

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-begotten 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;  
He became incarnate,  
by the power of the Holy Spirit from 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.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come.  
AMEN.

# The Nicene Creed

*A Guide To The Historic Christian Faith.*

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Day 21: We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

Day 22: We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

Day 23: We look for the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come.

Day 24: AMEN.

# The Nicene Creed

*A Guide To The Historic Christian Faith.*

*You may have grown up reciting the Nicene Creed every Sunday - or you may have never heard of it. Either way, it is our desire that by the end of this book you will realize why the Nicene Creed is needed, what the Nicene Creed affirms about our God, and why it matters. We hope that you will discover the beauty and truth presented in one of Christianity's great Creeds.*

### Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:16, Acts 20:28-30

Boundaries can be boring sometimes. When you were young and were told you can only play in your front yard, you could hardly stand it. When your parents say that you have to be home by 11, you know that sometimes that means ending a great night early. Many times it is hard to understand why we need certain boundaries. Other times, it is very clear. What if jail cells had no walls, football had no out of bounds, and red lights meant nothing? The truth is that most of the time, boundaries are good and are here to help us. The Nicene Creed, in many ways, is like a boundary for the Christian faith.

Why does Christianity need boundaries? Because anyone can make claims about God and the Bible. Especially with the quick and easy access we have to information today, a guy living in his parent's basement has just as much say as the Biblical Scholar who spent 40 years in study and teaching. The basement blogger and the Biblical Scholar both hold opinions about God, but that doesn't mean that they are both right. Having and expressing your opinion is not wrong when you are talking about which team is better, or what top looks best with those shorts. When you are talking about the God of the Universe, on the other hand, you must make sure that your "opinion" is right. Otherwise you run the risk of leading yourself and others away from the one True God you claim to believe in.

This is where the Nicene Creed comes in handy. For the past 1700 years Christians from a variety of denominations and traditions have

stood beside the Creed as a way to determine what is Orthodox. The word Orthodox comes from a Greek word meaning "right opinion" (just like the word orthodontics, or "right teeth"). Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, Presbyterians and more all believe in and stand behind the truths laid out in the Nicene Creed. So how do you make sure that your thinking about God is right? First and foremost, read your Bible. There is no other authoritative source on truth about God in the world. In addition to reading your Bible, read, learn and know the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed is a great boundary for Christianity. Those who do not agree with it are simply not Christians. When you hear someone say that Jesus was just a great teacher, you can remember in the Bible and in the Creed that Christianity says that Jesus is God. When you hear someone teach that church is not important, you will know that the Bible and the Creed both affirm the significance of the church for every Christian. So the Nicene Creed is a great boundary for Christianity, but it is so much more. It is a regular reminder that you are not only part of a larger Christian community, but also that you are exclusively committed to the one true God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. What does 1 Timothy 4:16 say we are to do concerning our thinking about God?
2. What does Paul call those who teach wrongly in Acts 20:28-30?
3. What does Paul mean by "from among your own selves" in Acts 20:29?
4. Does that mean that even in a church there can be false teachers?



## *We Believe*

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:14-27, Philippians 1:27-30**

The Nicene Creed is a relatively short document. This means a couple of things; one, you can and probably should memorize it, and two, every word matters. In fact, the first two words of the creed are so significant to the rest of the creed that we need to spend some time thinking through them. Both “We” and “believe” mean so much to our faith for many reasons, today we’ll look at just a few.

### **We**

The first word of the Nicene Creed sums up one of the greatest, most comforting, and most sobering truths of Christianity. You and I, as Christians, are not in this alone. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul compares the church (all Christians everywhere) to a body. We are each like individual parts to a body. Unless we are connected to the rest of the body, we can never function the way we were meant to. A hand is great, but without eyes guiding and an arm moving there is little it can do. Just like a body needs all of its parts to function correctly, we each need the rest of the church, and the rest of the church needs us. Why is it so important that we live the Christian life in community? Every single one of us will have times where we doubt and struggle with our faith. Every single one of us will feel so alone that we wonder if anyone else understands what we’re going through. The first word of the Nicene Creed means that God designed Christianity and the Church so that every single one of us is responsible for every single one of us both in times of suffering and in times of great joy. You need me, and I need you.

### **Believe**

The second word of the Creed is what sets Christianity apart from so many of the world’s religions. Christianity is not about a list of rules to follow, and it is not simply a moral system we try to keep. Christianity is based on historic events that actually happened. Being a Christian means that you not only believe that those events happened, but also trust that they happened on your behalf. It is easy to say you believe that something has happened, but it is quite difficult to live a life that shows you trust that those things happened for you. That is the kind of belief that the Bible and the Nicene Creed talk about - a belief that leads to action. So what are these events, and why do they matter? This is the question that the Nicene Creed seeks to answer. The rest of the Creed is a description of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and His plan to rescue His people from Sin and Death.

As we read and study the Nicene Creed, keep these two words in mind. In fact, let these two words guide how you spend time this month with the Nicene Creed. Grab a friend and talk through what we learn each day. Share with each other ways that you can live out what you are discovering. Be the community you were designed to live in.

1. Read the description of the church in 1 Corinthians 12:14-17.
2. What part do you play in the body? How about those who you work with this month?
3. Knowing this, what should we do with the person who bothers or annoys us?
4. What does Philippians 1:27-30 have to say about community?

“

## *In one God*

Scripture: Deut. 6:4; Ex 20:1-3, John 10:30, Eph 4:4-6

### **The Only God**

God has always revealed to His people that He alone is God. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This verse became the most quoted verse from the Old Testament by the Jewish people, and it still is. For the Jewish person, the most important thing you can know about God is that He is one. This is why Judaism and Christianity are both called “monotheistic.” When we say we believe in one God, we are saying that the God we know from the Bible is the only true God. We are saying that we believe Buddha is not God, that Allah is not God, Vishnu is not God. Our God is the only God.

### **Undivided**

We also believe that our God is not divided. He is not one thing at one moment and another thing at another moment. This means the God of 1 John 4:16 and the God of Isaiah 63:1-6 are the same. One of the earliest heresies was the belief that the God of the Old Testament was an entirely different God from the God of the New Testament. Guys like Marcion threw out the whole Old Testament, and kept only the parts of the New Testament where God appeared “loving” and “gracious.” When we say God is one, we are saying that attributes like justice, wrath, love and mercy all exist in perfect harmony and unity. Deut 6 goes on to say that the Israelites are to “hear” (lit. “obey”) the oneness of God by not having divided hearts, not having divided souls, not having divided strengths, families, lives. All of these are to be one...fully devoted to the God Who is One.

### **United**

Yet even Deut. 6’s very strong statement that God is “one” doesn’t rule out the existence of more than one Divine Person. This word —“one” (ehad) doesn’t mean “numerically one,” but “united.” This same word is used in Genesis 2:24 to describe Adam and Eve when they got married. Is it saying they ceased to be two people? We do not believe that God is alone, but that He exists in unity—unity within Himself and unity with His Son and the Holy Spirit...but we’ll cover that later this month.

1. How do Christians today act like Marcion? When was the last time you sang a worship song about God’s wrath? Have you ever heard Isaiah 63 read out loud in church? Do you ever praise God for His justice...that He doesn’t put up with sin?
2. How do we live “divided” lives? Are you a different person at school than you are at home? At church? At camp?

*Heresy:* a belief about God, man, or redemption, that calls itself Christian, but is so unbiblical, that the “heretic” is said to believe in a god other than the God of the Bible.

*Person:* an individual entity with its own identity and actions—not necessarily a human person.



