

# What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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## The Creeds

- What is a "creed"?
  - From the Latin "credo", "I believe". Per Merriam-Webster:

### **Definition of *creed***

1. **a brief authoritative formula of religious belief**, e.g. *the Nicene Creed*
2. a set of fundamental beliefs; *also* : a guiding principle, e.g. "*Never settle for mediocrity is his creed.* — *Jill Lieber*"

- The so-called "Ecumenical" Creeds are the three most recognized and used by the Christian church: The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, and The Athanasian Creed.
  - All three are explicitly Trinitarian in that they express biblically-based statements about God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - No creeds are *universally* accepted by all groups claiming to be Christian. Some denominations consider the creeds to be heretical replacements for scripture. Some believe they are too connective to the Roman Catholic church and its history. (These tend to be the same groups that question whether Roman Catholics are Christians.)

Sects such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Jehovah's Witnesses explicitly reject the creeds, because they adhere to non-Trinitarian theologies, and therefore they reject not only the creeds, but most any "orthodox" expression of Christology.

- What is the function of creeds? Do we need them?
- Why do you think they have survived so long?
- Why do we use the creeds in our worship services here at Gloria Dei?
- What statements do our pastors make regarding the creeds when we recite them together in worship?

## The Apostle's Creed

- We don't know exactly when this creed was formulated, or when it first came into wide-spread use. The earliest reference to the Apostles's Creed appears to be in a letter written by Ambrose to Pope Siricius ca. 390 AD: "Let them give credit to the Creed of the Apostles, which the Roman Church has always kept and preserved undefiled". Clearly it had already been in use for some time.
- Most popular in the western Church
- Gloria Dei tends to use this creed on non-communion Sundays

### **Text (from the Lutheran Service Book):**

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

And 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.

On the third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence 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.

\* *Christian*: the ancient text reads "catholic," meaning the whole Church as it confesses the wholeness of Christian doctrine.'

## The Nicene Creed

- Early in the fourth century, a new teaching appeared which claimed that Jesus was not true God. Arius, a north African priest and a member of the clergy of Alexandria, objected to Alexander's (the bishop of the time) "blurring" of the distinction between Father and Son by his emphasis on the Son's "eternal generation". Alexander accused Arius of denying the divinity of the Son and also of being too "Jewish" and "Greek" in his thought, which started quite a verbal war between the two.

Remember, Christianity had only come out of the shadows legally ca. 312 under Emperor Constantine! Arius was a persuasive orator, and soon the controversy was so widespread that a church council was called to settle the matter. Out of that meeting -- the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea -- in A.D. 325 came the Nicene Creed, which clearly confesses Jesus to be true God. It was expanded in A.D. 381 at the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople to express/defend the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and that version is the one widely used today as a confession of the triune faith. The 381 version is a truly "ecumenical" statement of the Christian faith, accepted by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, and most of the major Protestant denominations.

- Gloria Dei tends to use this creed on communion Sundays

### ***Text (breaks for emphasis/analysis):***

I believe in one God,

The Father Almighty,

- maker of heaven and earth
- and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,

- the only-begotten Son of God,
- 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;
- who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man;
- and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

- He suffered and was buried.
- And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And
- He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit,

- the Lord and giver of life,
- who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
- who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified,
- who spoke by the prophets.
- And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church
- I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
- and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

## **The Filioque Controversy**

In the late 6th century, some Latin-speaking churches added the words "and from the Son" (Filioque) to the description of the procession of the Holy Spirit, in what many Eastern Orthodox Christians have argued is wrong, since the words were not included in the text by either the Councils of Nicaea or of Constantinople.

Such a minor thing, right? Not so minor! "Filioque" eventually became one of the main causes for the East-West schism in 1054, and seemed to always be front and center in the failures of the repeated attempts to unite Roman and Constantinople.

As recently as 1995, the Vatican commented on this yet again, stating that the word Filioque is not heretical when associated with the Latin verb *procedo* and the related word *processio*.

For the record, Lutherans have no issue with its inclusion, regardless of the fact that it was not included in the A.D. 381 rendition of the creed. One might think the matter should be settled by John 15:26, "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."

