

# *A Creed to Live By*

## STUDY GUIDE



A line-by-line journey through  
the Nicene Creed

SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
FALL 2025

## **A CREED TO LIVE BY**

### **A 7-week Supper and Study (Fall 2025)**

#### **Week 1: Introduction and Paterology**

We 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 the Father before all ages.

Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made,  
of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made;  
who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.

And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,  
and 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 shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead;  
whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit

the Lord, the Giver of Life,

Who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son  
together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.

I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**Week 1:**  
**Introduction to the Creed;**  
**Paterology and Theology of Creation**

**We believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.**

**Introduction**

1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nicene Creed

Standing and reciting the Creed together

**Historical Background of the Creed**

What is a creed, anyway?

A creed is a declaration of Christian belief (comes from the Latin *credo*, I believe)

Creeds are usually written in a time of doctrinal controversy, to clarify genuine apostolic teaching

The First Ecumenical Council (Council of Nicaea)

- Called by the Christian emperor Constantine in 325 AD to combat the Arian heresy
- Arius was a presbyter of Alexandria who taught that the Son of God was not co-equal with the Father but a creature inferior to God the Father
- Many clergy and faithful opposed this teaching, especially St. Athanasius of Alexandria
- All the bishops of the Church were invited to this council to resolve this issue (cf. the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us”)
- 318 bishops attended, along with numerous other clergy and theologians; after months of work, they produced the Creed
- Apocryphal story from the Council of Nicaea: St. Nicholas of Myra (the inspiration for Santa Claus) allegedly struck Arius on the face when arguments got heated— this probably didn’t happen

## The Second Ecumenical Council (Council of Constantinople)

- Emperor Theodosius I convened this Council in May 381 after continuing controversy over Christology and Pneumatology (theology of the Holy Spirit)
- 150 bishops attended, all of them orthodox
- Added a paragraph about the Holy Spirit (the original Creed simply read “We believe in the Holy Spirit”)
- This paragraph made clear the personhood, divinity, and activity of the Holy Spirit
- This expanded version of the Creed is the one we recite on Sundays

Discussion Question: What does the Creed mean to you?



## The Significance of the Creed

- The Creed as confession of faith
- The Creed as Rule of Faith
- The Creed as symbol of the faith
- The Creed as unifying force in the Church

## What Does the Creed Do?

- Narrates the Christian story
- Interprets Scripture
- Constructs a world and worldview
- Prepares the worshipping congregation at Baptisms and Eucharists

## **The meaning of belief**

“We believe/I believe”

Belief as trust, handing oneself over, abandoning oneself to God

## **“We believe in one God”**

Monotheism, not polytheism or pantheism

A personal God

## **“The Father Almighty”**

Paterology: Theology of God the Father (cf. Christology and Pneumatology)

The Divinity, Personhood, and Attributes of God the Father

The divinity of God the Father was never in question in church history, unlike the divinity of the Son or the Spirit

The Father is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful or almighty), omnipresent (everywhere present), and omnibenevolent (all-good)

Other classical attributes of God the Father:

- Uncreated
- Unbegotten
- Eternal
- Self-existent
- Inconceivable
- Ineffable
- Formless
- Invisible

The Father in relation to other Persons of the Trinity:

- The Father, unbegotten, the Source or Origin of the Godhead
- The Son, begotten of the Father
- The Spirit, proceeding from the Father

## Discussion Question:

When you think of “God the Father,” what comes to mind?

## **“Maker of heaven and earth”**

The Father as Creator of all things

### **Creation**

Visible: Time, space, matter

Invisible: Angels, heaven, spiritual realities

*Creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing)

Humankind as made in the Image and Likeness of God

Sin as marring the Image of God and introducing spiritual sickness into the world

Sin is not mentioned as such in the Creed, but its implied presence sets up the need for a Redeemer, who will be mentioned in the next line

Next week: Christology!

### **Further Reading**

#### Church Fathers

- *On First Principles* by Origen
- *Against Heresies* by St. Irenaeus of Lyons
- *On the Cosmic Mystery of Christ* by St. Maximus the Confessor

#### Modern theologians

- *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* by Luke Timothy Johnson
- *Introduction to Christianity* by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
- *Light from Light: A Theological Reflection on the Nicene Creed* by Robert Barron

#### Anglican poetry

*The Salutation* by Thomas Traherne

*The Salutation* by Thomas Traherne

These little limbs,  
    These eyes and hands which here I find,  
These rosy cheeks wherewith my life begins,  
    Where have ye been? behind  
What curtain were ye from me hid so long?  
Where was, in what abyss, my speaking tongue?

When silent I  
    So many thousand, thousand years  
Beneath the dust did in a chaos lie,  
    How could I smiles or tears,  
Or lips or hands or eyes or ears perceive?  
Welcome ye treasures which I now receive.

I that so long  
    Was nothing from eternity,  
Did little think such joys as ear or tongue  
    To celebrate or see:  
Such sounds to hear, such hands to feel, such feet,  
Beneath the skies on such a ground to meet.

New burnished joys,  
    Which yellow gold and pearls excel!  
Such sacred treasures are the limbs in boys,  
    In which a soul doth dwell;  
Their organized joints and azure veins  
More wealth include than all the world contains.

From dust I rise,  
    And out of nothing now awake;  
These brighter regions which salute mine eyes,  
    A gift from God I take.  
The earth, the seas, the light, the day, the skies,

The sun and stars are mine if those I prize.

Long time before

I in my mother's womb was born,

A God, preparing, did this glorious store,

The world, for me adorn.

Into this Eden so divine and fair,

So wide and bright, I come His son and heir.

A stranger here

Strange things doth meet, strange glories see;

Strange treasures lodged in this fair world appear,

Strange all and new to me;

But that they mine should be, who nothing was,

That strangest is of all, yet brought to pass.



## **Week 2:**

### **Christology**

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all ages.  
Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made,  
of one essence with the Father by whom all things were made...**

#### **Recap of Week 1**

- The Historical Context of the Nicene Creed
- God the Father
- The Creation of the world

#### **Christology: The Doctrine of Christ**

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Fully Divine and Fully Human

The longest part of the Creed is about Jesus Christ

The first part of the Christological paragraph focuses on the pre-existence, divinity, and Sonship of Christ

The second part focuses on his Incarnation and birth from the Virgin Mary, his life, his death, and his Resurrection

Therefore, his divinity is emphasized before his humanity, though this was not how Jesus was experienced by his disciples: they knew him first as a man and only gradually came to understand his identity as the divine Son of God

The lines we'll look at today are easily the most abstract, technical, and difficult in the entire Creed. It's likely that many people reciting these words every Sunday don't know what they mean.

