

November 7th

Memory verse:

There is a river,
the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God,
the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. Psalm 46:4

Tiny children could learn the words in bold and understand that the river is God's supply of everything his children need. More about today's memory verse in tomorrow's lesson.

We have some lessons from the middle ages today. Have you ever sung “O Come all ye faithful”? Do you remember how the second verse begins?

*God of God,
Light of Light
Lo, He abhors not the Virgin's womb
Very God
Begotten, not created...*

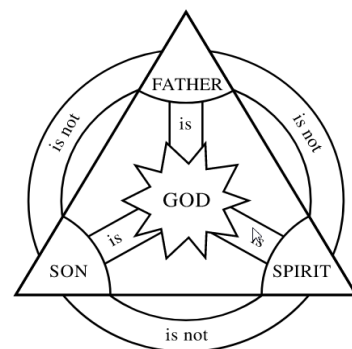
If you are used to singing this hymn you will remember these words because they are rather tricky to fit into the tune. All the best choirs sing the last two lines above like this:

*Ve-e-ry God Be-
gotten, not crea-a-ted...*

as it is the only way to avoid a sort of hiccough in that last line!¹ However there is another much more important reason to remember those lines. They have their origin in something that happened in today's lesson. Look out for it as you read on...

Something to read from history

Athanasius² (c. 296-373), was the great defender of the doctrine of the **Trinity**. Do you know what **Trinity** means? If you have even some idea what it means you are doing well! It is such a tremendous teaching that our poor fallen human minds cannot get to the bottom of it. Sometimes a diagram like the one on the right is used to try to help us understand it but even that does not tell the full story. The word **Trinity** is not a Bible word but it is one that has been used to describe a teaching that is in the Bible: the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God—but there is only one God. You can find that teaching in many places in the Bible but the most clear and famous is 1 John 5:7



For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

This is what the Bible teaches and this is what Athanasius believed. As a result, he was banished by the Roman Emperor Constantine I³ to the town of Trier on **7th November** 335AD. This was to be

¹ Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkS57yCik7E> to see how it is done. Verse 2 begins at 1:17.

² We have no picture of Athanasius from his own time. I have found the oldest one I can for you and that dates from hundreds of years after he lived. You can see it on the next page.

³ See Lesson for 25th July.

the first of many periods of exile which he suffered for his defence of the doctrine of the Trinity but he never gave up standing for the truth. You can read how this came about in an extract from E H Broadbent's excellent book *The Pilgrim Church* which I have put in today's optional resources files.



Those familiar words from “O Come all Ye Faithful” with which we began this lesson are taken from the Nicene Creed, part of which reads:

...one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...

It was at a gathering of Bishops in Tyre in 335 that Arius's supporters first threw out Athanasius. Then both they and Athanasius met with the Emperor Constantine I in Constantinople and here he was accused of the intent to cut off supplies of grain to the city. He was found guilty, and sent into exile to Augusta Treverorum (modern Trier). Athanasius stuck to his post heroically defending the doctrine of the Trinity. He never lived to see Arianism overthrown in the church. He carried on regardless of what everyone else thought. If need be, he said, he would be *Athanasius contra mundum*, Athanasius against the [whole] world. After he died a church council of 381AD confirmed the Nicene Creed but the Bible confirmed Athanasius all along. How sad when people listen to the “church” councils and not the Word of God!

During most of Athanasius's lifetime the doctrine of the Trinity was distinctly unfashionable. The clever people, the people in the know, the people with political power thought it was wrong. This did not influence Athanasius. Imagine being sent into exile for believing something that no one else thought was correct! Athanasius's view was the minority view. It just happened to be the right view because it is what the Bible teaches and that was why he stuck to it. There are great lessons for us today in Athanasius's life story. We must always keep in mind that truth is not determined by majority vote. How is truth determined? The Bible says, “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17) and that was Athanasius's standard when it came to dealing with Arius's teachings. It should be ours too.

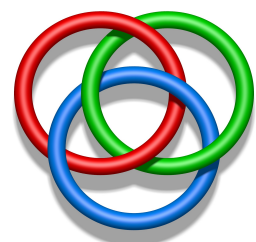
Something to think about

That Arius's teachings were wrong⁴ is no doubt true. But as one writer has pointed out:

While these bickering theologians [at the Council of Nicaea] (representing less than one sixth of the preaching and teaching bishops) were establishing “orthodoxy”, their local churches were accepting and practising candle lighting, prayers for the dead, kissing pieces of wood and clothing, sprinkling holy water, and pretending to drink literal blood. Every one of these pagan superstitions came from rejecting the authority of the bible and replacing it with some other authority.⁵

Heresies like these by this time were widespread but the church hierarchy was unconcerned and sadly that probably included Athanasius as well as the rest.

