

Giver of Life

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# Giver of Life

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ORTHODOX TRADITION

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*a* PARACLETE GUIDE



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o my wife, Lara, and our children—  
through whom the Giver gives me Life



# Contents

PREFACE

ix

INTRODUCTION

1

1	O Heavenly King	11
2	The Comforter	23
3	The Spirit of Truth	35
4	Who Art Everywhere Present and Fillest All Things	51
5	Treasury of Good Things	65
6	Giver of Life	79
7	Come and Abide in Us	91
8	Cleanse Us from Every Impurity, and Save Our Souls	105
9	O Gracious Lord	117

NOTES

125



## Preface

A MAN IS LOST IN THE WOODS. He's been wandering there for many years, doing enough to survive but perpetually uncertain how exactly to find his way out. With each wrong turn, he learns a little more about both the forest and his lostness. Signs of life are everywhere. Even though he is lost, his internal compass grows gradually sharper over time, so he never panics. He just keeps moving.

One day, while walking down a path, he meets a group of people who are also lost, but they've only been lost for a few hours. The frightened group pleads with the man—please, can you tell us how to find our way out of this forest? No, the man replies, but I can tell you how not to get more lost.

That story is one of my favorite descriptions of the priesthood. My priesthood, at least. While I am an Orthodox priest, I stumble through the woods in my own way and cannot offer anything of lasting value about much, and especially not about so lofty and sacred a topic as the Holy Spirit in Orthodox tradition, a topic that requires such precise reflection that a single wrong word could lead to the thicket of confusion or over the ledge of heresy. So, in this book I try to stay to the paths worn smooth by the reflections of the saints through the ages, those men and women who have found their way—or, more precisely, allowed themselves to be led—out of the woods.

The rest of us who feel varying degrees of lostness can join ourselves with the patient but pleading soul as described in a prayer poem called "An Akathist Hymn to the All-Holy and Life-Creating Spirit":

The life-creating Spirit, Who descended like a dove  
upon Christ in the Jordan, rested also upon me in the  
font of baptism. But the influence of His goodness hath  
weakened because of the darkness of my falls into sin.  
Wherefore, as a traveler lost in the forest at night doth  
wait for the light, so do I await Thy rays, O Good One,  
lest I perish utterly.

In *Giver of Life: The Holy Spirit in Orthodox Tradition*, the reflections of the saints—the early saints of Holy Scripture; the later saints of holy history—are evident especially in the liberal use of quotations and stories from them, but also, I hope, in how they inform my own contributions to the text. The frame around which the whole reflection is built is an ancient prayer to the Holy Spirit (a prayer the reader is encouraged to embed into his or her own prayer life). Breaking the prayer into phrases, we reflect on the truths and treasures each phrase may yield. The only additional prayer the author can make is that, in the end, all that remains of the book in the hearts and minds of readers is only what the Holy Spirit Himself has placed there.

We need the Holy Spirit to understand the Holy Spirit. As we begin, the most fitting plea for His guidance is, not surprisingly, supplied by a saint—Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022),


whose own reflections on his personal and firsthand experience of the Holy Spirit have inspired seekers of the forest's edge for a thousand years:

Come, true light. Come, eternal life. Come, hidden mystery. Come, nameless treasure. Come, ineffable reality. Come, inconceivable person. Come, endless bliss. Come, non-setting sun. Come, infallible expectation of all those who must be saved. Come, O Powerful One, who always creates and recreates and transforms by Your will alone. Come, O invisible and totally intangible and impalpable. Come, You who always remain motionless and at each moment move completely and come to us, asleep in hades, O You above the heavens. Come, O beloved Name and repeated everywhere, but of whom it is absolutely forbidden for us to express the existence or to know the Nature. Come, eternal joy. Come, non-tarnishing crown. Come, purple of the great king our God. Come, crystalline cincture, studded with precious stones. Come, inaccessible sandal. Come, royal purple. Come, truly sovereign right hand. Come, You whom my miserable soul has desired and desires. Come, You the Lonely, to the lonely, since You see I am lonely. Come, You who have separated me from everything and made me solitary in this world. Come, You who have become Yourself desire in me, who have made

me desire You, You, the absolutely inaccessible one. Come,  
my breath and my life. Come, consolation of my poor soul.  
Come, my joy, my glory, my endless delight.<sup>1</sup>

# Introduction

## SPRING AND A PRAYER

 THE STORY OF PENTECOST in the second chapter of the New Testament book of Acts is full of imagery that captures us from childhood—sounds from heaven, a rushing mighty wind, tongues of fire and flames over heads. Languages burst forth and lives are forever changed. So dramatically odd was the experience that the apostle Peter began his homily that day with an assurance to the onlookers that, no, those of us receiving this outpouring of the Holy Spirit are not drunk.