... but they are precise exactly because there was such room for error in theologizing about the identity of Christ

Discussion Question: Why is the deity of Christ important to the Christian faith?

### **Scriptures about the deity of Christ**

- Prologue to John's Gospel (John 1)
- John 8
- Colossians 1
- Hebrews 1
- The Great Commission in Matthew 28
- Thomas' confession in John 20

### **“Know Your Heresy”**

**Adoptionism:** Jesus Christ was a normal human being, born of human parents, who was adopted as God's Son at his Baptism

*Orthodox response:* Christ is the eternal Son of God, begotten of the Father before the foundation of the world, and is himself divine.

In other words, Christ has always been the Son of God, not just from the moment of his conception in the womb of Mary or his Baptism, or some other point in his earthly life

**Arianism:** Christ was created by God the Father before all else and the Father created all other things through Christ, but Christ is still a creature and not co-eternal with the Father; “there was a time when he [Christ] was not”

*Orthodox response:* Christ is the eternal Son of God, begotten (not made) of the Father before the foundation of the world. Christ is divine. Christ is a creature only in his Incarnation, when he assumes our nature.

**Modalism:** The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three different names or faces for the same Divine Being

*Orthodox response:* The Father, Son, and Spirit are three divine Persons, not simply three names for one Person

**Apollinarianism:** Jesus Christ had a human body and soul, but not a human mind

*Orthodox response:* Jesus was fully human, with a human body, soul, mind, and will (cf. St. Gregory of Nazianzus: “What is not assumed is not healed.”)

Discussion Question: Are you familiar with any of these heresies? Are there any others you can think of?

## **We Believe in One Lord**

Echoes language about one God

Lord: *Kyrios* in Greek

## **Jesus Christ**

The personal name of Christ, Jesus

Hebrew name Joshua (Yeshua) [“YHWH saves”]

Jesus is one of three historical figures mentioned by name in the Creed (the others being the Virgin Mary and Pontius Pilate, each of whom represent a response of faithfulness or unfaithfulness to Christ)

Christ: Messiah, the Anointed One, the prophesied Savior of Israel

The anointed member of the people of Israel who will deliver them from their enemies

Not only their worldly oppressors, but their spiritual oppressors as well = sin, evil, death, and Satan

## **The only begotten Son of God**

Christ is the Son of God, and uniquely so

Not the same as being children of God in the general sense or through adoption: Christ is naturally, uniquely the Son of God

Only Christ is begotten of the Father in *that* way

The begottenness of the Son cannot be imagined or visualized; it is a condescension of human language

### **Begotten of the Father before all ages**

The Son is begotten of the Father “before” time began

Christ does not become the Son of God at his Incarnation, but before Creation; at his Incarnation he becomes the Son of Mary

### **Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made**

“God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1)

God is light, and Christ is light

This line reiterates that Christ is truly divine and not created

### **Of one essence with the Father**

This is the Greek term *homooúsios*

*Homo* (same) *ousia* (being, essence, substance)

Meaning that Christ is the same sort of divine that the Father is, not that Christ is “kind of” divine or quasi-divine

Contrasted with *homoi-ousios* (note the extra i), which holds that Christ is of a similar substance as the Father

Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1), “the exact imprint of His Being” (Hebrews 1)

### **By whom all things were made...**

This line affirms that all things were created through the Son of God (cf. Prologue to John’s Gospel, Colossians 1, et al)

Discussion Question: What does this part of the Creed mean to you? What other questions do you have about it?

*Next Week:* The Incarnation of Our Lord and Mariology (doctrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Lord).

## Further Reading

### Church Fathers

- *First Apology* of St. Justin Martyr
- *On the Apostolic Preaching* by St. Irenaeus of Lyons
- *Five Theological Orations* by St. Gregory the Theologian
- *Commentary on John* by St. Cyril of Alexandria

### Anglican poetry:

“Holy Sonnets: Batter my heart, three-person'd God” by John Donne

## **Holy Sonnets: Batter my heart, three-person'd God**

By John Donne

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,  
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;  
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

## **Week 3:**

### **The Incarnation and Mariology**

**Who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.**

#### **Recap of Weeks 1 and 2**

- The Historical Context of the Nicene Creed
- God the Father
- The Creation of the world
- The Pre-Existence, Divinity, and Sonship of Christ

#### **The Incarnation**

“The enfleshment”

The dogma that the eternal Word of God became a human being, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The eternal God enters time, space, and matter and becomes one of us

The incarnate Christ is One Person in Two Natures, divine and human

Discussion Question: What does the Incarnation mean to you?

#### **Scriptures about the Incarnation**

- John 1:1-18 (especially 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”)
- Philippians 2:5-8 (“humbled himself... being found in human likeness”)
- Galatians 4:4-5 (“born of a woman, born under the law...”)
- Colossians 2:9 (“in him the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily”)

## **“Know Your Heresy” Part II**

**Nestorianism:** The Word of God and Jesus Christ are two separate Persons

Two Persons, Two Natures

*Orthodox response:* The Word of God and Jesus Christ are the same person, before and after the Incarnation

One Person, Two Natures

“The One Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God”

**Monophysitism:** Christ had only one nature, a mixture of divine and human

One Person, One Nature (quasi-divine and human)

*Orthodox response:* Christ has two natures, divine and human, each whole in its integrity. Christ is not halfway human and halfway divine, but fully human and fully divine.

**Docetism:** Christ has only one nature, divine. He only appears to be human.

One Person, One Nature (divine)

This is like the opposite of Arianism. Arians taught that Christ is not truly divine. Docetists taught that Christ is so divine that he’s not human at all.

*Orthodox response:* Christ is fully human. His humanity is not an illusion but real. Cf. Jesus’ physical presence, his bodily resurrection, the fact that he ate and drank, the fact that he hungered and tired, etc.



## **The Third and Fourth Ecumenical Councils**

### **Council of Ephesus, 431 AD**

- Condemned Nestorianism, which taught that the Word of God and Jesus Christ were two different Persons
- Affirmed that the pre-incarnate Word of God and the man Jesus Christ are the same person, before and after the Incarnation
- Affirmed the propriety of referring to Mary as the Theotokos (Mother of God), not simply as Christotokos (Mother of Christ)

### **Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD**

- Clarified the hypostatic union, which is the union of the divine and human natures of Christ
- Christ is One Person in Two Natures, divine and human (with a human body and soul)
- Christ shares with the Father his divinity and shares with us his humanity through his mother Mary
- The two natures are distinct, whole, and unmixed

For an overview of all seven ecumenical councils, see *Appendix A*.

