



The Creed

What We Believe about God, Jesus,
the Holy Spirit, and the Church



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION & FORMATION

SAINT THOMAS SEMINARY - ARCHDIOCESE of HARTFORD

Center for Catholic Education and Formation Archdiocese of Hartford

*Leadership Formation for
Teachers, Catechists, and Parish Ministers*

Learning Module: The Creed

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The Creed

Part One: Engage

Activity One

I Believe.....



ARCHDIOCESE of HARTFORD
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The Creeds

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day 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.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.



Credal Knowledge

Test yourself on the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds

DAVID O'BRIEN

This quiz can help you, students, and families review our Catholic faith. Find the answer key on page 52.



1 The summary of the central beliefs of the Christian faith stated at every Mass is called a _____.

- a) creed b) manifesto c) encyclical
d) papal bull

2 The Apostles' Creed was originally used to prepare new converts for the sacrament of _____.

- a) Confirmation b) Matrimony
c) Holy Orders d) Baptism

3 How many articles of faith make up the Apostles' Creed?

- a) 3 b) 7 c) 12 d) 10

4 The Apostles' Creed was first used in _____ by the disciples of St. Peter.

- a) Jerusalem b) Rome c) Corinth
d) San Francisco

5 The creeds are structured around the Christian understanding of God as _____.

- a) judge b) invisible c) lover
d) trinity

6 The Apostles' Creed was written by Jesus' Twelve Apostles.

True | False

7 "I believe in ... Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was _____ by the Holy Spirit ..."

- a) visited b) anointed c) conceived
d) inspired

8 According to the Apostles' Creed, faith in which person of the Trinity is affiliated with faith in the forgiveness of sins?

- a) the Holy Spirit b) the Father
c) the Son d) the Blessed Virgin Mary

9 The Apostles' Creed mentions all of the following about Jesus except his _____.

- a) miracles b) birth c) death
d) resurrection

10 The _____ Creed was written to clear up confusion about Jesus' human and divine natures.

- a) Incarnation b) Nicene
c) Apostles' d) Chalcedonian

11 *Consubstantial* is a theological term describing that God the Father and God the Son are both fully and totally God.

True | False

12 The Catholic Nicene Creed is used by all except _____.

- a) Anglicans/Episcopalians
b) Eastern Orthodox c) Buddhists
d) the major Protestant churches

13 The four marks of the Church are: one, holy, catholic, and _____.

- a) international b) institutional
- c) technological d) apostolic

14 When Catholics profess the creeds at Mass, they are renewing their _____ vows.

- a) baptismal b) marriage
- c) poverty, chastity, obedience
- d) loyalty to the pope

15 Christians believe in the same God of Abraham as do Jews and Muslims.

True | False

16 "I believe in one God, the Father _____."

- a) of the Church b) of the saints
- c) of humankind d) almighty

17 Of the Holy Spirit, the Nicene Creed states: "With the Father and the Son is adored and _____."

- a) feared b) glorified c) trinityfied
- d) obeyed

18 The Nicene Creed states that _____ "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead."

- a) Jesus b) Elijah c) Moses
- d) Adam and Eve

19 Along with other reasons, the great Eastern and Western Churches (Orthodox and Roman Catholic) split apart in 1054 A.D. over the doctrine called the _____.

- a) Hypostatic Union
- b) Real Presence
- c) Incarnation
- d) Filioque

20 The Emperor Constantine called for the Council of Nicaea.

True | False

Answers

ANSWERS to **CATHOLIC IQ**, from page 32.

1. a.) Catholics should use the creed as a mirror to examine their faith. "Look at yourself in it, to see if you believe everything you say you believe. And rejoice in your faith each day" (CCC, 1064).

2. d.) Early Christians used the Apostles' Creed as the curriculum for teaching interested people the fundamental beliefs of Christianity before they were baptized.

3. c.) Tradition breaks the Apostles' Creed into 12 articles to match the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles, symbolizing the fullness of faith.

4. b.) St. Peter, along with St. Paul, brought the faith to Rome, and they were both martyred in Rome (see CCC, 194).