One other symbol that has been used to demonstrate the Trinity is that of the so-called “Borromean rings.” Look at the illustration carefully. Could you really make such a shape with three dimensional rings? If any one of the rings



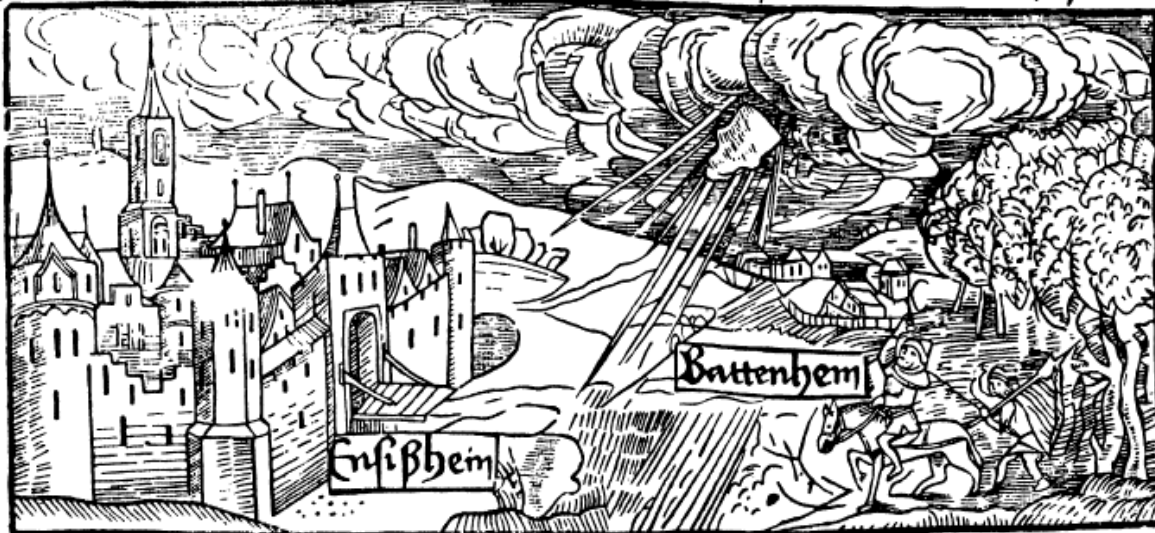
⁴ We should be careful here since, at this distance in time, gauging what Arius really taught is not simple. We have little but his enemy's reports to go on.

⁵ Bryan C. Ross

were to be broken and removed what would happen to the other two?⁶ It is not such a good representation of the Trinity as the one on the previous page but is it an interesting figure in itself.

Some geology and geography – from the late middle ages

Von dem bonnerstein gefallē jm̄ x̄c̄ij. iar: vor Ensisheim.



Look carefully at the picture above. Can you guess what is going on?

In the lesson for 30th June we learned about the meteorite that landed in Tunguska in Russian Siberia in 1908. But when was the *first* meteorite impact recorded? It was a long while ago: **November 7th** 1492! The Ensisheim meteorite⁷, struck the Earth around noon in a wheat field outside the town of **Ensisheim** in Alsace. **Alsace** is in France – today. Get out your atlas and find the area. You will see that it is on the border with Germany. In 1492 Ensisheim was not part of France; it was German territory.



If you look at the contemporary wood cut above you will see the knobby meteorite with flashes of light coming out of it descending, point first, into the neat furrows of the wheat-field – where it is depicted again in its landing position. In the distance you can also see the nearby town of Battenheim. Both towns have been labelled with their names by the artist. Watching in horror is a horseman. I wonder if he is a knight accompanied by his squire?

If you are ever in Alsace you can go and see the meteorite today in the Ensisheim town museum. Well, you can see what is left of it at any rate!

As it fell to earth the meteorite looked like a fireball and could be seen from over 90 miles away. The tremendous sound of its impact was heard 100 miles away. People hurried out of the walled town and from the surrounding farms to gaze on the lump of rock that had fallen so dramatically out of the sky. Then they began to chip off pieces for souvenirs. Soon the stone was in danger of being

⁶ Step by step instructions for drawing your own set of rings here:
<https://www.facebook.com/erasmusprimaryschool/videos/borromean-rings/262610198455726/>

⁷ Illustration: By Konrad Andrä - Sternwarte Singen e.V., CC BY-SA 2.0 de,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=16106548>

destroyed completely so the local magistrate ordered them to stop taking away pieces. The stone could then be preserved and presented to their ruler Maximilian, King of the Romans, the son of the reigning Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III. King Maximilian was en route to a war but he ordered the meteorite to be preserved in the Ensisheim church. The king and his advisors decided its arrival was a good omen for his military campaign.

The Italian chronicler Sigismondo Tizio (1458-1528) noted:

At this point there has to be mention of the immense portent which was seen this year in Germany: for on the seventh day of November, near the city of Ensisheim and the village of Battenheim above Basel, a great stone fell out of the sky, triangular in shape, charred, the colour of a metallic ore, and accompanied by crashing thunder and lightening. When it had fallen to earth it split into several pieces, for it had travelled at an oblique angle; to the amazement of all, indeed, it flattened the earth where it struck. A chunk of this rock was sent to Francesco Cardinal Piccolomini from Germany all the way to Rome, together with some verses skilfully composed by Sebastian Brant.⁸

For information on what exactly a meteorite is and where meteorites come from, see the lessons for 30th June. If you have printed the page with the wood cut on it you might like to colour it in in brilliant colours to make your own medieval illustration. If you cannot print the page perhaps you can carefully copy the picture.

What about hunting for meteorites yourself? It is not that easy. Between 10 and 20 are estimated to fall in Britain every year and of those most are not found. However, that means they are waiting there to be discovered doesn't it? Find a guidebook (your local library might help you) and get cracking!

⁸ Translation from Ingrid D Rowland, "A Contemporary Account of the Ensisheim Meteorite, 1492" *Meteoritics*, volume 25, number 1, page 19.