### **Who for us men and for our salvation**

For us men [human beings] and for our salvation

The Incarnation is introduced as being for us and for our salvation

*Cur Deus Homo*: Why God Became Man

Discussion Question: Why do you think God became human?

Excursus: Would the Word of God had become incarnate if we hadn't sinned? See *Appendix B*.

## **Came down from heaven**

The Incarnation takes place in time and space

The Son of God “came down from heaven” [i.e., left the timeless, spaceless, immaterial realm where God dwells in light] and came down to earth to be conceived in a particular time and place, with a particular body

## **And was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary**

The Incarnation is accomplished through the Holy Spirit

Christ has no human father, only a human mother = the virginal conception

All other humans are conceived because of the coming together of a man and a woman, except for Christ

The totally unique manner of his conception points to his special identity as the Son of God

Christ is not the son of Joseph, except in the legal or informal sense

Yet the Incarnation also takes place through the Virgin Mary

Her “yes” to God allows the Incarnation to happen in her

The greatest example of *synergy* (the cooperation of a human will with the will of God)

Christ receives his human nature from Mary

She is human, and he receives his humanity from her; his divinity he has as part of his identity as the Son of God

## **And became man.**

Became human— fully human

Christ has a human body, mind, soul, and will (i.e., everything human beings have, except sin); Christ is in full solidarity with us

Christ heals human nature from the inside out, so he must possess everything we possess

“What is not assumed is not healed” – St. Gregory of Nazianzus

## Mariology

The doctrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God incarnate

Essential teachings about Mary:

- She is human, and only human (no Mariolatry)
  - We worship Christ and honor Mary.
- She conceived Jesus in her womb without a human father, by the Holy Spirit (the virginal conception)
- She was a virgin before and after giving birth to Christ (the perpetual virginity of Mary, affirmed by the Fifth Ecumenical Council, the Fathers of the Church, and several of the Reformers)
- She is the Mother of Christ (Christotokos) but also the Mother of God incarnate or God-Bearer (Theotokos)
- Her death is not recorded in Scripture, but is traditionally commemorated on August 15

*Next Week:* The Paschal Mystery (the Passion, Death, Burial, Harrowing of Hell, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ)

## **Further Reading**

### Church Fathers

- *On the Incarnation* by St. Athanasius
- *The Tome* of St. Leo the Great
- *On the Unity of Christ* by St. Cyril of Alexandria
- *The Gospel Commentaries* of St. John Chrysostom
- *Life of the Virgin* by St. Maximus the Confessor

### Anglican poetry

“Journey of the Magi” by T.S. Eliot

“The Virgin” by William Wordsworth

**The Virgin**  
BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Mother! whose virgin bosom was uncrost  
With the least shade of thought to sin allied.  
Woman! above all women glorified,  
Our tainted nature's solitary boast;  
Purer than foam on central ocean tost;  
Brighter than eastern skies at daybreak strewn  
With fancied roses, than the unblemished moon  
Before her wane begins on heaven's blue coast;  
Thy image falls to earth. Yet some, I ween,  
Not unforgiven the suppliant knee might bend,  
As to a visible Power, in which did blend  
All that was mixed and reconciled in thee  
Of mother's love with maiden purity,  
Of high with low, celestial with terrene!

## **Week 4:**

### **The Paschal Mystery, Part I**

#### **The Passion, Death, and Burial of Christ**

**And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,  
And suffered and was buried.**

#### **Recap of Weeks 1-3**

- The Historical Context of the Nicene Creed
- God the Father
- The Creation of the world
- The Pre-Existence, Divinity, and Sonship of Christ
- The Incarnation of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary

#### **The Paschal Mystery**

The Passion, Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The central mystery of the Christian faith

The fulfillment of all the types of resurrection, deliverance, and salvation in the Old Testament, especially the liberation of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt

Jesus is the Paschal Lamb who is sacrificed for us, takes away our sins, and leads us from the bondage of sin to the freedom of eternal life through the waters of Baptism (cf. the Red Sea)

The Paschal Mystery is the focus of Holy Week and is most movingly expressed in the Great Vigil of Easter

It is also commemorated every Lord's Day at the Holy Eucharist

## **The Sixth Ecumenical Council**

Third Council of Constantinople, 680-681 AD

- Rejected Monothelitism, which teaches that Christ has only one will
- Affirms that Christ had two wills, human and divine, and that the human will was in perfect submission to the divine will
- Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is seen as an exemplar of Christ's human will submitting to the divine will ('not my will but thine be done')
- The unity of Christ's human and divine wills is key to understanding his voluntary undertaking of the Passion

### **And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate**

The Creed passes at once from the Incarnation and birth of Christ to his crucifixion

There is therefore no material in the Creed about the miracles, teachings, or overall ministry of Christ prior to the Passion

Crucifixion: The most terrible, shameful way to die in the Roman Empire

Reserved for slaves, revolutionaries, and other malefactors

"For us": Echoes language about the Incarnation being for us and for our salvation

"Under Pontius Pilate": Situates the Crucifixion of Christ within real history, not as a mythic event or metaphor

### **Scriptures on the Death of Christ**

- Psalm 22 ("they pierce my hands and feet")
- Isaiah 53 ("but he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...")
- The Passion narratives in the Four Gospels
- 1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit..."

- 1 John 3:16: “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”
- John 10:17-18: Jesus said, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”
- 1 Peter 2:24: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”
- 1 Thessalonians 4:14: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”
- Romans 5:8: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Matthew 16:21: “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”
- Romans 6:3-4: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

## The Mystery of the Crucifixion



- God demonstrating his love for fallen humanity
- God's solidarity with suffering humanity
- The ultimate act of nonviolent enemy-love
- Christ offering himself to take away the sins of the world
- An act of sacrifice and worship
- The source of healing for those sick with sin (cf. the Bronze Serpent)
- The prototypical and exemplary instance of martyrdom
- The fulfillment of the Suffering Servant prophecies of Isaiah
- An act of substitution... but also participation

Discussion Question: What does the Passion of Christ mean to you?



## **And suffered [death] and was buried**

The Creed says that Christ suffered, died, and was buried

**The suffering of Christ** was physical, mental/emotional, and spiritual

The suffering of Christ is central to many spiritual traditions within Christianity (e.g., the Passionists, Dame Julian of Norwich, the confessors and martyrs, et al)

But the suffering of Christ can also be fetishized in a way that is unhealthy

A test case: *The Passion of the Christ* (2004): Deeply spiritual work of art or a snuff film with gratuitous amounts of torture?