## *The Father*

Scripture: 1 Cor 8:6, Matthew 28:19, Col 1:3, Jude 1:1

### **God is Father**

In the Old Testament God is most commonly called by one of three names “God” (Elohim), “Lord” (Adonai), or “LORD” (Yahweh.) This name was considered so holy that no one ever pronounced it. Instead, whenever they read Scripture out loud, and they came to this word, they would just said “adonai.” This is why most Bibles type it as LORD in all caps. In the New Testament, the writers most commonly use two names for God—“God” (theos) and “Father” (patros). And often (like in the verses listed above) they write them together. 1 Cor 8:6 says that the “one God” we believe in is “the Father.”

### **Our Father**

The Bible is God’s revelation of Himself to humankind. Don’t miss how big that is...God (infinite) reveals Himself to humans (finite). In order to communicate truths that are way beyond our grasp, the Bible uses human terms like Father. We all have fathers. Some of us have bad fathers, or absent fathers. Some of us have good fathers. There are some ways in which earthly fathers help us know what our heavenly Father is like, and many ways in which our earthly fathers will hinder our thoughts of God. For those of us who don’t know our fathers, or have abusive fathers, the very thought of a heavenly “father” is offensive. “Why would I want another father? All they do is hurt me...let me down.” Even those of us with good, loving fathers can mislead us in our thoughts of our Heavenly Father. We think of God as basically the same as us...maybe a little older and wiser. A big cuddly figure who bandages our spiritual skinned knees. So what does it mean that God is Father? Three things: He is the

Original Source. He is has a Son. We can be adopted as His Sons and Daughters.

### **The Source**

God is the one “from” whom are all things. There is nothing and no one that exists that does not come from God. He is the source of all things.

### **The True Father**

God is the truest Father because He always has been a Father. There was never a time when He didn’t have His Son, Jesus Christ with Him (John 1:1). But He is also the true Father because He is not also a Son. No one “had” Him. All of our fathers became fathers, and they were all also sons.

### **Abba Father**

God can become our Father if we receive His Spirit. Romans 8:14-15 says, “because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

1. How might your own earthly father be a poor picture of your Heavenly Father?
2. Jesus used the name “Abba” for His Father once. He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, just before His death on the cross for your sins and mine, proclaiming His Father’s authority and submitting to His will. What are we saying when we call God “Abba, Father?”

“

## *The Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.*

Scripture: Genesis 1, Romans 1

Christianity is very clear on who the source is behind all of Creation. Being a Christian means that you believe the Bible when it says that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” That does not mean that every Christian agrees on how or when God created the world. There are great Christian men and women that believe that creation took place in six literal days. Other great Christian men and women believe that it did not necessarily have to take place in six literal days. The bottom line is this: Christians believe that God created the world. There are a few significant truths we’ll look at today that have to do with God’s creation.

### “Ex nihilo”

Christians believe that God created the world out of nothing. The latin phrase that is used to describe this is ex nihilo (ex: out of, nihilo: nothing). This is significant for several reasons. One is that it sets God apart from creation. You and I, His creation, can create things. We draw, paint, build, cook, write software, develop relationships, etc. But none of us can create something out of nothing. The artist needs paint and a canvas. The builder needs certain supplies. God is different. He alone is able to create anything out of nothing. This makes God, among other things, Almighty.

### “Seen and unseen”

Especially if you grew up in or around the church, you probably associate creation with nature. This is a very good and true aspect of God’s creation. In fact, Romans 1 says that God’s invisible attributes can be clearly seen in nature. God created everything that is seen. He also created everything that is unseen. What does unseen mean? A

couple of things. One it means things like love, wrath, hope, peace, fear, etc. Some times we don’t like to think of God as wrathful, but you cannot believe in the God of the Bible if you don’t believe in a God that hates evil.

Unseen also means something much deeper. In addition to creating everything, God also created a “right way” to do everything. That means that along with creating plants, he also created a “right way” to grow and harvest plants. Along with telling mankind to cultivate the earth (use natural resources, develop technology), He also created a “right way” to cultivate the earth. When He created sex (yes, God created sex and called it good), He also created a “right way” to have sex. Because of sin, mankind doesn’t always use creation the “right way”. When we grow and harvest plants the wrong way, we ruin land and aren’t able to supply enough food. When we use natural resources the wrong way, our environment is negatively affected. When we take the gift of sex and use it outside of a committed and loving marriage, our hearts and those around us are hurt. The commands found in the Bible are not there to make our lives boring, they are there for our good. Doing things the “right way” DOES NOT save you, but doing things the way God intended for them to be done is one way of worshiping the Almighty maker (Romans 12:1).

1. Read the account of creation in Genesis 1.
2. What does God say about creation when He is finished?
3. How has doing things the “wrong way” impacted you in the past?

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*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God of true God, begotten; not made, of one being with the Father.*

**Scripture: Mark 1:9-11, John 1:1-18, John 5:18, Heb 1:1-3**

We believe in one God, but we also believe in one Lord—Jesus Christ. The name Jesus reminds us that we’re talking about a real man, the one named Jesus who was born in Nazareth in, um...0000 AD. The name Christ reminds us that this is the One that God had promised from years ago. It seems like people in Jesus’ time were expecting an Anointed One. When John the Baptist came on the scene he was asked “Are you the Prophet?” (John 1:21) Later, people said of Jesus, “Surely this man is the Prophet. Others said, “He is the Christ.” (John 7:40-41) Obviously people were expecting a Christ (an Anointed One), and this phrase is saying that “The man named Jesus, born in Nazareth, is that Christ.” The creed goes on to say that this man is also the Only-Begotten Son of God.

This title says a lot. First, it says something about God—He is Father. Second, it says something about the Son—He has the status of the Firstborn. (This was a big deal back in olden times—the firstborn received twice as much inheritance as the rest of the kids.) The rest of today’s phrase explains the third significance of “Only-Begotten Son of God.” First comes a clarification. When we think about how we were begotten, we usually think of it in terms of our modern language, using the word “had” as in, “My parents had a son, and he was beautiful.” Anyway, you and I are “had” at a point in time. The Son is eternally begotten. The never was a time when He wasn’t “had” by the Father, He is currently “had” by the Father, and He always will be “had” by the Father.

He’s never been less begotten than He is now, nor will He ever be less begotten than He is now. This is how Jesus’ Sonship is unlike ours. But the Creed moves on to show how His begottenness is just like ours.

Think about it. Is there anything that your dad (and/or mom) is, that you are not also? Your dad is human...you are human. Your dad thinks or reasons...you think or reason. Your dad is limited by time...you are limited by time. Jesus is God of God, or God from God. There is nothing that His Father is that He is not also. His Father is eternal (outside of time)...He is eternal. His Father is infinite...He is infinite. God is Light...He is Light. There is no way in which the Father is God, that the Son is not also God...they are both “true God.” This is why Jesus is called “the Only Begotten God.” (John 1:18 NASB)

So if you “have” a son or daughter they are just like you (as far as what they are, and sometimes, but not always who they are), but if you make something/someone they are by definition less than you. So it’s important to remember that God’s Son, Jesus Christ is “begotten...not made.” A quick way to summarize this statement is that the Son is of one being with the Father. This not only means that the Father and the Son are exactly alike, but that they are one...not one person, but one in nature, mind, will, etc. Jesus claims, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30) and later prays to God “that all of [my disciples] may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...that they may be one as we are one.” (John 17:21-22)

1. If Jesus was (is) the eternal Son of God, where was he before he was born of Mary
2. How might this view of God’s Son effect our worship of Him? What about our worship of God the Father?
3. Read Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 1:19. What might this view of who Jesus is mean for His work in salvation?

