

What is a creed? Basically, a creed is a statement of belief. The Lutheran Church confesses its faith according to three creeds and they were written to help answer the challenges that Christians faced at the time of being written.

The first creed is the Apostles' Creed and it is believed that the 12 apostles helped to write it which explains how it got its name. It gives a very basic understanding of God's activity in the world. Now at that particular time, there were not a whole lot of discussions or issues with the divinity of Jesus or even with the Holy Spirit which is why the Apostles' Creed does not really deal with them; however, we assume our current understanding of Jesus and the Holy Spirit when we confess the Apostles' Creed.

The second creed that we use is the Nicene Creed. It received its name because it was adopted in the city of Nicaea by the First Council of Nicaea in 325. Most creeds were written during times of conflict or misunderstandings and so the creeds were written to help clarify what we believe.

So in 325, the church was dealing with the Arian controversy. Arius was a Libyan presbyter in Alexandria and he said that even though Jesus was divine, he was a created being and therefore could not be equal with the Father. So Arius would say that God the Father was up here and then Jesus would be about here and that there was a time where there was no son of God because he hadn't been created yet. That statement really throws a wrench into the first chapter of John.

The Nicene Creed of 325 explicitly affirms the co-essential divinity of the Son. As John 1 tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being⁴ in him was life,^{*} and the life was the light of all people.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

The Son, Jesus is that Word. The Council of Nicaea made that very clear in the face of the Arian controversy. After the Nicene Creed was adopted, everything went ok until 381 when it was amended at the First Council of Constantinople and it is this amended version that we confess as the Nicene Creed. This later version talked of the Holy Spirit as being worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son.

The Athanasian Creed describes the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in much greater detail. Churches first started using this creed during the 6th Century. It is composed of 44 rhythmic lines and appears to have been intended as part of the liturgy during a worship service.

The whole purpose of our creeds is to help describe our belief in God. They were all written during times where people questioned our belief in God and as a result, they helped to shape our belief.

As we continue our Lenten journey, think about how our creeds helped to define and shape your belief in God.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen

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: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate 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 and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped 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.

Athanasian Creed

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith.

Which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.

But the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one Eternal.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one Uncreated, and one Incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet not three lords, but one Lord.

For as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge each Person by Himself to be both God and Lord, so we are also forbidden by the catholic religion to say that there are three gods or three lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

And in the Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believes rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of his mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect man, of a rational soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching His godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His manhood; who, although He is God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God; one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, He sits at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the quick and the dead. At His coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.