

# *Credo in unum Deum - exploring the faith of the church*

## **1. Establishing orthodoxy**

‘Credo in unum Deum... We believe in one God’, thus opens the Creed that we recite at our principal church services. It is referred to as the Nicene Creed, from its origin at the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325 - but actually it is was strengthened and added to at the First Council of Constantinople in AD 381. So a bit of confusion, this is ironic, because the purpose of a creed is to clarify the faith! I often introduce our recitation of the creed with words such as these... ‘Let us confess the faith of the church, in the words of the Nicene Creed’. We recite the creed in order to both proclaim and preserve the so-called ‘Apostolic Faith’, the pure and original faith of those closest to Jesus, who were directly empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The interesting thing is that there is an ‘Apostles Creed’ which is shorter and especially used at baptisms, with the priest asking those present to make their declaration of faith with three questions; ‘Do you believe and trust in /God the Father/his Son Jesus Christ/the Holy Spirit?’ What is different between the two ancient Creeds and does it matter? Well yes, it matters and has always mattered and the Creeds themselves were developed to establish orthodoxy (=correct belief) and thereby refute heresy (=a sect with wrong thought). As time went by there was development of thought and belief and some deviated from the fundamental truths taught by scripture and established by the early Christian church. At times the conflict was great and one of the great champions of this era was Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria who struggled against Arianism (a heresy of non-belief in the divinity of Christ). The First Council of Nicaea was called to settle this dispute, unfortunately Arianism was simply driven underground and so a further Council was called at Constantinople. In this way Creeds were developed and to us some 1,600 years later may seem a bit obscure.

Yet beware! Arian tendencies are abroad both in sects such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses with their distorted ‘New World’ translation of the bible and recently and significantly in novels of the ilk of the Da Vinci Code. These want to regard Jesus as a man elevated by God to a special status, but by no means equal in nature to that of the Trinitarian Godhead, which is contrary to the Orthodox faith of the vast majority of billions of Christians of many denominations. The thrust of Dan Brown’s novel is that the pagan emperor Constantine hijacked the church and established its scripture and upgraded Jesus to a deity at the Council of Nicaea. Jesus became the Son of God by a narrow vote, but prior to that time no-one believed him to be divine. This is the stuff of a highly successful novel, spawning many other ‘me-too’, ‘copy-cat’ novels, each posing a pseudo scientific analysis and rebuttal of the long established faith of the church. Then conversely there is the heresy of Gnosticism: Jesus was never man, he only appeared to be so...



Icon depicting the Holy Fathers of the First Council of Nicaea holding the Nicene Creed.

If we believe in one God, how can we say there are three – Father, Son and Holy Spirit? What does it mean when we say Jesus descended to the dead/into hell, or indeed ascended into Heaven? Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father and the Son? What about our belief in the holy catholic church (we know it has erred at times)? What is the Communion of Saints – and the resurrection of the body, or is it of the dead? Even more challenging is to consider these two great creeds omit. Consider other ‘creeds’ of Philipians 2:5-11 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (appendices 3&4). The Creed we use at Our Family Service is derived from Ephesians chapter three (appendix 5). This is a brief commentary on the Nicene and Apostles Creed exploring and expounding the faith - *Ecclésiā apostólicā, sanctā* (Holy Catholic Church). Even so it will require some time and engagement of the intellect, but remember it took centuries to (almost) settle the faith of the church!

Cre-do in u-num De-um, Pa-trem o-mni-po-ten-tem, fa-cto-rem cae-li et ter-rae,  
vi-si-bi-li-um o-mni-um, et in-vi-si-bi-li-um. Et in u-num Do-mi-num  
Je-sum Chri-stum, Fi-li-um De-i u-ni-ge-ni-tum. Et ex Pa-tre na-tum  
an-te o-mni-a sae-cu-la. De-um de De-o, lu-men de lu-mi-ne, De-um ver-  
-rum de De-o ve-ro. Ge-ni-tum, non fa-ctum, con-sub-stan-ti-a-lem Pa-tri: per  
quem o-mni-a fá-cta sunt. Qui pro-pter nos ho-mi-nes, et pro-pter no-stram sa-

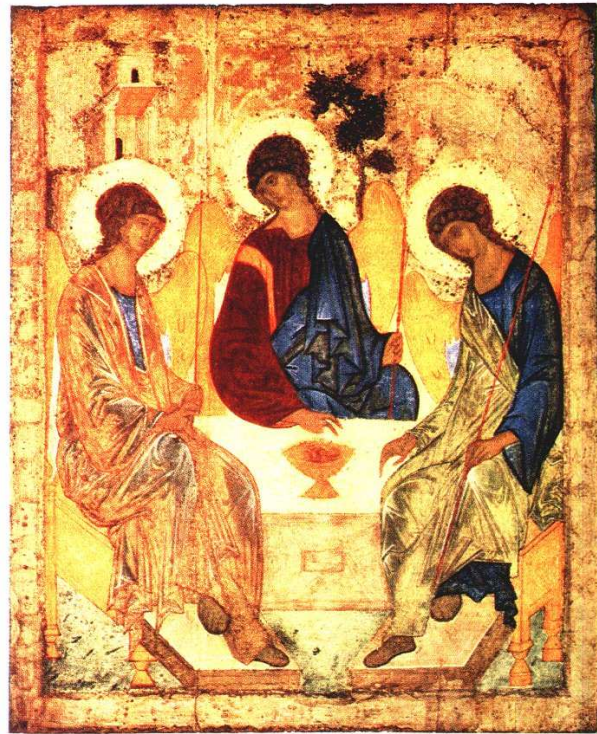
The Nicene Creed in Latin with notation for chanting in plainsong

***Credo in unum Deum*** – I do believe in one God. Some say they don’t believe in God – they too then are people of faith – they believe, but they cannot know. What I always say is, ‘Even if you don’t believe in God, I believe that He believes in you!’ What do you *credo*? I believe that Jesus is Lord!

*The full text of the Nicene Creed is provided at Appendix 1 and the Apostles’ Creed at Appendix 2. (There are several other creedal statements at appendices 3-5).*

## 2. Faith and Facts

This commentary is about the faith of the church and by this I mean the one holy, catholic and apostolic church... the what? We must recognise that the Judeo-Christian tradition is a very broad church and quite divided, not always catholic (= universal). Churches can regard each other as cults, errant – some claim to be the true church of Christ, considering the conventional churches to have lost touch with the true faith of the apostles very early on. We are holy – you are not they claim. So how do I define *the church*? I mean the church that adheres to the traditional beliefs enshrined in the catholic/universal creeds of Nicaea from which we (the Church of England) originate.