“

## *Through Him all things were made.*

Scripture: Genesis 1, John 1:1-3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-17

The Bible is very careful in its wording about who Jesus is. The Bible begins with the words “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John 1:1 begins with similar words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” The words “In the beginning” remind us of creation, and of the God who existed before creation. So this phrase is repeated twice before we get to the phrase, “through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made which has been made.” The Creed uses the exact wording of John 1:3. (“by” and “through” are both translations of the same Greek word—both the New Testament and the Creed were originally written in Greek) The fact that creation was done “by” or “through” the Son means two things: 1. The Son does something only God can do—create ex nihilo. 2. That the Father acts through the Son.

### **Through Him**

The Son has a close, intimate relationship with the Father. There has never been a time when the Son was not “on the bosom of the Father.” (John 1:18) Sounds awkward, but it’s a term used for the seat at a banquet reserved for those closest to the host. There was never a time when the Father and the Son did not share in all things. Not only do they share eternity, power, sovereignty, infinity, etc., but the Son also shares in the Father’s actions. God creates, but He does so “through” the Son. 1 Cor. 8:6 says “we have one God, the Father, from whom are all things...and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things.” The Father never acts apart from the agency of the Son.

### **All Things Were Made**

If all things were created through the Son, can He be created? Of course not! “Without Him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:3) This is one of the strongest statements of Christ’s deity. He cannot be made, because everything that was made was made through Him.

1. Who seems more like a doctor, the guy who calls himself Dr., or the guy who not only calls himself Dr., but has a stethoscope and uses big words like hyposarcosis? Why is it significant that Jesus is not only called God, but does things that God does?
2. What other things does the Bible say Jesus does that only God can do?

*Eternality:* Existing outside of time. Not limited by time, sequence, or change.

*Sovereignty:* Ability to rule. Ability to do what you want to do.

*Agency:* An agent is someone who does something for someone else. My insurance agent talks to the insurance company for me, and talks to me for the insurance company. Agency is what agents exercise. Bet you didn’t know agents exercised, but they do.

“

## *For us*

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7, 2:18

For us? Who's us? A better translation might be “for us humans,” but that just sounds weird. So who are we as humans?

### **We are created in God's Image**

We've already mentioned that God created the earth in six days (whatever that means, it definitely means God did it, and that it took way less time than it would for you to do it) At the end of each of the first 5 days God begins by saying “Let there be...” and there was. And as each day ends God sits back, folds His hands and says “It is good.” But day 6 begins differently. On that day He does not say, “Let there be...,” but “Let us make man in our image.” God the Father (or Whoever is talking there) suggests that the three Divine Persons together make a new kind of creature that will display their glory, not merely by demonstrating their creative power (Rom. 1:20), but by reflecting the “Image” of the Trinity. Mankind—male and female—reflect God's Image by living in community (Gen. 1:26 “let us...and let them”), by ruling over creation (Gen. 1:26 “let them rule”), and by knowing Him and becoming like Him.

### **We are very good...sorta**

Day 6 also ended differently than the other days of creation. When God sits back at the end of this day he does not say that it is “good.” He says it is “very good.”

### **We are physical**

When God made man, He did not make him out of spiritual stuff. He didn't make him immaterial. He made him out of dirt. (Gen. 2:7) It doesn't get more physical than that. We (humans) are made of

matter, and in order to be human one must have this material component—the body.

### **We are soul**

So we are by necessity material beings, but we also have an immaterial side. In fact the very source of our life is God's Spirit, who was breathed into Adam to make him a living being (or a living soul). (Gen. 2:7) One has to have this spiritual component as well in order to be human. God never intended for them to be separated. Take the soul away from the body and it starts to rot. Take the body away from the soul and it's called “naked.” (2 Cor 5:2-3) One is not better than the other—they are both human. And human is very good.

### **We are male and female**

One thing in the first two chapters of the Bible is called “not good.” It is man (male) being alone...Adam needed a companion. God rights this wrong by making a woman for him. She is taken from his side to show that she shares the same nature as Adam. Just to review: Adam alone = “not good.” Adam with Eve = “very good.”

1. What was “not good” about Adam? Was it that he was alone, or was it that he was single? Were we created for relationships or were we created for marriage?

2. What do Col 1:15 and 2 Cor 4:4-6 teach us about what (or Who) God's “Image” is and what it means to be created “in” it?

“

## *And for our salvation.*

Scripture: Genesis 3:6, 22-24, 6:5, Ps 51:5, Rom 1:18-20, Rom 5:12-14, Eph 2:1-3

Remember how we said we are very good...sorta? This is the “sorta” part. And this “sorta” is the under-statement of the century. Humanity was created very good, but it doesn’t take an imaginative genius to see that humans are not very good. What happened? Why do we need “salvation?”

### **We are prideful**

We fell from our place of privilege when Adam thought, “Wow, I can be like God.” And not in the “I’ve been walking with Him in the garden for ages and have come to know Him and grown in my reflection of His Image.” It seems like that was the point of life in the garden, but instead we said, “I can be like God in an instant. Just reach out and grab a fruit and Crunch...I will be like God.” Our original sin was the sin of wanting to get for ourselves what God wanted to give us by walking with Him—knowledge of Him and likeness to His Image.

### **Adam is our forefather**

But wait, my grandma didn’t eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, why did she die? That would be a great question if it weren’t such a bad question. The problem with the question is she did eat the fruit. Paul says, “death spread to all men because all sinned.” And we say, “Yeah, but that didn’t happen until I was like 4 when I stuck my hand in the cookie jar.” Paul replies (I like to think with a Scottish accent), “death reigned...even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.” (Rom 5:14) It is clear that every human being bears at least this one penalty of sin. This means they all have sin. It also means they bear all of the

penalties of sin—not just physical death, but eternal and spiritual death. We are “by nature objects of wrath.” An eternal God has been sinned against, and an eternal punishment is in order. (Mark 9:47)

### **Naughty by Nature**

In the mid-90’s there was a rap group by the name of “Naughty by Nature.” They were a two-hit-wonder: “O.P.P.” and “Hip Hop Hooray.” (Just try pulling off the gangsta image today with a song called Hip Hop Hooray.) Their name best describes our situation. Sin is not a behavior problem. It is a nature problem. This is how things got so bad in Genesis 6, and it’s how Paul describes us in Eph 2:3 (“by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind”). This is why David describes himself as sinful from the time he was conceived (Ps 51:5), and why Paul says sin was already “dwelling” in him before he even knew right and wrong. (Rom 7:11 and 23)

### **Big problem = big solution**

If our problem were just the things we do, then the solution would be easy. AA, NA, SAA, therapy, counseling, maybe some good anti-depressants. But our problem is not what we do, but *who we are*. (Ouch, I know.) So the solution is nothing short of “our salvation.” Nothing short of True God from True God coming down from heaven and being incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and becoming man (human...the “very good” kind) and being crucified, suffering, being buried, rising again, and ascending to heaven.

1. Are you a sinner because you sin or do you sin because you are a sinner? What’s the difference?
2. We inherit a sinful human nature from Adam. Where do we get a good human nature?

“

## *He came down from heaven*

Scripture: John 1, Colossians 1

John, one of Jesus' most loved disciples, opens his Gospel with the line "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." These might be some of the most controversial words ever written. Let's find out why.

### **In the beginning was the Word**

Jesus, called the Word here by John, existed in the beginning. The same beginning that Genesis 1 means when it says "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Bible claims that Jesus has actually always existed. John is saying something about Jesus that no sane person has ever said about someone else. This is controversy number one: Jesus has always existed.

### **And the Word was with God**

First, John claims that Jesus has always existed. Then he said that Jesus was with God. Not only was Jesus always around, but He had a special relationship with God the Father; He is His Son. Colossians 1 even says that Jesus was actively involved in creation. This is controversy number two: Jesus has always existed, and has a special relationship with God the Father.

### **And the Word was God**

If controversies one and two did not have your mind spinning, welcome to controversy number three. Not only has Jesus always existed, and not only does He have a special relationship to God the Father, but the Bible actually claims that He is God. If you remember back to Day 6, the Bible teaches the idea of a Triune God or The Trinity. We believe in one God, but that one God exists in three persons. As confusing as that concept is, keep in mind that

Jesus is God. That means that He has all the rights, powers, and privileges that come with being God. This is controversy number three: Jesus is God.

### **The Word became Flesh**

John 1:1 is packed with controversy and deep statements about who Jesus is. But what John goes on to say is possibly even more shocking than the fact that Jesus is God. John writes in verse 14 that "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." Jesus did not simply put on a human costume. The Bible says that He actually *became* human. This means more than we can ever imagine, but we'll give it a shot. Jesus, who has always existed, chose to be born. Jesus, who never felt hunger, chose to depend on a family to feed him. Jesus, who enjoyed a perfect relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, chose to be betrayed by his closest friends. And finally, Jesus, who as God never had to face death, chose to lay down his life.

1. Read John 1 and Colossians 1.
2. What do these two chapters say about Jesus' character?

“

*He became incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.*

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38, Acts 10:30-38

The fact that Jesus came down from Heaven to become human is overwhelming. The way He came down from Heaven to become human is just as fascinating. The Nicene Creed describes what the Bible tells us about the birth of Jesus: in a miracle performed by the Holy Spirit, Mary (a virgin) became pregnant and gave birth to the Son of God. What makes these two insights into Jesus' birth significant?

### **By the Power of the Holy Spirit**

The Creed is very careful to spend time describing each person of the Godhead (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and we will talk more about the Holy Spirit when we get to that section of the Creed. That being said, we still can learn quite a bit about the Holy Spirit from the account of Jesus' birth. In order for Jesus to be born as a man, a miracle had to take place. Something supernatural happened when Jesus was born to Mary. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is also seen performing many miracles and doing good deeds. After Jesus' resurrection, the Bible gives us some insight into these miracles and good deeds. In Acts 10, Peter is speaking to a crowd and says that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." So even before we learn what the Creed has to say about the Holy Spirit, we know that He is God, able to give life, and able to empower humans to do good.

### **From the Virgin Mary**

The fact that Jesus was born from a virgin is very significant, and the Nicene Creed wants to make sure that we understand that. In Genesis 3, after mankind sins, God tells Adam that all of his offspring will be affected by sin. We do not have to learn how to lie, hurt or want things that aren't ours. We are simply born with this rebellion against God inside of us. All of us, except Jesus, inherit this from our parents. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary became pregnant as a virgin so that she could give birth to Jesus - who lived a sinless life on our behalf.

If you haven't already, take some time to read Luke's account of Mary learning that she was chosen to give birth to Jesus (Luke 1:16-38). We have much to learn from Mary about obeying God even when it is difficult. But we also can learn much about our need for a savior from Mary's reaction when she first heard the news that she would miraculously become pregnant and give birth to Jesus. In Luke 1:46-47, Mary says "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God *my Savior*." Mary was chosen above all other women who have ever lived to be the one to give birth to the savior. It would have been somewhat understandable if she used this honor as a reason to think that she was above all of the rest of humanity. But she didn't. She knew that like us, she too needs a Savior.

1. Knowing that the Holy Spirit is the source of all good deeds, how should we feel when we do the right thing?
2. What are some things that can sometimes make you think that you don't need saving? (Good grades, behavior, money, popularity, etc)

“

## *For our sake he was crucified, under Pontius Pilate*

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 5:8

What does Jesus' death have to do with me? The answer to this question might be one of the most important answers ever given. Growing up you may or may not have heard the phrase "Jesus died for your sins", but if you are anything like me you just got used to hearing it instead of trying to understand what it really means. The Nicene Creed makes it a point to remind us of the Biblical truth that Jesus' death was for our sake.

### **For our sake**

Imagine that you walk up to a friend in the middle of lunch and slap them across the face. There are definitely some consequences to your actions. You might lose your friendship, earn a detention, get slapped back or all three. Now imagine that you find a way to walk up to the President of the United States and slap him across the face. This time the consequences are a bit more steep. Attacking a peer, someone who has the same status as you, is wrong and has certain consequences, but attacking someone who is a higher authority or power than you deserves an even greater punishment. So if an offense against your friend is bad, and an offense against the President is worse, imagine what would happen if you were to offend the highest authority and power in the universe. This is what each and every one of us have done to God. We take the life God gave us and choose to do things our way. We have offended the greatest being in the universe, and deserve the greatest punishment in the universe. Someone has to pay. I can't pay for your sin because I am also guilty. You can't pay for my sin because you are also guilty. We need someone who is not guilty to take our place. Jesus lived the life we could not live, so He could die the death we should have died.

### **Crucified**

So Jesus is the only one who could have paid for our sin. Why did He pay for our sin on a cross? Most historians, Christian and non-Christian, agree that one of the most violent, painful and bloody forms of execution throughout human history was crucifixion. The Roman empire had perfected a way to make sure that criminals who deserve death suffer as much as possible before they die: the Cross. It is no accident that God chose to allow Jesus to die by crucifixion. Violence, blood and pain are all very offensive to humans. Our sin and rebellion against God is even more offensive. The Cross is a reminder of both God's love and his justice. His justice means that someone has to pay for our sin, and His love means that He sent His only Son to take our place.

### **Pontius Pilate**

Why include the name of the Roman ruler at the time of Jesus' crucifixion? The writers of the Nicene Creed understood one very important thing about Christianity - the events described in the Bible actually happened. Christianity is not a collection of stories aimed at teaching us how to live. It is an account of historical events that really took place. The Nicene Creed includes Pilate's name because they want to show that Jesus' death was an actual, historical event.

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Romans 5:8.
2. How are both God's justice and mercy shown in these verses?

“

## *He suffered death and was buried*

Scripture: Romans 6:20-23, Romans 3:23-25, 1 John 4:10

Death has never been a comfortable thing. The Nicene Creed says that Jesus suffered death because they too know that death is difficult. We saw yesterday that because of who God is, someone had to pay for our rebellion against him. We also learned that Jesus paid the penalty that we deserved. Today we answer the question Why did Jesus have to die?

### **Suffered death**

As we saw yesterday, an offense against an infinitely great being (God) deserves as infinitely great punishment. In Romans 6, God reveals through Paul's writings that the punishment for sin is death. Paul is referring to both a physical and a spiritual death. Physical death, although it is mysterious in many ways, is somewhat easy for us to comprehend. Spiritual death, on the other hand, can be pretty difficult to grasp. The Bible teaches that because of our rebellion against God, our punishment is that after we die, we spend eternity apart from God. One of the great characteristics about God is that he is good. There is nothing good outside of God. Even in the darkest, most seemingly evil circumstances here on earth there are still hints of good. A prisoner trapped in the deepest dungeon still has a glimpse of hope. The most disastrous storms still have an element of beauty and awe. A child who lives in an abusive home still has moments where they are loved and cared for. Hell, which Jesus talked about several times, is a real place where there is absolutely no trace of good. This is the ultimate punishment. This is what we deserve, and this is what Jesus took on when he died on the Cross for our sake.

There are a few important things to know about what happened on the cross. Theologians have used these words to help describe what took place on the Cross. These may be bigger, unfamiliar words, but they are worth knowing. As you learn these words, think deeply about what they tell us about what Jesus did for your sake.

### **Penal Substitutionary Atonement.**

**Penal**, as in penalty. There is a penalty for sin.

**Substitutionary**, as in substitution. Jesus acted as our substitution.

**Atonement**. The making right of an offense. At one moment, because of the cross, we are able to be made right with God.

