

Nicene Creed - Lent Course 2025 – Session 1

I haven't listened to / looked at all of these so this isn't an endorsement but you might find some of this of interest or use:

Diocesan Lent Course - <https://www.chichester.anglican.org/lent/>

Lent Talks Radio 4 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0028tnv>

Lord I Believe - A 12-part series defending the Nicene Creed in its 1700th anniversary year with John Twisleton - <https://twisleton.co.uk/broadcasts/>

The Society (of St Wilfrid and St Hilda) – (traditional Anglo-Catholic group) - Year of Faith 2025 Lent Course - <https://www.sswsh.com/fullposts.php?id=380>

Grove Booklet – Discipleship Series – Richard Steel, *The Nicene Creed and the Bible: A Workbook for Disciples* ID15

Recent Nicaea / Nicene Creed related books

The Nicene Creed: An Introduction, Phillip Cary (Lexham Press, 2023)

The Nicene Creed: A Scriptural, Historical, and Theological Commentary, Jared Ortiz and Daniel A. Keating (Baker Academic, 2024)

On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God
Edited by Matthew Barrett (IVP Academic, 2024)

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,
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,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who 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.

Session 1: God the Father

Bible reading: Matthew 11:25-end

What is a creed?

Latin – credo – I believe

What do you think the purposes / value of a creed might be?

- Saying the creed as an act of worship / pledge of allegiance not just academic exercise
- A summary of the teaching of the Bible – clarifying what the Bible teaches
- Emphasises the main / central truths of the Bible and so helps us to see the big picture / keep the main thing the main thing / not get distracted into other perhaps important and interesting truths which are less central – seeing ourselves as related to the big story of God and his purposes
- A useful focus on God the Holy Trinity and his saving acts
- Promoting unity and refuting error – excluding teaching that is beyond the bounds
- A sense of history / continuity / fellowship / solidarity with Christians around the world and down the centuries – it emphasises what we have in common even if we might disagree about other secondary matters

Cf. The Apostles' Creed (Google is good for historical background etc.)

The Nicene Creed

Originally written in Greek – translated in to Latin

The Council of Nicaea 325

The Arian controversy, which provoked the creed (more on this in session 2)

The Council of Constantinople 381

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed!

BCP p240: "I believe" / original and Common Worship version, "We believe..."

What are the pros and cons of "We believe" or "I believe"?

What do you think is meant by "believe" here? What is Christian faith?

Cf. James 2:19

More than intellectual assent (though not less!) – also personal trust / dependence

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,**

seen and unseen.

Perhaps we take the idea of “one God” for granted? Why do you think it matters? (What are the alternatives?)

(How might this statement have seemed in context for the original writers of the creed?)

(Is this still relevant / necessary today?)

What does the creed tell us about the uniqueness of God?

And his relationship to creation?

God as uncreated creator – the Creator / creation distinction

What does it mean to call God Father?

Of whom is God the Father?

What might the bible suggest a good father might do / be like?

What do you make of the combination of “Father” and “Almighty”?

What does it mean to remember that God is both the Father and the Almighty?

Gerald Bray - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/god-as-father/>

The OT on God as father (or like a father) to Israel - [Isa. 63:16–17](#); 64:8-9

[Deut. 14:1–2](#)

[Psalm 103](#):13

[Ps. 103:13](#)

Jer 31:20

The teaching of Jesus

“He who has seen me has seen the Father,” he said ([John 14:9](#)).

“I and the Father are one” ([John 10:30](#)).

John 5:17

John 8:37–59

The Lord’s Prayer – Our Father...

Father – John 20:17

Paul – abba – Aramaic – Dad - Father - [Gal. 4:6–7](#)

Ephesians 3:15 see NIV footnote – God as the original / paradigm of Fatherhood – all human fathers as derivative fallible pictures of fatherhood (cf. Freud – God as a projection of Father)

<https://marclloyd.blogspot.com/2022/07/is-god-male.html>

<https://www.churchsociety.org/resource/is-the-holy-spirit-to-be-referred-to-as-she/>

<https://www.churchsociety.org/resource/topical-tuesday-is-god-a-she/>

What might a Christian say about what is “unseen”?

What should Christian attitudes to creation be?

How does the creed change our perspective on life, the universe and everything?

(A big comprehensive vision which also includes us)

The creed could be said to begin on a cosmic scale – but also to be personal and intimate
(Steel)

Nicene Creed – Session 2: God the Son

Possible Bible readings:

John 1:1-14

Hebrews 1-2

Today, the second of three main sections: Trinitarian structure – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit

This long central section of the creed

What does that tell us?

