

The Festival of the Holy Trinity  
A Study of the Three Ecumenical Creeds  
May 31, 2026 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

### In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty and everlasting God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we give You most hearty thanks that You have granted unto us a clear and abundant revelation of Your being and purpose; and we humbly ask You, give us grace to acknowledge, honor, and praise You as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, who lives and reigns, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 134)

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In Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever, dear fellow redeemed:

#### THE APOSTLES' CREED

The word "creed" comes from the Latin word "credo," which means "I believe." That's how the first two ecumenical creeds begin, with the words "I believe." The creeds state what the Christian believes about God based on the teaching of the Bible.

While not all Christians today recite a creed when they gather for worship, the use of creeds dates back to the Old Testament era. Moses taught the people of Israel a basic creed about God which is recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4: "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*" In the New Testament, the apostle Paul wrote creed-like details about the life of Christ in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*" (15:3-4).

The structure for the Apostles' Creed comes from the great commission which Jesus gave to His disciples after His resurrection. He said, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Mat. 28:19). As the apostles went about this work, they naturally had to explain who this Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were.

While there is no historical evidence that the apostles themselves wrote the creed we have, an early version of the creed was in use as early as the year 150. The creed is clearly based on the inspired writings of the apostles, which is why it is known as the "Apostles' Creed." It is also known as the "Baptismal Creed" due to its connection to Jesus' trinitarian words, and because in the early Christian Church it was recited by adult catechumens before they were baptized.

The first article describes God the Father as "Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." "Almighty" means there is no limit to His power. He made everything out of nothing by the power of His Word. The universe did not come about from a big bang and an evolutionary process taking millions of years. It came about because "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*" (Gen. 1:1).

The second article describes the work of God the Son. Though He was certainly active in the creation of all things, the creed especially focuses on His incarnation, His taking on of human flesh in the virgin Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Son of God became Man so that He could be crucified and die in our place for our sins, descend into hell to proclaim His victory over the devil, and rise from the dead in triumph. He ascended into heaven to the right hand of His Father to serve the members of His Church until His coming on the last day to judge the living and the dead.

The third article of the Apostles' Creed describes the work of God the Holy Spirit. Through the powerful Word and Sacraments of God, the Holy Spirit calls sinners to repentance and faith. That's what He did for each of us, making us members of the holy Christian Church through Holy Baptism. This Church of believers, invisible to our eyes but known by God, is the communion of saints, the gathering of Christ's people who are joined to His body by faith, and who eat and drink His body and blood for the remission of their sins. The Holy Spirit continuously brings us this forgiveness, so that we are prepared for our earthly end and look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.

Please turn to page 94. Let us confess our holy faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed. [then hymn #37]

## **THE NICENE CREED**

The Nicene Creed is an expanded version of the Apostles' Creed. The first draft of this creed was written in the year 325 at the Council of Nicaea, and it was finalized in 381. This creed was needed to settle a doctrinal controversy that was troubling the church. A theologian named Arius was promoting the teaching that the Son of God is not equal to the Father in power and glory, but that He is actually a special being created by the Father. Arius came up with catchy songs to spread his false teaching that "there was a time when he was not" (Arius' slogan).

The controversy became so heated that the Roman emperor Constantine called an ecumenical council, meaning a council for the entire church. Arius and his followers came, as did the theologians who opposed them. One of these was the pastor Nicholas of Myra, whose practice of charitable giving inspired the later legend of "jolly old St. Nicholas." Another attendee was a young pastor named Athanasius. He became a leader in the dispute against Arius and argued convincingly from the Scriptures that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God from eternity. This is why we use the word "triune" to describe God. The three Persons are one God.

The first article about God the Father is nearly the same as in the Apostles' Creed, except that it adds that He is the "Maker... of all things visible and invisible." This wording comes from Colossians 1:16 which says, "*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.*" The invisible part of God's creation includes the holy angels which serve God and His people.

The second article of the Nicene Creed is the longest one. It clearly describes the Son as being one God with the Father. It says He is "begotten" of the Father. This is a term that shows how God the Father and God the Son have been from eternity. God the Son is always and forever begotten of God the Father. He is "begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light,

very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made" (see Joh. 1:1-3, Heb. 1:2).

The Nicene Creed has traditionally been connected to and spoken at a service with Holy Communion, so that everyone clearly understands that the Son who gives His body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar is true God.

The third article about God the Holy Spirit is also expanded in the Nicene Creed. The Holy Spirit is described as the "Lord" – true God. His relation to the other Persons in the Godhead is not as one who is begotten, but one who "proceeds from the Father and the Son." His work is to speak what He hears from the Father and the Son, to take what is theirs and give it to us (Joh. 16:13-15). He inspired the prophets to write the words of the Old Testament and the evangelists and apostles to write the words of the New Testament. He continues to work powerfully through the inspired Word to convert hearts to faith in Jesus.

The primary means that He uses to bring people into the "one holy Christian and Apostolic Church" is Holy Baptism. Baptism is not a commitment we make to God or something that needs to be done multiple times like many Christians today teach. Along with the early Christian Church, we acknowledge in the Nicene Creed "one Baptism for the remission of sins."

Please turn to page 95. Let us confess our holy faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. [then hymn #38]

## THE ATHANASIAN CREED

The earliest evidence of the Athanasian Creed dates to the mid-400s. Since Athanasius died in the year 373, it is likely that this creed was named in honor of his work to defend the faith and was not written by Athanasius himself. It is significantly longer than the other two ecumenical creeds because it gives great detail about what can and cannot be said about the Triune God on the basis of the Bible. We only use it in church twice a year, but it is a wonderful instructional tool for study at home and for conversation with other Christians who may not be clear on this teaching.

At the very beginning of the creed, it might surprise us to see a reference to the "catholic faith." The word "catholic" means "universal." It does not mean the "Roman Catholic faith," though the Roman Church also confesses the three ecumenical creeds as we do. The *universal* faith, "the true Christian faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the Persons nor dividing the substance."

The end of the Athanasian Creed gives familiar language like the other two creeds about the Son of God. But then it says that at Christ's coming, "all will rise again with their bodies and will give an account of their own works." That wording comes from Hebrews 4:13 which says that "*no creature is hidden from his sight... to whom we must give account.*" But we do not need to fear the Day of Judgment since Jesus paid for all our sins and has filled our account with His righteous words and works.

Then the creed says, "And they that have done good will enter into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire." This is another reference from the Bible where Jesus says,

*“an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (Joh. 5:28-29).* Jesus is not teaching us to trust our own good works to get to heaven. He is making a distinction between believers and unbelievers. Believers do good by the faith the Holy Spirit has worked in them, while unbelievers do evil because they rejected God’s grace. Believers are saved by faith in what Jesus has done; unbelievers are condemned by their own unbelief.

Please turn to page 29. Let us confess our holy faith in the words of the Athanasian Creed (pastor, odd-numbered verses; congregation, even-numbered). [then hymn #43, vv. 1-4]

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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