



Week 7: The Nicene Creed

Pastor Brian Zahnd

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Christianity is a received faith. We don't get to make it up. But along the way, what we as believe as Christians may need to be defined and clarified.

The creeds were never an attempt to be a *complete* credal statement of Christian faith. Rather they came about as a specific response to specific questions and controversies.

In 318, Arius from Antioch arrived in Alexandria.

He was a follower of Origen.

For Arius, the Son was not fully God, but a divine creation.

Alexander of Alexandria (Patriarch of Alexandria) opposed the teaching of Arius. Patriarch Alexander had a young assistant by the name of Athanasius.

The church faced a controversy about the nature of Christ. Is the Son equal to the Father?

Constantine, the first "Christian" Emperor, moved quickly to make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Council of Nicaea

In 325 Constantine invited all 1,800 bishops in the Roman Empire to the imperial resort town of Nicaea. Their task was to settle this theological controversy. 318 bishops attended.

All but two bishops signed the Nicene Creed: *The Son is as fully God as the Father.*

Council of Constantinople

What we today call the Nicene Creed is actually the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. In 381, 150 bishops gathered in Constantinople including Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Jerusalem. They affirmed that the Holy Spirit is fully God with the Father and Son.

The Nicene Creed (notes)

The only number we need to use in talking about the Trinity is one.

Jesus is our “one Lord,” both the emperor and Yahweh, the embodiment of Israel’s God.

“One being” Greek word: *homoousios* meaning “same substance.” (Athanasius)

Jesus “came down from heaven” as opposed to the soteriology of Arian.

Jesus was fully God and fully human according to the soteriology of Athanasius.

“...His kingdom will have no end.” The kingdom of God is what we mean by salvation.

“...Who proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

“And the Son” was added in 589AD. (Filioque controversy)

“We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” The four marks of the Church.

It is really quite simple: we believe in one God who made everything; we believe in his eternal Son, equal to him, who came down for our salvation, to do for us what we could not do ourselves; we believe in his eternal Spirit, worshiped just as much the Father and Son are, who makes us alive. This is the Nicene faith. Indeed, this is the Christian faith, to which believers throughout history and throughout the world have been dedicated. The Nicene Creed is for everyone.

–Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions*