

Introduction to the Series

“We Believe”

A rediscovery of the Nicene Creed

Our goal

- A clear understanding of the Nicene Creed, as a common statement of faith, shared by orthodox Christians across time and space.
- To gain this understanding, an outstanding line-up of speakers will help us explore:
 - the Biblical roots of the Creed, specifically each article of it,
 - the theological meaning and significance of the Creed, specifically why it is important for us as orthodox Christians, and
 - the implications of the Creed for us today as individuals, as churches, and as the Church.

Introduction

Where do we start, and why?

“We Believe”: Introduction to the Nicene Creed

Earliest Creeds	1 Corinthians 15.3-8 (c. AD 45)	Hippolytus, <i>Apostolic Tradition</i> 21 (c. AD 215 but consists of older traditions)	Apostles' Creed	Nicene Creed (AD 325)	Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 381)
	For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,	¹² When each of them to be baptized has gone down into the water, the one baptizing shall lay hands on each of them, asking			
		"Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?" ¹³ And the one being baptized shall answer, "I believe." ¹⁴ He shall then baptize each of them once, laying his hand upon each of their heads.	I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.	We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible	We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
1. Jesus is the Christ / Jesus Christ is Lord		¹⁵ Then he shall ask, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God,	I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth,	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made;
		who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,	He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.	Who because of/for us men and because of/for our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man,	who because of/for us men, and because of/for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;
2.Christ has died and	that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried,	who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died,	He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.	Suffered	he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried,
Christ is risen	that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,	and rose on the third day living from the dead,	He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.	And rose again on the third day,	and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures,
	and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred				

	<p>brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.</p>				
		<p>and <u>ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father,</u></p>	<p>He <u>ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.</u></p>	<p><u>Ascended to the heavens,</u></p>	<p>and <u>ascended into heaven,</u> and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;</p>
		<p>the one <u>coming to judge the living and the dead?</u>" ¹⁶When each has answered, "I believe," he shall baptize a second time.</p>	<p>He will come again <u>to judge the living and the dead.</u></p>	<p>And <u>will come to judge the living and the dead.</u></p>	<p>from thence he <u>shall come again,</u> with glory, <u>to judge the quick and the dead;</u> whose kingdom shall have no end.</p>
		<p>¹⁷Then he shall ask, "Do you believe <u>in the Holy Spirit</u></p>	<p><u>I believe in the Holy Spirit,</u></p>	<p><u>And in the Holy Spirit.</u></p>	<p><u>And in the Holy Spirit,</u> the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.</p>
		<p>and <u>the Holy Church</u></p>	<p><u>the holy catholic Church,</u> the communion of saints,</p>		<p>In one holy catholic and apostolic Church;</p>
			<p>the forgiveness of sins,</p>		<p>we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;</p>
		<p>and <u>the resurrection of the flesh?</u>" ¹⁸Then each being baptized shall answer, "I believe." And thus let him baptize the third time.</p>	<p><u>the resurrection of the body,</u> and the life everlasting. Amen</p>		<p>we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.</p>
				<p>But, as for those who say, There was when He was not, and Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration of change – these the Catholic Church anathematizes.</p>	

Goal of the Introduction

- To set the stage for an exploration of each of the articles of the Nicene Creed.

What will we cover today?

- What you need to know to set the stage for the Nicene Creed:
 1. Scripture is the starting point
 2. There is evidence of statements of faith (or creeds) already in Scripture
 3. These earliest creeds are primarily Jewish
 4. The earliest developments of creeds have to do with baptism (how individuals ["I"] get IN to the Church)
 5. As Gentiles (non-Jews) enter the Church, the baptismal creeds change
 6. Later creeds, e.g. Nicene, have to do with how the Church ("We") STAY ON THE RIGHT PATH (orthodoxy)

1. The ground of our faith

- As Christians, the ground of our faith is Scripture.
 - For Anglicans, this is stated clearly: “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.” (Article 6 of the “39 Articles of Religion”)

The Holy Scriptures (the Bible)

- Holy Scripture is actually “Scriptures” (plural)
 - So, too, the word “Bible”, which comes from the Greek and is actually plural, meaning “Books”.
 - The Holy Scriptures are a library of books, not a single book.
- Old Testament:
 - 39 books (more if you add the books accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, and even more if you add those accepted by Orthodox Churches)
- New Testament:
 - 27 books

The variety of the books of the Bible

- The Holy Scriptures present a rich feast
 - Old Testament: Law, Historical Books, Prophets, Writings (Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, etc.)
 - New Testament: Gospels, History (Acts), Letters, Apocalyptic vision (Revelation)

Are there common elements in the Scriptures?

