

COVENANT MEMORIAL

A Fresh Perspective on Real Presence

Essay No 12

A Short History and Purpose of Creeds

Below are short, pastorally framed introductions to the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, written for general congregational use, not specialists.

They are suitable to be:

- read aloud occasionally,
- printed in a service booklet,
- used in a teaching series,
- or paraphrased by a leader before the creed is recited.

The Apostle's Creed: A Short History and Purpose

The Apostles' Creed is one of the **earliest summaries of the Christian faith**. It did not come from a single council or author, but grew out of the Church's early teaching and baptismal practice.

From the very beginning, new believers were taught to confess:

- who God is,
- who Jesus Christ is,
- and the hope into which they were being baptised.

The creed takes its name not because it was written directly by the apostles, but because it faithfully **reflects their teaching**. For centuries, Christians have used it as a simple, clear statement of the gospel.

The purpose of the Apostles' Creed is not to explain everything Christians believe, but to **anchor the Church in the essentials**:

- God the Father, who created and loves,
- Jesus Christ, who truly lived, truly died, truly rose again,
- the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the Church,
- forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life.

When we confess the Apostles' Creed, we are:

- standing with Christians across the world,
- joining believers across the centuries,
- and declaring together the faith by which we come to Christ.

It is especially well suited to **regular worship**, because it is:

- brief,
- biblical,
- and deeply rooted in the story of salvation.

The Nicene Creed: A Short History and Purpose

The Nicene Creed comes from the early centuries of the Church, a time when Christians sought to **confess clearly who Jesus Christ is** and how He is related to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

As the gospel spread, important questions arose:

- Who is Jesus Christ in relation to God?
- Is He truly divine, or a created being?
- How can Christians worship one God and yet confess Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

The Nicene Creed was written to answer these questions faithfully from Scripture. It was shaped by the teaching of the apostles and affirmed by the whole Church to preserve the heart of the Christian faith.

The purpose of the Nicene Creed is not speculation, but **clarity and unity**. It speaks carefully so that Christians may worship rightly and proclaim the gospel truthfully.

This creed teaches especially that:

1. **Jesus Christ is truly God**, eternally begotten of the Father, not created,
2. **The salvation we receive is God's own work**, accomplished through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ,
3. **The Holy Spirit is fully divine**, the giver of life, who dwells and works within the Church.

Because of its careful Trinitarian and Christological language, the Nicene Creed has been used throughout the centuries as:

- the Church's primary confession in public worship,
- a safeguard of orthodox faith,
- and a unifying declaration shared across traditions.

When we confess the Nicene Creed, we are joining our voices to Christians across the world and across time, affirming the faith that has been faithfully received, taught, and lived.

The Athanasian Creed: A Short History and Purpose

The Athanasian Creed comes from a later period in the early Church, when Christians were working carefully to **protect the heart of the gospel** from confusion.

In the early centuries, believers faced serious questions:

- Is Jesus truly God, or only a great teacher?
- Is the Father different from the Son?
- Who is the Holy Spirit?
- Can we speak of one God without denying Father, Son, and Spirit?

The Athanasian Creed was written to address these concerns with clarity and care. Its goal is not to speculate about God, but to **guard the truth that saves**.

This creed teaches two essential things:

1. **God is one God in three Persons:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. **Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human**, united without confusion or division.

The language of the Athanasian Creed can feel strong to modern ears, but its intent is pastoral:

- to protect worship from false ideas,
- to keep the Church grounded in who God truly is,
- and to preserve the confession that the One who saves us is none other than God himself.

Because of its length and detail, the Athanasian Creed has traditionally been used:

- on Trinity Sunday,
- on major feast days,
- or on special teaching occasions.

When we confess it, we are not claiming to understand God fully, but humbly affirming what Scripture teaches and what the Church has carefully received.

A Pastoral Word to the Congregation

Creeds are not meant to replace the Bible.

They are meant to **help us read the Bible rightly**, worship God faithfully, and remain united in truth.

When we confess a creed together, we are saying:

“This is the faith we have received.

This is the faith that has carried the Church through the centuries.

And this is the faith in which we trust the living God.”

One-Sentence Creed Introductions (Informal Use)

General (works for either creed)

- **“Before we come to the Table, let’s say together the faith that Christians have shared from the very beginning.”**

For the Apostles' Creed

- **“Let’s stand and confess the simple, ancient faith that tells the story of the God we trust and the hope we share.”**
- **“These words have helped Christians remember what they believe for centuries—let’s say them together.”**
- **“This creed puts into a few sentences the gospel story we’ve been singing and living.”**

For the Nicene Creed (still informal, but respectful)

- **“Today we’re using a longer creed that helps the Church say clearly who the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are—let’s confess it together.”**
- **“These words help us hold onto the Christian faith about who God is and who Jesus really is—let’s say them together.”**

Very Casual / Small-Group Option

- **“Let’s say out loud the faith that shapes us before we share this meal together.”**

Closing Pastoral Tip for Leaders

In informal settings, **tone matters more than explanation.** Say the line naturally, don’t over-signal that something “official” is happening, and let the shared act itself do the work.