Also this was the controversial section at Nicaea, especially on the nature of God the Son

**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're not going to manage an exhaustive Bible study on everything mentioned here tonight!

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

Lord

Jesus – (an ordinary name!) – Joshua – The Lord Saves – He will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)

Christ (Greek); Hebrew (Messiah) = Anointed one; prophets, priests and kings were anointed with olive oil in the Old Testament – set apart as holy for a special purpose – the long-promised rescuer king

the only Son of God,

Who else are sons of God?

How would you distinguish the way we are sons of God from the way Jesus is Son of God?

Men and women sons and daughters of God by adoption through faith

(sons also implied heirs)

Jesus The Son of God – Son of God by nature / essence / being

(sons of God – angels)

(son of God – the OT King)

**eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,**

O Come All Ye Faithful:

“God of God, Light of Light,

lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb;

very God, begotten not created;”

begotten, not made,

Did Father Christmas (St Nicholas, Bishop of Myra) slap / punch an Arian / the heretic Arius?!
(There is doubt over whether St Nicholas was there!)

[Petrus de Natalibus](#) – 1370 bishop of Equilio (Jesolo) near Venice, and died around 1400.

“It happened that saint Nicholas, now an old man, was present at the Council of Nicaea, and out of jealousy of faith struck a certain Arian in the jaw, on account of which it is recorded that he was deprived of his mitre and pallium; on account of which he is often depicted without a mitre.”

<https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2015/02/28/did-st-nicholas-of-myra-santa-claus-punch-arius-at-the-council-of-nicaea/>

Obviously not physically begotten as God is Spirit without body or parts (Article 1 of the 39 Articles of Religion of the C of E - <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion#1> – see also Article 2 on God the Son as very God and very man)

I. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, ever- lasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

II. Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and

buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.

Eternally begotten – timelessly

“subsisting eternal relations of origin” – they are always related as Father and Son

The Son is never without the Father and the Father is never without the Son (in the bond of the Holy Spirit)

Ordered relationship, but all three persons equally one God

(Remember what we said last time as the Fatherhood of God as original and human fatherhood a created reflection of that, rather than the other way round – Ephesians 3:15 – perhaps God made fathers and sons to be a picture of his life)

(See also Athanasian Creed - <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/creed-s-athanasius> - not actually written by St Athanasius!)

The Son is all that the Father is except Father and so on

(For us, sons come into being!)

The son not a creature – as the heretic Arius seemed to teach

Arius said of the Son “there was when he was not” – which is heresy!

of one Being with the Father;

homousios (Greek) – homo - same – ousia - substance / essence / being / nature

consubstantial (Latin)

Not that the Father and the Son are made out of some third stuff which we call divine being!

Contrast homoiousios – like essence – similar essence - only one “i”, one iota difference

Edward Gibbon: “The difference between the *Homoousion* and the *Homoiousion* is almost invisible to the nicest theological eye.” (Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Random House), vol. 1, ch. xxi, n.155.)

Using a non-biblical or extra biblical (technical) term – what do you think of that?

The thing is that the heretics quoted Bible verses too and said they believed them

So the issue was how to put all the Bible verses together

Everyone said they were committed to the authority of the Bible

The debate was about what the Bible taught

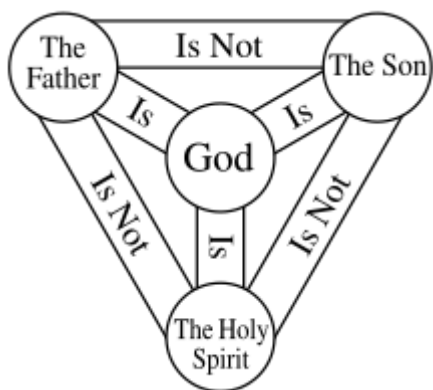
This word aimed to rule out some interpretations of Scripture as outside the Christian faith
Creeds are a summary of and therefore a guide to reading Scripture – though it is Scripture which is the ultimate authority

Creeds get their authority from being true and faithful summaries of Scripture (which are ancient and widely shared). They are in principle reformable by Scripture.

The Son really is God – as much as the Father is God

The Son is God in the same way that the Father is God – fully truly God – though the Son is not the Father and the Father is not the Son

The shield of the Trinity – trinity diagram - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity>



Why does it matter that Jesus really really is God?

