

**We believe ... in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord and giver of life, who  
proceedeth from the Father and  
the Son, who with the Father and  
Son together is worshipped and  
glorified, who spake by the  
prophets.**

A brief overview and introduction

# Reminder of points from the Introduction to the series

- When reciting the Nicene Creed, remember:
  1. The common core elements of Scripture are the starting point for all the articles of the Nicene Creed.
  2. The Nicene Creed particularly develops statements of faith already found in Scripture (the earliest expressions of the common core of belief).
  3. The earliest creeds in Scripture were Jewish, so later creeds (like the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds) built on the Jewish nature of faith.
  4. The earliest creeds of the early church built on the Scriptural creeds particularly in relation to baptism (which asks: how do "I" get IN to the Church?)
  5. As more and more Gentiles (non-Jews) enter the Church (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries), these Gentiles posed new questions and challenges.
  6. So, creeds of the 4<sup>th</sup> and later centuries (like the Nicene Creed) arose particularly to deal with those new questions and challenges in order to answer a crucial, and different, question from the one asked in baptism: how do "we" [the Church] STAY ON THE RIGHT PATH (orthodoxy)?
- Let's look at each of these 6 in relation to the Nicene Creed's article on the Holy Spirit.

# 1. Scriptural background for the Holy Spirit

## ■ OT

- Holy Spirit is there from the beginning
  - Genesis creation (Gen 1.2)
  - Engaged with humans after the Fall until the Flood (Gen 6.3)
    - Origin of the idea of the “Spirit” as the *shekinah* (i.e., ‘presence’ of God on earth)
  - Empowering God’s anointed leaders and prophets (Num 11.17; Ezek 2.2)
  - Future hope (Is 11.1-2; 44.3)

## ■ NT

- Holy Spirit is there from the beginning
  - Birth of Jesus
  - Baptism and Temptation
  - Miracles and Teaching
  - Pentecost: The Church in the power of the Holy Spirit looking forward

## 2. The Holy Spirit in the creeds of Scripture

- The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 3.6)
- To this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds [i.e., *the minds of Jewish readers who have not believed in Jesus*]; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Cor 3.14-16)

# 3. The Jewish nature of the NT teaching on the Holy Spirit

- It is the same Spirit of God that is present in both OT and NT
- What kind of Spirit?
  - Lord
  - Life-giving
  - Speaks the Word of God
  - Powerful... and dangerous!
    - 1 Sam 10.10-11
    - Pentecost: like a tornado

# 4. Baptism and the Holy Spirit

- Baptism of John: with water
  - A preparation for everyone – Jew and Gentile – of what is to come. (The playing field is levelled.)
  - John says that the one to baptize with Holy Spirit is yet to come!
- Baptism of Jesus: with Holy Spirit and fire
  - A powerful, out-of-control destruction of all that is not truly of God (by “fire”) and an equally powerful, out-of-control renewal or creation of all that is godly (by “Spirit”)

# 5. The impact of Gentiles in the church's teaching on the Holy Spirit

- Initial impact: Gentiles brought with them
  - Denials of the goodness of creation (Gnosticism).
    - Gentile views of nature were a challenge to the Biblical (Jewish) view of God's Spirit involved in creation and caring for it.
  - Questions about Jesus' humanity.
    - Gentile views of God challenged the New Testament understanding that a God would ever suffer as we do, or that the Spirit would bother to assist someone who did not fight back.
  - Personal mysticism.
    - Gentiles understood "spirit" as a power within me and under my control, not as God's Spirit who takes control of me for the good of the whole economy of God – church, human world, and creation!

# Specific problems in the fourth century teaching on the Spirit

- Eventual impact: The edict of Constantine opened the flood-gates to Gentiles entering the Church and they brought with them their beliefs *en masse*.
- Two main problems:
  - First problem: addressing the way in which Jesus' divinity was undermined by Gentile belief, most clearly represented by Arius (Council of Nicaea 325)
  - Second problem: addressing the way in which the Spirit was viewed by Gentiles, most clearly represented by "Macedonius"

# Macedonius and the 'Spirit-fighters'

- In the mid-300s, a group (probably) led by a bishop named 'Macedonius', gathered followers around him to oppose the notion that the Holy Spirit was God
  - Known as *pneumatomachi* or 'Spirit-fighters'
  - Denied that the Spirit was of the same essence as God the Father and God the Son
    - They considered the Holy spirit to be a "creature" or "an angelic figure" (cf. Heb 1.14).
  - They built on a general weakness in early Church Fathers' teaching regarding the Holy Spirit. (The Church Fathers realized how *dangerous* the Holy Spirit is!)

# Council of Constantinople (381)

- Based on the work of the Cappadocian Church Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzen), the Council of Constantinople
  - condemned the Spirit-fighters (as Arius had been condemned at Nicaea) and
  - expanded the Nicene Creed to include the article on the Spirit that we now find in what we call the “Nicene Creed” and which should thus more properly be called the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed”.

# The conclusions of the Nicene and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

And in the Holy Spirit.

And in the Holy Spirit, 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. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

# 6. How the Church stayed on course: The Nicene Creed

- The Nicene Creed is an attempt to respond to the challenges and keep the Church on track.
  - Scripturally:
    - *The Lord, the giver of life ... who spoke by the prophets*: The core elements concerning the Holy Spirit as presented in Scripture are encapsulated here.
  - Theologically:
    - *Who proceeds from the Father and the Son*: As the Son is of the same essence as the Father, so is the Spirit.
  - In terms of the implications for the life of the Church:
    - *Who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified*: If He is of the same essence as the Father and the Son, then He is worthy of our full worship and glorification.

# Concluding liturgical postscript

- There is a moment in our Eucharistic celebration that is crucial for our life together in the Spirit = “epiklesis”: ‘calling on’ the Holy Spirit
  - BAS 230: “And we pray, that by the power of thy Holy Spirit, all we who are partakers of this holy communion may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction”
  - BAS 185 Eucharistic Prayer 3: “We pray you, Gracious God, to send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts, that they may be the sacrament of the body of Christ and his blood of the new covenant. Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice, that we, made acceptable in him, may be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”
- The “epiklesis” (calling on the Spirit) is a liturgical reminder every Eucharist ...
  - that from the beginning of the Father’s good creation, the Spirit has been giving life to the world and caring for the world;
  - that when we turned away in sin, the Holy Spirit did not cease to give life to the world, and that now, and as a result of the sacrifice of Christ alone (of which we are given the most precious reminder in the Eucharist), the Holy Spirit reminds us that men and women cleansed by the blood of Christ have been given fullness of life in Christ alone;
  - that , as it was in the beginning, so it is now: our fullness of life , which is for now and for all eternity can only be lived out in its fullness, not in our own power, but through the Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.