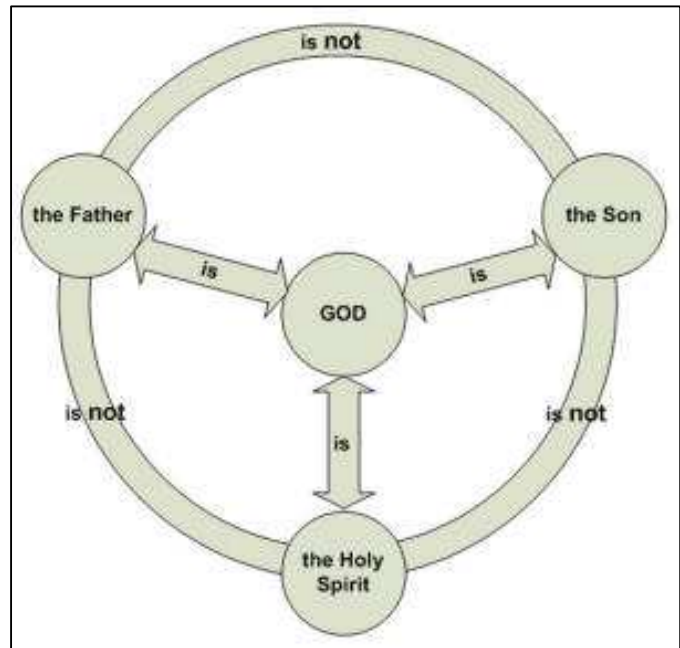
Rublev's famous icon showing the three Angels being hosted by Abraham at Mambré

I have posed many questions. Before our quest begins let me state that *faith* is not the same as *fact*! I do not mean to belittle faith, but stress a vital difference. *Faith* is not dependant on proof, it requires trust in Gods' promises. Faith engenders loyalty and rightly leads to adoration and worship. *Fact* is supposedly unquestionable and thus much less challenging. There is a measure of personal introspection required when examining the *faith of the church*. The holy bible presents its evidence, '*that you may come to believe*' (Jn 20:30), and I encourage you to apply your reason in this fact-hungry, research-filled, science-orientated age.

One can investigate the bible for answers to everything; sadly some churches have become the modern equivalent of the Pharisees with the worth they place in legalistic adherences. These churches over-focus on the end of the world, and the rejection of the mainstream churches. They are characterised by divisiveness rather than love and tolerance. Churches that set harsh rules and are puritanical are more about human control than freedom and life *in Christ*. I consider that the prime indication of the true church is the 'fruit' of its members. Jesus taught us that we have a personal responsibility to employ the unique gifts we are given, to share the love he exemplified, our 'works' are the fruit of the Holy Spirit given to us. Thus I have given a brief definition of *faith* and *church*; now for facts...

Historically there has been development of thought in the church and much controversy – perhaps more among the 'authorities' than with the *Laos* (ordinary people). Have you ever considered how church folk in England in the 1550's went from being Roman Catholic, to English Catholic, to Protestant Anglican, to Roman, to *Via Media* Anglican in just a few short years as the monarchy changed between Henry VIII, Edward VI, (Bloody) Mary, Lady Jane Grey and Good Queen Bess? (Interested? Read *The Voices of Morebath: 2003*, E Duffy).

Clearly some change in thinking is more political than biblical, but from the earliest times the Church Fathers debated, intrigued and fought over definitions of *the faith*. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity (The three-ness of the one God) as represented by this diagram is not clearly defined in the bible. It is deduced through living as a person of faith – within the true Church. In order to describe the nature of the Godhead and define the nature of Christ (Christology) there were sustained arguments at Nicaea about Greek words such as homoousios (same essence) and homoiousios (similar essence) indicated by a mere ‘iota’ of difference (note the additional letter ‘i’). The Trinity is a way of preserving the Jewish understanding of the ‘oneness’ of God whilst incorporating the Son, Jesus Christ, who is believed to be truly God and truly man and then including the agency of God in The Holy Spirit.



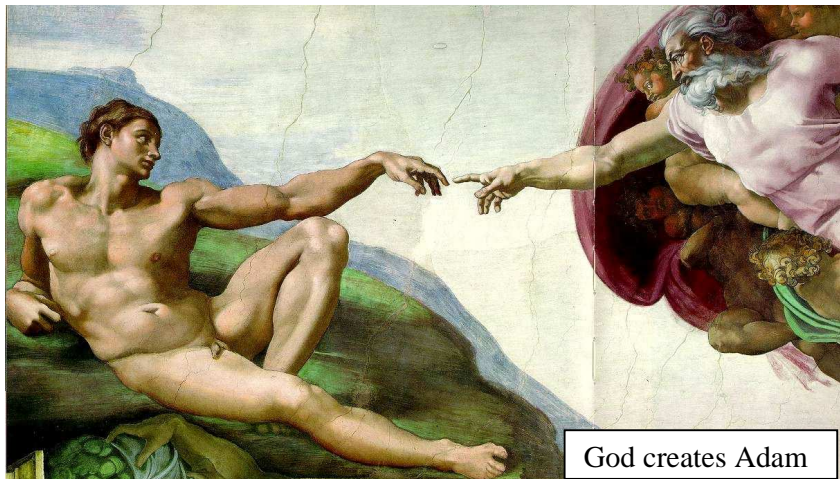
There is a three-ness in God, three persons, but not three Gods (*Pantheism*) nor three revelations of one person (*Modalism*). Some rejected the God of the Old Testament in favour of Christ the new God (*Marcionism*). Some thought Jesus was a human adopted by God at his baptism/ascension (*Adoptionists*). Some held God the Father as eternal, who then created the Son, who in turn created the Holy Spirit (*Arianism*). Others held that Jesus’ human nature and body was an illusion – he was pure spirit (*Docetics*). There were controversies about soteriology (salvation), an early second century case being Gnosticism, a mystical, dualistic influence on various religions that holds secret knowledge to be the way to salvation; the human soul is a good, divine spark embodied in an evil body. Recently there has been much debate concerning the *New Perspective on Paul* – have *Lutheran* Protestants misunderstood the idea of Salvation by our faith in Christ, rather than by the faith of Christ and the place of ‘grace’, ‘works’ and biblical law observance in salvation? *Luther et al* did spark the Reformation of which the Church of England is partially a product. Are we saved through our own faith – or by the faithfulness of Christ – or indeed is it a combination of both? Thus theological debate continues...

Our starting point must be to know more about the settled faith of the church, working through the creeds must be helpful. So much then for the controversies and heresies that the church has worked through; the Creeds then devised to clarify and establish an orthodox faith. Now begins consideration of the creedal texts and exploration of their meanings. As far as is practical the Apostles Creed is integrated, which itself largely derives from the Nicene. It may get technical, (viz explaining perichoresis - the mutual indwelling of three persons of the Trinity) but I have attempted to use plain English. I *believe* it very worthwhile to know more about what we mean as we regularly use the creeds, remembering that many churches do not often recite them, or in fact place much *credence* in them (*All puns intended*).

### 3. In God the Father

*Nicene Creed* - "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible."

*Apostles Creed* - "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth..."



The opening of the creeds is almost uniform, the only marginal difference being the accentuation of the oneness of God. This prompts me straight away to stress that the Christian Creeds are not complete in their explanations, they miss out vital factors such as worship, prayer, scripture, sacraments – all things that were established in the earliest churches and evidenced in the New Testament. The history of formation of the Apostles and Nicene Creed is beyond the scope of this commentary, I'm accepting their validity and authority by virtue that they are valued and used by the mainstream (orthodox) church. The creeds were principally developed and refined over time to refute unorthodox beliefs (heresy); I aim to expound their meaning.

Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one... All the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) profess the oneness of God. It is true that Christianity is seen by the other two faiths as errant, in that it seems to believe in three gods. The Hebraic Shema, (Hear O Israel) is the creed that Jesus taught. Islam's faith is declared in its' call to prayer, "There is no God, but God..." The Christian Creeds also accentuate the oneness of God and then go on to talk of Father and Son and Holy Spirit as persons of the Trinitarian One God.

Before we move onto the Trinity, let's explore God! What do we mean when we say God? We believe (how can we know?) that God is a reality. If there is no God (or God is dead, as Friedrich Nietzsche famously said) there is no moral obligation to anyone or anything. If we do not owe our existence to a creator/maker then we only have the self to satisfy and perhaps some others who add value to our lives. If we do not have to give account and be judged by God, then we can do whatever we can get away with, all morality assumes accountability to God. Without God we are selfish, conversely with God we are obligated to be unselfish – Jesus added to the Hebraic Shema (Love God) the command to, "Love one another" and taught us to serve others, not self - as he modeled in his life. God is Father of all, we're family!