- In the midst of this feast, are there common elements?
- Is there a main line or are there main lines running through all these texts leading us to salvation?
- Where would we look?

Identify the common elements

- “It seems that the soundest method towards that end is to isolate, among the rich variety of these writings, those elements which are so widely common to them that they must be regarded as forming part of a central tradition, by which they were all more or less controlled.” (C. H. Dodd, Stone Lectures, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1950)

What is that common core?

- In the case of the New Testament: “The common and central tradition (of the New Testament has) at its core what the New Testament itself calls the *kerygma*, or proclamation of the Gospel. In its most summary form the *kerygma* consists of the announcement of certain historical events in a setting which displays the significance of those events. The events in question are those of the appearance of Jesus in history – His ministry, sufferings and death and His subsequent manifestation of Himself to His followers as risen from the dead and invested with the glory of another world – and the emergence of the Church as a society distinguished by the power and activity of the Holy Spirit, and looking forward to the return of its Lord as Judge and saviour of the world.” (Dodd, Stone Lecture)

2. The New Testament contains creeds as expressions of the core

- The earliest creed (statement of faith) of the early Church is
 - Jesus is the Messiah (“You are the Christ [=Messiah]” is the creed commended by Jesus himself in Mark 8.29)

What did it mean to proclaim “Jesus is the Messiah”?

- What did Peter mean in this statement of faith?
 - The statement of faith by the crowds, as well as by Jesus’ immediate and closest followers (like Peter) was that Jesus was the Messiah/Lord who had come to be acclaimed King and to reign in an earthly kingdom centered in Jerusalem.
 - For example, when Jesus rides up to Jerusalem the expectation of all is that he is the king who has come to reign: “Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”” (Mark 11.9-10)

“Jesus is the Messiah” is true, but HOW is Jesus the Messiah?

- But, then come the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Messiah Jesus.
 - If this is God’s Messiah, then Peter and the crowds and others must have said “our expectation was wrong!”
 - “Jesus is the Messiah (Christ)” is true but not complete as it stands but how is He the Messiah?
 - in death, in His risen life, and in His ascended glory.

An early creed that includes Jesus' death and resurrection ...

- This fulness is expressed in the early creed that Paul has delivered to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 15: *column 2 on the hand-out*)

... and it will include the expectation of his return to rule.

- In sum, to declare how Jesus will reign as Messiah, the earliest Church confessed that Jesus, as the Messiah, reigns as King...
 - through death
 - Specifically the hands of the religiously pure among the Jews (primarily in Jerusalem), as well as the Roman leadership that oversaw His crucifixion: "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2.36)
 - through resurrection
 - Specifically, that God has vindicated His servant Jesus by raising Him from the dead to new and unending life: "(David) foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up" (Acts 2.31-32a)
 - and by the promise of His return in judgment (*which Paul develops later in 1 Cor 15*)
 - Specifically, to deal with those who have dishonoured God's Messiah: "Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets." (Acts 3.19-21)
- The origin of our Eucharistic acclamation: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!"

3. The Jewish nature of early Christianity

- You will note that both “Jesus is the Christ” as well “[Jesus the] Christ has died, is risen, will come again”) affirm faith in a Jewish context
 - Jesus is a Semitic name, meaning “Saviour”
 - Messiah [=Christ] is a Jewish expression
- These creeds, which we still affirm, reflect that the earliest faith in Jesus is rooted in Jewish understandings of Jesus, drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures

Problem: What happens when the gospel enters the Gentile world?

- When the gospel enters the Gentile (non-Jewish) world, one of the first things that the apostles had to do was to teach Gentiles (non-Jews) about the Jewish background for understanding Jesus. For example
 - Jews knew well that there is one Lord and one God. 'Hear, o Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.' (Dt 6)
 - But Gentiles had many lords and many gods. Gentiles were very willing to admit that Jesus could be one among many lords and gods that they knew.
 - Early preachers, like Paul, had to teach the Gentiles that they did not need to give up their language to talk about God (e.g., the word "Lord") but that they had to give the old words new meaning (e.g., "Lord" will now mean the one whom Jews had known from their Hebrew Scriptures as the one, true God)
 - "no one can say "Jesus is Lord" [the Old Testament name for God] except by the Holy Spirit". (1 Cor 12.3b)