5. d.) When Catholics profess the creeds, we affirm our belief in the Father who creates, the Son who redeems, and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies (See CCC, 190).

6. False. The Apostles' Creed is based on the teachings of the apostles, but they did not write it. "The Apostles' Creed is so called because it is rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostles' faith" (CCC, 194).

7. c.) Jesus Christ did not have an earthly father. God's Spirit impregnated the Virgin Mary; therefore, Jesus is truly the "only begotten Son of God."

8. a.) In John 20:22-23, Christ gave his Spirit to the apostles (and therefore to the Church) to forgive sins. It is through the Holy Spirit that priests have the power to forgive sins through the sacraments, particularly in the sacrament of Reconciliation (see CCC, 976).

9. a.) "Concerning Christ's life the Creed speaks only about the mysteries of the Incarnation (conception and birth) and Paschal mystery (passion, crucifixion, death, burial, descent into hell, resurrection and ascension). It says nothing explicitly about the mysteries of Jesus' hidden or public life" (CCC, 512).

10. b.) A popular priest named Arius taught that Jesus was fully human but not fully divine, which was not true and confused many Catholics.

11. True. Meaning in Latin "of the same substance," *consubstantial* indicates that the Father and the Son are both equally divine. Jesus is not a saint or a gifted or inspired person. He is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.

12. c.) The central beliefs of Christianity found in the Nicene Creed are common to most historical Christians (see CCC, 195). Buddhists, however, are not Christians.

13. d.) Catholic and Orthodox Christians trace their roots back to Christ's original 12 apostles (see CCC, 870, 811).

14. a.) Baptism is the first and most important profession of faith because it signals our incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

15. True. Rooted in the Old Testament revelation, Christians profess with Judaism and Islam that "there is only one God. . . . God is one in nature, substance, and essence" (CCC, 200).

16. d.) "Once our reason has grasped the idea of God's almighty power, it will easily and without any hesitation admit everything that [the Creed] will afterwards propose for us to believe — even if they be great and marvelous things, far above the ordinary laws of nature" (CCC, 274).

17. b.) "The mission of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of the Son (John 14:26) and by the Son 'from the Father' (John 15:26), reveals that, with them, the Spirit is one and the same God" (CCC, 263).

18. a.) Christians believe that Christ's return will bring about a new heaven and earth (see Revelation 21) that will fully establish the kingdom of God.

19. d.) After almost 1,000 years of separation, both Eastern and Western Church leaders recognize that both

positions on the *filioque* are reconcilable because of their "legitimate complementarity" (see CCC, 248).

20. True. Despite not being baptized yet, Constantine recognized the growing appeal of Christianity in the fourth century and sought to use the faith as a source of unity throughout the sprawling and contentious Roman Empire.

ANSWERS to **KIDS' QUIZ**

1. b.) The creed at Mass summarizes the central beliefs of the Christian faith.

2. a.) The Nicene Creed was written in 325 A.D. at a gathering of Catholic bishops called an ecumenical council.

3. d.) Tradition holds that the Apostles' Creed was the first creed used by the early followers of Jesus.

4. False. The Creed comes after the Scripture readings and the homily but before the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

5. c.) The creeds state the main roles of each person in the Trinity: The Father creates; Jesus became a human being, suffered, died, and resurrected; the Holy Spirit continues Jesus' ministry through the Church.

6. c.) The Blessed Virgin Mary was Jesus' mother. She is our spiritual mother too.

7. b.) According to the book of Genesis, "in the beginning" God created everything (Genesis 1:1).

8. a.) The word *catholic* means "universal," showing that the Church is open to everyone and should be in every part of the world.

9. d.) Through Jesus, we know God forgives our sins and wants us to forgive those who sin against us.

10. c.) After Jesus was crucified, he rose from the dead three days later, on the first Easter Sunday (see Luke 24:1-12).

Nicene Creed Worksheet

The Nicene Creed	What this means to me	Insights I've gained	What this means to me now
I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.			
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.			
For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.			