**The death of Christ** is the death of the incarnate Word

The wordless cry of Jesus prior to his expiration as the summation and expression of all human suffering to God

After Jesus' death, the veil of the Temple is torn in two, symbolizing that the barrier between God and man is being torn down with the death of Christ

The death of Christ is God participating in human death, which He cannot do unless he becomes human, because God cannot die

**The burial of Christ** is an essential part of the Paschal Mystery

It is included in one of the earliest descriptions of the Gospel:

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and following: "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel... 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..."

The burial of Christ is proof that he really was dead

Jesus' body resting in the tomb is a sign of the Sabbath Rest promised to God's people

Also a reminder that the Silence of God is part of his dealings with us, just as his Speech is

**The Harrowing of Hell:** the teaching that while Christ's body rested in the tomb, his spirit went to the underworld, the realm of the departed, to preach the Gospel to the departed spirits

This teaching is explicitly referenced in the Apostles' Creed ("he descended into hell" or "he descended to the dead" or "the underworld") but is omitted in the Nicene Creed

This teaching was widely believed in the fourth century when the Creed was promulgated

Grounded in Old Testament teaching about Sheol: a shadowy underworld where all people go when they die

Not a place of punishment, but a place of low consciousness, a place where things are forgotten

Sheol translated into Greek as Hades (not the same as later depictions of "Hell")

1 Peter 3:1-20: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, **being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey**, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water."

1 Peter 4:6: "For this is the reason **the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead**, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does."

The Harrowing of Hell gives hope that even disobedient persons who lived prior to Christ (and perhaps after?) have a chance to repent and be saved

*Next Week:*

The Paschal Mystery, Part II:

The Resurrection, Ascension, and Return of Christ

## Further Reading

### Church Fathers:

- *On Pascha* by St. Melito of Sardis
- *The Paschal Homily* of St. John Chrysostom
- *Life of Moses* by St. Gregory of Nyssa
- *On the Two Wills of Christ* by St. Maximus the Confessor

### Modern theology:

- *The Death of the Messiah* by Raymond Brown
- *The Crucified God* by Jurgen Moltmann
- *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott
- *The Crucifixion* by Fleming Rutledge
- *Mysterium Paschale (The Mystery of Easter)* by Hans Urs von Balthasar

### Anglican poetry:

“The Sacrifice” by George Herbert

## **“The Sacrifice” by George Herbert**

*Oh all ye, who pass by, whose eyes and mind  
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blind;  
To me, who took eyes that I might you find:  
Was ever grief like mine?*

*Judas, dost thou betray me with a kiss?  
Canst thou find hell about my lips? and miss  
Of life, just at the gates of life and bliss?  
Was ever grief like mine?*

*The Jews accuse me with despitefulness;  
And vying malice with my gentleness,  
Pick quarrels with their only happiness:  
Was ever grief like mine?*

*Pilate, a stranger, holdeth off; but they,  
Mine own dear people, cry, *Away, away,*  
With noises confused frightening the day:  
Was ever grief like mine?*

*And now I am deliver'd unto death,  
Which each one calls for so with utmost breath,  
That he before me well nigh suffereth:  
Was ever grief like mine?*

*O all ye who passe by, behold and see;  
Man stole the fruit, but I must climb the tree;  
The tree of life to all, but only me:  
Was ever grief like mine?*

Lo, here I hang, charg'd with a world of sin,  
The greater world o' th' two; for that came in  
By words, but this by sorrow I must win:  
Was ever grief like mine?

But, *O my God, my God!* why leav'st thou me,  
The Son, in whom thou dost delight to be?  
*My God, my God* -----  
Never was grief like mine.

Betwixt two thieves I spend my utmost breath,  
As he that for some robbery suffereth.  
Alas! what have I stollen from you? Death.  
Was ever grief like mine?

But now I die; now all is finished.  
My woe, man's weal: and now I bow my head.  
Only let others say, when I am dead,  
Never was grief like mine.

## **Week 5:**

### **The Paschal Mystery, Part II**

#### **The Resurrection, Ascension, and Return of Christ**

**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 shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.**

O GOD, who for our redemption didst give thine only begotten Son to the death of the Cross, and by his glorious resurrection hast delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily from sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- Collect for Easter Sunday

#### **Recap of Weeks 1-4**

- The Historical Context of the Nicene Creed
- God the Father
- The Creation of the world
- The Pre-Existence, Divinity, and Sonship of Christ
- The Incarnation of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
- The Passion, Death, and Burial of Christ

#### **The Paschal Mystery**

The Passion, Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ: the central mystery of the Christian faith

The fulfillment of all the types of resurrection, deliverance, and salvation in the Old Testament, especially the liberation of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt

The Paschal Mystery is the focus of Holy Week and is most movingly expressed in the Great Vigil of Easter

## **“And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures”**

### The importance of the third day in Scripture

- On the third day of creation, God separated the waters from the land, which He calls “earth”, and then causes it to bring forth vegetation (**Genesis 3**)
  - A symbol of God bringing forth life from barrenness
- On the third day of his journey to Mount Moriah, Abraham almost sacrifices his son Isaac but is prevented by an angel (**Genesis 22**)
- The patriarch Joseph prophesies that the cupbearer of Pharaoh will be restored to his position on the third day (**Genesis 40**)
- The LORD reveals Himself to Moses and the people on Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19:10-11**): The LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.
- **Hosea 6:1–2**: “Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. **After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.**”

### **Scriptures about the Resurrection of Christ**

**Romans 6:8-11**: But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**Philippians 3:10**: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

**Romans 8:11:** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

**Romans 6:4:** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

**Romans 14:9:** For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

**Romans 8:34:** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-8:** 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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ...

**1 Corinthians 15:21-22:** For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Discussion Question: What stands out to you about these Scriptures? What common threads do you see?



## **The Resurrection of Christ**

The dogma that the Lord Jesus, after dying, bodily rose from the dead, with a transformed, immortal body filled with the Holy Spirit

*Article IV of the Articles of Religion (Church of England)*

*Of the Resurrection of Christ*

“Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all Men at the last day.”

The moment of Jesus’ resurrection is not described in the Bible and is generally not depicted in early Christian art; it is a mystery, hidden, like the moment of his conception

Rather, the Gospels portray the Resurrection through the empty tomb, which is discovered by the myrrh-bearing women who receive an angelic message about Jesus’ resurrection

### Post-Resurrection Appearances in the Scriptures

1. To Mary Magdalene [John 20]
2. To the other women [Matthew 28]
3. To Peter [1 Corinthians 15]
4. To two disciples on the Road to Emmaus [Luke 24]
5. To the Twelve (minus Thomas) [John 20]
6. To the Twelve (with Thomas) [John 20]
7. To seven disciples at the Sea of Tiberias [John 21]
8. To the apostles on a mountain in Galilee [Matthew 28]
9. To 500 believers at once [1 Corinthians 15]
10. To James, the stepbrother of the Lord [1 Corinthians 15]
11. To the apostles, before his Ascension [Acts 1]
12. To Paul [Acts 9]

## The Resurrection of Christ



- The central celebration of the Christian faith
- The model for the future resurrection of the dead
- The enduring sign of God's victory over evil, death, and the devil
- The decisive first step in the renewal of the cosmos
- The ushering in of the last stage of human history
- The basis of human deification
- The call to missionary activity (cf. the Great Commission)
- The basis of the Paschal sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist
- The foundation of all sanctification, including the sanctification of the human body (cf. incorruptibility of relics)

Discussion Question: What does the Resurrection of Christ mean to you?

