

The long version...

From eternity past, God has existed as one being in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In their relationships with one another, the trinity exemplifies love. God created the world good and made human beings in his image as the pinnacle of his creation. That means that just as God is relational, we were created for harmonious relationships with God, self, others and the world (Gen 1-2; John 1:1-5; 1 Cor 12:4-6).

However, Satan tempted the first humans, leading them to disobey God. This resulted in the severing of their relationship with him. The effects of this relational breakdown rippled throughout God's creation, damaging humanity's relationship with God, self, one another, and creation. Our violation of these God-centred relationships is called sin (Gen 3-11; Rom 8:18-25).

But God didn't abandon the world he had called 'good,' or his human image-bearers. Instead he put into effect his plan to rescue the world from sin. This plan began with Abraham and Sarah, the parents of the Jewish people. God promised that through them blessing would come to the whole world. Their descendents became the nation of Israel, whom God chose as his own people in order to eventually extend his saving love and mercy to all nations (Gen 12:1-7; Exo 19:5-6; Psa 22:27-28; 67:1-2; Jer 4:1-2).

However, Israel became increasingly unfaithful to God. Eventually, God judged them by allowing other nations to defeat Israel and take them into exile for seventy years. But even then, God was still outworking his plan to bring renewal to the world through Israel. In the midst of Israel's exile, God promised liberation, restoration and peace (2 Chr 36:15-21; Isa 1; 52:1-12; Jer 30-31).

These hopes and expectations were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus was both fully God and fully human, which meant God could identify completely with our humanity through him. Jesus is the true image of God and in his life, teaching and miracles he embodied the first signs of God's kingdom - a renewed creation in which humanity's relationships with God and others would be restored. In his crucifixion Jesus died for us as our representative, and died with us as our brother. Through his death he defeated Satan, sin, and death itself. Then God physically

resurrected Jesus, marking the beginning of his new creation on earth. Soon after his resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven where he now resides. (Mark 1:15; 1 Cor 1:18- 25; Col 1:15-20; Heb 2:10-18).

After Jesus' ascension, God sent the Holy Spirit to fill and empower Jesus' followers. By his Spirit, God continues to reconcile people to himself and to restore the image of God in humanity. Individually, we can be reconciled to God by turning away from a self-governed life (repentance) and turning toward God by placing our faith in Jesus and following him. When we do so, God forgives our sin, restores our relationship with him, and comes to live within us by his Spirit. God calls his followers into a community called the church, a living expression of his kingdom (new creation) in action. The church actively participates with God in bringing his new creation into every corner of life. We do this through expressing faith, hope and love toward one another and the world (Acts 1-2; Eph 2:1-3:13).

One day Jesus will return to earth to judge the world and usher in the new creation in all its fullness. Then God will bring his entire creation to its final goal, doing away with sin and death, and establishing perfect shalom (peace) on earth. Those who have continually rejected his offer of reconciliation will experience eternal judgement by being excluded from the new creation and eternally separated from God. Those who are reconciled to God through Jesus will be fully renewed in the image of God and will enjoy perfect relationship with God and with one another for eternity. (Isa 11:4-9; 65:17-25; Rev 21-22).

So what?

Our world offers us various other stories by which we can live - alternative visions of the world. But only God's story can make true sense of our past, give real meaning to our present and provide genuine hope for our future. It compels us to ask, 'Where am I in this story?' God invites each of us to enter his story through relationship with Jesus. As our lives are continually renewed by him, we become God's agents of renewal in the world around us. This is not only an individual journey, but one we are meant to share together in the context of God's family, the church. God's church is a diverse, global community, comprising all those who are united to Jesus. Shore Community Church is a local expression of this worldwide church, committed to loving God, loving one another and loving the world. As we do so, we are participating in God's story of hope-filled renewal through Jesus Christ for a broken world.