## The Athanasian Creed

- Despite the clarity of the Nicene Creed, the controversy continued for some time. Toward the end of the fifth century, another creed was written that marveled at the mystery of the Trinity in a way that no creed had ever done. Though attributed to Athanasius, a fourth-century opponent of Arius, this anonymous creed clearly came at a later stage in the debate.

The Athanasian Creed proclaims that its teachings concerning the Holy Trinity and our Lord's incarnation are the catholic faith. In other words, this is what the true church of all times and all places has confessed. More than 15 centuries later, the church continues to confess this truth, confident that the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has given himself for our salvation.

- In some Lutheran (and other) congregations, this Creed is recited on Trinity Sunday.

### **Text:**

Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith.

Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally.

And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.

For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another.

But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit: the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, the Holy Spirit uncreated; the Father infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite; the Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal.

And yet there are not three Eternals, but one Eternal, just as there are not three Uncreated or three Infinities, but one Uncreated and one Infinite.

In the same way, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; and yet there are not three Almightyies, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;

And yet there are not three Gods, but one God.

So the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord.

Just as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so also are we prohibited by the catholic religion to say that there are three Gods or Lords.

The Father is not made nor created nor begotten by anyone.

The Son is neither made nor created, but begotten of the Father alone.

The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.

Thus, there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another; but the whole three persons are coeternal with each other and coequal, so that in all things, as has been stated above, the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is to be worshiped.

Therefore, whoever desires to be saved must think thus about the Trinity.

But it is also necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man.

He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man, born from the substance of His mother in this age: perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to His humanity.

Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: One, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.

For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ, who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds.

And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved.

## **Bible References for the Nicene Creed**

**I believe** (John 14:1; Romans 10: 8-10; 1 John 4: 15) **in one God** (Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 44:6; Ephesians 4: 6), **the Father** (Isaiah 63:16; Matthew 6:9; 2 Peter 1:17) **Almighty** (Genesis 17:1; Exodus 6: 3; Psalm 91:1; Revelation 4:8), **maker of heaven and earth** (Genesis 1:1,8; Job 4:17; Jeremiah 51:15) **and of all things visible and invisible** (Genesis 1:31; Colossians 1: 15-16).

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ** (Ephesians 4:5; Acts 11: 17), **the only-begotten Son of God** (John 1: 18; 3: 16; Matthew 14: 33; 16:16), **begotten of His Father before all worlds** (John 1: 1-2; Hebrew 1:5), **God of God** (John 17: 1-5), **Light of Light** (Psalm 27: 1; John 8: 12; Matthew 17: 2,5), **very God of very God, begotten, not made** (John 1: 18; 3: 16), **being of one substance with the Father** (John 10:30, 14:9); **by whom all things were made** (John 1:1-2; Hebrews 1: 1-2; I Corinthians 8:6; Colossian 1:16 ); **who for us men and for our salvation** (I Timothy 2: 4-5) **came down from heaven** (John 6: 33,35) **and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary** (Luke 1: 35) **and was made man** (John 1: 14); **and was crucified also for us** (Mark 15: 25; I Corinthians 15: 3) **under Pontius Pilate** (Matthew 27:2,26; John 1: 14; 1 Timothy 6:13).

**He suffered** (Mark 8: 31; 1 Peter 2:21; Hebrew 2:10) **and was buried** (Luke 23: 53; I Corinthians 15: 4). **And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures** (Luke 24: 1; 1 Cor. 15: 4; 2 Timothy 2:8) **and ascended into heaven** (Luke 24: 51; Acts 1: 10) **and sits at the right hand of the Father** (Mark 16: 19; Acts 7: 55). **And He will come again with glory** (Matthew 24: 27) **to judge both the living and the dead** (Acts 10: 42; 2 I Timothy 4: 1); **whose kingdom will have no end** (2 Peter 1: 11).

**And I believe in the Holy Spirit** (Matthew 28:19; John 14: 26; Acts 13:2), **the Lord and giver of life** (Acts 5: 3-4; Genesis 1: 2; Romans 7:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6), **who proceeds from the Father and the Son** (John 15: 26), **who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified** (Matthew 3: 16-17), **who spoke by the prophets** (I Samuel 19: 20; Ezekiel 11: 5, 13).

**And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic church** (Matthew 16: 18; I Peter 2: 5, 9; Mark 16: 15; Acts 2: 42; Ephesians 2: 19-22); **I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins** (Ephesians 4: 5), **and I look for the resurrection of the dead** (John 11: 24; I Cor. 15: 12-49) **and the life of the world to come** (Mark 10:29-30). Amen.