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried,

and rose again on the third day 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.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.			
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and			
I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.			

Closing Question

*How can **what** I believe influence and shape my relationship with God and how I live my faith?*

The Church's Creeds

Maura Thompson Hagarty, Ph.D.

Millions of Christians all over the world regularly profess their faith by reciting an ancient prayer called the Nicene Creed. The word “creed” comes from the Latin “*credo*” which means “I believe.” “*Credo*” implies much more than agreeing with an idea, however. One of its roots is the word for heart. To say “I believe” in something is to say “I set my heart on” and “I place all my trust in” that something. After the homily on most Sundays, Catholics stand and join in the age old practice of reciting the Creed. The people join together in professing aloud that they believe in God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

When we pray the Creed we announce that our hearts are set on God. The conviction at the center of our prayer is that God is with us. We believe there is a loving, intimate, and life-giving bond between ourselves and God. As the psalmist’s words proclaim, our connection to God is amazingly strong:

Where can I go from you spirit?

From your presence where can I flee?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

If I sink to the nether world, you are present there (Psalm 139:7-8).

Our prayerful recitation of the Creed proclaims this awesome presence of God in our lives, too. This doesn’t mean that we never wonder where God is, however. We seek happiness and meaning far too often in the face of seemingly hopeless and painful situations. We often fail to see God in these situations, but at the heart of the Creed is the belief that all the while we are searching, God is pursuing us and trying to get our attention in order to draw us into relationship – always! So when we recite the Creed our prayer is a statement of what we believe, but it is also an expression of hope— the hope that the love and presence of the God we “set our hearts on” will become more and more real to us with each passing day.

The Creed and Christian Identity

Human beings have always searched for God, even if they have not understood their desires and yearnings in this way. Throughout human history this search has helped make people open to encounters with God. These significant experiences have given rise to feelings and beliefs so important and meaningful that individuals and communities have been compelled to find ways to express them. People throughout the ages have been inspired, for example, to pray, to join with others in religious rituals, to make sacrifices to help others, to work for justice, and to relate to others with loving kindness. They have also worked to express their encounters with God through spoken or written words in order to understand them better and share them with others.

The first Christians recognized that in Jesus they encountered God. Their encounters with Jesus after his death were most profound. He was still alive, still with them! What did this mean? When the disciples set out to proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection they tried to communicate the meaning and significance of Jesus' life, death, and new life through their actions and their words. The need of the first Christians to put into words the meaning of what had happened to Jesus and to the disciples gave rise to the formulation of creedal statements or professions of faith. Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth contains one of the earliest Christian creeds:

For I handed on 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; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).

Notice that Paul's statement of faith combines historical facts with statements of faith. Christ died (historical statement) for our sins (faith statement). He was buried (historical statement) and then was raised on the third day (faith statement). Like Paul's profession, Christian creeds are much more than accounts that historians or journalists might record. They are professions of faith written by Christians in response to God's revelation made known through the mission of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed, the creed most often recited in Catholic liturgies, evolved from the early Church's practice of baptism. Before being immersed in the water of the baptismal pool, those joining the Church were asked a series of three questions about their belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The questions were much like the questions we use today to make and renew our own baptismal promises. They are creedal statements expressed in the form of questions. "Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?" the celebrant asks parents and godparents at a child's baptism today, for example. The parents and godparents profess their faith by responding "I do" to the questions (Rite of Baptism, n. 58).

During the early centuries of the Church's existence, conflicts arose over what Christians believe and how best to articulate these beliefs. Many generations after Jesus' earthly life, some Christians were raising serious questions about the nature of God, especially in relation to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Church's response to these questions and the resulting conflicts gave rise to a creed that is longer and more elaborate than the question and answer dialogue originally used in the celebration of baptism. The councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, towns in modern-day Turkey, were convened in 325 C.E. and 381 C.E., respectively, so that the bishops could discuss and clarify fundamental Christian beliefs about God and the divinity of Jesus and the Spirit. The work of the councils resulted in official declarative statements that comprise what today we commonly refer to as the Nicene Creed.