Only as God could he perfectly reveal God

John 10:30 - I and the Father are one.

John 14:9 - Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

Only God could save

(Perhaps we might say the divine nature of the Son gives infinite value to his atoning sacrifice?)

through him all things were made.

John 1:3

Colossians 1:15-17

Cf. The Father as creator

All creation through the Son

The Son as the agent of creation

A bit technical! "inseparable operation" / "the external works of the Trinity are undivided" –

"Because God is one, God's wisdom, love, and power are one. Therefore, the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity in their external works are not distinctions of agency.

They are distinctions in mode of agency. The Father acts through the Son by the Spirit. The Son acts from the Father through the Spirit. The Spirit acts from the Father and the Son. But in each instance we are talking about one singular divine agency because we are talking about three persons who are one undivided God." Scott R. Swain

- <https://credomag.com/article/the-undivided-trinity/>

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

Salvation – a rescue mission – not just an educational project or a few tips etc.

Hymn worthy!

From heaven you came helpless babe... (who was also the eternal God!)

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,

When Thou camest to earth for me;

Thou who wast rich beyond all measure...

**was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.**

Incarnate – made flesh – Latin for flesh / meat

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

For us – in our place, on our behalf

Try to imagine you'd never heard a Christian creed before.
Might you find it surprising that it mentions Pontius Pilate?
What might the point of that be?

**On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;**

he ascended into heaven

Come to the ascension day service!

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Christ's ongoing intercession and mediation for us

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,

and his kingdom will have no end.

(cf. 1 Cor 15:28)

This final line specifically combats the teaching of Marcellus of Ancyra who seems to have thought that when his mission was finally accomplished the Son would somehow be reabsorbed into God.

Do you think there is important stuff the creed misses out?

Session 3: The remainder of the creed – Holy Spirit to end!

**I / we 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 worshipped and glorified,
who 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.

Bible reading:

John 14 – 17 for the work of the Spirit and the church

John 14:25-27

John 15:26-27

John 17:20-23

* * *

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

Article V. Of the Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

The Spirit equal to the Father and the Son

Also personal – a divine person - he, not it – not simply a force or energy – God himself
God is Spirit

the Lord, the giver of life,

The Spirit's role in creation – Genesis 1:2 – the Spirit / breath / wind of God hovering over the waters

spirit / breath / wind in Hebrew and Greek

giver of spiritual life

John 3 (Ezekiel 37)

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

(This is a bit tricky and technical!)

Remember it is the eternal relations of origin between the Persons of the Trinity which distinguish them. The Father is all that the Son is except Son and vice versa.

If we just said the Son is from the Father, and the Spirit is from the Father, we would have to say something else by way of distinguishing the Son and the Spirit from one another. Why would they not be two Sons or two Spirits if they have the same eternal relations of origin?

The Son begotten not made
The Spirit proceeding by breathing / spiration not made
(Not creatures made by the Father but eternally related)

The filioque clause – “and from the Son”

Some Latin churches added this clause to the creed in the late 6th Century

The [East–West Schism](#) of 1054

The division of Western (Latin) Catholic and Eastern (Greek speaking) Orthodox churches – sometimes difficulties of language / usage / understanding were involved – and likely there’s always politics as well as theology!

Pope John Paul II claimed there is a “disagreement not so much at the level of faith as at the level of expression”.

Everyone agrees the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son – Galatians 4:6

Holmes: “the textbook split between East and West is not nearly as great as is often suggested.” in *The Procession of the Spirit: Eternal Spiration in Barrett, Classical Trinitarianism* p487

The Son is from the Father and the Spirit is from the Father and the Son but the Son “got” himself and all things (relationship-wise) from the Father so there are not two “sources” of the Spirit. All is from the Father.

The Spirit is from the Son (who is from the Father!).

Maybe the Spirit might be said to be from the Father through the Son or by means of the Son? Cf. John of Damascus and Maximus the Confessor.

For more on this see Holmes, *The Procession of the Spirit: Eternal Spiration in Barrett, Classical Trinitarianism* p486

Cf. the mission of the Spirit in time – the sending of the Spirit by Father and Son in history, corresponding to their eternal relations of origin (the eternal processions)

It is God in himself who is (somewhat) revealed in his dealings with the world

It is fitting that the Son becomes incarnate and that the Father and the Son send the Spirit

On the sending of the Spirit

E.g. John 14:26 – Jesus: “the Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name”

John 15:26 – Jesus: the Spirit “whom I will send to you from the Father”

John 20:22 – the risen Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit”

who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,

i.e. the equally divine nature of the Spirit, worthy to be worshiped as God

One God in three persons, not three gods

who has spoken through the prophets.