So a great way to begin to sum up what took place on the Cross is to say that Jesus was a **substitute** who paid our **penalty** so that we could be **made right** with God.

1. Why does it matter that Jesus actually died?
2. Why does it matter that Jesus was our substitute?

“

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

Scripture: Luke 24, 1 Corinthians 15:12-28

When I was in the Third Grade, I planned an elaborate scheme to find out once and for all whether or not Santa Clause was real. When I say “planned” I mean that I thought of the idea two minutes before I acted on it, and when I say “elaborate scheme” I mean I hid at the top of the stairs to see if my dad drank Santa’s milk. Surely enough, a few minutes after I was supposed to be in bed I saw my dad reach for the frosty glass of milk and take a sip. In an instant my whole view on Santa was changed forever.

A similar situation happened quite a few years later. I had heard my entire life that on Easter Sunday we celebrate the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. Much like my belief in Santa Clause, I began to be unsure of whether or not I actually believed that Jesus was dead and then became alive. Did the resurrection really happen? This might be one of the most important questions ever asked. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:19 Paul says that if the resurrection did not happen, and we have no hope in also being resurrected one day, we (Christians) are to be pitied more than any other people. This fear and uncertainty led me to look closely at the resurrection of Jesus. One of the most detailed accounts of the resurrection is found in Luke’s Gospel. There are several things found in Luke 24 that led me to believe that Jesus is alive. Read through Luke 24, and let’s take a look at a few key points.

### **1. Luke was a doctor.**

Keep in mind that the writers of the New Testament were just like you and I. They had jobs, friends and families. They had a lot to lose by saying things that sounded crazy. Any doctor today who claims that a patient died and then three days later came back to life will

not have a long career. Luke wrote that Jesus rose again because he knew that Jesus rose again.

### **2. Women found the empty tomb.**

A common Jewish prayer at the time Jesus lived was “God, I thank you that I am not a woman or a Gentile.” Life was rough for women. In fact, their testimony in a legal case was not valid unless a man backed up what they said. Luke knew that women would not be believed. If he were to make up Jesus’ resurrection, he would claim that a well respected group of men were the first to find Jesus. Instead, he writes that a group of women found the empty tomb. He wrote this because he knew that Jesus rose again.

### **3. Jesus walked seven miles.**

So many historical documents outside of the Bible talk about the resurrection that historians have to develop theories to explain what they think really happened. One of the leading theories is that on through the beatings and the Cross, Jesus didn’t really die. Three days later, they say, he recovered and appeared to many people, claiming that he rose from the dead. The problem with this theory is that when you suffer the injuries that Jesus suffered, it is ridiculous to assume that you can recover enough in three days to be able to make a seven mile journey on foot. Unless, of course, you are God and were raised from the dead.

1. What difference does it make if Jesus rose from the dead or not?
2. What else from Luke 24 convinces you that the resurrection was real?

“

*He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

Scripture: Hebrews 1:3, 12:2, Luke 24:50-53, John 19:30

In the Gospel of John, the first statement made aloud about Jesus was “Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Since before the beginning of time, Jesus had one mission on earth: to be our sacrifice (remember penal substitutionary atonement?) After the resurrection, Jesus returned home to heaven. The Bible says that He is actually seated at the right hand of God. The Nicene Creed includes this detail - that Jesus is seated - for a reason.

### **Seated**

In the Old Testament, God designed a very elaborate sacrificial system for the people of Israel. Once a year the high priest would make an animal sacrifice as a symbol of God’s forgiveness of sin. This system was not intended to pay for sin itself - that is what Jesus came to do. This system was set up by God to prepare His people to understand the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. From the time the high priest began the sacrifice to the time he finished he was not allowed to sit. If the priest were to sit, it would symbolize the fact that the sacrifice for sin was finished (which it was not until the Cross.)

So when the Bible says (Hebrews 1:3) that after Jesus paid for our sins He sat down at the right hand of God, it is saying that Jesus’ work of paying for our sins was finished. Later in Hebrews 8 Jesus is called our great High Priest, and again it says that he is seated. An Old Testament high priest could not sit down because sin was not paid for. Our Ultimate High Priest, Jesus, can and did sit down

because sin is paid for. Not some of our sin. All of it. One sacrifice paid for all the sin we have committed, are committing, and will commit. Jesus meant what He said on the Cross. “It is finished.” (John 19:30)

### **For now**

Sin is paid for, Jesus is alive and He is sitting at the right hand of God the Father. But the story is not over. We’ll look more at this tomorrow, but for now look at what Hebrews 10:11-13 says about Jesus being seated:

“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.”

Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father ... for now.

1. How much of your sin was “future sin” when Jesus said “It is finished” on the cross?
2. What does that mean about how much of your sin is already paid for?

“

*And He will come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead.*

Scripture: Acts 1:11, 1 Thess 4:16, Titus 2:13, Phil 2:6-11, Rom. 14:10-12, 2 Tim 4:1, Rev 20:11-15

### **He will come again**

Jesus says “It is finished” or “It is done” twice. The first time is when He’s on the cross dying for the sins of His people. The second is after He returns and establishes a new heaven and a new earth. When he said “it is finished” on the cross He wasn’t saying “I’m finished, I’ve done everything I’m going to do.” He was saying, “This work of propitiation is finished.” Our hope is not only in Jesus’ first coming or in His death on the cross, but also in His second coming. The angel tells Christ’s apostles, “What are you doing staring at the sky? You saw Him go, you’ll see Him return in the same way.” (Acts 1:11 author’s paraphrase) Knowing that Jesus is returning is the basis of our hope in the age to come, and it effects how we live in this present age.

### **With glory**

When Jesus came the first time it was in humility. John and his companions saw Him and touched Him, (1 John 1:1) but even John hadn’t seen Him “as He is.” (1 John 3:2) When He returns He will not be wearing the servant’s towel, (John 13:4) but a robe dipped in blood with the words “King of kings and Lord of lords” written across it and tattooed on His leg. (Ok, so it just says “written on His thigh,” but leg tattoos are pretty BA...can I say that about Jesus?) Not bowing to wash His disciples’ feet, but enthroned, with every knee bowing at His name. (Phil 2:10)

### **To judge**

But this throne isn’t just a fancy chair. It’s a “Judgment Seat.” The place where judges used to determine whether an athlete would receive an olive-branch crown or be disqualified. And everyone stands before this throne—the living and the dead. We’ve already mentioned that the physical death that we all see isn’t the only penalty for sin. Even those who have died physically will be raised from that death to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Some will be raised just so they can experience another death that is physical, spiritual, and eternal. John calls this the “second death.” (Rev 20:6) Some will be raised never to die again, but we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Numerous places where the Bible reminds us that Jesus is returning, in the same breath it tells us to be careful how we live.

So hope doesn’t sit and look at the sky. (Acts 1:11) It waits, (Rom 8:25) but it also works. (Titus 2:12) It groans, (Rom 8:23) but it also goes into all the nations making disciples. (Matt 28:19, Acts 1:8) It perseveres, (Rom 5:3-5) but it also purifies. (1 John 3:3) Jesus tells the story of some bridal attendants (Luke 25:1-13...in the 1st century they were required to be virgins) who, while waiting for the bridegroom, forgot to bring enough oil to burn in their lamps. They leave to buy more oil and the bridegroom shows up and shuts the door and locks it. They say, “Let us in” and he yells back out at them, “Who are you?” (author’s paraphrase) You can almost hear sarcasm, “I know you can’t be my attendants, because if you were my attendants you would have been ready for me. Your whole life would have been arranged around my arrival to the wedding reception. What? Were you looking so forward to my party that you forgot the only thing I put you in charge of?”