Its official name, the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, reflects its origin in the fourth century councils that produced it.

The Nicene Creed

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, one in 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 was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered, died, and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in fulfillment of 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 Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped 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.

The Apostles' Creed

The Nicene Creed is one of the two most well-known Christian creeds. The other one is the Apostles' Creed. The text is shorter than the Nicene Creed and the language, simpler.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

An ancient legend tells the story that each of the twelve apostles contributed a line or phrase to the creed. This story is fictional, but it conveys an important insight: the Apostles' Creed professes beliefs that have come to us from the apostles and the first Christian community.

Contemporary Creeds

The Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed occupy a special place in the Church—the Nicene because of its origin in ecumenical councils and its adoption by Christians throughout the world and the Apostles' Creed because it faithfully summarizes the Christian faith and was prayed by the ancient Church of Rome. These two are far from the only creeds, however. Untold numbers of creeds have been written over the centuries. The Church affirms the value of having a variety of creeds. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, explains, “we do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith has allowed us to touch” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 170). When people put their faith into their own words, influenced by their own culture, it can help to foster deeper faith in individuals and communities and motivate people to carry out actions inspired by faith.

The following excerpts from Christian creeds are examples of contemporary professions that reflect the communities in which they originated:

The Masai Creed (c. 1960), written for East African Christians:

We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it. He created man and wanted man to be happy in the world. God loves the world and every nation and tribe on the earth. . . . We believe that all our sins are forgiven through [Jesus]. All who have faith in him must be sorry for their sins, be baptized in the Holy Spirit of God, live the rules of love, and share the bread together in love We are waiting for him. He is alive. He lives. This we believe. Amen (Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 200).

The creed from *The Mass of the Marginalized People in Honduras*, written in 1980:

. . . I believe you are transforming this death-dealing world through the Holy Spirit, who is God's love and power. You live raised from death, and are present in the fight in

which we build your kingdom of justice, peace and love. . . (Pelikan and Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, p. 797).

A creed written by young people who were living in the former East Germany when it was under a socialist system of government emphasizes the dignity of the individual:

I believe in God. By this I mean I believe I am wanted. I know, therefore, I shall be used for the many small steps of the great love of God. I am of value. I therefore have courage to allow myself to be used. . . (Marthaler, *The Creed*, 411).

A creed written by the Hispanic participants in the Third Encuentro Nacional de Pastoral in 1985:

We believe in the most holy Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We sense his powerful work in our people, and we see it as a model to be followed. . . . We believe in our identification with Christ, as the suffering people we are. We believe, even as he did, in the divinity of all human beings and in their liberation through love. . . . We believe in the gift of being a prophetic voice as something given by God to our people and as a means of promoting the unity and love that are necessary for the building of the Kingdom. . . (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Hispanic Ministry: Three Major Documents*, pp. 47-48).

Creeds reflect the culture of the people who write them and so there is a lot of variety in the choice of words and the manner of expression. All Christian creeds have an essential common element, however. They all express belief in God as triune—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christian creeds also share a common structure. They are tri-partite, that is, they have three sections, each of which professes faith in one of the persons of the trinity.

Though contemporary creeds have an important place in the lives of Christians, they do not supersede the Nicene Creed in importance. The Church recognizes that there is enormous value in continuing to profess faith using this ancient formulation. Because it was written and officially approved at a council during an era that preceded the split between the Church in the East and the West that occurred in the 11th century and the 16th century conflict that led to the split between Catholics and Protestants, the Nicene Creed is the one most widely embraced in the world. When we recite it at Sunday mass, we join in communion not only with God but with Christians from all over the world. It is unlikely that any new creed could function in this way as a symbol of unity.

Why do we say it over and over again?

