

Lesson 2

Holy Trinity

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 28:16–20

The angel at the tomb had said, “He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him” (v. 7). The Eleven and the others went to keep this appointment—and were given the Great Commission. It was another mountaintop experience. Most interpreters consider this the last of Jesus’ appearances and think Paul was referring to it when he wrote about Jesus’ being seen by five hundred at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6).

“They worshiped Him.” The Greek describes them doing obeisance, bowing low before Jesus.

15. “But some doubted.” Why were some still doubting, and why did Matthew include this fact here?

16. What does Jesus’ “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” say about His person? What does this say about Jesus’ work as the Savior?

“Go therefore” connects the Great Commission directly to Jesus’ position of supreme authority—a vital connection, for the emphasis is not on “go” (a participle in Greek) but on “make disciples” (an imperative verb). Literally, it says, “Having gone, disciple!” We can *go* in our own strength if we are willing, but only God can *disciple*. Though written primarily for Jewish readers, Matthew’s Gospel extends the Kingdom to all nations.

Two participles bring out the methods to be followed in discipling: ___ and ___. Though many Scriptures refer to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in various ways, this is the only place where the name is given in this formal way. It is determinative in Christian doctrine.

17. How is this peculiarly Christian name of God a capsule form of the Gospel?

Baptism brings God’s grace, so it is one of the Means of Grace given to the Church. The holy name of the Trinity conveys the saving Word, and the water personalizes its message to the one thus washed.

18. What does “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” imply about discipling and discipleship? With what promise did Jesus back up His command? How is this promise a vital part of the Great Commission?

19. How is it that twenty centuries later, we are still being challenged to go and disciple the world, baptizing and teaching?

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 1:1–2:4a

Genesis, the book of beginnings, speaks of the meaning of life as God's gift. The creation song of chapter 1 uses broad, sweeping terms to praise the Creator. Genesis is traditionally seen as one of the Five Books of Moses, the Torah. *Torah* means "law," but in the Scriptures its meaning is much broader than just "laws." It tells also of God's covenant of grace and gives instruction about life under the covenant.

20. Hebrew poetry uses repetition of key phrases. Which do you see in the creation song? How is the creation song divided into stanzas?

There is disagreement about the meaning of the word "day" in this song. Those who favor literal interpretation argue that the Hebrew *yom* means a day, a twenty-four-hour day, and point to "there was evening and there was morning" to support this view. Others look at the size and the apparent age of the universe and argue that the "day" of Genesis points poetically to an era, a period in the progression of creation toward our inhabitable earth—and they show that "day" is used with various meanings in other parts of the Bible. Really, the length of time does not seem to be the major concern. If God could create over long eons of time, He could create the universe in six twenty-four-hour days or, for that matter, in one instant. Of greater importance is seeing God working by divine fiat, creating from nothing through His Word of power, producing the desired results, and leading to His creation of mankind in His own image.

21. What was the effective instrument in God's creative activity? (See John 1:1–3; Hebrews 11:3.)

22. God said, "Let there be light," but this was before sun, moon, and stars were created. What might this "light" be?

23. How was the earth moved progressively toward a place for man's habitation?

24. What is indicated by the phrase "according to its kind"?

25. In a song that is basically repetitive, why does the wording change when it speaks about the creation of man? Why is man the key figure, next to the Creator, in the creation song?

26. What is meant by “the image of God”?

27. How does this lesson tie in with the emphasis of today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:14a, 22–36

This is Peter’s sermon on Pentecost. In his first remarks, he addressed the scoffing skepticism of some and the wonderment of others. He explained that what they were witnessing was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter moved then to what had produced this momentous occurrence: the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Peter began with “Men of Judea”—a formal address that emphasized the covenant and prompted them to “think covenant.”

28. What did Peter say was behind everything that had led to Jesus’ being “delivered up” to the Jewish leaders, who then arranged for His crucifixion?

29. What assurance may we find in this emphasis on God’s will and desire? What was Peter emphasizing about Jesus with his “it was not possible for Him to be held by [death]”?