Those who accept scripture – Torah, Bible, Koran (people of the book) need no proof of God – simply put, God *is* and we accept "*I am*" as El, Elohim, Adoni, YHWH, The Lord of Hosts, God, Allah. For others who do not readily accept the claims of scripture, how can God be proved? Historically in three ways: -

(i). In human consciousness – vast numbers (I contend a huge majority) of humans past and present have sought and seek *the other*, some entity beyond themselves and the ordinary physically provable, knowable world in which we exist.

(ii). From the order and design increasingly apparent in the universe. The beginnings of science put doubts in man's mind as knowledge proved challenging to scriptural belief.

Those who believe in a fundamental inerrancy of scripture are thus at odds with science which produces contrary physical evidence. The result has been a marked decline in belief in the educated world as 'clever' people 'threw out the baby with the bathwater' – scripture and its meaning being consigned to the waste-heap of history. Scripture is the story of man and God; it is the product of the faith through at least six thousand years and all of it written down before the scientific era. I believe that everything necessary for salvation is contained within scripture – my faith is not rocked by modern understandings revealed in science – quite the opposite. The incredible purposeful and 'intelligent' design of the universe revealed by the new insight of science strengthens my faith; such that I believe all the more that there is a 'maker of all things visible & invisible'.

(iii). Many ancient writings (including scripture) point towards a search for, an experience of and development of understanding towards God. I don't think God has changed, but human conceptions of God have. Horrific 'religious' practices including human sacrifices and great cruelties and conflicts arise from a primeval, primitive misunderstanding of God. But since the time of Abraham man has moved towards a compassionate and merciful perception of God (albeit in 'fits and starts'). God is – He is He – God *is* the reality.

What then is God? If I could define God, it could not be God. God surpasses the limitations of physics and philosophy. To describe God is to contain the unknowable and immeasurable. What can we begin to say about God? Perhaps the most important doctrine is the oneness of God. He is before and after (both outside and inside time and space). He is unrivaled, unlimited and undivided. He is one. Distinctive to Christianity is the belief that the personal creator is as truly three as he is one (more next time on Father, Son and Holy Spirit).



The New Dictionary of Theology: 1989, IVP, Leicester, pages 276-7) states,

*God is self-existent, self-sufficient and self-sustaining. God is integrated, perfect and immutable, infinite, bodiless (a spirit), omnipresent, omniscient and eternal. God is purposeful, all-powerful and sovereign, both transcendent over and immanent in, his world. God is impassible. God is holy love & moral perfection.*

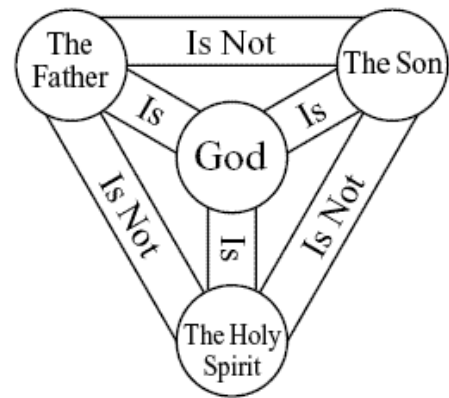
God created everything from nothing. How long did this take? Six days states Genesis, but what is a day, especially when the sun – which defines our earthly day as 24-hours was itself created during the first day? Time scale is meaningless and a distraction from the process itself. All things that are and became, have their origin in God. That is what the Creeds say and I find them quite modern, "God created all things, visible and invisible". How true when scientists are searching for the missing so-called Dark Matter (which must exist by latest scientific reasoning to complete the cleverest scientists' equations of time, energy and matter).

#### 4. In God, The Trinity

*Nicene Creed* – “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty...And in one Lord Jesus Christ...And I believe in the Holy Spirit”

*Apostles Creed* – “I believe in God...and in Jesus Christ...I believe in the Holy Spirit...”

I have written of the oneness of God, acknowledging that explanation of the one in three, three in one – *Holy Trinity* is needed. Thus far I have laid some foundations before commencing with commentary on the texts of the Creeds. This diagram shows the oneness of God at its centre, but three persons, (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit) all distinct, but undivided are shown as interrelated aspects of God.



The creeds say something about each of the persons of God. The Father is the Creator; Jesus Christ, the only Son is begotten of the Father and is Lord. The Holy Spirit is the giver of life and is Lord. In John’s Gospel 1:1-14 observe what it says about *The Word*. The Word of God was in the beginning, was with God and was God. The Word created all things and in him was created all life and the Word became flesh and lived among us. John speaks of God and Word as one, of life as spirit, as Word becoming flesh and living with us. In these densely compacted 14 verses we have ‘Oneness’ and also Creator, Life, Spirit (Light) and incarnation of The Son (Jesus). The Word is Jesus and he was in the beginning with God and involved in Creation and the Spirit brought life and light into being. Genesis 1:1 speaks of a formless void in darkness, “And the Spirit of God hovering...” When Christians speak of God they talk of persons with characteristics – a Father figure (but it could equally be Mother in my thinking); a Son, God with us as Jesus of Nazareth, known as Messiah/Christ, and a Spirit which turned the ‘dithering disciples’ into ‘authoritative apostles’ at Pentecost. This language and indeed the way Jesus spoke of Abba (father) and Son of Man does in human terms seem to divide God into distinct persons. How then are they one – are they not three? An answer is to be found in *Perichoresis*. I once asked three teenage girls who were great friends one with the other to me demonstrate *Perichoresis* at St Michaels Church, Verwood. They were dancers. Each wore the same dress, except they wore different colours. The dance began with the three linked as in the diagram above. As we read extracts from scripture they separated and danced, but always our attention linked them together – they were one and yet three. At times they came back together and their gestures suggested they were perfectly connected and related even when separate. It was the most powerful sermon I have preached and it had no *words* from me only the Word of God spoken above the gentle music of the dance.

The Trinity is as truly one as he is three! The Trinity is about relationship a mutual indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit. To believe in God as Trinity is to enter into relationship. We love God; we love others, by the Spirit which has been given to us. Without the Spirit we cannot love in this way. Without God there is no imperative to love. Without others there is no prospect of relationship. We talk of three persons, but these are not separate in a human sense – that would be Tritheism – exactly what Christians are accused of by persons of the Islamic and Jewish faith.

I have already stated that God is not totally definable and this is also the case with the doctrine of the Trinity. There has been much debate resulting from the various attempts of definition. St Augustine saw Trinity as a mind that knows of itself because it conceives of its own existence: what is more, it must also love its own self-conception. A lover cannot love without a beloved, and there is of necessity a love which flows between them but which is not strictly identical with either. The Spirit then is the fruit of the mutual love of the Father and Son. Herein lays the greatest controversy. The Spirit proceeds from the Father (The unbegotten, who begot the Son) says the Greek, Eastern Church. The Western, Augustinian view is of The Spirit proceeding from the Father and The Son. There is no disagreement between the Eastern and Western Churches that God is three co-eternal persons. Unfortunately, in history the difference in understanding and the political situation surrounding the decline and division of the Roman Empire led to a schism (division) between the churches and so the so called Roman and Orthodox Church resulted. In recent times with more sophisticated and less heated political undertones the churches have come much closer to unity on the issue. You may have noticed that when we have a united service we use the ecumenically agreed text of the Nicene Creed and this omits the words that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as the Father. The bible tells us that Jesus said that he would ask the Father to send another – the councillor – the Spirit that will help, guide, empower and bring ‘life’ to all who follow the Way that the Father leads us in his Son Jesus Christ. (John 14.15).