You are not alone if sometimes you feel bored by reciting the Creed week after week at Sunday mass. Repetition may seem like a negative thing, but when it comes to a community's worship it can be quite valuable. Human beings tend to suffer from spiritual amnesia, explains

theologian Mary Collins. By this she means that we tend to forget who we are and who we belong to in a spiritual sense. This is not the complete loss of a sense of identity that a victim of a physical trauma might experience. It is, however, a tendency to forget an important aspect of our identity – that God loves us and is constantly with us. We need to be reminded over and over again. The practice of gathering on Sunday for worship and repeating rituals and prayers, like the Creed, helps us to remember that our relationship with God is a huge part of who we are. This special kind of remembering, sometimes called anamnesis, is the opposite of spiritual amnesia (see Collins, *Contemplative Participation*, 54-55).

The refrain from Rich Mullins' song entitled "Creed" captures the idea that our beliefs and our identity are closely connected:

And I believe that what I believe
Is what makes me what I am
I did not make it, no it is making me
It is the very truth of God and not
The invention of any man

When we pray the Creed week in and week out we remember our core beliefs and our Christian identity as creatures whom belong to God and to one another. These relationships make us who we are.

Five Ways to Put Your Heart into the Creed

If you ever have difficulty putting your heart into the Creed, here are some suggestions.

1. If you yearn to pray using other words, spend some time outside of Mass thinking about the text of the creed and expressing the same beliefs in your own words. You may find that your prayer using the ancient words will gradually become deeper and more meaningful.
2. Think about how vast the world is and the fact that the Nicene Creed is said by Christians that span the globe. Imagine yourself in communion with all of these people.
3. Remember the creed is not claiming any special status for the Catholic Christians and that when our prayer talks about the wonderful qualities of the Church—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—we are not bragging about ourselves. Our prayer is uttered with the hope that we will recognize what God has given to us and that we will become more and more the people that God calls us to be.
4. Keep in mind that when we recite the Creed at Mass we are at prayer. Reflect on these words from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "To say the Credo with faith is to enter into communion with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and also with the whole Church which transmits the faith to us and in whose midst we believe" (CCC 197).
5. Think about the Creed's context in Mass. Its placement after the readings and the homily is deliberate. When we recite the creed, we are responding in faith to the Word of God we have just heard. This leads us to the liturgy of the Eucharist that will follow.

Resource Catholic 101: What is the Creed?

Brian Strassburger, SJ. *The Jesuit Post*, July 1, 2020

(<https://thejesuitpost.org/2020/07/catholic-101-what-is-the-creed>)

“Let us stand and profess our faith.”

Every Sunday at Mass, we stand as a congregation after the homily and recite the words of the Creed. “I believe in one God, the Father almighty...”

What exactly is the Creed? Where did it come from? What are we saying when we recite it? The truth is, the Creed is a huge topic, and many lines in the Creed were the product of tremendous debate and contention. You could take a whole graduate-level class on the contents of the Creed! This article is not going to unpack everything about the Creed. Not even close. This article is an introduction.

What the Creed is NOT.

First things first, let’s dispel some misguided ideas about the Creed. It is not a single, solitary summary of the entirety of the Catholic faith. In fact, it’s not even single. We use two Creeds regularly in the Catholic Church: the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed. These two Creeds aren’t contradictory, but they include different wording, and the Nicene Creed has more content.

Even the longer of the two, the Nicene Creed, doesn’t include a complete summary of the Catholic faith. For example, the Eucharist is never mentioned. And while the stanza on Jesus talks about his birth and Passion, it gives no mention to his teaching or miracles. What about Mary and the apostles? Barely mentioned. Yet those are all things that “We believe.” So, we can’t say that the Creed is a complete summary of the Catholic faith.

In fact, we also can’t say that the Creed is exclusively Catholic. A variety of Christian churches use the Creed: Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and more. When we profess belief in the “holy catholic Church” in the Creed, it’s important to note that the word catholic has a lower-case c.¹ It means “universal,” not Roman Catholic. There’s even disagreement over what the word “catholic”/universal means in the context of the Creed, but it does point beyond a local church to belonging to something greater.

The last point to clarify is that the Creed is not lifted out of the pages of Scripture. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus didn’t address the crowd and say, “Those who want to follow me must believe the following things...” It’s not included among the letters of Paul nor the Acts of Apostles. We did not take the lines directly from any place in Scripture. Now, that’s not to say that the Creed goes against the Scriptures. It is certainly rooted in the Scriptures. But the

composition of the Creed came centuries after the life of Jesus and the writing of the Scriptures.