1. Read 2 Peter 3:11 and Titus 2:11-13. What has Jesus put us in charge of before His return?
2. Do you ever praise Jesus for being a righteous Judge? How can we worship Jesus as Judge, and still show compassion on people stuck in sin?

“

*And His kingdom will have no end.*

Scripture: Titus 2:11-14, Revelation 21

Jesus is our Savior. He is the one who made the sacrifice and paid our penalty for sin. But He is much more than just our savior. Over and over the Bible refers to Jesus as our King and our Lord. A king and a lord both have free reign over a land and a people. In Revelation 19, among other places, Jesus is called the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What does it mean for Jesus to be our King and our Lord?

### **Savior and Lord**

We are not just saved from something. We are also saved to something. The goal of the Christian life is not to simply stop sinning or get into heaven, but to become more and more like Jesus our example by re-aligning every area of our lives back to the way God intended. Just like we could not save ourselves, but needed Jesus to pay our penalty, we cannot make ourselves better. In Titus 2 Paul writes that Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” This means a couple of things. One, God saved you, and He will continue to purify you as well. You are not left on your own to “get better.” Two, it means that Christians should be marked by how zealous they are for doing good. This does not mean that after becoming a Christian you are instantly excited about doing good in every area of your life. Sanctification (God’s work in your life of making you more like Jesus) is a long, slow, and difficult process. This is partly why we need to be involved in a local church. We each need people in our lives who are brave enough to speak difficult truth to us.

Sometimes in the Christian faith we have to be very careful to distinguish between doing good works because we have been saved and doing good works so that we will be saved. We are saved because God, in His goodness, revealed to us that we have a need for a savior and that Jesus is that savior. We did nothing to deserve our salvation. We do good out of gratitude and obedience, not to try to earn our salvation.

### **Already and Not Yet**

Another key theme throughout Scripture when speaking of Jesus as King and his Kingdom is an idea known as “already and not yet.” The “already” simply means that there are some aspects of life where we can clearly see the Kingdom working. In 2,000 years the church has grown from 120 gathered in a room to literally billions of Christians across the globe. The Gospel (the good news about sin, Jesus, the Cross and the Resurrection) has spread to every continent and more people are added to the church every day. Countries such as North Korea and China, who have traditionally been violently opposed to Jesus, have seen tremendous growth in Christianity. In the Cross and the Resurrection, Jesus has secured victory over Satan, sin and death. God is continuing to save His people until the final day when Satan, sin and death have no power over His Kingdom.

The “not yet” means that although victory was accomplished, evil, sin and death still exist and have limited power in the world. In God’s perfect timing, there will be a day when Jesus will return and once and for all defeat Satan, sin and death. Then we will live in what the Bible calls a New Heaven and New Earth. We will spend eternity living in the perfect Kingdom ruled by our perfect Savior and King.

1. What are some ways that you see the Kingdom working?
2. What do you most look forward to about the future perfect Kingdom?

“

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father.*

Scripture: Gen 1:2, 2:7, 2 Cor 3:17-18, Rom 8:11, John 15:26

### **Lord**

We mentioned before that one of the most common names for God in the Old Testament was “Lord.” In fact, two of His names were pronounced “Lord” when spoken out-loud. So when the Nicene Creed calls the Holy Spirit “Lord” it is saying that He is God. More on that tomorrow.

### **The Giver of Life**

Life comes from the Spirit. In Genesis when it says God “breathed into [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life,” the words “breathed” and “breath” are the same word for “Spirit.” (ruach) Many people take this to mean that the Holy Spirit was what God breathed into Adam’s nostrils. No matter how you understand Gen 2:7, the Spirit is the One who makes and keeps mankind alive. When we are found dead spiritually, it is the Holy Spirit, who gave life to Jesus in His resurrection, who gives life to our mortal bodies. (Rom 8:11) Take away the Spirit and we die. This is how someone can die eternally... they are eternally separated from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is what Jesus dies to give us. God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, so that those who believe in Him should not perish, but have the Holy Spirit (the Giver of eternal life). Eternal life is simply a byproduct of having the Holy Spirit—eternal God—living in us. Life is the gift. The Spirit is the Giver of it.

### **Who proceeds from the Father**

Jesus Christ is fully God because He is eternally begotten of the Father. He is God from God. The Holy Spirit isn’t begotten...the Son is the Only Begotten. But the Holy Spirit is God from God. He “proceeds” from the Father. (John 15:26) Eve was taken from Adam’s side, which showed that she was fully human—equal to Adam in every way. The Holy Spirit proceeds from God’s side as it were, which shows that He is fully God—equal to the Father and Son in every way. There’s just a little difference between begottenness and procession, they are basically two different ways of being “from.” There is a lot of overlap in the roles of the Son and the Spirit. The Son gives life through His resurrection (John 11:25), but the Spirit raised Jesus and also gives life to us. (Rom 8:11) We have access to the Father “through” the Son, but “by [the] Spirit.” (Eph 2:18 “by” can also be translated “in” or “with”) “Through” and “by” are two completely different words, but there is a lot of overlap in their meanings. So these two different Persons have slightly different roles in a lot of the same actions. The Father does all things through the Son and by the Spirit. The Father saves through the Son’s incarnation, atonement, etc, and by the Spirit’s indwelling and sanctification. This is one of the reasons these three Persons are called “One.” The other big reason why the Three are One will be discussed tomorrow.

1. If the Holy Spirit is not simply a “benefit of salvation,” but rather salvation is a benefit of having the Spirit, how might your worship of the Spirit change?
2. What are some other acts of God the Father where the Son’s and the Holy Spirit’s roles can be seen? Creation? Revelation?

*Sanctification:* The constant process of the Holy Spirit making us more holy through our own conscious decisions. Phil 2:12-13- We work because God (the Holy Spirit) is working in us.

“

*With the Father and Son He is worshiped and glorified.*

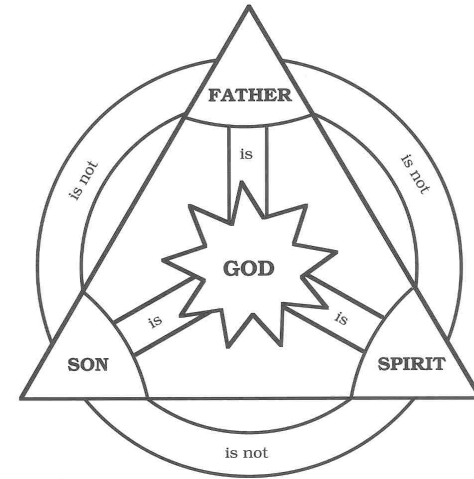
Scripture: Acts 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18

We need to start off today with one quick clarification. If you fully understand the concept of Trinity ... you do not fully understand the concept of Trinity. There are some things about God that we simply won't fully understand. That being said, there are many things that we can know for sure about our Triune God. Since the beginning of the Church, different thoughts about the Trinity have come and gone that are simply wrong. The Nicene Creed was written primarily in order to declare an Orthodox stance on the Trinity. Using the Bible as the authoritative source, there are three things we must keep in mind when thinking about the Triune God.

**There is only one true God:** There are not three Gods. Throughout the Old and New Testaments the Bible is very clear on this.

**The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all God:** Although we know there is only one God, all three persons of the Trinity are referred to as God throughout the Bible.

**The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct persons:** Although there is only one God, and all three persons are referred to as God, there is still a distinction between the three persons.



Knowing those three truths and using them as boundaries for how we think about the Trinity, Orthodox Christianity has used a word to begin to describe this relationship in more detail. That word is consubstantiality. Don't freak out, let's take a closer look.