## “And ascended into heaven”

### *The Ascension of Christ*

- Recounted at the end of St. Luke’s Gospel and the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles
- 40 days after his Resurrection, Christ bodily ascends into heaven to be exalted as Lord of heaven and earth
- The Ascension is to be understood not as Jesus entering a physical space above our earth but as ascending to the realm where God “dwells in light inaccessible” (1 Timothy 6:16)

The Ascension is the completion of the Incarnation

With the birth of Christ, the divine nature is brought into the presence of humanity. With the ascension of Christ, human nature is brought into the presence of God.

Whereas the Incarnation is God meeting humanity in our place, the Ascension is humanity meeting God in His place.

The risen Christ has ascended into the heavenly places to appear in the presence of God for us. Jesus took our human nature into heaven, so **that our nature is always in the presence of God.**

The Ascension as the completion of Christ’s mission of descent and ascent: “I came from the Father into the world. Now I am leaving the world and returning to the Father” (John 16).

The Ascension shows the ultimate destiny of human beings: To be filled with the Holy Spirit and live bodily in the Presence of God

At every Liturgy, we are called to “lift up our hearts” and to dwell on heavenly things: “Do not set your minds on earthly things, but on heavenly things, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father” (Colossians 3)

## **“And sits at the right hand of the Father”**

### *The Session of Christ*

- In the ancient world and in the language of the Old Testament, to be seated at the right hand of the King is to have his special favor
- Christ being seated at the right hand of God the Father means that he reigns in glory with the Father

Because Christ is ascended and in the presence of the Father, he “ever lives to make intercession for us” (Hebrews 7:25).

Christ as our Mediator (an especially strong emphasis in the Western liturgy) is made possible through his Ascension

Romans 8:34: “It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

1 John 2:1-2: “And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.”

The ascended Christ is our Mediator and Advocate, always interceding for us to God the Father

**“And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.”**

### *The Second Coming of Christ*

The Second Coming is when Christ will return in glory to judge the world in righteousness

The signs of the end are described by Jesus in eschatological discourses near the end of the Gospels (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21)

For the early Christians, the return of Christ was an event full of hope and joy: “Maranatha!” (“Come, our Lord!”)

## *Judgment Day*

**2 Corinthians 5:10:** “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.”

Jesus as the judge is meant to be comforting.

“It is not a stranger who judges us but he whom we know in faith.” – Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

The Judgment of God will be perfect justice and perfect mercy

To look forward to Judgment Day is to remember both the finished work of Christ but also the abiding seriousness of our moral responsibility.

How we live matters! What we think and say and do matters, for there will be a Judgment.

***Next Week:*** Pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit) and Triadology (doctrine of the Holy Trinity)

## **Further Reading**

### *Church Fathers*

- *On Pascha* by St. Melito of Sardis
- *The Paschal Homily* of St. John Chrysostom
- *Life of Moses* by St. Gregory of Nyssa

### *Modern theology*

- *Mysterium Paschale (The Mystery of Easter)* by Hans Urs von Balthasar
- *The Resurrection of the Son of God* by N.T. Wright
- *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week* by Pope Benedict XVI
- *On the Resurrection* by Gary Habermas
- *Can These Bones Live?* by Robert Jenson

### *Anglican poetry*

“Easter Wings” by George Herbert

## **“Easter Wings” by George Herbert**

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
Though foolishly he lost the same,  
Decaying more and more,  
Till he became  
Most poore:  
With thee  
O let me rise  
As larks, harmoniously,  
And sing this day thy victories:  
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne  
And still with sicknesses and shame.  
Thou didst so punish sinne,  
That I became  
Most thinne.  
With thee  
Let me combine,  
And feel thy victorie:  
For, if I imp my wing on thine,  
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

## **Week 6: Pneumatology and Triadology**

**And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life,  
Who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son  
together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.**

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful and kindle in them the fire of thy love.

*--Traditional Catholic prayer*

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth,  
Who art everywhere present and fillest all things;  
Treasury of Blessings, and Giver of Life –  
Come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity,  
and save our souls, O Good One.

*--Orthodox prayer to the Holy Spirit*

O heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray thee so to guide and govern us by thy Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget thee, but may remember that we are ever walking in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*--A Collect for Guidance from Morning Prayer in the BCP*

### **Recap of Weeks 1-5**

- The Historical Context of the Nicene Creed
- God the Father
- The Creation of the world
- The Pre-Existence, Divinity, and Sonship of Christ
- The Incarnation of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
- The Paschal Mystery (The Passion, Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ)

## **Pneumatology: The Theology of the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit: the most mysterious Person of the Holy Trinity

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

- Co-creator of creation, with the Father and the Son (see Genesis 1:2)
- Anoints kings and holy men and women
- Speaks through the holy prophets

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

- Overshadows the Blessed Virgin Mary, who conceives Christ in her womb
- Descends on Christ at his Baptism
- Christ casts out demons through the Holy Spirit
- Christ gives the Spirit to his disciples after his Resurrection
- The Spirit leads the Church and the apostles in Acts
- The Spirit enables us to confess Christ as Lord and to share in God's very own life
- The Spirit empowers us in our various ministries

Attributes of the Holy Spirit: Uncreated, Eternal, Invisible, Formless, Omnipresent, All-Knowing, All-Powerful

The Spirit in relation to other Persons of the Trinity:

- The Father, unbegotten, the Source or Origin of the Godhead
- The Son, begotten of the Father
- The Spirit, proceeding from the Father

Discussion Question: Who is the Holy Spirit to you? What is the role of the Spirit in your life?



After the divinity of Christ was established, the next major doctrinal question in the Church became “Is the Holy Spirit divine”?

### **The Divinity of the Holy Spirit in Scripture**

Matthew 28:19: 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...**

Acts 5:3-4:

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart **to lie to the Holy Spirit** and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ... How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**”

1 Corinthians 2:10-11:

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. **For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.** For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? **So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**

Heb. 9:14:

“... how much more shall the blood of Christ, who **through the eternal Spirit** offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

### *The Progressive Revelation of the Trinity in salvation history*

“The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New Testament manifested the Son and suggested the deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit himself dwells among us and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself.

