

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only-begotten Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; [he descended into the underworld]; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come 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-begotten 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 human beings and for our salvation he came down from heaven, he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made 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], who with the Father and the Son 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.

Introduction

The Apostles and the Nicene Creeds are the two fundamental creeds of the Christian Church. The Apostles Creed was developed to instruct people preparing for baptism. Even today candidates for baptism are often asked to publicly confess their faith through the Apostles Creed. It probably reached its present form in the

fourth century though its roots go back to the second century “Rule of Faith” mentioned by Irenaeus and other Church Fathers.

On the other hand, the Nicene Creed was officially approved by the Church at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. It arose in answer to the great fourth-century Arian controversy over the person of Christ. Arius, an Egyptian clergyman, taught that the Son of God was greater than human but less than God. This creed was finalized in 381 at the Council of Constantinople by additional material clarifying the deity and role of the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed is the basic confession of the Christian faith recognized and confessed by almost all branches of the Christian Church—Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, Oriental, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, etc. Baptists usually don’t recognize creeds but have traditionally believed the content of the Nicene Creed.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is your impression when you first read through these Creeds? What strikes you about their differences and similarities?
2. Notice their three-fold structure. Where do you think this comes from? Have a look at Mark 1:9-12; Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 11:11-13; John 15:26—16:10; Acts 1:4-8; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 1:1-14 (an example of the many longer passages that contains references to Father, Son, and Spirit); Ephesians 2:21-22.
3. What is in the Apostles Creed say about Jesus that is absent from the Nicene Creed? Notice the factuality of this creed, the insistence on historical events.
4. What does the Nicene Creed add to the Apostles’ Creed’s description of Jesus? Compare John 1:1-18; 2 Corinthians 4:1-4; Philippians 2:1-11; Colossians 1:15-20, 2:9-12; Hebrews 1:1-14.
5. What does the Nicene Creed add concerning the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit? Compare Genesis 1:1-2; Mark 1:4-12; Luke 1:35; John 3:1-8; 6:61-65; 7:37-39; 14:25-26; Acts 1:8, 2:13; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 2:10-12; Ephesians 3:5 (cf. 1:13, 4:30); Titus 3:5; Hebrews 9:8, 10:15; and 1 Peter 1:20-21; 3:18.
6. What is the significance of these additions about Jesus and the Spirit “for us human beings and our salvation”? See Romans 1:12-20; 2 Corinthians 5:21; and Hebrews 10:5-10.