Jesus, risen from the dead, had ascended from earth to heaven ten days earlier. His disciples, still winded with wonder, were now gathered to tend to crucial details: stay in Jerusalem, as Christ had commanded before His ascension; find a replacement for Judas, who had killed himself after betraying Christ; and pray about what comes next. And what came next has been called the birthday of the Church.

A mighty sound filled the dwelling where the disciples were staying, as if poured into that small space from the vault of heaven. The Old Testament prophet Joel said this would happen. He prophesied that someday God would pour out His Spirit and give to the world a new power that would create wonders in the heavens and on earth (Joel 3:1–3). Then tongues as if made with

fire appeared above each of the disciples. This part of the supernatural event was predicted by the New Testament prophet John the Baptist. Christ will come, he announced while preaching in the desert, and will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16).

Filled with divine inspiration, the disciples miraculously began to speak about the wonderful works of God in languages not their own. This caught the attention of pilgrims who were a long way from home, from towns and tribes far to the north and south and east and west of the Roman Empire. Many had come to Jerusalem as Jews, but left as Jewish *Christians*. Those “wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11), the apostle Peter explained convincingly, reached their highest point in the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

The descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples that day more than energized the Jerusalem assembly; it released a transformative power into the world that has been changing lives ever since. “The Lord Jesus Christ sowed a most precious seed in the field of this world,” wrote the saintly bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, “but the power of the Holy Spirit was needed to come upon it, to give it warmth and light, and make it grow.”<sup>2</sup> The power then is the power now. Orthodox Christians celebrate Pentecost as both a fixed event and a constant reality—the Spirit who stirred the dust in first-century Jerusalem is the same Spirit who has stirred hearts in every age and place since.

As a liturgical celebration, the feast of Pentecost is lovely. Winter, with its deadening blanket, yields to spring, and Pentecost almost always falls during spring. Orthodox

Christians around the world harvest and bring new greenery of all kinds into the churches—ferns, sprigs, branches, flowers, palms, herbs, even trees.

The splash of green foliage is designed to call to mind not just life but also a special kind of life. It is the life that transcends biological existence and flows from the very Godhead Itself; it is the life that is actually a *state of being*—immortal, everlasting, changeless. Ferns and flowers fade and die, but souls filled with this “life from above” flourish forever.

This use of biological life for the celebration of spiritual life also helps to connect the New Testament event of Pentecost with its Old Testament predecessor, the “Festival of Weeks,” the feast that commemorated the beginning of the grain harvest—an important season in the life of an agrarian culture like ancient Israel. “You shall observe the Feast of Weeks,” the Lord spoke to Moses, “the firstfruits of wheat harvest” (Exod. 34:22).

Intimacy with the land was an inevitable result of Hebrew practical dependence on the cycles of planting and harvest but also of their solemn observance of a liturgical calendar imbued with references to the land’s activity. Major feasts—Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks—filled that practical dependence with religious significance.

But the Festival of Weeks was more than a day’s observance. The celebration spread over seven consecutive weeks, beginning on the morning following the Sabbath day of Passover. Seven weeks of seven days, plus the day of Passover, equals fifty days. Later in the Old Testament, the Festival of Weeks came to be known as Pentecost, a Greek word that means “fiftieth” (Tob. 2:1; 2 Macc. 12:32).

Thinking poetically, we might say that the wheat harvest of the Old Testament Festival of Weeks became a soul harvest at the New Testament Pentecost—because of that dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, about three thousand converts joined the new Christian community. And the two loaves of bread required by the old festival became the two nations blessed by the new reality—God’s plan of salvation was extended not just to Jews but to Gentiles too.

The Spirit Who changes lives, the Spirit Who pours forth upon all—these are among the themes we will explore in the chapters that follow. Something else we will discover in the chapters that follow, in its own way showing forth the particularly Orthodox understanding of the Holy Spirit, is *limitation*.