For it was not safe, when the Godhead of the Father was not yet acknowledged, plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when that of the Son was not yet received to burden us further, if we may put it this way, with the Holy Spirit... it was necessary that, increasing little by little, and as David says, by ascensions from glory to glory, the full splendor of the Trinity should gradually shine.”

*--St. Gregory Nazianzen*

## **The Second Ecumenical Council**

First Council of Constantinople, 381 AD

Expanded the Nicene Creed to clarify the identity and role of the Holy Spirit

Affirmed that the Holy Spirit is divine; solidified dogma of the Holy Trinity

### **“And in the Holy Spirit”**

The long paragraph about the person and work of God the Son is followed by this line about the Holy Spirit

Originally, there was only this line in the Nicene Creed of 325; everything that follows about the Spirit was added in the revision of 381 at the Second Ecumenical Council

The vagueness of the statement (We believe in the Holy Spirit): well, what is the Holy Spirit? A creature? An impersonal force? A god?

This vagueness led to the need for further clarification

### **“The Lord, the Giver of Life”**

This language opposes the belief that the Spirit is a creature or an impersonal force, neither of which would be described in this way

The Giver of physical life and spiritual life

It is the Spirit who regenerates, renews, and gives eternal life to believers

### **“Who proceeds from the Father”**

Procession of the Holy Spirit

“Jesus said to his disciples, ‘But when the Comforter 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’ (John 15:26).

The Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father

What does it mean to proceed? A mystery

It’s something other than being begotten

The original Creed of 325 and 381 says that the Spirit proceeds from the Father; the phrase “and the Son” was added later

See *Appendix* on the Filioque.

## **“Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified”**

Explicitly states the divinity of the Spirit

The Spirit is worshipped and glorified with the same honor as the Father and the Son

## **“Who spoke by the prophets.”**

This phrase grounds the work of the Spirit in the Old Covenant and the history of the People of God

So at this point in the Creed, there has been teaching about the Father (one line), the Son (two long paragraphs) and the Spirit (one line, later expanded to one paragraph).

So that brings us to the dogma of the Holy Trinity.

## **The Mystery of the Holy Trinity**

The One God exists in Three Co-Equal, Co-Eternal Divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

## **“Know Your Heresy” Part III**

**Macedonianism:** The Holy Spirit is a creature, is not divine

This doctrine was advanced by the Pneumatomachians ("Spirit fighters")

*Orthodox response:* The Holy Spirit is uncreated and divine, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity

**Modalism:** The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three different names or faces for the same Divine Being

*Orthodox response:* The Father, Son, and Spirit are three divine Persons, not simply three names for one Person

**Tritheism:** The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate gods

*Orthodox response:* The Father, Son, and Spirit are three divine Persons, but one God; polytheism is incompatible with the monotheistic revelation of the Old Testament

## Insufficient or Misleading Images for the Trinity

- Water, Steam, and Ice
  - The three Persons are not phases or stages
- Egg white, eggshell, and egg yolk
  - The Trinity is not just the sum of its parts
- The Sun, light, and heat
  - Light and heat are just aspects of the sun, and the Son and Spirit are not just aspects of the Father
- A three-leafed clover
  - The Trinity is not just the sum of its parts

## **An image or symbol of the Trinity that may actually work?**

Three Burning Suns that converge to occupy the same space, burning as One Sun

This example comes from St. Gregory of Nazianzus

Christian prayer *usually* proceeds to the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Yet one can pray to the Godhead in different ways.

- Prayer to the Holy Trinity
- Prayer to God the Father
- Prayer to God the Son
- Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Discussion Question: How is devotion to God the Holy Trinity expressed in your prayer life?

*Next Week:* Ecclesiology (theology of the Church), sacramental theology, and the Last Things

## Further Reading

### Church Fathers

- *On the Holy Spirit* by St. Basil the Great
- *Letters to Serapion* by St. Athanasius the Great
- *On the Holy Spirit* St. Didymus the Blind
- *Five Theological Orations* by St. Gregory of Nazianzus
- *On the Trinity* by St. Augustine of Hippo
- *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* by St John of Damascus

### Modern Theology

- *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Faith* by T.F. Torrance
- *The Trinity and the Kingdom* by Jurgen Moltmann
- *The Comforter* by Sergius Bulgakov

### Anglican poetry:

“Immanence” by Evelyn Underhill

*Immanence*

by Evelyn Underhill

I come in the little things,  
Saith the Lord:  
Not borne on morning wings  
Of majesty, but I have set my feet  
Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat  
That springs triumphant in the furrowed sod.  
There do I dwell in weakness and in power;  
Not broken or divided, saith our God!  
Is your strait garden plot I come to flower:  
About your porch my vine  
Meek, fruitful, doth entwine;  
Waits, at the threshold, Love's appointed hour.

I come in the little things,  
Saith the Lord:  
Yes! on the glancing wings  
Of eager birds, the softly pattering feet  
Of furred and gentle beasts, I come to meet  
Your hard and wayward heart. In brown bright eyes  
That peep from out the brake, I stand confessed.  
On every nest  
Where feathery patience is content to brood  
And leaves her pleasure for the high emprise  
Of motherhood—  
There doth my Godhead rest.

I come in the little things,  
Saith the Lord:  
My starry wings  
I do forsake,  
Love's highway of humility to take:  
Meekly I fit my stature to your need.  
In beggar's part  
About your gates I shall not cease to plead—  
As man, to speak with man—  
Till by such art  
I shall achieve my immemorial plan,  
Pass the low lintel of the human heart.

## **Week 7:**

### **Ecclesiology, Sacramental Theology, and Last Things**

**In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.**

**I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.**

**I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.  
Amen.**

#### **Recap of Weeks 1-6**

- The Historical Context of the Nicene Creed
- God the Father
- The Creation of the world
- The Pre-Existence, Divinity, and Sonship of Christ
- The Incarnation of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
- The Paschal Mystery (The Passion, Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ)
- The Holy Spirit
- The Holy Trinity

#### **Ecclesiology: Theology of the Church**

**“In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.”**

In the Creed, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit leads into the doctrine of the Church, which is where the Spirit dwells and decisively acts in the world.