The Trinity then for me is a unity of undivided persons who are known to us as Father, creator of all things, Son – God incarnate (Emmanuel=God with us until he returned to the Father) and Spirit the life (breath) of God ever present in all creation past and immediate. But all were present in the beginning. God is one and yet became incarnate in Jesus that we might know Him as Lord and saviour.

Christians know God by the exemplary life of Christ and are convinced of its personal relevance by The Holy Spirit.

It might help to consider how we experience the very common substance  $H_2O$  – the combination of Hydrogen and Oxygen. In our everyday lives  $H_2O$  is known to us as three different substances, each with different characteristics: - Steam, Ice and Water. Steam is a gas and it is colourless and invisible - we only see the vapour as it begins to cool to become water (the liquid form). In its liquid form water is wet and flows, but cool it below its’ freezing point and a solid mass is formed.  $H_2O$  – Steam, Water, Ice – it’s the same substance, but with three wholly different properties. Each state of  $H_2O$  has a different effect on us and a different function in life. Similarly God is one, but known to us in three ways.



Boiling water is thrown in sub zero temperatures and changes instantly

Consider how a single person can be a mother, a daughter and a sister. The same person has a distinctive role in each case, but the relationship is cemented together by love to establish the community we call a family. In a similar way God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one divine loving community, both three persons and yet undivided.

## 5. Jesus is Lord

*Nicene Creed* – “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made”

*Apostles Creed* – “and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord”

Christians submit to Christ as Lord. In essence it is sufficient to confess that Jesus is Lord and this is the exact statement that adorned the altar frontals of former pope, John Paul II when he was abroad during his many foreign visits. It is often found written on the facing wall in Baptist churches and Chapels. In the Scriptures, Jesus of Nazareth has received many titles. He is called the

Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, Saviour, and Messiah. He has also been called "Lord." Unlike many of the other terms given to Jesus, the term Lord is relatively common and as such its meaning is often taken for granted. But what does the Lordship of Christ actually mean?

It was ‘doubting Thomas’ who on seeing the risen Jesus said, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Jesus Himself gives the first inkling into the significance of being called Lord when He addresses a great multitude of people along with His disciples in the plain, “Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). If anyone recognizes Jesus Christ as his or her Lord, then the first requirement from such a person is utter and total obedience. This obedience is given to Jesus Christ because of the authority that was granted to Him. Jesus said, as He departed for His throne in glory, “. . . All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18). How did Jesus gain this authority? On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter addressed the crowd that had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast. He recited from the Psalms, the words of King David, linking them to the deeds and happenings in the life of Christ. After explaining about the suffering, death & resurrection of Jesus and proving that the words in the Psalms did not refer to David but to some future, greater person, Peter said, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The Father bestowed the office of Lord to Jesus Christ His Son because Jesus had surrendered Himself in full obedience to God and had accomplished the work of salvation through crucifixion and taken victory over all enemies through His resurrection.

The Apostle Paul also stresses the connection between the obedience of Christ and His lordship in the book of Philippians, “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:8-11).



*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God...  
The Jesus Prayer & Christogram*

As Lord, Jesus Christ deserves reverence, honour, and obedience because of the glory that was bestowed upon Him by the Father. We are to take the same mind of obedience that Jesus Himself had. We as followers of Christ must acknowledge Him in all of our ways. We are only to do what pleases Him and what He has commanded us to do. This is how He, Himself lived towards the Father during His earthly sojourn, “So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.’” (John 8:28).



Medieval monogram of the Greek name of Jesus (IHSOYΣ) found in various styles throughout Christendom

What does the lordship of Jesus Christ mean? It means that we recognize Him for who He is and give Him the honour that He is due. He has earned it; He is worthy of it. Church are his followers, united in worship, encouraging and supporting each other and enabling others to hear the Gospel, good news. Ultimately, this is how our walk with Christ should begin, by recognizing and confessing that He is Lord. This is how salvation is received, by this very recognition. “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10). Salvation is not merited by us; it is the free gift of God in and through Christ. The word we use to describe this undeserved favour is ‘Grace’. By the Grace of God we are saved; in the words of the hymn, “ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven” and to Him we offer our praise and wor(th)ship. We are each offered salvation, many choose to decline, either rejecting the grace of God or simply not perceiving their need to be reconciled to God and be saved.

The Nicene Creed tells us that Jesus is not a creature, he was begotten of the Father, the *only* begotten (Son) and that this was before all creation in which God, Father, Son and Spirit were the creators of all things. The Son existed before he was incarnate (made man



and lived on earth) (John 1.1-18). The Son is God of God, Light of Light of the same *one* substance as the Father. These statements are to counter various heresies which held the Son as a lesser being, or a creature, or a separate God, of a different nature or essence to the one God. The Son (The Word) became flesh – some knew Him, some didn’t and now billions herald Christ as Lord, and strive to submit to His authority, His Way. Jesus was not a superhuman; he is both Lord and God! He calls us to follow Him.

## 6. Jesus, God with us

*Nicene Creed* – “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made”. (Continued)  
Modern text – 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.



The finger of God and Adam touch in the famous Michelangelo Sistine Chapel wall and ceiling paintings.

The Nicene Creed is more detailed than the Apostles Creed at this point. Jesus was begotten, not created. Everything that has or still exists, or will exist has its origin in God. God is the ‘*Ground of all Being*’. All things bear the marks of our creator God. Ants and whales, galaxies of stars and sub-atomic particles are all creatures of God, part of The Creation. In this way all things are subordinate and separate to God. Jesus, the Word of God, Son of God was not created and is not subordinate or separated from God. Jesus was God before time itself and before creation was brought into being. Jesus is one with God and not a separate being.

At this point I have to make you aware that there is room for debate about essentially Greek Platonic (Hellenic) world views and Jewish (and thus early Christian) doctrine. The Creeds themselves, as I have previously explained, exist to normalise and standardise thinking about belief to bring ‘Orthodoxy’. Platonic philosophy thinks of the pre-existence of Jesus as essential, thus the heavy emphasis of this part of the Nicene Creed...*the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God*. The Apostle’s Creed however skips over all this and seemingly has nothing to say. What then was Jewish and perhaps very early Christian thought? The role of the prophet, the one who is inspired by God might be a starting point. On the Emmaus road the travellers speak of Jesus as, “*a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people*” (Luke 24:19).

It is the notion that Jesus was Immanuel (God with us) that the Jews rejected. Yet Jesus the man was so perfectly in spiritual union with His Father in heaven, that he was according to the great Jewish Pharisee & convert Saint Paul, “*The image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation*”(Col 1:15). But Paul is clear that Jesus is not only equal to God, but that he is the exact representation of God, having all the power and authority of God. Paul in all his writings says little of Jesus, but much of ‘The Christ’, the man who God resurrected from the dead and the implication this has for all mankind. In conclusion then it is not the *how* but *what* that is essential for us, as those who subordinate ourselves to God in Jesus Christ. “My Lord and my God” said Thomas, doubting no more! (Jn 20:28)

## 7. The Incarnation

*Nicene Creed* – “Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man”

*Apostles Creed* – “and in Jesus Christ... who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary”

Essential to the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus Christ was both divine and human. This is the doctrine of ‘The Incarnation’. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the Son was made incarnate – born into the human condition – at a time of God’s choosing. Matthew and Luke’s Gospels state clearly that Jesus was born of a woman, not of man but miraculously conceived of



The Holy Spirit of God. Mary was a young girl at the time and was a virgin. Mary has a special (holy) place in the church. As the one chosen to bear the Lord she is known as ‘Theokotos’ – Mother of God. Indeed all generations have regarded her as blessed as is proclaimed with The Magnificat - The Song of Mary (Luke 1:46). Within Catholic tradition she, as the most significant biblical feminine figure is deeply revered and greatly honoured, because God honoured her above all women. When the Archangel Gabriel announced, “Greetings, you who are favoured above all women, the Lord is with thee”, Mary though startled, willingly gave her consent to The Lord with the immortal words, “I am the handmaid of the Lord”. And so the Holy Spirit came upon her and the Most High overshadowed her and the child born, Jesus, was called holy, the Son of God (Luke 1:35-38).