Baptism

- The main way for non-Jews to show that they were willing to adopt this new Jewish-shaped understanding was for them to undergo that same public proclamation that Jews had been undertaking since John the Baptist: **baptism by water**.
 - Jews declare their expectation in God's promised Messianic age and Messianic deliverer and their repentance in expectation of that coming.
 - Gentiles would now do the same!
 - Baptism was a declaration of willingness to start learning about the Messiah Jesus, starting with his own starting point, His Jewish roots.
 - Mt 28.19-20a: To His disciples, the risen Jesus says: "Go therefore and make learners of all the nations [i.e. the Gentiles] BY baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy spirit and BY teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."
 - Baptism by water put everyone – Jew and non-Jew (i.e., Gentile – on the same "playing field" with regard to learning about the God revealed in Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures (Jewish)
- Baptism by **Spirit and fire** were the end = the goal of this baptism:
 - A destruction of all that is not truly of God (by "fire") and a renewal or creation of all that is godly (by "Spirit") Baptism by water prepared everyone – Jew and Gentile – to have all that was not of God destroyed by fire and to be created into a new and never ending life in the power of the Spirit

4. Baptismal creed

- Eventually, statements of faith (creeds) developed as pronouncements to be made by those to be baptized, both Jews AND Gentiles
- Probably started with simple question and answer: Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* (which dates from the early 3rd century AD but reflects traditions that are in practice at the beginning of the 2nd century AD – i..e., between AD 100-150) (*column 3 on your hand-out*)

5. The early question-answer becomes the “Apostles’ Creed”

- The Apostles’ Creed is a development of the original baptismal creed.
- The goal is two-fold:
 - Continue to put all those entering into faith in Christ – Jew and non-Jew – on the same “playing field”
 - Also, to begin to meet challenges to Christian faith from within Christian faith
 - Especially as Gentiles bring with them their non-Jewish religious beliefs:
 - Denials of the goodness of creation,
 - Questions about whether Jesus was really a man or not, and
 - Personal mysticism and denials that the Spirit was at work in the world (catholicity).

Apostles' Creed: The three pillars of orthodox, baptismal belief

- God the Father maker of heaven and earth
 - No Jew needed to be told that creation is good. See Genesis 1!
 - Gentile Christians influenced by myths and by the experience of life around them did!
 - Gnostics used these myths and experiences to deny the goodness of God's world.
- Jesus Christ was truly a man
 - While early Jewish Christians needed to affirm that Jesus was Son of God and Lord, Gnostic-inspired Christians needed to be reminded that Jesus was not just a philosophical principle or an un-suffering redeemer.
 - He was born of a human mother, suffered at a point in history, died like others, and was buried (not just spirited away). See the Gospels, Galatians 4, Hebrews, etc.!
- The Holy Spirit is in the Holy church
 - The Spirit is not just limited to Israel, as early Jewish Christians thought.
 - Nor is the Spirit found only in spiritual cliques. (Gnostics believed that other Christians were less spiritual than they were.)
 - The Spirit is found wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name.
- Note how each of these pillars is grounded in the Scriptures!
- In all subsequent creeds, these three pillars will remain.

Christianity: From illicit religion to imperial religion

- From the time of Jesus to AD 300:
 - Earliest believers were Jewish (persecuted by the Jewish leadership)
 - Statements of faith found in earliest creeds
 - Later believers were mainly Gentile (persecuted by the Roman imperial authorities)
 - Statements of faith found in baptismal creeds
- In AD 313: Constantine declares Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire.
 - Believers flood the Church in greater numbers as it becomes required to be a Christian to be Roman.
 - Baptismal creeds are maintained as the means of entry to the Church (“Do you believe in...? “I believe in ...”)

6. Growth of challenges to faith from within

- The Church ceased to be persecuted from without
- The main challenge to faith now came from within
 - As in the Baptismal creeds, there is evidence of continuing challenges to the understanding of God the Father (how could a good God create such a miserable creation?) – Gnosticism
 - New challenges to the Son and the Spirit
 - The Son is not God in the same way as the Father is God: Arianism
 - The Spirit is not God in the same way as either the Father or the Son: “Spirit-fighters”

Arius

- Around AD 320, Arius (a Bishop) attempted to show that Jesus was a man
 - Only God is unbegotten (not born). Since the Word is begotten (born), the Word cannot be God.
 - Arius's understanding of John 1.1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God-like"
 - The Word is indeed above all other creatures and even used by God in making creation.
 - Arius's understanding of Proverbs 8.22 The author, speaking of Wisdom, is actually speaking of the Word: "The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago."
 - Thus, the Word is God only a kind of God or God-like.

