



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

The
Creed: An
Introduction

The Creed:
God, the
Father

The Creed:
Jesus Christ

**MIDWEEK
SCRIPT**

2020

February

Session 1 – The Creed: An Introduction

Welcome!

For the next few months of this year, we will be focusing on a study of our Creed. Today's session will be an introduction, and then we will proceed by spending time studying and discussing each of the ten articles of our faith that make up our New Apostolic Creed. In doing so, we hope that together we can not only become more knowledgeable about our beliefs, but also build up our *most holy faith* as it says in the book of Jude (v. 20-21).

Why does the New Apostolic Church need a creed?

One of the most often-quoted Bible verses is Acts 16:31 – *Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved*. Every Christian believes this passage, and yet one could ask the question, “What is belief in Jesus Christ?” Is it believing Jesus was the Son of God? Is it believing He once lived and then died? There are many different interpretations of this verse. However, the New Apostolic church's definition of “belief” is what is stated in the ten articles of faith.

What is this creed?

The word creed comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means, “I believe.” A creed is a church's statement of core beliefs and often starts with the words, “I believe.” A denomination is defined by its creed, which distinguishes it from the doctrine of others, but also shows similarities.

The Old Testament already had confessional statements of its own, linked to God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt; for example, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!* (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

Early creeds of the first Christians can be found in the New Testament, and express God's act of salvation in the sending of Jesus Christ. Some examples are:

- *Jesus is the Lord!* (Romans 10:9)
- *The Lord is risen indeed.* (Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5)
- *O Lord, come! or Our Lord is coming!* (1 Corinthians 16:22)

Further confessional statements of Jesus Christ and His work can be found in early church hymns, as recorded in 1 Timothy, Philippians, and Colossians (1 Timothy 3:16, Philippians 2:6-11 – see Summer 2019 VISION article, Colossians 1:15-20).

As Christianity spread through the Roman Empire, different views and beliefs were incorporated into the Christian doctrine. This fusion of perspectives caused confusion and uncertainty among the believers; in particular, the doctrines of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ ignited serious disputes. To counter this development, various creeds were formulated over the course of time. We'll look at three of the most important for our purposes: The Apostles' Creed, the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, and the Athanasian Creed.

The **Apostles' Creed** was compiled in the second century and lightly supplemented in the fourth century (120-250). Its essential statements are based on the sermon preached by Apostle Peter in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:37-43). It covers Christianity's core beliefs about God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The **Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople** was the product of the Council of Nicaea in 325, convened by Emperor Constantine, and further refined, most significantly in the Council of Constantinople in 381. This creed goes beyond the Apostles' Creed to solidify the profession of the Trinity and emphasize distinguishing features of the church. Corresponding to the Nicene Creed in its statements regarding the Trinity is the much more detailed **Athanasian Creed**, which likely came into being during the sixth century. Divergences on specific wordings, especially in regard to the Holy Spirit, eventually led to the separation between the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054.

The doctrine of the New Apostolic Church is based on Scripture, and professes the beliefs outlined in both creeds of the early church, since they essentially summarize the core beliefs found in the Bible. As such, they stretch beyond confessional borders and represent a unifying link between all Christians.

Session 2 – The Creed: God, the Father

Welcome back!

Last week we discussed the history of the early church creeds. The New Apostolic Creed is closely related to, and largely corresponds to, these creeds, especially the Apostles' Creed. You will see this very clearly as we look at the first three articles of our faith. The remaining seven articles represent a further interpretation, and complement these creeds, expounding on ministry, the sacraments, the teaching of the last things, and the relationship between the individual and society.

Our Creed has been revised on several occasions in accordance with the dynamic tradition of the writings of the New Testament itself. Dynamic tradition is not rigid, but is instead characterized by both preservation and change. Preservation is vital if we do not want to forget our history and origins. Change is essential for our doctrine to be sure that we do not get stuck in the insights of a particular period, but rather remain relevant to the present generation. Our Creed helps us define our faith and share it with others in a concise way.

We believe that God's love, grace, and omnipotence cannot be exhaustively expressed in doctrinal or confessional statements. God will always be greater than anything human beings can ever say about Him. Therefore, our Creed does not draw any boundaries that would deny other Christians access to His love and also salvation.