The mystery of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox tradition—flowing as it does from the very mystery of God in Trinity—is vast, deep, subtle, and awesome. Towering saints have devoted wells of ink to the subject, and yet we feel the trembling of even their pens as we read what they have written. The reflection of any one person is limited. For the Orthodox mind, however, this is unsurprising. And really, it’s the consensus of the saints through the ages that we look to, and they tell us that *knowledge about the Holy Spirit is gained through experience of the Holy Spirit—an experience deeper than words and concepts and known only to what the New Testament calls “the hidden person of the heart”* (1 Pet. 3:4). “Concepts create idols,” wrote Saint Gregory of Nyssa. “Only wonder grasps anything.”<sup>3</sup>

Knowledge, if understood as information, is important. But information is limited. We may learn, for example, about the transfigured Moses on Mount Sinai without ever undergoing

transfiguration ourselves; we may learn about the apostle Paul being caught up to the third heaven without ever ascending there ourselves. Any Orthodox reflection on the Holy Spirit will be an invitation to the Holy Spirit to move from the page and into the person.

When Orthodox Christians gather to celebrate Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Spirit, we frequently sing this troparion, or hymn:

Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God, who hast revealed the fishermen as most wise, having sent upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them Thou hast fished the universe, O Lover of mankind, glory to Thee.

We may understand “fishermen” to mean more than just men who fish, but also *simple, humble, unworldly*. The apostles upon whom the Holy Spirit descended in the upper room at Pentecost were men of simple vocation and not like those who occupied the Roman senate or the Jewish council. “The Holy Spirit hath taught wisdom to the illiterate,” we sing at the Feast of Pentecost, “and hath revealed the fishermen as theologians.”<sup>4</sup> In subsequent Church history, saints would emerge from every facet of society—from caves and palaces, from monasteries and universities. The Orthodox embrace the intellect, but we’re also aware of its limitations.

So, while a book like this one about the Holy Spirit may transmit information, an interior awakening is the real goal. This is why Orthodox theological insight is embedded in our liturgical life. As we pray, so we believe; as we believe, so we

pray. Prayer opens the heart to the penetrating presence of God, whose touch upon every person in every place at every time is always Trinitarian—*from* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit.

It is fitting, then, that a reflection on the Holy Spirit in Orthodox tradition would weave, like a river winding through a forest, around our most common prayer to the Holy Spirit. Indeed, this prayer is so important that Orthodox Christians rarely begin any activity of significance—indeed, rarely any morning—without it:

O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth,  
Who art everywhere present and fillest all things; Treasury  
of good things and Giver of life; come and abide in us, and  
cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Gra-  
cious Lord.<sup>5</sup>

This is a “fountainhead” prayer; its power flows into every other prayer. “The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought,” wrote Saint Paul, “but the Spirit Himself makes intercessions for us with groaning which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26). Acquire the Holy Spirit and, in a sense, *He* becomes our prayer life. Writing in the seventh century, Saint Isaac the Syrian wrote, “When the Spirit makes His abode in a person, he is no longer able to stop praying, because the Spirit never ceases to pray in him.”<sup>6</sup>

The Holy Spirit brings us to the Son, who brings us to the Father. In this Holy Trinity is life stronger than death, love

greater than hell, and unity greater than all fragmentation that relentlessly tears at our existence.

The greenery of Pentecost eventually fades. Flowers wilt, ivy dies, and the churches are purged of all browning leaves and petals and stalks. We, as creatures in time, leave the season of Pentecost and anticipate the next phase of the liturgical year. Over the months, other church beautifications will emerge—commemorating the transfiguration of Christ or the birth of Mary or the elevation of the Cross. Though the event celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit may pass, the power of that experience never does. Instead, the Holy Spirit remains, leading to deathless life all who strive to be simple, humble, and unworldly.



Giver of Life

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# 1 O Heavenly King

O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things; Treasury of good things and Giver of life; come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Gracious Lord.

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**F**LOWERS, like those with which the Orthodox adorn our churches during Pentecost, open gradually. So too does Holy Scripture, revealing its inner treasures over time. Orthodoxy is an emphatically Trinitarian faith, but the book of Genesis does not open with an explicit and detailed explanation of "Holy Trinity" or "three Persons" or "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Yet Orthodox Christians believe that the aroma of the Trinity rises from the first page.

"Let Us make man in Our image" (Gen. 1:26). Who, exactly, is Us? "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us" (Gen. 3:22). Like Whom? "Come, let Us go down there and confuse their language" (Gen. 11:7). Who is coming down? These references to God are uttered by God Himself. Is He referring, perhaps, to Himself and the angels? But why would humanity be made in the image of both God and the angels? Or is He referring to some plurality within Himself? But if, as

Moses wrote, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4), how can there be plurality in *one*?