**Con:** a latin root meaning “together in”

**Substantia:** latin for “substance, essence, being”

This is the second reason that the three Persons are called One. All three Persons are “together in substance”, or, they are all One in substance. They all three share the same characteristics. All three are eternal, almighty, merciful, and just. All three are all-powerful, all-knowing. There is not one Person of the Trinity that is less God than the other. This is why the Nicene Creed affirms that along with God the Father and God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is worshiped and glorified.

1. What do you picture when you think of God?

2. How can what the Bible says about the Trinity shape the way you think about God?

“

## *He has spoken through the Prophets.*

**Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:3-4**

Humans are very curious beings. We have within us a desire to know things that are unknown. This translates well do our desire to know God. We all have deep questions about life, God, relationships, school, work, family and more. When a life decision (big or small) arises, many of us wish that God would just tell us which choice to make. The truth is that everything God desires for you to know about His character, life, and the story of redemption through Jesus has been revealed to us in the Bible. The Nicene Creed affirms that one of the chief roles of the Holy Spirit is to speak through the Prophets so that we may know who God is.

### **He has spoken**

Paul, one of the Apostles, writes several letters to a young man named Timothy. In many ways, young Timothy is much like us. He has been given a good amount of responsibility within the church, has significant decisions to make, and is trying to figure out what it means to live the Christian life in a world that does not know or love God. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul shares some valuable insight with Timothy, saying that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.” The Holy Spirit is the one Paul describes as “breathing-out” this revelation about God, life and the story of redemption through Jesus. Several different men all living at different places and in different times wrote the Bible, but it was the Holy Spirit who “breathed-out” God’s revelation to them. This is why we also call the Bible the Word of God - it truly is the exact words that God chose to communicate about Himself to mankind.

### **What about today?**

The Bible was not written just for people who lived long ago like Timothy, Mary, Paul and Peter. It is a sacred book that contains truth that all people living in all time periods need to know. The Bible relates to your life today the same way it related to your parents life when they were your age. How can this be? Another role of the Holy Spirit related to speaking through the Prophets is to continually reveal the truths found in the Bible to us today. When you become a Christian, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is given to you. This means that you are not alone when you read the Bible. Anytime a truth from Scripture is made clear to you, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Praise God that He has given us the Holy Spirit as a guide through Scripture!

The Bible is true for all people everywhere. This does not mean that it directly relates to every single situation you are in. If you need to decide which college to attend or what job to apply for, there is not a magical page in the Bible you can turn to that will tell you what to do. There are, however, deep truths throughout Scripture that the Holy Spirit reveals to you to help make your decision. One of those truths is that we are to surround ourself with Christian community and wise counsel. That means that we should find and spend regular time with Christians who are older and wiser than we are, and can guide us through life decisions. Another deep truth is that as Christians we are to bring Glory to God in everything we do. This means that no matter which decision we make, we are able to live out our purpose as Christians. This takes the pressure off of making the perfect decision! You can make God look great as a janitor, and you can make God look great as a CEO. *How* you do what you do is far more important than what you do.

1. How can you make sure that you regularly spend time reading the Bible?
2. What big or small decisions are you working through now? How can Scripture, community and wise counsel help you?

“

## *We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.*

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, Eph 4:4-6, 5:22-32, Eph 2:15-16, 2 Tim 2:2, Jude 3

There are a lot of people these days talking about the Church, either because they hate it, or they want to defend it. The good thing is that everyone is talking about the Church. The bad thing is everyone is talking about the Church. Everyone with a camera crew and a cool pair of glasses shares their thoughts, biblical or not. The Nicene Creed does weigh in on the issue, and its voice should be heard—especially in days like these.

**One:** There is only one Church. Biblically, our confession of one Church is connected to our confession of one God, one Lord, and one Spirit.(Eph 4:4-6) This is because our one Lord only has one Body (Eph 2:16) and only one Bride.(Eph 5:25) To confess more than one Church would be to confess more than one Lord, or to confess Him as an adulterer. There is only one Church, and it is holy, catholic, and apostolic. This means that self-called “churches” or organizations that aren’t holy, catholic, and apostolic are not the Church. But this also means that all members of this one Body are connected in a significant way. I’m going to let you in on a secret: if you want to sound “with it” around other Christians today, use the word “community” a lot. It’s all the rage, and it should be—remember, we were created for it. There are many places where community can be found, but there is only one Body—only one Community where you are connected to other members and the Head in a supernatural way. This doesn’t mean it’s automatic. Much of the New Testament is devoted to Christians “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”(Phil 2:2) It’s hard work, mainly because this glorious Body of Christ is chock full of sinners.

**Holy:** The Church is Jesus’ Bride, but she’s kind of a skank. God tells Hosea to go out and find a prostitute and marry her...”That’s what being your God is like,” He says. (Hosea 1:2) He paints a similar, but (way) more graphic picture in Ezekiel 16. But we see in Eph 5:26-27 that His plan for His Bride is to cleanse her. To take her in off the streets, dress her wounds, and replace her worn, tattered, immodest rags with fine, flowing linen. (Rev 19:8)

**Catholic:** Catholic doesn’t mean what you think. Catholic simply means universal—the Church is not one thing at one place or time and another thing at another place or time. It’s a good term, which is why the Roman Catholic Church put it in their name. Your local church isn’t a piece of the Church, but it is a church...a microcosm of the catholic Church, and yet it cannot live in isolation from other churches. My church is accountable to yours because they are both the Church and they are one.

**Apostolic:** Apostolic means “of the Apostles.” We believe that the Church as She exists today is the same Church that the Apostles cultivated in the 1st Century. The Church maintains both the Apostles’ doctrine (a right understanding of the Bible) and the Apostles’ authority. Paul tells Timothy not only to pass on what he heard from Paul, but to pass it on to faithful men who will be able to teach it to others. There is a chain of sound doctrine that remains unbroken from Paul to every true church. There is also a chain of authority handed down to church leadership from the Apostles. The result is a church’s responsibility to exercise church discipline when necessary.

Discuss these 5 traditional marks of a local church. 1. Identification with the catholic Church. 2. Teaching Apostolic (biblical) doctrine 3. Exercising Apostolic authority (leadership structure and use of church discipline) 4. Right use of the ordinances (Communion and Baptism) 5. Loving fellowship among its members.

“

## *We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.*

Scripture: Eph. 4:5, 1 Cor. 12:13, Acts 2:38, 16:31, Eph. 2:8-10

### **One way in**

You may have already noticed, but the Nicene Creed takes its outline from Ephesians 4:4-6. Which many agree was itself a creed that Paul was quoting as he encouraged the church in Ephesus to maintain the unity of the Spirit. One of the many things we share as Christians is the way we entered this believing community. Of course we enter a believing community by believing. Faith is how we come to a relationship with God. Faith is how we become a member of Christ's Body. Faith is how Jesus' crucifixion, suffering, burial, resurrection, and ascension are made to be "for us." (Eph. 2:8-10) Yet there are a lot of things that happen when a Person believes. There are emotional feelings that occur before and after coming to faith, like guilt, joy, sorrow, and awe. There are questions asked to people who have already believed. Sometimes "every head is bowed and every eye is closed." Often a hand is raised or an aisle is walked. Most of the people I've talked to say they "prayed a prayer to receive Christ." Let's be clear on one thing: raising a hand never saved anybody from sin. Walking an aisle never reconciled a sinner to a holy God. No prayer ever placed anyone into the family of the heavenly Father. Faith alone is the instrument with which God saves through His grace. (Acts 16:31)

### **One way to show it**

This doesn't mean that prayer, walking aisles, or raising hands are bad things. In fact, I would tell anybody who has believed to pray and vocalize the faith they've come to. More importantly, I would tell them to talk to their church leadership about being baptized.