*Ekklesia*: assembly, church, ingathering

#### *Scriptures on the Church*

**Ephesians 2:19-22:** “So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”



**1 Corinthians 12:12-14:** “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.”

**1 Corinthians 3:9:** “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

**1 Peter 2:9-10:** “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

**1 Timothy 3:15:** “If I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.”

**Revelation 21:1-2:** And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

**Ephesians 5:23ff:** “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church.”

## Images of the Church in Scripture and Tradition

- The Body of Christ
- The temple of the Holy Spirit
- The building of God
- The field of God
- The Bride of Christ
- The pillar and ground of truth
- The new Israel
- A holy nation
- A royal priesthood
- A hospital for sinners
- An army in the fight against Satan
- A school of prayer

From *An Office of Instruction* in the 1928 BCP:

### **WHEN were you made a member of the Church?**

*Answer.* I was made a member of the Church when I was baptized.

### **Question. What is the Church?**

*Answer.* The Church is the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head, and all baptized people are the members.

### **Question. How is the Church described in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds?**

*Answer.* The Church is described in the Creeds as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

### **Question. What do we mean by these words?**

*Answer.* We mean that the Church is **One**, because it is one Body under one Head; **Holy**, because the Holy Spirit dwells in it, and sanctifies its members; **Catholic**, because it is universal, holding earnestly the Faith for all time, in all countries, and for all people; and is sent to preach the Gospel to the whole world; **Apostolic**, because it continues steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship.

### **Question. What is your bounden duty as a member of the Church?**

*Answer.* My bounden duty is to follow Christ, to worship God every Sunday in his Church; and to work and pray and give for the spread of his kingdom.

### *Oneness of the Church*

One Head, One Body

The Church is mystically one (“the blessed company of all faithful people”)

### *Holiness of the Church*

Holy: set apart, sanctified, consecrated (by the Holy Spirit)

### *Catholicity of the Church*

Catholic: kata-holos = according to the whole

The whole faith for the whole people of God (universal)

### *Apostolicity of the Church*

The Church possesses the apostolic spirit to go forth into the world and preach the Gospel

## **“I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.”**

Baptism as the entry into the Church

“One baptism”

- Baptism can only occur once, since a person can be united with Christ in his death and resurrection in this way only once
- If someone is baptized with water in the Name of the Holy Trinity (the essential elements of the sacrament), they are baptized
- No rebaptisms

“For the remission of sins”

This phrase makes it clear that Baptism actually accomplishes something, namely the forgiveness of sins; it is not merely a symbol

Baptism is the only sacrament mentioned in the Creed, but its inclusion points to a broader understanding of the Nicene Church about the importance of material things in the celebration of the Christian mystery

## **Sacramental theology**

How God uses ordinary matter (water, oil, bread, wine, et al) to convey His grace in the Church

A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as a sure means whereby we receive that grace

The Dominical Sacraments: Baptism and the Holy Communion (dominical since they were instituted directly by the Lord (*Dominus*) Jesus)

The other Sacraments: Confession and Absolution, Confirmation, Matrimony, Ordination, Unction

But in a broader sense, everything in the life of the church can be sacramental if it directs us to, and expresses in some way, the Mystery of God

This leads to the broader question: How can created things (including art) figure into the worship of the Church?

## **The Seventh Ecumenical Council**

Second Council of Nicaea, 787 AD

- Affirms that icons, images, stained glass, etc. can be made of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the angels, and the saints
- Images are not worshipped but venerated (honored) because they represent the persons they depict
- This was the final stage in the affirmation of the full humanity of Christ: Jesus has a human body, soul, mind, and will, *and* can be depicted in art, like any human can be

Discussion Question: Why is it important to have images and other forms of art in church?

**“I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”**

The last line of the Creed looks forward to the end of time, when the dead will be raised and the new world will be ushered in (cf. Revelation 21, “then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...”)

The Creed began with the very beginning-- the existence of God and the creation of the world-- and now it ends with the very end: the life of the world to come

The story of the Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery, and the Church is narrated in the middle

So the Creed is narrative, in an elliptical and poetic way

Last Things:

- Death
- Resurrection of the Dead
- Judgment
- The Life of the World to Come

**“I look for the resurrection of the dead”**

The traditional teaching on bodily resurrection is that when a person dies, their spirit departs from their body and exists in some way (the intermediate state: a lot of mystery there)

The body decomposes and ceases to exist as an integral entity (via decomposition, cremation, destruction, etc.)

On the Last Day, every person who has ever lived will have their bodies raised and reconstituted and their spirits will return to their body to face Judgment

**“And the life of the world to come.”**

The life of the world to come (Hebrew *Olam Haba*) is affirmed, but not explained further

No particular doctrine of heaven or hell is explicated by the Creed

**“Amen.”**

The final word of the Creed is an affirmation. It means, “yes” “indeed” “this is so”

A final affirmation of the beginning words of the Creed, “I believe...”

2 Corinthians 1:18-20: “As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been *Yes* and *No*. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not *Yes* and *No*; but in him it is always *Yes*. For all the promises of God find their *Yes* in him. **That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God.**”

The Creed is the profession of our Christian faith, the essential truths upon which we base our Christian lives. It is truly a creed to live by.

A final word from St. Augustine:

“May your Creed be for you as a mirror. Look at yourself in it, to see if you believe everything you say you believe. And rejoice in your faith each day.”

Standing and reading the Creed together once more

## Further Reading

### Church Fathers:

- *On the Church: Treatises and Letters* by St. Cyprian of Carthage
- *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments* by St. Cyril of Jerusalem
- *Three Treatises on Divine Images* by St. John of Damascus
- *On the Holy Icons* by St. Theodore the Studite
- *The City of God* by St. Augustine of Hippo
- *On the Soul and Resurrection* by St. Gregory of Nyssa
- *The Fount of Knowledge* by St. John of Damascus

### Modern Theology

- *The Nicene Faith* by John Behr
- *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* by Michael Ramsey
- *The Dwelling of the Light: Praying with Icons of Christ* by Rowan Williams
- *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis
- *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology and Theology of Hope* by Jurgen Moltmann
- *The Bride of the Lamb* by Sergius Bulgakov

### Anglican poetry:

*Rublev and Advent Calendar* by Rowan Williams

*Rublev* by Rowan Williams

One day, God walked in, pale from the grey steppe,  
slit-eyed against the wind, and stopped,  
said, Colour me, breathe your blood into my mouth.

I said, Here is the blood of all our people,  
these are their bruises, blue and purple,  
gold, brown, and pale green wash of death.

These (God) are the chromatic pains of flesh,  
I said, I trust I shall make you blush,  
O I shall stain you with the scars of birth

For ever, I shall root you in the wood,  
under the sun shall bake you bread  
of beechmast, never let you forth

To the white desert, to the starving sand.  
But we shall sit and speak around  
one table, share one food, one earth.



*Advent Calendar* by Rowan Williams

He will come like last leaf's fall.

