

EARLY CHURCH CREEDS

These early church creeds were formed from Scripture and were a way of keeping the core aspects of the faith intact for people. These were commonly memorized and, even in some churches today, said during times of gathering for Worship. They were primarily formed to guard against various false teachings that crept into the church. Most of these heresies dealt with the nature of Jesus. This is still a problem today and why these Creeds are just as important today as they were in the early years of the church.

They are not meant to replace Scripture or to act as a summary for doctrine. They are intended to be learned alongside Scripture and to pair with our reading of the Word of God. It is encouraged to memorize the Apostles' Creed—this has been quoted by people getting baptized into the faith for millennia.

Old Roman Symbol

The Apostles' Creed

The Nicene Creed

Athanasian Creed

Old Roman Symbol

The Old Roman Symbol (Creed) was based upon what was known as the “rule of faith” in the second century AD which was formed from Matt. 28:17 and was used by Early Church Fathers Irenæus and Tertullian.

I believe in God the Father Almighty;

and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord,

Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,

Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried,

on the third day rose again from the dead,

ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father,

whence He will come to judge the living and the dead;

and in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Church,

the remission of sins,

the resurrection of the flesh

the life everlasting

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed was an adaptation of the Old Roman Creed. It is 12 lines long and is said that each of the Apostles wrote one line to establish the faith:

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

I believe 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 to the dead. On the third day He rose again;
He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and 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 the life everlasting. Amen.

* 'catholic' simply means 'universal' or 'complete'. From *katholikos*: *kata* ('about') and *holos* ('whole').

The Nicene Creed

As the church grew, numerous sects and heresies found their way into the Church. Because of this, the older Creeds did not weed out significant heresies. The Church convened twice in the 300s at Nicea and Constantinople where this creed was written and ratified.

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

We 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 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.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father *[and the Son]*¹,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

We 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.

¹ 'and the Son': this is known as the *filioque* (Latin for 'and from the son'). It was added later to the Creed and has been a source of contention between Eastern (reject it) and Western (accept it) Christianity; ultimately leading to the Great Schism of 1054 AD. It is a question of the nature of the Trinity and the East believed the West was teaching a completely different faith.

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Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed was written by St. Athanasius and deals with the Trinity and the two natures of Jesus: fully man and fully God.

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that (s)he hold the catholic* faith. Which faith unless everyone does keep whole and undefiled, without doubt, shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this:

We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity—neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one—the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Spirit unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated nor three infinities, but one uncreated and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so are we forbidden by the catholic faith to say, “There are three Gods or three Lords”. The Father is made of none—neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone—not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son—neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not

three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal and coequal. So that in all things—as aforesaid—the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped. Who therefore that will be saved, let him/her thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that (s)he also believes faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that “our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man”—*God*: of the Essence of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and *Man*: of the Essence of his mother, born in the world. Perfect God and perfect Man; of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although He is God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Essence; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, He sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all people will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except for a person believe truly and firmly, (s)he cannot be saved.

* ‘catholic’ simply means ‘universal’ or ‘complete’. From *katholikos*: *kata* (‘about’) and *holos* (‘whole’).