So, you might be asking now, what exactly is the Creed?

What is the Creed?

The word “creed” itself comes from the first word in Latin: *credo* (“I believe.”). So we can certainly say that the Creed is something which we believe and hold to be true. Here’s how the Catechism of the Catholic Church begins its explanation: “Whoever says ‘I believe’ says ‘I pledge myself to what I believe.’ Communion in faith needs a common language of faith, normative for all and uniting all in the same confession of faith.”

The Catechism goes on to say that the Creed is a “sign of recognition and communion between believers...a summary of the principle truths of the faith.” In other words, it’s a summary, even if it’s not a complete one. It’s a summary of the principle truths, the main ideas, the core tenants. It’s not everything, but it’s a lot of the most important stuff.

And the Creed is a sign of recognition and communion between us. At Mass, we profess the same Creed all together. It’s a point of agreement. There might be issues in church teaching that we dispute (Lord knows there are lots of these!), but the Creed presents some that we can all agree on.

The Catechism further writes that the Creed “serves as the first and fundamental point of reference for catechesis.” It’s a starting point for learning about the faith. It’s like an elevator pitch. What do we believe as Catholics? Start with the Creed.

In fact, Christian missionaries have often embraced this as a starting point of evangelization. St. Francis Xavier, the great Jesuit missionary of the 16th century, would begin by teaching the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Our Father, and the Hail Mary in any new town or village that he arrived at. Even today, the Creed is a fundamental component of RCIA.

In brief, the Creed is a concise summary of the principle truths that we agree on as a Church. It’s also our elevator pitch that serves as a starting point for introducing the faith.

Where did it come from?

If we didn’t lift the Creed straight off the pages of the New Testament, where did it come from? Let’s look at both the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed.

The origins of the Apostle’s Creed have been lost in time. An ancient tradition held that on the day of Pentecost, the twelve apostles composed this Creed, with each apostle contributing one of the twelve articles. Today that tradition is no longer widely held. The earliest written versions

that we have are from the 4th century, so it was likely composed later than the Apostolic era. The Catechism asserts that we can rightly call it the Apostle's Creed not because the apostles wrote it, but because it is "rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostles' faith."

The origins of the Nicene Creed are much better known. It was the product of the first two "Ecumenical Councils" in the history of the Church (Vatican II was the 21st, and most recent, Ecumenical Council). The First Council of Nicaea was held in modern-day Turkey in the year 325. The primary issue of the council was asserting the divinity of Jesus. Thus, this Council gave us lines about Jesus like: "God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father." But it didn't give us the finished product that we pray today.

Over fifty years later, the Second Ecumenical Council was held in Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) in 381. As a complement to the Council of Nicaea, this council made a point to assert Jesus's humanity. It used the Creed approved at Nicaea and expanded on the descriptions of Jesus's birth and Passion: "by the Holy Spirit [he] was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried."

Constantinople also added significantly to the last half of the Creed, which recites what we believe about the Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son." And it added the final stanza on the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," along with references to baptism, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life.

The Nicene Creed that we profess today is the finished version of what was begun in 325 at the council in Nicaea and finished in 381 in Constantinople.²

What are the principle truths in the Creed?

Every line of the Creed is packed with meaning, so it would take a lot more than an introductory article to outline all of the truths contained (and how we arrived at them). But let's just highlight a few key points.³

For starters, the Creed is fundamentally Trinitarian. We profess our belief in one God, who is three persons: God the Father, Jesus Christ the only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴ The first three stanzas are dedicated to each of the three persons of the Trinity.

As mentioned previously, the Creed asserts both the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Jesus is one person with two natures.⁵ He is fully human and fully divine. We also affirm a few fundamental truths about Jesus. The Incarnation: Jesus became human and was born to Mary. And Jesus's Passion: He suffered, died, and rose from the dead. We confess in the Creed that Jesus's life, passion, death, and resurrection are undertaken "for our salvation."