It is by this miracle that God’s nature was both fully human and yet fully divine. Jesus begotten of His Father before all time, God from God, was made incarnate by God’s will with a humble girl’s consent and God was seen on earth. This is the event that we celebrate at Christmas. In the inspirational words of the beloved 18<sup>th</sup> century Carol, “O Come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant – come and behold him – very God, begotten not created – Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing – O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!”.

Jesus, the Word, through whom all things were made, (John 1:1-3) was not created at the time of Mary’s conception; he was already existent – begotten of God in the beginning. The Word, Jesus, was made flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:14). This unique divine and human nature was evident because Jesus was both subject to the limitations of humanity and yet was through his intercession with The Father able to heal, to teach, to exorcize, to lead, to inspire like no other man before or since. The Incarnation transformed humanity forever.

This same Jesus told us that we too could and needed to be born of above – of Heaven – of The Holy Spirit (John 3:1-11). By this power we could become children of God, not just born of the natural process of human sexual relations, but born of God. God was made man, so that man might come to God.

## 8. Jesus Presented His Life to God

*Nicene Creed* – “Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man”

*Apostles Creed* – “and in Jesus Christ...who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary” (Continued)

Jesus was made man; he was born of the virgin Mary and of the Holy Spirit. In February, in church, we move rapidly in our liturgical year from celebrating Jesus’ birth at Christmas towards his self-sacrificial death, on the cross on Good Friday, commemorated this year on March 21<sup>st</sup>.

The picture above depicts Jesus as an infant child, still a babe in arms, but already being offered in sacrifice to God, according to the Jewish custom of the offering of the first-born son. This is known as The Feast of The Presentation, observed on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February. God became man and was raised by a loving mother, and adopted by Joseph and raised in a lowly carpenter’s home in Nazareth of Galilee.



The Creeds also jump straight from birth to death and omit so much detail. I wonder what might have been included. I offer these ideas; *Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. He preached the Gospel to the poor, he announced freedom for the oppressed, healed the sick, gave hope to the downtrodden, despised and rejected and he declared the favour of the Lord. He joyfully announced the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and required all to turn back to God in repentance and be ready for a transformed life.* The Creeds however function to establish orthodoxy, especially where divergence in belief caused division (schism). The soteriological (saving) works and ministry of Jesus was and is self-evident. Jesus was totally committed to this Good News. He invited others to join with him and take the message to all, recognising that many would reject his Gospel. He taught in parables in the Rabbinic tradition, was able to open up the meaning of the scriptures (our Old Testament) and prophesied, especially that when his time had come he would be taken and be killed by those who acted to oppose God. Jesus called God, ‘Abba’ Dad and spent much time in prayer.

Jesus was tempted not to live in accordance with his Father’s will; a particularly human trait – but he was obedient. He was empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit and overcame the propensity of humanity to sin. Jesus was the perfect example for human life; he was without sin and finally presented his life to God in a demonstration of perfect faith, asking Father God’s forgiveness for all who opposed him.

Jesus presented his life to God as a human he overcame human weakness which is innate in every human life – he is a perfect example for us to imitate, that we too might present our lives to God.

## 9. Jesus Suffered, Crucified, Died.

*Nicene Creed* – “and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried...”

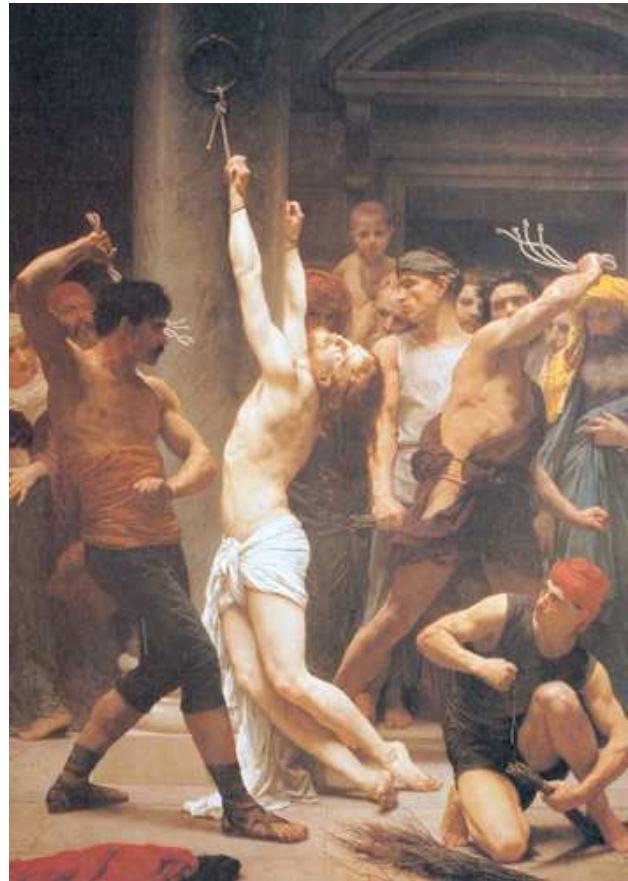
*Apostles Creed* – “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead”.

The arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ is attested in each of the four Gospels. Jesus is brought before the Roman Governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Jesus is scourged before crucifixion in Matthew and Mark and in Luke Pilate tries to prevent the crucifixion by ordering a flogging, but the crowd are insistent on crucifixion. In John’s Gospel there is no mention of a flogging. In each case Jesus’ fate lies in Pilate’s hands, but the four Gospels represent Pilate’s attitude differently. Luke (being a Greek?) seems the most conciliatory towards the Roman role.

“He has done nothing deserving death” Luke 23:13-23. Matthew 27:18-26 also has Pilate perceiving that Jesus is undeserving of death, but his hand is forced by the crowd “I am innocent of this man’s blood, it is your decision”. In Mark 15:15 Pilate, wanting to satisfy the crowd, has Jesus flogged, and hands him over to be crucified. In John 19:11-12 Pilate tried to set Jesus free but was caught between the Lord telling him his only power over Him was given from above, and the threatening crowd arguing, “We have no King but Caesar”.

The Apostle’s Creed adds the statement that Jesus died and descended to the dead. Jesus did not pass out, go into a coma and revive some time later. He died relatively quickly, whereas the normal aim of crucifixion was to make the victim suffer for up to several days; but Jesus had been flogged and was therefore in a weakened state. John’s Gospel graphically tells us that by special permission the soldiers were breaking the legs to hasten the cruel process of crucifixion because a special Sabbath was drawing near, but when they came to Jesus he was already dead. To make sure, his side was pierced with a spear, “bringing a sudden of blood and water” (John 19:28-37). This water results from the lung cavity filling with bodily fluids as the body is horribly stretched, until the crucified unable to support themselves drown. The suffering caused by crucifixion is almost beyond comprehension. It was a uniquely cruel and barbarous practice.

Jesus died and his body was taken by a secret disciple, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. They prepared the corpse with about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes, wrapped in linen strips and buried it nearby in a new tomb in a garden. Jesus lay dead and buried, his followers shattered. Several days passed...