If we wrote a creed today, it might be helpful to have a section The Inspiration of Scripture, which was agreed pretty much by all Christians in ancient times.

2 Timothy 3:16 – all Scripture God-breathed or God-Spirited

The close relationship between Word and Spirit – rather as my words come to you on my breath as I speak

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

The earliest versions of the creed and The Book of Common Prayer miss out “in” so that the text reads: “I / we believe one holy catholic and apostolic church”.

Whilst ultimate trust is owed only to God, believing the witness of the church can be helpful to our faith, though the church can and has erred (as the 39 Articles say)

These four words are sometimes called marks of the church: one, holy, catholic and apostolic

One

In what sense is the church one?

In what sense ought it to be one?

The multiplication of denominations etc?!

Google thinks there are more than 45,000 Christian denominations

The invisible church as one; the visible church obviously badly divided

The church in history is divided; the eschatological church will be united

The spiritual unity of the church – one in Christ, empowered by the same spirit etc.

Ephesians 4:3-6

Jesus’ prayer for the church to be one – John 17:11, 21-23

What sorts of church unity should we pursue and how?

Holy

Separate / special / set apart (from evil)

The church meant to be in yet not of the world

Is the church distinctive from the surrounding culture as salt and light or do we risk being assimilated to the prevailing cultural norms?

All of us as simultaneously righteous (by faith) and sinners

The church a divine institution, but made up of sinful human beings who often get things wrong / fall short etc.

Catholic

Universal / general / worldwide (not just Roman Catholic)

The Roman Catholic church not catholic enough?! – in that it makes exclusive claims

Not merely parochial – not a private club

Our fellowship with Christians down the centuries and around the world

Our openness to learn from others

Our desire to serve and support others

Apostolic

Apostle – one who is sent out (on a mission) – e.g. The British Ambassador who can speak for the British government

The Twelve Apostles / disciples

The New Testament as Apostolic – by / approved by the apostles

The supposed apostolic succession – the hands of bishops consecrating other bishops in an unbroken line to St Peter, the first Bishop of Rome?

Apostolic doctrine and spirit

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

A great shame that the church is divided over who the proper recipients of baptism are when baptism should be a sacrament of our unity

Cf. Acts 2:38 – “Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

It is clear from the rest of the Bible that forgiveness of sins is received by faith – but baptism is a sign / seal of these things, and God’s promises / signs are not empty

Article XXV. Of the Sacraments

Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him....

And in such only as worthily receive the same they have a wholesome effect or operation: but they that receive them unworthily purchase to themselves damnation, as Saint *Paul* saith.

Though not in an automatic / magical / mechanistic kind of way

The Bible seems comfortable talking about baptism in a pretty full-on realistic way. It isn't often concerned to say "remember baptism is (only) symbolic"

1 Peter 3:20-22 – "God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.^[e] It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."

Article XXVII. Of Baptism

Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or new Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God. The Baptism of young Children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.

Article XVI. Of Sin after Baptism

Not every deadly sin willingly committed after Baptism is sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after Baptism. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again, and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned, which say, they can no more sin as long as they live here, or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

We don't rebaptise people who have already been baptised in the name of the Trinity – one baptism! – we respect the baptisms of other Trinitarian denominations

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

The gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection
1 Corinthians 15

The resurrection of the body – not just some kind of disembodied spiritual existence of the soul in heaven

"Heaven" as in interim state before the New Creation – the renewal of all things

and the life of the world to come.

Cf. the opening of the creed – God the creator of heaven and of the unseen world

Compared to this form of life which is brief and passing away – life lived in the light of the coming Kingdom and of eternity

Revelation 21 – a new (or renewed) heaven and a new earth
God's original purposes for the cosmos fulfilled
From a garden to a garden city – a return to Eden only better!

A new creation with a perfect (sinless) life – perhaps getting even better every day, progress in holiness and knowledge of God etc. which never ends, more and more love and joy and...

Amen.

A Hebrew word with the idea of firm / fixed / sure / reliable / to be trusted / truly / so be it – a way of expressing agreement

Any reflections?

Will you say or think about the Nicene creed differently after these studies?

Has anything been especially striking to you?

Is there anything you'd like to think about further?

Are you convinced about the value of Creeds? Why?

(Is there anything you'd change in this one / add to it?!)