So pages are turned and petals are opened: while early Genesis suggests some kind of plurality, later Genesis hints toward *three*. The Orthodox perceive God's appearance to Abraham in the form of three mysterious visitors as rich with Trinitarian significance. A famous icon often used in churches during the season of Pentecost—by the Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev and called *The Hospitality of Abraham*—shows three angelic figures seated at table, two looking toward one, and is often adorned with boughs that represent the ancient oak of Mamre beneath which the encounter occurred (Gen. 18).

When Orthodox Christians reach the end of the Old Testament and turn around to survey the landscape covered, we see perhaps the most powerful foreshadowing of the Holy Trinity: the presence, everywhere, of "God" who gives His "Word" and shares His "Spirit."<sup>7</sup> Yahweh is in the midst of His people not as a concept or an idea but as Word that is also an *act* and as Spirit that is also a *presence*.

Entering the New Testament, the three come into sharper relief. "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' " (Matt. 3:16–17). At the baptism of Christ, the three have now been identified—God, a Son, and a Spirit.

Later, Jesus commands the disciples to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). "Name" here is singular—a vital detail. In this call to evangelize known as the great commission, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are identified individually yet are united in some way.

More pages, more petals. In the last book of the four Gospels—the Gospel according to the apostle John, the last in order and the last written—Jesus reveals greater detail and distinction about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16–17). The New Testament Greek word for Helper is *parakletos*, or Paraclete, also translated as Comforter and found in the prayer to the Holy Spirit serving as our guide.

"These three are one." One *what*? And *how* are they one? Are the three actually distinct from each other, or are "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" just labels describing different ways God interacts with His world? The New Testament identifies "Father" and "Son" and "Holy Spirit" but does not formulate an explicit doctrine about them or their relationships with each other. For that, we look to the faithful Church Fathers of the turbulent centuries following the New Testament period.

Exploring Church history expecting to find nothing but sweetness and light is a bit like exploring a hospital expecting to find nothing but well and healthy people. The content of Christian faith is important, and people struggle over important things. Often, the modern mind casually accepts much of what the ancient mind struggled to clarify. We might thumb through our pocket New Testaments, for example, without appreciating (or even realizing) how many years were spent and how

much sweat was spilled over the complex matter of the New Testament's formation.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity—sprouting in the Old Testament, blooming in the New—was the subject of vigorous discussion in the early centuries of the Church. No one was disputing the *titles* of "Father" and "Son" and "Holy Spirit," since the Scriptures frequently mention each. Instead, the questions to which answers would emerge only after great struggle were these: Who, exactly, is the Son, who is the Holy Spirit, and what relationship do they have to each other and to the Father? And these questions really mattered because, like the source of a river, their resolution would influence later Christian belief and behavior.

Heresies rose; debates raged. While struggling to grasp essential truths, men passed words with passion and urgency. The first ecumenical council, convened in AD 325 in the city of Nicaea (in what is now Turkey), was summoned, in part, to deal with a controversy surrounding the divinity of Jesus Christ. A teaching about Christ had emerged, promoted by a renegade priest named Arius, that "there was a time when He was not." This "formula," because it was rightly interpreted to be an attack on the equality of the Son with the Father, was rejected at the first ecumenical council. Church Fathers at that council declared that Christ is "light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, *of one essence* with the Father."

If words were passed at the first council with passion, so, perhaps, were blows. According to legend, in a fierce act for which he was immediately imprisoned, bishop Nicholas—the

*saintly* Nicholas on whom the current sanitized Santa Claus is based—marched across the debate hall and slapped the face of Arius. If it happened, a mild gesture, maybe, compared to such a malicious heresy.

The Church had no time to recuperate from the fractious assault on the nature of the Son of God, for a new struggle was brewing—over the nature of the Holy Spirit. Again, sharp questions pierced the air: Is the Holy Spirit divine? In what sense? Is the Holy Spirit equal with the Son and the Father or more of an impersonal force or energy between those two? If the Son and Holy Spirit are equal with God the Father, then are there, logically, three gods?

Among those churchmen who fought against the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father were the *pneumatomachians*, or “Spirit-fighters.” Macedonius, a bishop of Constantinople who denied the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, fanned their flame of dissension. And once again, the Church was called upon to more firmly establish the content of her faith and restore peace to her children.