30. Why did Peter quote from David’s Psalm 16 and later from David’s Psalm 110 to undergird his proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus?

Note the contrasting phrases in the quote from Psalm 16: “You will not abandon my soul to Hades” and “or let Your Holy One see corruption.” In the first, we see David’s hope for his own life beyond the grave; in the second, we have an inspired prophecy regarding God’s Holy One, the promised Messiah.

31. Why did Peter contrast David’s being dead with Jesus’ being alive? What connection did Peter make between David and Jesus, the Son of David?

32. How did pointing to Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of God and Jesus' being given the Holy Spirit by the Father to pour out on His followers—and Peter's backing it up with Scripture—add impact to Peter's message? What is the significance of Peter saying God made Jesus "both Lord and Christ"?

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Holy Trinity

Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 28:16–20

The Gospel accounts do not tell of Jesus' disciples worshipping Him in this way before His death and resurrection. But now they knelt before Him with heads bowed low, worshipping Jesus fully as God.

15. Matthew's "some doubted" brought a familiar human element into the occasion—one to which we can easily relate. There are many reasons they could have doubted: cynicism, stunned amazement, or confusion over what they'd really seen could have clouded their judgment.

16. Jesus' "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" says the divine power and majesty that always were His as the eternal Word are now extended also to His human nature. It is our brother Jesus who is the either/or person in the Kingdom, God's right-hand man in charge of everything for the benefit of His Body, the Church. The fact that Jesus, the God-man, has been exalted to God's right hand says His saving work was fully successful, fully accepted by the Father. He now rules all things for the blessing, benefit, and extension of His kingdom.

Help your group understand that "make disciples" is the key command and that to accomplish this, we are fully dependent on God's power. It is our task to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts through this Gospel, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. (See Romans 1:16; 10:14–17.)

Fill-in Answers: The methods to be followed in discipling are baptizing and teaching. Both methods involve use of the dynamic Word of God, which is the active ingredient in the Means of Grace the Church is to utilize faithfully.

17. The name *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* points to God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier—God over us, for us, and in us. The name is a capsule that contains the whole truth of the Gospel, as the creeds imply. Calling Him the triune God not only expresses the mystery of the Three being One, but also says clearly that He is the one God of our salvation. The Sacraments add visible signs that touch individuals and personalize the Good News.

18. "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" implies that discipleship is more than believing that Jesus is the Savior. We are not to be content with elementary truths but are to grow in depth of understanding and application of the Word as it undergirds our faith and stimulates our Christian living. The Church's task is to make every Christian a "theologian" who can correctly apply Law and Gospel in his or her own life and in the lives of those around him or her. (See Hebrews 6:1–3.) Jesus backed up His command with the promise that He would be with His disciples always.

Without Jesus' presence and power in the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of the Gospel would lose its convicting and regenerating dynamic. Missionaries who leave home and family to carry the Gospel into other cultures and nations especially experience the reality of Jesus' promise. James Gilmour, nineteenth-century missionary to Mongolia, said, "No one who does not go away, leaving all and going alone, can feel the full force of this promise."

19. We are still challenged to go and disciple the world because the Church has tended to become inward-looking, serving its own needs instead of dedicating itself to mission. These verses challenge us to devote manpower, money, and technology to the task.

The Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 1:1–2:4a

The Book of Genesis is approached in a variety of ways by scholars. The Study Guide tries to state this in simple ways and give some of the reasons for it. Those who favor the traditional, conservative approach will feel at home with the view of the creation song being oral tradition by which God helped His people remember their Creator, which then was incorporated, under the guidance of the Spirit, by Moses into his writing. Remember, however, that also those who take a more liberal approach and question Mosaic authorship and literal meaning recognize Genesis and the creation song as part of the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, see it providing God's inspired instruction for His people, and look to it for theological insights into life as God's children. Recognize that you can't solve all the questions about interpretation and approach in your class. Underscore the truth that this Old Testament Lesson is God's inspired, instructive Word also for us today.

