



## The Creeds

The word *creed* comes from the Latin *credo*, which means “I believe.” There are three creeds called *ecumenical*, meaning they were accepted by the whole Christian church: the Apostles’ (~150AD), the Nicene (325-381AD), and the Athanasian (c. 451-700AD) Creeds.

The Apostles’ Creed is so named because it relates the teaching of the Apostles as contained in the New Testament. Historically, it develops from an old Latin baptismal creed, summarizing the essentials of the faith. It is the Creed used for basic instruction in the Small Catechism, and is usually spoken in services where the Lord’s Supper is not celebrated, and devotionally—at least twice a day in the Catechism’s suggested prayer regimen. It serves as a daily refresher in what one, in fact, believes (trusts) for forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.

The Nicene Creed was drawn up in the great ecumenical council at Nicea in 325AD and elaborated upon in another council at Constantinople in 381AD. It was written in Greek, and began “*We believe.*” The Church wrote this Creed in response to the Arian heresy, the teaching that God the Son was not God the way the Father was. Its opening, “*We believe*” (now assimilated to “*I believe*”) suggests its purpose: to state that the Church follows the teaching of Christ and what the Apostles’ believed, over against errors proclaimed by others. Its inclusion in the Divine Service reflects the Church’s desire to keep the doctrine that saves pure (Acts 20:29-32; Gal. 1:6-9) and to teach it thoroughly to all people (St. Matt. 28:20), keeping the Church united in it (Eph. 4:4-16; Rom. 16:17-20), especially as she is gathered in fellowship to eat the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-19). Here we confess what we *believe*—not only what we think to be true, but what we *trust* for all that we need: that Jesus Christ is Lord, who has redeemed us!

Because the Nicene Creed goes into more detail as to the person of Jesus, especially his two natures as true God and true Man, it is particularly fitting for use when the Church gathers before His Throne of Grace to partake of the Lord’s Supper. As we do, and say the Creed together, we are reminded we are not alone in faith!

The lengthy and rather poetic Athanasian Creed (*LSB* 319) is used but once a year on Holy Trinity Sunday. It reflects the precise doctrinal expressions of Athanasius, a church father who confessed the truth at Nicea in 325 and until his death in 373AD, during which time he spent 17 years in exile, under emperors who rejected the truth about Jesus, the Son of God. On Holy Trinity Sunday, we rejoice in this Creed at the precision with which God has given us to know Him, and take seriously what the faith means for us: “*Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic (that is, the one, whole, apostolic) faith.*”

*The Peace of the Lord be with you always,*

*Pastor Jeff Patterson †*