

The Creeds: Saying What We Believe

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the
power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge
the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit
he was born of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the
Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son
he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy
catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one
baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Precedents in the Scripture

- Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
- Leviticus 19:18b Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.
- Repeated by Jesus in the Matthew 22:38, 39; Mark 12:30, 31; and Luke 10:27.
- Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; and Philippians 2:11: Jesus is Lord.
- Philippians 2:6-11: A hymn or creed proclaiming Jesus as Lord.

Athanasian Creed (BCP p. 864f)

This creed was never mentioned in the ancient Church of the late 300s or early 400s as having been written by Athanasius himself—suggesting that it was written either after his death (May 2, 373) or as a "committee draft" leading up to the final version of the Nicene Creed. It is 44 lines long: the first half addressing the Trinity and the second half Christology, specifically affirming the full divinity of Jesus.

Nicene Creed (BCP p. 358f)

The first Council of the Church was held in the year 325 in the city of Nicea, in modern day Turkey. It was attended by over 300 bishops from the Latin speaking West and the Greek speaking East, including Europe, Asia, and Africa, and so is referred to as the first Ecumenical Council.

The Council was called to determine and defend the Church's Faith in light of the Arian controversy. Arius taught that the Father created Jesus as the First Son at the beginning of time. Athanasius and the other bishops asserted that Scripture taught that Jesus was eternal, having never been created, and so fully God.

The first Council in Nicea did not finish the Creed. Seven provincial councils or synods were held in various cities in the East and West to hammer out the details. Athanasius was from Alexandria and normally wrote and preached in Greek. The Athanasian Creed was written in Latin—and may therefore have been written at one of the provincial meetings.

A second Ecumenical Council was held in Nicea in 381 and there the Church formally adopted the Nicene Creed. It remains the basic Creed affirmed by Orthodox Churches birthed in the East, and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches birthed in the West.

The Apostles' Creed (BCP p 96, 304)

Unlike the Nicene Creed which was adopted by the Church in Council, the Apostles' Creed was received by Tradition. Some believe the Creed was crafted by the Apostles with each Apostle contributing a favorite verse of Scripture. There is another creed, the Old Roman Symbol, which is a bit shorter—and may have been revised as late as 750 to make the Scriptural references more apparent. A creed or group of creeds, of one form or another, was recognized by many of the early Church fathers as early as the 300s.

Comparisons

The Apostles' Creed affirms basic faith at the time of Baptism, while the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds defend the Faith against corrupting influences. Therefore the two accomplish different goals, and articulate their message differently.

First it should be noted that the Apostles' Creed begins "I believe..." while the Nicene Creed begins "We believe..." The first is used as individuals come into the Church. The second is used as the Church gathers together as the Body of Christ.

The Apostles' Creed assumes the divinity of Jesus, while the Nicene Creed explicitly asserts his divinity. The Apostles' Creed focuses on Jesus as Lord and the Life of Faith—while the Nicene Creed expresses the wonder of the Trinity.

Are the Creeds Important Today?

There are voices in society that believe creeds of any kind are detrimental to people—that they impose beliefs and violate individual freedoms. Likewise, there are voices in the Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion who want the freedom to adapt the Church to the times. They argue that the Anglican Church is not a "confessional church".

In Matthew 16:13-18, Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the son of the Living God."

That short sentence is a confession. It is a declaration and an affirmation. Paul's use of the Creed in Philippians 2 demonstrates how a creed unites people in a common faith. Further, Paul is able to defend the faith against false teachers because there is this common and agreed Gospel.

What does the Apostles' Creed do for us today?

In many Churches, the question is frequently asked, "Are you saved?" Episcopalians often do not know how to answer the question. The Apostles' Creed however is our answer—at least in ideal circumstances. It marks our baptism and our confirmation; it marks our personal commitment to follow Jesus as Lord.

The Church should be clear about how you become a Christian. What do you need to believe or do? The answer is summed up in the Creed—affirming who Jesus is and the importance of the Church, e.g., the community of the Faith.

What does the Nicene Creed do for us today?

First off, it holds the preacher accountable. In the Liturgy, we read the Scripture first, hear the Sermon second, and affirm the Creed third. In the Liturgy, the sermon is placed as a bridge to explore the Scripture and apply it to our worship and our lives.

Second, the Creed unites the congregation in our worship as the body of Christ. We have processed into Church and gathered as individuals to hear the Word of God. After which, we affirm the Creed as one body of Christ before we pray together and share the Eucharist together.

Third, the Creed warns us that the world wants to change our Faith rather than to receive the good news of the Faith.

Fourth, the Creed reminds us to grow in our understanding of the Faith. Our Faith reflects the majesty of the Trinity and calls us to worship God in his majesty. The Creed summarizes on the one hand, and peeks into on the other hand, the glory of God and our relationship with him.

Fifth, in the context of the Liturgy, the Creed calls us to give thanks to God for his Son Jesus Christ and our salvation through his death and resurrection. If this is truly our Faith, then what better response than to praise God!