20. The creation song has many key phrases that are repeated: "And God said, 'Let there be,'" "And it was so," "God saw that it was good," and "According to their kinds." The stanzas of the song begin with "And God said" and end with "there was evening and there was morning. . . ." The Hebrews reckoned their days from sunset to sunset, not from sunrise to sunrise. Whether this grew out of the tradition of the creation song or the song was written to reflect the Hebrew approach is hard to say.

21. The effective instrument in God's creative activity was His powerful, creating Word. God's Word is more than words. It is power to make things happen.

22. Sir James Jeans, an English scientist and a Christian, said, "The whole story of creation can be told in the six words, 'God said, Let there be light.'" He saw this as God supplying the cosmic energy that is the building block of the material world in its atomic structure.

23. Your group will easily recognize the progression: energy; atmosphere; landmasses; vegetation; sun, moon, stars; living creatures; man, the manager and caretaker.

24. "According to its kind" established the distinctions between kinds of animals and birds and limited reproduction to within the kind. That limit still applies today.

25. The account of the creation of man is not begun with "And God said, 'Let there be . . .'" as in preceding stanzas of the song. It describes God as "talking things over" beforehand, and says something about man that it does not say about anything else: that we were created "in the image of God." This change makes you sit up and take notice; the song has moved to its climax, its main point. The creation song and all of the Bible was written with man in mind—that we might know who we are, why we are here, where we are going, and how to get there.

26. "The image of God" cannot mean that man was designed to look like God, for God is spirit and has no material composition or appearance. It must mean that man was designed to be like God in having personality, with the full ability (in the original creation) to reflect God's holy personality in thought, word, and deed.

Ask yourself and your group: "How does the creation song make you feel?" Responses may range from "small and insignificant compared to the awesome Creator and His creation" to "important and secure in awareness of the Creator's intentions for mankind."

27. This lesson focuses on the One who has revealed Himself as the triune God in regard to His work as Creator and gives its own insight into why God was loving enough also to be Redeemer and Sanctifier.

The Epistle for the Day: Acts 2:14a, 22–36

28. The popular response to Jesus' miracles was one of high expectation—they showed Jesus to be the promised King who would restore Israel. This led the religious leaders to see Him as a threat to the status quo that gave them their positions of prominence and power. When Jesus did not fulfill their expectations of a political hero who would make Israel a prosperous and prominent independent nation, the crowds pointedly rejected Him and turned against Him as well. Peter said that all of this happened “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.”

29. It surely gives us added assurance as we trust Jesus for salvation to know that the momentous events that were the setting for His atonement for sin were not just happenstance, but were a fulfillment of God's saving purpose in human history. This does not make the principals involved just puppets mindlessly following God's script. They acted out of their own motivations, but according to God's will, His plan of salvation was being accomplished. Peter's saying “God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it” pointed to Jesus as the Son of God, the Author of life, for whom death was completely foreign.

30. Peter quoted Psalm 15 and Psalm 110 as “proof-texts” from Scripture, tying his witness to the authority of God's prophetic Word. We still want our preachers and teachers to be able to say, “Thus says the Lord.”

31. David was the Jews' hero of heroes. Pointing out that David still lay in his tomb while Jesus had risen emphasized Jesus' far greater importance for God's people than even David. David had been given the promise that one of his descendants would establish his throne forever. (See 2 Samuel 7:16–19, 25–29.) Peter's reference connected this prophecy of an eternal King to the man they themselves had acknowledged at times as the Son of David—whose identity was now fully established by His resurrection from the dead.

32. By emphasizing Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand and His being the one who poured out the Spirit, Peter brought the crowd beyond what had happened—Jesus' death and resurrection—to what was happening in their own experience. It was Jesus, risen and ruling from heaven, who was confronting them in this Pentecost event. Jesus did not rise just to die again at some later time, but to rule forever and to save eternally.

“Lord and Christ” referred to the expected Promised One, but they had reduced the promise to purely earthly expectations. Note the directness and boldness of Peter's preaching: “God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”