Have you ever tried to explain a big concept to a small person? It can be quite a challenge. I recall my cousin’s son, Peter, aged 3, overhearing a conversation and asking, ‘Daddy, what is digestion?’ His father, a doctor, proceeded to explain in excruciating detail. Peter soon became disinterested.

On the other hand, I remember going to a voting booth with my father when I was about 5 or 6 years old. I don’t remember why I was taken along. Perhaps I too had overheard a conversation and wanted to know what ‘voting’ meant. We went to my primary school, into the hall. The walls were lined with strange boxes that people stood in. I remember Dad holding my hand as we stood in line. Then Dad spoke to a man at a desk and was given a piece of paper. We went to one of the boxes and Dad did some writing. He folded up his piece of paper and posted it in a special posting box – at least, that’s what it looked like to me. I don’t remember what Dad said to me about all of this; I just remember being fascinated, watching.

I think that, for God, explaining God to us human beings must be a little like explaining digestion or voting to a small child. God could do what my cousin did, and give a long, technical explanation. We would soon lose interest, just like Peter. Or God could show us who God is, just like my father showing me what voting means. I don’t remember an explanation, but I do remember what happened.

People of any age learn best when they are shown, not just told. So God in wisdom has shown who God is by what God does. Long ago, when God rescued the Israelites from slavery, they came to know God as the one who journeys with us. Through the wilderness, the tough times, into the promised land, the good times, God was with the people of God, in a cloud by day and fire by night. God supplied the people’s needs, providing bread, meat and water in the desert. God is a companion to God’s people. God cares for our needs.

A story is told of how the young men of the Israelites came to Moses and said, ‘We are going so slowly. Can’t we travel faster?’ Moses replied: ‘You go on ahead, scout out the territory, come back and tell us. But as for me, I will go at the pace of the pregnant women, the elderly and the little ones.’ God journeys with us, at our pace.
Then, God joined the journey. God became one of us, a human being, journeying as one of us. Jesus of Nazareth knew the joys of being human, growing up in his family, sharing friendship with his disciples, healing and preaching. But Jesus also knew the pain of being human, grieving over the death of a friend, feeling the hurt of rejection, and suffering pain and death. Ever since, God knows what it is to be human.

The pillar of cloud and fire was temporary; Jesus' human life came to an end, as all human life does. But God intended to dwell with us permanently, not just as the God who goes ahead of God's people, not just as the God who dwells amongst God's people as one of us, but as the God who dwells within us, always. God sent the Spirit to guide us from within. So now, God is with us, always, to the end of the age.

As a child, I went with my father to vote but I didn't understand what was happening. As I learnt more, that experience gradually made more sense, and I began to understand what the various bits of memory meant. The man at the desk, the boxes people stood in, the special post box – I slowly learnt their names and purpose until the day that I, too, walked into that same school hall to vote.

In the same way, over time, the Church reflected on how God’s people had come to know God. God's people experienced God as the one who journeys with us as our companion, supplying our needs. God has journeyed as one of us; God knows what it is to be human. And God dwells within us, guiding us on our journey.

The Church reflected, and the Church prayed, naming God 'Father, Son, Spirit'. Three names, three persons, but one God. That is a difficult concept for us human beings. One plus one plus one equal three, we think. But the being of God is not about mathematics, any more than being human is. The being of God is about love.

Father, Son, Spirit – three persons so closely intertwined in love that they are one, eternally. God – Father, Son, Spirit – knows that human minds find it hard to wrap themselves around this concept, just as my 5-year-old mind could not wrap itself around the concept of 'voting'. So the God who journeys with us invites us to journey with God.

God knows that it is only through experience that we will come to know the Trinity. So, we are invited into the life of the Triune God who has shared our life.
Words here become confusing. Pictures are better. For hundreds of years, the Church has used a particular picture to help God’s people encounter the Triune God. This picture is the Rublev icon, named after Anton Rublev who painted it in about 1410.

An icon is not just a painting. It is a window into heaven, an aid to prayer. As we look at an icon, we are drawn in, to that which the icon depicts. An icon of a saint draws us in to the saint's life, enabling us to learn from the saint's witness to God. An icon of an event, like the birth of Jesus, draws us into that event, so that we are present in the stable on Christmas Eve. And Rublev's icon of the Trinity draws us in to the very life of God.

In this icon, there are three persons seated around a table on which is a cup or chalice. The three are seated in a chalice shape. The table itself also has the shape of a chalice. Inside the chalice on the table – not visible in a small reproduction – is a lamb.

As I look at this icon, I am drawn in, as if I am at the fourth place at the table.

Central to this icon is the image of the chalice – the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation. As I hold the icon and allow myself to be drawn into it, to take that fourth seat at the table, I do so through the act of Christ. The icon reminds me that it is through Christ's sacrificial death that I am able to enter God's presence, accept God's hospitality, and even share in the very life of God. As I sit with the icon, I enter prayer, allowing the love of the Trinity to enfold me, hold me. And so, the Trinity is no longer just a complex theological concept; the Trinity is an experience of enveloping love. I invite you to take the icon home with you and use it in your prayers this week.
I close with a Welsh blessing:

May God stride out before you in your journey through life and through prayer.
May Jesus our playful brother pace you in his holy way till the end.
May the Holy Spirit greet you at each corner and cuddle you to her breast.

Amen.