Answering that call was, among others, Saint Basil the Great. Like many Church leaders in these turbulent centuries, Saint Basil would have preferred a quieter life. In fact, history remembers Saint Basil as much for his pioneering work in monasticism as for his penetrating writings during the Trinitarian controversy. But Saint Basil felt moved by the very Spirit he was called upon to defend, and, as a bishop, he wanted to see peace and right faith return to the Christian communities. When he surveyed the condition of the Church, he likened it to a naval battle being fought in a raging storm.

His counsel summoned and his conscience moved, Saint Basil wrote a treatise called *On the Holy Spirit*. On display in this work are both Saint Basil's sharp intellect and his pastoral sensitivity. Words matter, he believed, so we had better get our language about God correct. "Those who are idle in the pursuit of righteousness," he wrote of those he considered careless about such things, "count theological terminology as secondary."<sup>8</sup> Much of *On the Holy Spirit* is devoted to the role of prepositions in Holy Scripture.

Words matter because how we understand something influences what we believe about it, and what we believe about it influences our relationship with it. If I believe, for example, that my neighbor is a dangerous criminal, my belief—*right or wrong*—affects how I relate to him. More importantly, my belief about what God is like—*right or wrong*—affects how I relate to Him and how I perceive He relates to me, and that belief spills into the river of faith downstream: prayer life, worship life, and my whole relationship with the divine.

In *On the Holy Spirit*, Saint Basil deftly argues for the full divinity of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's full equality with the Father and the Son. Since both the truths of God and the souls of men were at stake, he believed, Saint Basil argued for the divinity of the Holy Spirit but avoided using the controversial language that might further isolate his opponents from the Church. Nowhere in *On the Holy Spirit* does Saint Basil write that "the Holy Spirit is God"—a detail that *On the Holy Spirit* shares with Holy Scripture itself, which may explain some of Saint Basil's reticence. Yet the book assembles an enormous record of references to the divinity of the Holy Spirit from the

biblical, baptismal, and liturgical tradition of the Church. And that tradition, Saint Basil explains, requires that we give “glory to the Father with the Only-begotten One, and do not exclude the Holy Spirit from this same glory.”<sup>9</sup> He continues:

The Holy Spirit partakes of the fullness of divinity.<sup>10</sup>

If wherever God is, the Spirit is present also, what nature shall we presume Him to have?<sup>11</sup>

The Holy Spirit is always described as united with the Godhead; why should He be deprived of His glory?<sup>12</sup>

These fundamental truths are embedded into the worshiping life of the Church through the Divine Liturgy that Saint Basil helped assemble and that bears his name. Just before the bread and wine are shown to be the body and blood of Christ—an act of change accomplished by the Holy Spirit—the priest calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of truth, the Gift of adoption, the Pledge of the inheritance to come, the First-fruits of eternal good things, the life-giving Power, the Fountain of Sanctification.” And not just bread and wine but worshipers too are changed by this Holy Spirit, “by Whose enabling every rational and intelligent creature doth ascribe to [the Father] perpetual praise.”<sup>13</sup>

But in the turbulent fourth century, in which Saint Basil lived, debate stretched beyond the question of *if* the Holy Spirit is God to include the question of *how* the Holy Spirit is God. Critics wondered how those who believed in a shared divinity could escape the charge of polytheism—if the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are all divine, then are not all three

gods? Such a question provided an opportunity for Church Fathers to articulate a decisive and lasting description of the unity-in-plurality of the Trinity.

By “Church Fathers” here, we mean especially Saint Basil, his friend Saint Gregory the Theologian, and Basil’s younger brother, Saint Gregory of Nyssa—three bishops called, because of where they lived, Cappadocian Fathers. (Cappadocia is a region near the center of what is now Turkey, and some of its citizens had been part of the Pentecost event, described in Acts 2.)

The fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers laid a sturdy part of the foundation on which all later Orthodox reflection on the Trinity would rest: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit share one divine essence—called *Nature*—while each has a particular existence, or way of being, unique to Him—called *Hypostasis* (which means, “what stands under”). By way of analogy, Saint Basil referred to an idea from Aristotle: every human being is a distinct person who “stands under” the general nature all human beings share in common. “Nature is to person as general is to particular,” wrote Saint Basil in a later letter.<sup>14</sup>

So, the godhead is “one essence in three hypostases,” or one Nature in three Persons. Or, as Saint Symeon the New Theologian describes the Trinity, “triple light in unity but unique light in three.”<sup>15</sup> In the service of Matins on Pentecost morning, we proclaim, “Light is the Father, and Light the Son, and Light the Holy Spirit.”<sup>16</sup> Nature does not precede *Hypostasis*, and *Hypostasis* does not precede Nature—this “tri-unity” is a single and simple reality.