Along with the truths about the Trinity, we also affirm the four “marks” of the Church in the Creed: it is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” These marks are interconnected characteristics that the Church aspires to realize.⁶ With the Church, we further recognize the fundamental importance in our faith of baptism, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life.

What do we do with it today?

At the end of reciting the Creed at Mass, the entire congregation proclaims “Amen.” It is our declaration of affirmation. “It is so!” We the people, the assembled faithful, affirm our common belief in the Creed. It is not the entirety of our faith, but it includes some of the most important, principle truths of what we believe.

Rooted in the Scriptures and written centuries ago, the Creed continues to hold meaning in our lives today. Spend time with it. Reflect on the words. Bring it to prayer. Because this is what we believe.

End Notes

- ¹ Some Christian denominations change the word “catholic” to “Christian” to avoid the confusion with the Roman Catholic Church.
- ² While we commonly call it the Nicene Creed, it has also been called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed since it was a product of both those councils, but that’s definitely more of a mouthful.
- ³ This section on the principle truths focuses on the Nicene Creed, although several of the main points are included in the Apostle’s Creed as well.
- ⁴ Entire classes are taught on the Trinity and the language is very confusing. We use the word “person” in English to talk about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Ecumenical Councils, theologians used the Greek word “hypostasis,” meaning “to stand under.” The Triune God has one nature/essence (“ousia” in Greek) and three “persons” (“hypostases”).
- ⁵ The language is again very technical and arises from the Greek. Jesus is one “person” (“hypostasis” in Greek) who possesses two “natures” (“physes” in Greek): human and divine.
- ⁶ According to the Catechism: “These four characteristics, inseparably linked with each other, indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. The Church does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities.” (811)

Resources for Teaching the Creed

Online

"Three Ways to Teach the Creed to Younger Children." Darcy Osby. Catechists Journey.
<https://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/2017/01/three-ways-to-teach-the-creed-to-younger-children/>

"Creeds: Words of Life-Giving Faith." William H. Johnston, PhD. Catechist.
<https://www.catechist.com/creeds-words-of-life-giving-faith/>

Creed Resources from The Religion Teacher:
<https://www.thereligionteacher.com/?s=Creed>

Creed Resources from Catechist's Journey (Loyola Press)
<https://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/?s=Creed>

Creedal Knowledge (Quiz for Children and Adults) from *Catechist*
<https://www.catechist.com/credal-knowledge-test-apostles-nicene-creed/>

Creed Resources from Saint Mary's Press Resource Center
<https://www.smp.org/search/?s=resources&q=Creed>
<https://www.smp.org/search/?s=resources&q=Nicene+Creed>

The Creed Game (Loyola Press): <https://www.loyolapress.com/faith-formation/activities/the-nicene-creed-game/>

Library of Creed Videos and Activities (Archdiocese of Seattle):
<https://seattlearchmedia.weebly.com/creed.html>

Videos

The Creed (Video Catechism)

VCat, the video catechism, presents eleven short videos that explore the creedal statements in the Nicene Creed. The videos include stories and teachings designed to engage middle school and high school youth.

Access the videos at: <http://vcat.org/creed>

"The Creed" (Animated Video)

When you recite the Creed, are you being real or are you being a robot? Do you even know what you are saying? Is there a difference between believing there is a God and believing in God?

Video: <https://youtu.be/0YNeTwWU1RE>

"I Believe" (Music Video)

John Burland and Genevieve Bryant from John's album "All Are Welcome Here". Music is a powerful way to engage our hearts and minds to declare what we believe. When we affirm our faith together, we stand as one and are strengthened. This is the message of my new song, "I Believe", and I hope that as you listen, it inspires you to joyously proclaim your faith!

Video: <https://youtu.be/mvYbfojVkGQ>

Children's Version: "Yes, Lord, I Believe" Music Video – with John Burland, Miss Heidi, and the Kids' Liturgy Community

Video: <https://youtu.be/MzCJEqeIHCI>