The Council of Nicaea (325)

- Arius's thought was condemned by many unofficially.
- But Arius also had powerful friends (e.g., Eusebius of Caesarea) and was an expert in propaganda.
- So, because the disturbances between supporters of Arius (Arians) and those who condemned him threatened the peace of the state, Constantine called a council of bishops to settle the matter.
- (Probably) 318 bishops from all over Christendom ("ecumenically") met in Nicaea in 325.
- The result was the official condemnation of Arius and the publication of the Nicene Creed – based on the baptismal creed – and enshrining orthodox belief (*sixth column in the hand-out*).

Council of Constantinople (381)

- The challenge to orthodox faith did not stop with the condemnation of Arius and the publication of a new creed.
- The same tendencies that had led Arius to consider the Son as less than God now led another group to look on the Spirit as less than the Son.
 - As Arius had done with the Son, these “Spirit-fighters” (*Pneumatomachioi*) considered the Spirit to be the first, and highest, of God’s creatures.
- The result of the Council was
 - the condemnation of the “Spirit-fighters” and
 - the expansion of the Nicene Creed with emphasis on the person of the Spirit in what is properly called the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed” (*the final column in your hand-out and the Creed in the form that we know it today*).

By way of conclusion

Three points

1. Christian creeds as an expression of a common core of belief

- Creeds do not replace the Bible.
- They are succinct formulations of the core elements of the gospel, the proclamation of the Gospel based on the Holy Scriptures.
 - All orthodox Christians hold firmly to the earliest creeds as found in the Holy Scriptures (e.g., Jesus is the Christ; Jesus is Lord; Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again).
 - Anglicans also share two creeds (The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed) with orthodox Christians around the world because we believe that these creeds reflect core belief found in the Scriptures.

An implication: Creeds are not exhaustive

- Creeds do not tell us everything that Scripture does; they tell us
 - What I must believe to come to faith in Christ (Baptism)
 - What WE must believe to continue to be the Church
- They presume that the rest of the Scriptures, both New AND Old Testament, is authoritative for “fleshing out” that belief.

2. Creeds outline orthodox belief

- The creeds help to identify the *sine qua non* of Christian belief
 - What must I believe to learn Christ (starting with everyone else at baptism)
 - What must WE believe as the Church to be considered Christian.

An implication

- The creeds became necessary
 - When individuals expressed a desire to learn of Christ
 - Individuals were willing to suffer persecution to follow Christ.
 - When Christian faith began to be challenged from within by scholars, priests, bishops, etc.
 - The Church was in danger of crumbling because of challenges to faith from within.
 - This became the great threat to the faith.

3. The creeds reflect the process of the proclamation of the gospel

- The creeds underscore the elements of the common core of Christian faith in light of important historical contexts for the proclamation of the gospel.
- Creeds explicitly and implicitly highlight those elements of Christian faith that have been called into question or misunderstood during the formative years of the Church's doctrine.
 - The creeds point the way for right belief (i.e., orthodoxy).
 - The creeds caution against making the same errors that have been made and ending up with wrong belief.
 - Some have said and continue to say Jesus is not the Messiah
 - Some have said and continue to say Jesus is not the Lord, or at least, not the only Lord.
 - Some have said and continue to say Jesus did not really die, or was not really raised, or is not coming again.
 - Some have denied and continue to say that creation could not be the work of a good God.
 - Some have denied that the Spirit is God.
 - Some have denied that the Spirit works in the whole Catholic (world-wide) Church.
 - Etc.

An implication: Do we need new creeds?

- While some (“revisionists”) say that old 1-4 cent. creeds are of no further use to us, that even as creeds evolved then, so they need to evolve today.
- To orthodox Christians, the challenge is to “live into” the creeds that developed during the formative stages of the creation of the Christian Church
 - That is, our challenge is
 - to remain orthodox with the Church throughout space and time and
 - to learn what the implications of the creeds are for us today.

Some study questions

1. What might have happened to faith had there been no common core, and resulting statements of faith (creed)?
2. How do the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed reflect the essential core of Scriptural truth?
 - What Scriptural truths do they reflect? Why?
 - What Scriptural truths do they not reflect? Why?
3. What are the three pillars expressed in the Apostles' Creed, which (as pillars) continue throughout all subsequent Christian statements of faith (i.e., creeds), including the Nicene Creed? Why might we call these pillars?
4. What theological truths does the Nicene Creed establish as the essential elements of orthodox Christian belief? Why are these important? Are they still important theologically today?
5. Unlike the Apostles' Creed which is intended to start individuals on their journey of learning about Christ at baptism, we say the Nicene Creed together weekly as a reminder of how each day of the week is to be lived out in light of it. What is the significance of the fact that this is "our" Creed, said to together with Christians and the Church across space and time?