Within the Trinity there is *order*—the Father is the cause or source of divinity for the Son and the Holy Spirit—but

there is no *inferiority*—the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal with the Father. The God of the Bible, of the Creed, and of the Liturgy, is not the Holy Trinity but the one Father who shares His divinity with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is God, or divine, because He is *of* God the Father; the Holy Spirit is God, or divine, because He is *of* God the Father. Each is distinct but not a distinct god; *God is one* and from His divinity exists a communion of love—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in one essence, one will, one glory, and “one power, one rank, one worship,” as we sing on Pentecost morning.<sup>17</sup> This existence of the three has no beginning and no end. Rather, it is simply a state of being. That is to say, *God is*.

Every touch of God upon His world is Trinitarian—from the Father *through* the Son *in* the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> No Person of the Trinity acts independently of the other two. Saint Gregory of Sinai, writing almost a thousand years after the Cappadocians, explains that “God is known and understood in everything in three *hypostases* [or Persons]. He holds all things and provides for all things through His Son, in the Holy Spirit, and no one of them, whenever He is invoked, is named or thought of as existing apart or separately from the other two.”<sup>19</sup> Any invocation of the Holy Spirit brings a person into the presence of the Son and the Father too. For within the Godhead, wrote Saint Gregory of Nyssa, is *koinonia*—inseparable communion.<sup>20</sup>

Just as the first ecumenical council had been called, in part, to express the teaching of the Church on the divinity of Christ, the second ecumenical council was called, in part, to express the teaching of the Church on the divinity of the Holy Spirit. This gathering, convened in the city of Constantinople fifty-six

years after the first council, also served to fortify the creed—the statement of belief—that had been drafted at the first council. While the first council had included in its creed the simple statement, “We believe in the Holy Spirit,” the ensuing five decades of controversy surrounding the divinity of the Holy Spirit required the second council to thicken the creed with *what* Christians believe about the Holy Spirit:

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

Saint Basil’s style of speaking the truth while attempting to avoid further isolating his opponents—“their loss causes me tears and continual sorrow”<sup>21</sup>—was retained by the Church Fathers of the second ecumenical council. They withheld from the creed the phrase *of one essence* to describe the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the Father that the first council had used to describe the relationship of the Son with the Father. One goal, perhaps, was not to obliterate the opponents but to protect the truth while removing as many stumbling blocks as possible that would keep the opponents from embracing the truth.

From sprout to bloom. Even as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are present in every divine touch on creation, the revelation of the Holy Trinity to humanity’s full wonder blossomed over time. This was a measured unveiling—granting to the world what we needed when we needed it—and the work

of a God tender toward the souls of all who may believe. As Saint Gregory the Theologian, Basil's friend and co-Cappadocian, wrote:

The Old Testament clearly showed the Father, but only dimly showed the Son. The New Testament revealed the Son and hinted at the divinity of the Spirit. Today the Spirit lives among us, and is making himself more clearly known. As long as the divinity of the Father had not been recognized, it was dangerous to preach openly the Son; in the same way, as long as the divinity of the Son was not admitted, it was dangerous to impose, if we dare to use such words, the belief in the divinity of the Spirit as an added burden. You see the order in which God is revealed, an order that we must respect in our own turn: not revealing everything in a rush and without discernment but also not keeping anything hidden until the end of time. The one tendency risked injuring those who were outside, and the other one would have separated us from our own brothers.<sup>22</sup>

By the end of the fourth century, the Trinitarian controversies had largely come to a close. Heretical ideas about the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit would still emerge and cause division, but, with a strong and rooted Trinitarian theology now in place for the Church, these would be considered less of a threat and more of the same: deeply misguided attempts to change or innovate, to add or detract, even to overthink.

The Spirit of the Lord—the *ruah Yabweh*—that descended upon prophets and judges and kings, upon apostles and fathers and saints, is not an impersonal force or divine vibration. He is, as the prayer to Him states, a “heavenly king,” the third Person of the Holy Trinity, who shares royalty with the Son that both receive from the Father. As the Vespers of Pentecost proclaims, the Holy Spirit is “equal to the Father in Substance and throne.”<sup>23</sup>

That the Holy Spirit is called “king,” however, does not tell us what *kind* of King He is. For that, we look to the next part of the prayer, and the next chapter of our story.