## 10. The Resurrection

*Nicene Creed* – “and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father...”

*Apostles Creed* – “The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty”.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is central to an orthodox Christian Faith. Jesus’ life and ministry is fully vindicated by God as he is raised from human death to a new resurrection life. Mary of Magdala is weeping outside the garden tomb and has a conversation with a man she presumes to be the gardener. As Jesus calls to her, “Mary” she turns and cries out, “Rabbouni” (teacher). Jesus instructs her not to hold onto him, “...for I have not yet returned to the Father”.



Jesus instructs Mary to tell the brothers that he is returning to, “My Father and your Father”. This is so typical of the gospel – a previously mad woman is the one to proclaim the fulfilment of all Jesus had taught and said! But Jesus then appears to the disciples in a locked room and later again so that ‘Doubting Thomas’ is able to put his hands into the wounds and scars that Jesus’ resurrected body still bears. Thomas’ response is the words that all mankind might utter in response to all that has done through Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus later physically appeared to some five hundred persons (1 Cor 15:6).

Jesus was crucified on the eve of the Sabbath (Friday) and was seen by Mary early on the first day of the week (the day after the Sabbath) i.e. Sunday morning. He rose again on the third day, just as he prophesied. In Luke and Matthews’ Gospels there are six specific times when Jesus predicts he will die and yet be raised on the third day and there are various other references and allusions. In this and in so many other hundreds of ways Jesus’ whole life and ministry accorded to (fulfilled) scriptural prophecy for the Messiah.

Jesus Christ did not remain long after he met with his disciples. In Matthew 20:16-18 we hear a concluding account of a meeting in Galilee, on the mountain, where he had told them to go. Some worshipped him and some doubted, again so truthful is the account that even after all these events the lingering doubts of some disciples is not purged from the Gospel record. Jesus commissions his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations...

In Luke 24:50-3 there is a definite final meeting with the disciples in Bethany. Jesus blesses them, left them, “and was taken up into heaven”. The eleven disciples (and those with them) “worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy...staying at the Temple, praising God.” This is the basis for the Ascension. That Jesus ‘sits at the right hand of the Father’, there is no doubt. Jesus himself used this idiom in his parables and later of himself. To Pontius Pilate Jesus says, “from now on, the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God” (Luke 23:69). This is where the vindicated Messiah belongs. He was crucified, died and was buried, but on the third day he rose again, ascended to God in Heaven where he reigns in glory. In this we share in the joy of all disciples who believe! This is the faith of the church from the very beginning as is clearly attested in Acts 2:28-38. Do not be confused by this idiomatic language – Jesus is not actually separate from The Father – Father Son and Holy Spirit are one and in John’s Gospel Jesus’ prayer is this, “And now I am no longer in the World, but they (*his followers*) are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” (John 17:11).



## 11. The Second Coming

*Nicene Creed* - He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.  
*Apostles Creed* - and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus Christ is in Heaven and nearly two millennia have passed since his ascension. There is a biblical promise that he is with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). What will happen then? Time does not



constrain the Blessed and eternal Trinity. It does have total significance in human terms because we all have a beginning at birth and an end at death. Time marches on for mankind towards a conclusion, an end, according to biblical faith. Jesus confirmed this in his teaching, he spoke clearly of the ‘end of the age’ when the righteous and evil will be judged and separated (Matthew 3:39-49). This doctrine of the end of the age and judgement is known as eschatology. It has its roots in scripture in The Old Testament and was clearly preached by John the Baptist and amplified by Jesus Christ. “The time has

come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). The kingdom is not so much a place or institution – it is an attitude of man towards God. Substitute the word ‘reign’ for ‘kingdom’ and understand that each person has a free-will choice in the matter. To welcome the one who comes in the name of the Lord, Jesus the Messiah is to seek righteousness, which comes not from us, but from God to us as a gift in love. Conversely to reject God is to welcome evil and court final separation from God. It matters how we live and we will all stand before God sooner or later. Jesus taught us not to be complacent about this, not to be self-reliant and uncaring. Death comes upon us like a thief in the night – indeed it is my growing experience that the dying and newly bereaved look back, shocked at how time has raced by.

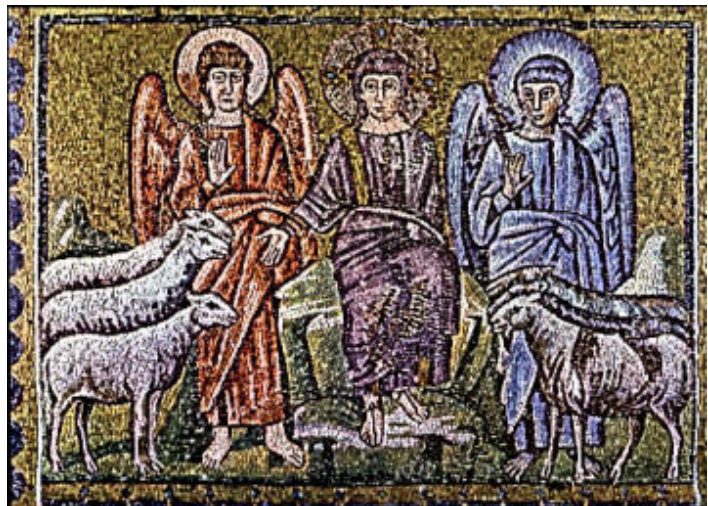
But we are not without hope, we who are left, because we trust in the completion of creation when the kingdom finally comes. When will that be? When will be the end of the age? You might ask this, just as the disciples did. Jesus’ response was two-fold. Firstly, it was not for him to reveal and it shouldn’t be expected soon – all manner of evil things would continue – birth pangs of better things to come. Secondly it would happen when the gospel had finally been proclaimed throughout the world (Matthew 23:37 – 24:14). Jesus said, “I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you can be also.” Thomas said, “Lord we do not know the way. Where? How? These are the big questions that are fully answered in the bible and by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and his holy church. “I am the way and the truth and the life, no-one comes to the Father except through me”. The Father and the Son are one. (John 14:1-14).

At the end of the age, the Lord will come again. There will a kind of spiritual harvest. All who have proved righteous among the living and the dead will be raised to joyful resurrection life in the eternal kingdom of God. Those who God judges unrepentant are unworthy and will “weep and wail” as they are removed from the kingdom (Matt 23:40-43).

The kingdom, the reign of God is still to come – at the end of the age, but in another sense it has already come into the hearts of all believers. The reign of God is both now and not yet. God reigns in Heaven and he reigns on Earth through the righteous, but the final reign of God on Earth is still to come when Christ comes again. When Christ comes again it will be an unmistakable and glorious event. God doesn’t depend on human technology,

but I can’t help wondering in this Communications Age that it is become much easier to communicate with all

Humans alive on Earth than it was when Christ first came. We have increasingly more sophisticated ways of proclaiming the Gospel and for all the dangers of the internet – it is a wonderful resource library if used sensibly for the Christian message and church. Have you never heard of Desperate Preachers.com – is this where all the vicar’s sermons come from?



A depiction of the separation of the sheep from the goats at the second coming of Christ (See Matthew 25:31-46).

## 12. The Holy Spirit

*Nicene Creed* - 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 worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.