## A Deeper Dive on “The Third Day”

**Read: Isaiah 53, Psalm 22**

Jesus had to *teach* the disciples about this; there is no one specific "proof text". One finds “the third day” as a repeated pattern in God's plan for His Messiah through studying the whole counsel of God’s Word, i.e., for the disciples and Paul (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), the entire Old Testament.

“Then Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day’”

The disciples: Matthew 12:40, 16:21ff, 17:22-23, Luke 24:46

Others, too: Matthew 27:63

### The “Yom Shlishi” - יום שלישי

The “Third Day” pattern found in the Old Testament:

- On the third day — "the earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit." (Genesis 1:12)
- On the third day — "Abraham looked up and saw the place [Mount Moriah] from afar." There he intends to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering to God. Yet he assures his companions, "We will worship and return." (Genesis 22:4-5)
- On the third day — Pharaoh releases his chief cupbearer from death-row. (Genesis 40:20-21)
- On the third day — Joseph releases his brothers from prison in Egypt. (Genesis 42:17-18)
- On the third day — The Israelites request Pharaoh's permission to make a three-day journey to offer sacrifice in the desert to God. (Exodus 3:18)
- On the third day — Plague Nine, the Plague of Darkness, in Egypt ends, "though the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings." (Exodus 10:22)
- On the third day — God descends to Mount Sinai in fire with the sound of a shofar. He then reveals The Ten Words, Israel's constitution of new life as a nation after their resurrection from the death of slavery in Egypt. (Exodus 19:16-19)
- On the third day — Israelites are to purify themselves with water after being in contact with the dead. (Numbers 19:12)

- On the third day — After coming to the river and preparing themselves, the Israelites cross the Jordan "to enter and possess the land that the LORD [their] God is giving to [them] as a possession." (Joshua 1:11; 3:2)
- On the third day — Joshua's spies emerge from hiding from the Jerichoites, then return to their commander. (Joshua 2:16, 22)
- On the third day — after asking God for release, King Hezekiah is healed of his fatal disease and offers thanks in the temple. (2 Kings 20:5)
- On the third day — Jonah is expelled from the fish belly. (Jonah 1:17 - 2:10) (Matt 12:40; cf. Matt 16:21; 17:23)
- On the third day — After fasting, Esther puts on royal apparel and enters the palace of the Persian king in order to thwart a death-plot against her people, the Jews. (Esther 4:16; 5:1)

### **Note also in “the third year”**

Years sometimes parallel days (e.g. 40 years in the wilderness= 40 days of temptation):

- In the third year — a famine during David's reign ends. (2 Samuel 21:1).
- In the third year — a famine called for by Elijah the prophet ends. (1 Kings 18:1)

## A Deeper Dive on “The Only-Begotten Son of God”

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his *only begotten* Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16 (KJV)

“...begotten of His Father before all worlds...”

(John 1: 1-2; Hebrew 1:5)

Just as Ephesians 1 reveals to us that we were chosen by God “before the foundations of the world, Revelation 13:8 calls Jesus “...the Lamb slain *from the foundation of the world.*”

How can this be?

And how can Jesus be “begotten” in a way that is somehow not about His... well, physical “begetting”???

Consider a lesson from the Old Testament that is referred to in the New Testament. Hebrews 11:17 says “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten [*monogenes*] son. . . .”

Yet we know that Isaac was *not* Abraham’s only begotten son. Isaac was the *second* son. Ishmael was Abraham’s first-born son. So if we take *monogenes* as a literal procreative kind of “begetting”, then God got His facts wrong!

However, if we understand *monogenes* as a unique, truly one-of-a-kind relationship, then God can accurately describe Isaac as Abraham’s “only” or “only begotten” son, because Isaac was the only son of the covenant.

We can apply this same kind of understanding to Jesus as God’s unique, one-of-a-kind Son, the very manifestation and fulfillment of the covenant that was God’s intention and will *before the foundations of the world*.

So when we see Jesus called the “only begotten” Son, we should remember that this word *is not* about procreation, or even about chronology. “Only-begotten” describes a singularity in objective reality; the unique relationship between the Father and the Son, as correctly expressed in the Nicene Creed!