Let us take a look at the first article of our Creed:

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

This first confessional statement attests to God as our Father and Creator, and His provision and generosity in our lives.

God, the Father... We understand that all human beings exist in a relationship of children of God because they have been created by Him, and so can call Him Father. In a narrower sense, we believe that childhood in God is the relationship between God and those who believe in the gospel, have received the sacraments, and align their lives to the return of Christ.

God is Almighty, not only with regard to His creation, but He is omnipotent in all respects. This is demonstrated by the fact that He authored all that exists from nothing (Hebrews 11:3). The reference to *heaven and earth* refers to "all things visible and invisible," as stated in the Nicaea-Constantinople Creed (Colossians 1:16). Both material and spiritual exist because God created it, and it testifies of Him. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

Although the first article speaks of God, the Father as the Creator, Scripture indicates that the triune God as a whole is the Creator – that is God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit – as is suggested in Genesis 1:26: *Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.*

How does seeing yourself as God's creation shape your relationship with Him and His world? Surely, when we consider who God is to us, it should elicit some response. In our discussion, we'll explore some of the writings of Psalms and see how their authors answered this question. We'll find that many of their responses consisted of expressing their thankfulness and praise to God, and also their conviction to serve and obey Him. Another response that we should consider to this foundational belief statement is stewardship. God Himself encouraged this when He told Adam and Eve to tend and care for the garden. We can interpret this invitation in a few different ways, most obviously in our attention to the keeping and caring for our planet. This is our duty

as Christians! This also means that we are good stewards over what God has given us personally in our lives: our gifts, talents, time, money, and resources. How are we using these things? How are we sharing them?

As we work through the rest of the articles of our Creed, we should always ponder what our response should be to the statements we are declaring. I believe that this will make these statements real for us and help us apply them in our lives.

Session 3 – The Creed: Jesus Christ

Welcome to our last session for this month! Today we're going to discuss the second article of our Creed. Let's read it together:

I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, entered the realm of the dead, rose again from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from where He will return.

This article answers the question – who is Jesus? Each statement has a direct relationship to the New Testament. Let's explore a few of the phrases.

Right from the beginning, the designations of *Jesus Christ* and *our Lord* hold significant meaning, and are professions in and of themselves. *Christ* means "Anointed One" in Hebrew, and points to Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. *Lord* was a designation for God in the Old Testament, but is applied to Jesus in the New Testament, emphasizing His divine nature and dominion over heaven and earth (Philippians 2:9-11). This is further shown when He is referred to as *Immanuel* or *God with us*. Clearly stated, Jesus is the incarnation of God on earth.

We can look to the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople for clarification on the meaning of the phrase - *only begotten Son of God*. The Creed states, "begotten of the Father before all the worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." In essence, this points to Jesus as a Person of the Trinity, inseparable and One with God, the Father and the Spirit. It also clarifies that Jesus was not created by God, but He existed from the beginning, and is true God and true Man.

The next few phrases express our belief in the incarnation of Jesus and His miraculous birth. The mention of Pontius Pilate substantiates Jesus historically. Pilate was the Roman governor in Palestine from 26 to 36 AD, which means Jesus' sufferings took place during his time of rule.

The rest of the article holds particular meaning for us as we approach Passiontide in the next month: that He *was crucified, died, and was buried*. We believe that Jesus willingly laid down His life for our sin and our redemption. While His death was the saving event, His resurrection from the dead is something that we can only grasp and understand from the perspective of faith. His resurrection is also the prerequisite and promise of our resurrection and the resurrection of the dead. We'll talk more about this and Jesus' descent into the realm of the dead when we discuss the third Article of Faith.

Jesus' ascension brought His direct presence on earth to an end, and signified His return to the Father and His exaltation. The last sentence of the article looks to the future, when Jesus will return and establish His kingdom.

As we enter Passiontide, let's take time to contemplate who Jesus is, as brought to expression in this second statement of faith, and what that means for us. How do I acknowledge that Jesus is my Lord? What does it mean that Jesus is true God and true Man? We can discuss these questions in our small group now, and give them thought as we approach Holy Week.