*Apostles Creed* – I believe in the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has a unique and equal role within the Holy Trinity and the Nicene Creed says this. The Spirit of God hovers over the world at Creation. In this sense He is the life giver, bringing light from darkness and form from void. He is central to life itself. Life is both physical and spiritual and through history God's will is revealed to spirit-filled

'prophets'. They live for God and not themselves and offer guidance that brings life and blessing. The prophets speak for God, but almost always their message is misunderstood and rejected. It inspired them, even when they struggled with seemingly overwhelming opposition viz Elijah and the prophets of Baal (Read 1 Kings 18:19). As time progresses there are no prophets for four hundred years until the time of John the Baptist who is 'filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth' (Luke 1.15).

In Matthew's Gospel a child, to be named Ye Shua (God Saves = Jesus), is conceived in the womb of Mary by The Holy Spirit. God remains fully God but also becomes fully human (incarnate). It is by this incarnation that God acts to bring salvation. By living, dying and rising again as a perfect example of how God wants humans to be, salvation is finally possible for all. The Kingdom of God is brought near by Jesus; man is called to respond. Jesus becomes the Christ (anointed one) as he is powerfully anointed by the Spirit at Baptism. The Spirit then drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tested. It is the Spirit of God at work in and through Jesus that redeems and reconciles God to man. Jesus' life and teaching are documented in the New Testament as the eternal covenant is renewed, but man still cannot fully grasp this new reality. At the end of his human ministry Jesus, The Son asks the Father and The Holy Spirit is sent down upon the disciples at Pentecost and they are transformed into Apostles with the same healing powers and miraculous abilities as Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is a gift given to those who repent and follow Jesus. Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts of the Apostles 2.38). It is The Holy Spirit of God in the believer that enables them to proclaim Jesus as Lord and to pray for righteous things. It is The Holy Spirit that guides, helps, enables and also convinces us of our faults and wrongdoings. The Holy Spirit brings a new and Godly vision for the physical life, whilst shaping our spiritual life. Christians are instructed to live by the Spirit. Its benefits are known as, 'The Fruits' and they are goodness, selflessness and bring abundance of life - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:16-26). Thus a spirit-filled Christian is known by these characteristics and the Spirit of God is made known in the world through them.



### 13. The Church

*Nicene Creed* - We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church...

*Apostles Creed* – the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints...

Some definition of terms is called for here!

*Holy* means; set apart, sacred, of God, pure, special.

*Catholic* means: universal, broad.

*Apostolic* means: according to the teaching of Jesus and the apostles truly inspired by God's Holy Spirit.

*Church* means: followers in The Way of Jesus, who gather to worship and accept Jesus as Lord.

*Communion* means: community, like-minded, in relationship.

*Saints* means: Exemplary followers of Jesus – both renowned and unrecognised.



The church as depicted here is not a building! It is 'constructed' of people – all who are following on The Way of Jesus Christ. People need buildings to gather in, to meet each other. When they come together they want to offer worship (to give God his worth) and various liturgies (forms of public worship) are in use in many different styles and languages. Most Christian worship includes readings of The Bible and Prayers are offered to God. Often songs or Hymns are sung. A Presbyter (Priest/Pastor/Elder) leads the worship and reminds people of Gods forgiveness and blessing. In most cases new Christians are baptised either as children of Christian parents or as adults. Many will join in Holy Communion (Eucharist/Mass) as the people remember Jesus at the last Supper and his commandment to meet and share this special celebration together. All this worship and meeting is to help form a Christ-centred, Holy Spirit-filled community that love God and one another (as Jesus commanded) and reach out to the wider community. Christians are instructed to share their faith and love others as themselves. All this is sacred – holy – of God. We join together, recognising that we are individuals with broad interests and yet we are united in our faith in Jesus. The church has formed ways of caring for Christians both spiritually and physically and importantly it has striven to develop a correct understanding and teaching of the faith. In this way there are Bishops and other leaders who are entrusted in ordering and guarding the apostolicity of the faith.

Human nature is full of error and we all are subject to sin – fall away from Jesus teaching. The church, corporately however believes that as it turns to God for guidance that the Holy Spirit of God inspires the Church. When human error occurs God is not confounded and can work his will through all who are sincere in their faith and practices. We believe in the church of God, it is His!

Recognising that there are churches that have fallen into error, what can be used to determine what is right and what might be wrong? The beginning of the answer lays in the Nicene and Apostles Creeds themselves. They are the standard for orthodoxy (right thinking) in the mainstream church.

Since the time of Jesus there have been many men and women who have been counted to lead exemplary Christian lives. Many of these have been declared as Saints. They are not persons to be worshipped, but their holiness (Godliness) can help to inspire believers. The Apostle Paul counted all practicing Christians as saints. Have you ever thought of yourself as a saint? The saints that have gone before, who have died to us, are alive to God. In this sense as we are in communion with God we are united with the saints and Heaven and Earth are united in a great communion.

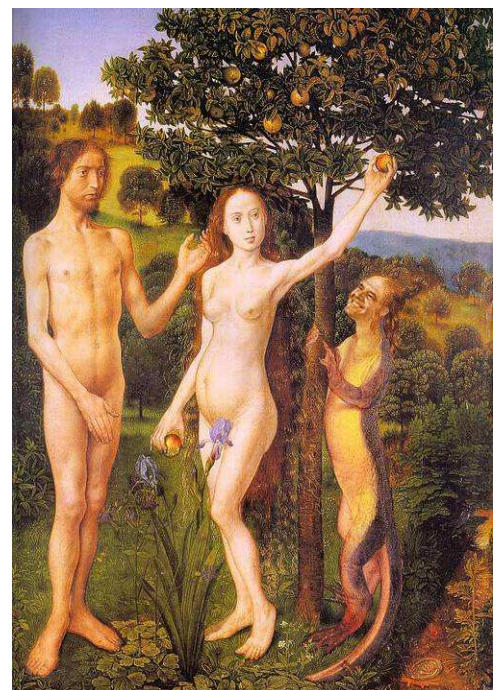
A brief early church history: - It is important to recall that the apostolic church was of Jewish origin and Jesus Christ a Jew (Yeshua the Messiah) was its inspiration. The early church was comprised of Jewish people who followed the way of Jesus as proclaimed by his disciples. They were added to by Gentiles (non-Jews) of Romano-Greek origin. Saint Paul had a particular ministry to the non-Jewish church. These times were very difficult as the Jewish nation struggled to free itself from Roman imperial rule. Sadly the Jewish Christians were progressively rejected and anathematised in reaction to the politics of the time. Within 35 years after Christ, many Jewish followers of 'The Way' had left Jerusalem and prior to its destruction in 70 C.E. that Jesus had prophesied (see Luke 21:20-21). The church became increasingly non-Jewish and especially so after secular leader Simon Bar-Kochva was declared The Messiah by Rabbi Akiva in 132 C.E. during the second Jewish revolt. Jewish Christians were forced to reject the Jewish leadership or Jesus and naturally they chose to uphold Jesus as the anointed Christ – The Messiah of God. Conversely Christians condemned the Jews for their non-acceptance of Jesus as Messiah and so began a separation of Jew and Christian with all the terrible consequences down through history.

## 14. Sin and Forgiveness

*Nicene Creed* - We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

*Apostles Creed* – the forgiveness of sins...

Sin is transgression of God's known will and any law established by Jesus and the apostolic church. Sin is a condition of partial or total estrangement from God brought about by such transgression. Transgression of God's sovereign will is evil. Christians believe that the human propensity to sin results from a 'fallen' state, classically expressed in the story of Adam and Eve and their original act of disobedience and disbelief. That resulted in a 'fall' from God's grace (favour). All humans have proven unable and or unwilling to seek and live by the will and law of God in all things – except that is Jesus, who was without sin. He lived a



life of perfect submission and example. Christians should always follow his teachings and the Holy Spirit inspired teachings of his apostles and the church.

