

Catholic

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The Trinity

EXPLORING THE MYSTERY THROUGH RUBLEV'S ICON

BARBARA HUGHES



The Hospitality of Abraham—an icon painted in 1425 by Andrei Rublev of Russia—
is revered by Catholics worldwide as a depiction of the Most Holy Trinity.

WIKIPEDIA

God is a bottomless well, and the understanding of God as Trinity is both the heart of the mystery and the very definition of Christianity (based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 234).

JAMES L. PAPANDREA, PHD

TRINITY 101: FATHER, SON, HOLY SPIRIT

It's been said that a picture is worth a thousand words, which may account for St. Patrick's use of a shamrock when trying to illustrate the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity. Equally familiar is the image of the gray-haired, bearded Father seated on a throne with Jesus to his right and a dove hovering overhead. But one of the most striking representations of the Trinity is the icon painted in 1425 by Andrei Rublev of Russia (1360–1430). As a gateway to the divine, his depiction of the Trinity—also known as the *Hospitality of Abraham*—provides a place where heart speaks to heart within an icon of ongoing inspiration.

Accepted by Catholics around the world as a thought-provoking depiction of the Trinity, Rublev's icon is more than a work of art to be admired. It can be seen as an invitation. The monk began his work hoping to provide a place of peace for his fellow monks during a time of great political turmoil in Russia. He wanted his monks to remain centered in God, and as a man of prayer and a skilled iconographer, he used his gift to create a place of entry. His intention is revealed by his inclusion of two sketches at the top of the painting that are so subtle that they almost blend into the soft golden background. In the upper left corner is a house that was intended to represent the house of Abraham. The door is open as a symbol of entry where all are welcome. But the open passageway can also serve as an exit, for in order to enter the house of the Lord, we must leave the trappings of earthly dwellings behind. Remember, when the Lord called Abraham he instructed him to go forth from his father's house; and when the rich young man in the Gospel asked Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life, Jesus told him to sell all he has, give to the poor, and follow him. Just as the Son gave his life for us, so we are called to enter into his rest by surrendering all that stands in the way of a deeper communion.

Rather than detract from previous interpretations, the lack of certitude about every symbol only adds to the depth

of meaning contained within Rublev's crowning masterpiece. Drawing from the Genesis account about Abraham and the hospitality he extended to three strangers who visited him in

Understanding THE MYSTERY

To begin to understand the mystery behind the Trinity, it helps if we look at God in terms of perfect balance.

Analogies for the Trinity:

- The Trinity is a perfect balance of oneness and threeness.
- The Trinity is a perfect balance of unity and distinction of persons.
- The second person of the Trinity is a perfect balance of true humanity and full divinity.

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