Baptism is the biblical way of showing that you've placed your faith in Christ—that you're a member of His Body. Sometimes the things that are only part of an event are used to describe that event. A wise poet once wrote, "If you liked it then you should have put a ring on it." This phrase only works because everyone knows what Beyoncé means when she says "put a ring on it." We all know what she means because the symbol of a ring is so closely connected to marriage that you can call getting married "putting a ring on it." This is why the Nicene Creed can call coming to faith "baptism." When Peter holds an evangelistic meeting in Acts 2, and people want to respond in faith, Peter does not say "come forward and one of our leaders will pray with you." He says, "repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:38) When Paul wants to remind the Roman church what happened to them when they believed, he says "don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus..." (Rom. 6:3) No one assumes that putting a ring on your left hand makes you married, and we must be careful not to think that getting dunked in water makes you a Christian. We must also be careful not to ignore this biblical command and symbol simply because many people have placed too much value in it.

### **For the forgiveness of sins**

How is faith and its declaration related to the forgiveness of sins? It is how your sins are forgiven. Jesus' work on the cross is only good for those who are united to it. Paul says "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death." (Rom. 6:3) Faith "includes us in Christ" (Eph. 1:13) This is why baptism is such a perfect symbol of faith. We can see, feel, hear, taste and smell (if you forget to plug your nose) a death, a burial, and a resurrection—His become ours.

1. Have you been baptized since you began your Christian walk?
2. Why is a public baptism important or special?

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*We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.*

Scripture: Rom. 8:23-25, 1 Cor. 15:19-20, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, 2 Cor. 5:17, Rev. 20:4-6, Rev. 21:1-8

### **Firstfruits**

Life as a Christian can be wonderful. And yet Paul claims that if all we got from salvation were the benefits we experience now in this life, then we should be pitied more than anyone else. Why? Because our hope is not in this life! In this life we experience the firstfruits. Firstfruits refer to the first little bit of the harvest. In the days of yore (when the Bible was written) and in many places today (like Iowa) harvest is a big deal. It's what you work the other 11 months of the year for. God said to the ancient Israelites, "I want the first little portion of your harvest." This was to symbolize that all of the harvest belonged to God. Luckily for the Israelites, God let them eat or sell the rest of their grain, but the reminder was always there at the beginning of harvest season, "this is all God's."

If you'll remember, we mentioned that the prize of our salvation is the Holy Spirit. He is the inheritance, and we know we will receive the whole inheritance because we have the deposit of the Spirit.(Eph 1:14) He is the harvest, and we know we the whole harvest is ours because we have the firstfruits of the Spirit. But people with the firstfruits don't sit around pretending the firstfruits are enough, they groan as they wait for the harvest. And what is the harvest? "Adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."(Rom. 8:23) Salvation isn't something that's just for our souls. If it were, salvation would mean becoming less than human. Remember, we were made from dirt and ribs. Take away the physical component and we are no longer human. So when Jesus was raised from the

dead, he wasn't raised as a ghost or a phantom. He was raised as a human with a soul and a physical body.(Luke 24:39) And Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection—we are the harvest.(1 Cor. 15:20)

### **So we will always be with Him**

And that's how we will spend eternity with God—as real people in real bodies.(1 Thess. 4:17) We groan, but we don't grieve. People who have no hope grieve, because this is all there is. Loved ones who have died are gone, never to be seen again (if there were no resurrection), but "since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (i.e. died)."(1 Thess. 4:14) I find great comfort in this. I wouldn't know how to enjoy Jesus' company without a body. I couldn't see Him without eyes, hear His voice without ears, hug Him without arms, or ask Him questions and tell Him I love Him without a mouth.

### **New**

But we're not the only things that will be resurrected. When John describes heaven in Revelation 21, he doesn't say there are a bunch of wispy cloud-like things wafting around. He says there is a new heaven and a new earth, because the first ones "had passed away."(Rev. 21:1) The earth and heaven both die and are raised new...better. There are still trees, rivers, mountains, even cities, but there is no more death, no more crying, no more pain, no more sorrow. Because the old things have passed away.(Rev. 21:4) In 2 Cor. 5:17 Paul says we become part of this new creation when we are "in Christ." We become part of the new order of things where "the old has passed away."(2 Cor. 5:17) We still wait here in the old—"for who hopes for what he already has?"(Rom. 8:24), but we belong to the new.

We have hope, and our hope is not to become less than human, or go somewhere else, but to be raised as new people on a new earth and "so we will always be with Him."

“

**AMEN.**

Scripture: James 1:22-25

### **Let it be true**

Amen. Just one word, and yet it is the most important word in the Nicene Creed. "Amen" is a Hebrew word. All we've done is replaced all the Hebrew letters with English ones. The writers of the New Testament did the same thing with Greek letters. Sometimes words are so significant that it's hard to translate them into another language. That's the way it is with Amen.

If we were to translate it, we would say, "that's true" or when, like when we say it at the end of a prayer, we would say "let it be true." When we say "Amen" at the end of the Nicene Creed, we are saying "let this be true" in my life. We are saying that what we believe to be true of God, His Son's and Spirit's work on earth and in heaven, and our relationship to Him will become as true in our actions as it is in our mouths. We confess one God with our mouths, we will confess one God with our lives. We confess one Lord with our mouths, we will confess one Lord with our everyday decisions. We say we believe in one Church, we will live in unity with our fellow believers. So when we say "Amen" it does not mean we are done confessing our Creed. It means that we will continue to confess it everyday in every word we say, every thought we think, and everything we do. If someone can't say this at the end of the Creed, then the words they just had spoken were a lie. You cannot say you believe these things and not live them.

### **Faith as a Mirror**

James compares our faith to a mirror. Why? Because it is who we are. If I look in the mirror, see that I'm naked, and even say out-loud, "I'm not wearing any clothes," but then I just head on out and go to Young Life club all ready to play some crazy games and sing 5-year-old top 40 songs in nothing but my blessedness, then the mirror didn't serve its purpose, and my confession was a lie. It wasn't a lie because it wasn't true, but because I didn't really believe it. (Unless I wanted to go to club Buck Rogers naked, which, for the record, would be inappropriate.) The truth of the Creed doesn't depend on your believing it, but its truth does you no good if it is not true in your life. My prayer for you is that the Creed would be true in you.

*I believe what I believe is what makes me what I am.*

*I did not make it.*

*No, it is making me.*

*It is the very truth of God, not the invention of any man.*

-Rich Mullins

AMEN.

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-begotten 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;  
He became incarnate,  
by the power of the Holy Spirit from 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.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come.  
AMEN.

# The Nicene Creed

*A Guide To The Historic Christian Faith.*

## ***We Hope***

Your time with the Nicene Creed is not over. If you are able to finish it—if you are able to say "Amen," then you will be living the faith we have been confessing for the last month, for the next month, and for every month after that until the Bridegroom returns. But we hope that a few things have happened in the last month.

**We hope you've learned that the Nicene Creed isn't a checklist that some crusty "higher-ups" a long time ago came up with to make everybody believe the same thing.**

**We hope that you grew to know the God who through His Son and by His Spirit has redeemed you.**

**We hope you can impress your friends by using the word "consubstantial" in a sentence.**

**We hope you discovered the value of sharing your faith, not just with those who don't believe, but with the "we" that believe it together.**

**We hope you memorized the Nicene Creed.**

**We hope your Amen can be seen by a watching world who will see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven, through His Son, and by His Spirit.**

- Tyson, Jon and the "We" of Christ's Church

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# The Nicene Creed

*A Guide To The Historic Christian Faith.*