One night when the November wind  
has flayed the trees to the bone, and earth  
wakes choking on the mould,  
the soft shroud's folding.

He will come like frost.

One morning when the shrinking earth  
opens on mist, to find itself  
arrested in the net  
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark.

One evening when the bursting red  
December sun draws up the sheet  
and penny-masks its eye to yield  
the star-snowed fields of sky.

He will come, will come,  
will come like crying in the night,  
like blood, like breaking,  
as the earth writhes to toss him free.  
He will come like child.

## **Appendix A**

### **The Seven Ecumenical Councils**

#### **ONE**

Council of Nicaea, 325 AD

- Promulgated the Nicene Creed
- Condemned Arianism, affirmed that the Son is co-eternal with the Father

#### **TWO**

First Council of Constantinople, 381 AD

- Expanded Nicene Creed to clarify the identity and role of the Holy Spirit
- Affirmed that the Holy Spirit is divine; solidified dogma of the Holy Trinity

#### **THREE**

Council of Ephesus, 431 AD

- Condemned Nestorianism, affirmed that Christ is One Person in Two Natures, human and divine
- Affirmed propriety of referring to Mary as the Theotokos (Mother of God incarnate), and not simply as Christotokos (Mother of Christ)
- Also condemned Pelagianism, the teaching that humans can save themselves by good works

#### **FOUR**

Council of Chalcedon, 451 AD

- Clarified the hypostatic union, which is the union of the divine and human natures of Christ
- Christ is One Person in Two Natures, divine and human (with a human body and soul)
- Christ shares with the Father his divinity and shares with us his humanity through his mother Mary
- The two natures are distinct, whole, and unmixed

## FIVE

### Second Council of Constantinople, 553 AD

- Reaffirmed the Chalcedonian Definition
- Rejected certain teachings which were thought to be Nestorian-leaning
- Also rejected certain teachings associated with followers of Origen, like the pre-existence of souls
- Affirmed that Mary is not only the Theotokos, but Ever-Virgin (a virgin before and after the birth of Christ)

## SIX

### Third Council of Constantinople, 680-681 AD

- Rejected Monothelitism, which teaches that Christ has only one will
- Affirms that Christ had two wills, human and divine, and that the human will was in perfect submission to the divine will
- Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is seen as an exemplar of Christ's human will submitting to the divine will ('not my will but thine be done')

## SEVEN

### Second Council of Nicaea, 787 AD

- Affirms that icons, images, stained glass, etc. can be made of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the angels, and the saints
- Images are not worshipped but venerated (honored) because they represent the persons they depict
- This was the final stage in the affirmation of the full humanity of Christ: Jesus has a human body, soul, mind, and will, and can be depicted in art, like any human can be

## Appendix B

### Would the Word have become incarnate if there was no Fall?

The Creed says that the Son of God became human for us and for our salvation. If we didn't need salvation (i.e., if we never sinned), would the Word have become incarnate anyway?

Two schools of thought:

1. The Thomistic school of thought, represented by Thomas Aquinas, holds that the Word of God would **not** have become incarnate without sin, since the Incarnation was for our salvation.
2. The Scotist school of thought, represented by John Duns Scotus, Albert the Great, and many Franciscans, reasons that since God loves the world and wants to be a part of it, He would have sent His Son to become incarnate and dwell among us regardless of whether we sinned.

Duns Scotus put it this way:

1. God, the highest good, willed Himself to be glorified.
2. He willed to unite the Divine Word with human nature in Christ.
3. The whole of creation was then planned in light of this central act of love.

For the Scotists, Christ becoming incarnate would have been the means of divinizing humanity, uniting the divine and human natures, and having Christ become the microcosm and centerpiece of all creation— all this apart from the Incarnation's function as the prerequisite to the Atonement.

Some theologians speculate that if humanity never sinned, there would have been no Crucifixion, but there still would have been an Incarnation.

This question is admittedly speculative— the answer to it is a *theologoumenon* (theological opinion). The general tendency of Catholic, Orthodox, and ecumenical Protestant theology in the past two centuries has been to favor the Scotist position.

## **Appendix C:**

### **The Filioque Clause**

#### **“Who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]”**

- The phrase “and the Son” [in Latin, *Filioque*] was added to the Creed by the Western Church in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century
- This was done without the approval of an ecumenical council
- This became one of the disputes that led to the Great Schism between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church

**The main issue:** Does the Spirit proceed from the Father alone or from the Father and the Son?

This question is complicated by the issue of whether the Spirit is said to be proceeding from the Father and the Son *in eternity* or from the Father in eternity and from the Son *in time*.

#### **Arguments Against the Filioque**

- The Lord Jesus says that the Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15:26), not the Father and the Son, and that should settle the matter
- The Filioque obscures the identity of the Spirit as the One who proceeds from the Father and places the Spirit in a subordinate position to the Son
- The Filioque was added by the Western Church without the approval of an ecumenical council and without the consensus of the whole Church

#### **Arguments for the Filioque**

- Christ says he will send the Spirit (John 15:26) and he breathes the Holy Spirit into the apostles (John 20), so this seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son in time, if not from eternity
- The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Christ as well as the Spirit of God, which could suggest He proceeds from both
- St. Cyril of Alexandria and St. John Damascene wrote that the Spirit proceeds “from the Father *through* the Son” which could be taken to mean “and the Son”

## Anglican approaches to the Filioque

- Since the Church of England is part of the Western Christian tradition, she inherited the Filioque clause as part of the Creed
- The seventeenth-century Anglican divines held various positions— some rejected it, while others defended it
- More recently, representatives of the Anglican Communion have acknowledged that the Filioque cannot be proved to be biblical, was a later, non-conciliar addition to the Creed, and strains ecumenical relations with Eastern Christian Churches, which lack the Filioque

At an Anglican-Orthodox meeting in Moscow in 1976, Anglican representatives agreed that “the Filioque clause should not be included in this [Nicene] Creed”

The 1978 Lambeth Conference formally requested that “all member Churches of the Anglican Communion should consider omitting the Filioque from the Nicene Creed.”

Anglican Churches in the Middle East regularly omit the Filioque due to their geographical and cultural proximity to other Eastern Christian Churches

At a 2015 meeting between representatives of the Anglican and Coptic Churches, they signed an agreement that dropping the Filioque clause from the Creed was advisable

## Can the Filioque be interpreted in a different way?

An Anglican who disagrees with the Filioque can

1. merely omit this phrase during the Sunday service, or
2. say it, but understand it to mean “proceeds from the Father *through* the Son” in eternity, or
3. say it, but understand it to mean “from the Father” in eternity and “from the Son” in time.