

THE CREEDS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Almost from the beginning of the Christian church, believers have stated their faith in the triune God in brief statements known as creeds. The word comes from the Latin *credo*, "I believe." The three best known and most widely used creeds are the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed.

The Apostles' Creed

We do not know the author (or authors) of this creed, nor do we know the exact date when it was first used. The text as we have it comes from eighth century Gaul (southern France), although it is much like the so-called Old Roman Creed which was used in the Western church already in the third century. Roots of this creed can be traced back to creed-like statements in the New Testament, for example, 1 Timothy 3:16, "He appeared in a body [a fleshly mode of existence], was vindicated by the Spirit [in a spiritual mode of existence], was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory." The tradition that each of the apostles wrote a line of the creed is not verifiable, but while the apostles did not produce it, the creed's roots and teachings certainly are apostolic.

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

**I believe in Jesus Christ, this only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The Nicene Creed

We know more about the history of this creed. The first general church council of the church met in Nicea (Greece) in 325 A.D. to deal with the teachings of Arius, who denied the deity and eternity of Jesus. The council stated its position by adapting a creed currently in use. This

statement was further modified and finalized by later councils at Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451). In the ninth century the phrase “and the Son” was added to the words “who proceeds from the Father” in the statement on the Holy Spirit. This addition produced discord between the Eastern and Western churches and was a factor in the separation of the two a few centuries later.

**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,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and became fully human.
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 and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken by through the prophets.
We believe in one holy Christian 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.**

The Athanasian Creed

It is quite certain that Athanasius, an early church leader from Egypt, did not write the Athanasian Creed. This work is not a creed in the usual sense, but rather a liturgical statement of faith, chanted regularly in the worship services. The creed is a strong defense of the doctrine of the trinity and the divinity-humanity of Jesus. The Athanasian Creed seems to have originated the West around the fifth century. The creed is usually read annually on Trinity Sunday (the first Sunday after the Festival of Pentecost).

The creed was prepared as a testimony against two errors regarding the mystery of Christian doctrine. One error denied that God’s Son and the Holy Spirit are of one Being or Godhead with

the Father. Another error denied that Jesus Christ, a single person, is also true God and true man. The creed, named after Athanasius, continues to serve the Christian church as a standard of the truth for the doctrine of the trinity and the doctrine of Christ.

Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold to the true Christian faith.
Whoever does not keep this faith pure in all points will certainly perish forever.

Now this is the true Christian faith:

We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God,
without mixing the persons or dividing the divine being.
For each person – the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit – is distinct,
but the deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
equal in glory and coeternal in majesty.
What the Father is, so is the Son, and so is the Holy Spirit.
The Father is uncreated, the Son uncreated, the Holy Spirit uncreated;
the Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite;
the Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal;
yet they are not three who are eternal, but there is one who is eternal,
just as they are not three who are uncreated, nor three who are infinite,
but there is one who is uncreated and one who is infinite.
In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty;
yet they are not three who are almighty, but there is one who is almighty.
So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;
yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
So the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord;
yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.
For just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually to be God and
Lord, so the true Christian faith forbids us to speak of three Gods for three Lords.
The Father is neither made nor created nor begotten of anyone.
The Son is neither made nor created, but is begotten of the Father alone.
The Holy Spirit is neither made nor created nor begotten,
but proceeds from the Father and the Son.
So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons;
one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.
And within this Trinity none comes before or after; none is greater or inferior,
but all three persons are coequal and coeternal,
so that in every way, as stated before, all three persons are to be worshiped as one God
and one God worshiped as three persons.
Whoever wishes to be saved must have this conviction of the Trinity.

It is furthermore necessary for eternal salvation truly to believe
that our Lord Jesus Christ also took on human flesh.

Now this is the true Christian faith:

We believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son,
is both God and man.
He is God, eternally begotten from the nature of the Father, and he is man, born in time
from the nature of his mother, fully God, fully man, with rational soul and human flesh,
equal to the Father as to his deity, less than the Father as to his humanity;
and though he is both God and man, Christ is not two persons but one,
one, not by changing the deity into flesh, but by taking the humanity into God;
one, indeed, not by mixture of the natures, but by unity in one person;
for just as the rational soul and flesh are one human being,
so God and man are one Christ.
He suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose the third day from the dead.
He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty,
and from there will come to judge the living and the dead.
At his coming all people will rise with their own bodies
to answer for their personal deeds.
Those who have done good will enter eternal life,
but those who have done evil will go into eternal fire.

This is the true Christian faith.

Whoever does not faithfully and firmly believe this cannot be saved.

**THE THREE ARTICLES OF THE CREED WITH MARTIN LUTHER'S EXPLANATION
(SMALL CATECHISM 1529)**

FIRST ARTICLE (GOD THE FATHER - CREATOR)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

I believe that God made me and every creature, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities.

And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and I need to keep my body and life. God also preserves me by defending me against all danger and guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.

SECOND ARTICLE – GOD THE SON – REDEEMER

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.

All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.

THIRD ARTICLE – GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT – SANCTIFIER

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.

But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.

On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.