Original Sin is forgiven through the act of Christian Baptism as one is baptised in the name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Spirit and all that it means. Sin is forgiven through the merit of Jesus Christ. Not only is the sinner pardoned for the evil he has done but he is also purified (redeemed) – his guilt removed. To be forgiven in such a way is known as salvation. Salvation is open to all who trust and believe in Jesus Christ. Salvation thus is a restoration of relationship with God, a freeing from the controlling power of evil enabling a holy life. When a child is raised as a Christian, or later they come to faith, they accept salvation through the rite of Christian Baptism and this is needed only once. Christians enter into a covenant relationship with God. God is faithful to his promises and therefore once baptism has been ministered it is not repeated. The candidate has a life-long duty to reciprocate and be faithful to their promise to God. This is expressed in a rejection of evil and a promise to turn to Christ.

Original Sin is forgiven at Baptism – but we all continue to sin thereafter, as we selfishly fail to love God and our neighbour. Consequently an important part of Christian worship has always been to publicly acknowledge the individual's sin – this is known as Confession, or a Penitential Rite – we say sorry to God. Normally there follows a proclamation of God's forgiveness by a Presbyter (Priest), known as absolution and a reminder that God is faithful and the Christian should turn away from sin and be faithful to their baptismal promises.

The rite of baptism itself is ancient and has its origins in the Jewish ritual of purification known as Mikveh. The picture is of a Mikveh pool located to the south of the Jerusalem Temple close to the Huldah Gate. It existed before John the Baptist – Baptism did not begin with him. The Jews used a ritual purification washing on various occasions and these are described in the Old Testament. But with Jesus Christ there is no need



for continuous purification - we believe that Baptism is a sacramental once only purification, sanctification and justification (redemption) of the convert. The Nicene formula makes this quite clear because in early times there were various debates about multiple baptisms (one can understand Jewish Christians doing this as a rite of cleansing) and re-baptism after changing denominations. Even today 'Baptist' churches require a 'believer's baptism' of an adult, rather than of a child. This originates from a difference in understanding of baptism as a mature individual response to God, rather than that of a child nurtured within the Christian family of the Church.

When John the Baptist called the Jewish people to Baptism he was inviting them to Mikveh. He prophetically declared that by their unholy way of life the people were no longer worthy to be the chosen children of God and they should repent (change their ways) and purify themselves as a gentile (foreigner) would if they wanted to convert to being a Jew. Their way of life had broken their part in the covenantal relationship with God - this was a radical and truly prophetic message. 'God could raise up stones to be his sons and daughters', said John (Luke 3.8). The people came to the River Jordan out in the wilderness where John was living - it was an humble place, quite unlike the Mikveh Pool of Jerusalem, but then the Gospel informs us that primarily it is the meek who respond to God.

Jesus presented himself for purification - John declared it unnecessary, but Jesus insisted on it, 'to fulfil all righteousness' (Matthew 3.15). As Jesus was baptised he had a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit and this is the major difference between Jewish Mikveh and Christian Baptism - the agency of The Holy Spirit - which purifies, sanctifies and justifies. We are baptised into the life, death and resurrection of Christ and are ontologically changed for all time. We are no longer separated from God by our sin, but restored to him. In Garden of Eden language we are brought back from the wilderness and returned to the garden. In Christ we are reinstated in the kingdom of God.

## 15. Life & Death

*Nicene Creed* - We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

*Apostles Creed* - the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The core Christian hope is that there is life beyond death. Jesus himself rose from human death to resurrection life and ascended to Heaven. This picture attempts to depict the complete surprise, the, 'It cannot be true can it?' moment when Mary of Magdala first sees the risen Jesus in the tomb garden. Jesus is not immediately recognisable and yet she is sure it is him. Many other disciples then have this experience, individually and corporately. Jesus is transformed and yet he bears the wounds of crucifixion. Jesus is risen just as he prophesied and this powerfully supports the obvious possibility then that all his prophesies and teachings are truths awaiting fulfilment. Jesus said to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Jesus then directly questions Martha and thus each of us, "Do you believe this?" Yes the Christian church believes that as we live for and in Jesus during our lives, so we have the promise of the everlasting life to come.



In confirmation of his promise, Jesus raises Lazarus from death and the odour of decay of four days that have already passed (John 11:11-44). It is miraculous and totally beyond human ability even some two thousand years later, with all our scientific and technical advances. The Lord will raise us to life, even though we die. This is resurrection – resurrection of the dead (Nicene) and body (Apostles Creed) – that we have a personal continuity that goes beyond death. This resurrection life will not be the same as our earthly life. As believers our bodies will be transformed before the kingdom of God is inherited (we become divine, animated and guided by the Holy Spirit - read 1 Cor 15:38-50 for more). We also believe that all the dead are universally raised and then brought to Judgement. For those who are worthy (righteous) there is life in harmony with God – Heaven. For those judged unworthy (wicked) there is separation from God (opinion about what this means ranges from eternal punishment (Hell) to total annihilation (extinction)).

In Roman Catholic theology (from the Council of Florence 1431AD) there crystallized a belief in a state called *Purgatory* between the time of human death and final judgement - which was counted to happen only at the end of the world. In this in-between period it is believed that the soul of the departed could be purified, through prayer and the act of having masses said on their behalf and burial chapels called Chantry were established and endowed so that rich dead persons might have priests offering Mass constantly. This in time developed into an abuse by the church of the sick and dying and their relatives – sadly gaining much wealth and property from vulnerable and frightened persons in the process. The Greek (and later Protestant) church generally did not accept this unbiblical notion of ‘purgatory’ and we do not believe that anyone alive can have a bearing over someone who is dead. The sale of ‘indulgences’ to remit time and punishment in purgatory by ‘authorised pardoners’ in the Roman Catholic Church was one of the chief precipitating causes of the Reformation, that led to the formation of the Protestant Church. Once someone is dead they are in God’s care, but as an act of love we remember them as they rest in peace awaiting resurrection and we may commend the souls of the faithful departed to the mercy of God that they might rise in glory.

‘The life of the world to come’ is an important doctrine. Just as those who have died are transformed as they are resurrected, so the whole of creation is awaiting transformation, following The Fall. Saint Paul says, “that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:18-21).” A new heaven and new earth will result at the end of time and those who are counted worthy by God will inherit all things (Rev: 21:1-5). This prospect is the marvellous hope that we have in the promises of God through Jesus Christ. We are redeemed, we only have to trust and believe. The Roman, Greek and Protestant churches still disagree on this and several other doctrinal issues – but the debate is much gentler – we concentrate on our common faith, and celebrate our diversity in worship style.

This completes this consideration of the universal creeds of the church. They do not illuminate or express all areas of Christian belief, but it is my hope that this series of fifteen articles has been helpful to those of us who regularly confess our faith in the words of ‘The Nicene Creed’ at the Eucharist and restate the faith of the church by ‘The Apostles Creed’ during Holy Baptism.

‘Credo in unum Deum... We believe in one God’. What do you believe?

Andrew Rowland

## Appendix 1

### The Nicene Creed as approved for Anglican Worship

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,  
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and 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 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.

\* 'and the Son' may be omitted for suitable ecumenical occasions.

## Appendix 2

### The Apostles' Creed

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.

*The origin of the Apostles' Creed is the profession of faith made at baptism. This association may have implications for the occasion when it is used at Holy Communion.*

## Appendix 3

### Philippians 2.5-11

<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

## Appendix 4

### 1 Corinthians 15.3-7

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,<sup>4</sup> and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,<sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.<sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.<sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

## Appendix 5

### Creed derived from Ephesians Chapter 3

We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.

We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Ephesians Chapter 3.14-20

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.