

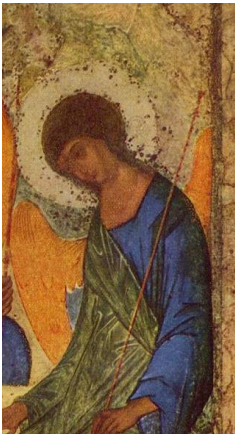
Resource Sheet 56 – the theological symbolism of St Andrei Rublev's icon of the Hospitality of Abraham

To the left is **the Father**,



..... who is seated beneath Abraham's "tent" as described in the [Genesis account](#); yet in the Icon the tent is shown as a magnificent castle: the open-doored House of the Father, the goal of our journey. He is shown clothed in garments which seem to shimmer, reflecting the Heavenly Glory.

To the right is **the Holy Spirit**,



..., clothed in green and blue hues: the colours of the Earth. These are also the colours of the Holy Spirit, as He "...is everywhere present and fills all things..." according to the Orthodox prayer. In addition, Orthodox churches are decorated in greenery at the feast of Pentecost (the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles), and worshipers wear green. The Holy Spirit is seated beneath a mountain, which represents the spiritual ascent all believers must experience.

And so in the centre is seated **the Son, or Word of God**.



His clothes are the typical bright red cloaked in blue, often seen on Icons of Jesus Christ, representing the Divine (red) and human (blue) natures. Over his right shoulder there is a band of gold; as Isaiah prophesied: *the Government shall be upon his shoulder*. Towering above Him is the oak of Mamre, yet within this icon is revealed as a foreshadowing of the Cross, or tree, from which Jesus would be hung.

With this in mind, we can see that what the Icon shows us is not the three individuals of the Holy Trinity, but the **relationship between Them**. Of the Three, the Father on the left of the picture is the only figure to be

unbowed, displaying a fatherly authority over the other Two. The Holy Spirit and the Son together bow to the Father, so that we can clearly see the Father to be the fountainhead of the other Two: from the Father comes both the Word (the Son) and the Breath (Spirit) of God. Contrary to the formulations of heretical theologians, the Holy Spirit does not bow before the Son, nor is He depicted as the love which flows between the Father and Son, but as a person in His own right, in a relationship with the other Two. The Son of God is shown as though in conversation with the Father, which is what is revealed to us in the Gospels, where Jesus frequently prays to the Heavenly Father. Despite the authority of the Father, all Members of the Holy Trinity are shown equal in size, and the reverence of the Son and Spirit to the Father appears voluntary; it is done out of love, not fear.

Yet we must be careful to separate what is revealed to us by God, and is therefore salvific, from that which is formulated by arrogant “over-philosophizing” and can therefore lead us off in dangerous directions. We can look upon the Icon of the Holy Trinity and contemplate the relationship of the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit, yet we must not try to concentrate too much on the Three figures as separate beings.