesus - the Son of God - people heard God's voice. Jesus was seen as the visible icon of the invisible God. What God revealed to Moses – God as a loving and caring God – became concrete in Jesus.

The New Testament speaks more than once of God's Spirit, by whom Jesus was inspired. This Spirit also inspires the disciples of Jesus. When he said goodbye to them before his ascension, he assured them: you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end (Acts 1:8). In the Acts of the Apostles we read how the Holy Spirit is at work in the early church.

The names Father, Son and Spirit are not definitions but metaphors. Metaphors are words that indicate realities we know from experience, but which refer at the same time to a reality beyond our understanding. But they are only human words with all their limitations. Who and how God is remains a mystery to us. But in the tradition of our faith God is not experienced as something abstract, as an unreachable being, but as a God who communicates with us, who comes to us, who forgives us, who walks with us. This is expressed in the three names.

God is Father, made visible in his Son Jesus. We too are called to be sons and daughters, to make God visible, by living in the footsteps of Jesus. We are called to be inspired by God's Holy Spirit.