

THE APOSTLES' CREED

*The story of God
and this world that
changes everything*



St Leonard's & St Peter's
BENEFICE OF EYNHAM & CASSINGTON



The Apostles' Creed

What Christians believe

The Apostle's Creed is a grass-roots confession and summary of Christian faith. A basic form of this creed was in wide use by churches in the second century AD. The Apostles were witnesses to Jesus' life, death and resurrection from the dead, and their teaching in the New Testament provides the foundation for Christian thought and practice.

The story of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Central to this summary is the understanding that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed in the teachings of scripture, and, most clearly, in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It is less a set of ideas or concepts than a story of God and the world he has made. As such, it has long been closely associated with baptism, by which the follower of Jesus begins their life with Christ in the Christian community. In baptism the candidate is plunged into the story of this triune God. The Spirit unites us with Christ by faith that we might enjoy the love of the Father. Our story becomes interwoven in his story. The Christian's living and thinking becomes shaped by this story summarised for us in the Creed.

A window through which we explore the truth of God

Each line offers the opportunity to think about the person, work and activity of God as revealed in scripture. You may wish to read some of the bible references in this booklet to begin the deeper dive, and to see how the creed is rooted in the Apostles' teaching. Many have memorised the Creed, that it might become a tool to assist the study of life in this world. There are many differing concepts of God or gods, but the Christian is rooted in the understanding of God who is the Father who made us, whose humility is revealed in his Son Jesus Christ, through death on a cross, and who is the Holy Spirit, drawing us into the life everlasting.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

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

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

Romans 12.1-8

The follower of Jesus confess that the creed is personal. *I believe*. In today's culture we are reluctant to commit ourselves to anything. Yet an encounter with Jesus has led millions to allow themselves to be immersed into this story of God, and own it for themselves, saying 'this is where I stand'. It was a brave thing to do in the early church, and it is an increasingly countercultural move today. It is, however, something Christians do not confess alone. Week by week churches will join in saying this Creed together. Jesus meets us as individuals but brings us into his family, that not only encompasses the globe, but also reaches through history. As individual persons we say this together as the singular body of Christ: "I believe".

believe

John 20.31

The Creed serves as a reminder, for followers of Jesus, of the story that defines the Christian's life. This is what we believe, this is the story we are leaning on, not another, trusting that this God will sustain and hold us in life and death. All our eggs are in this particular basket. We have burned our boats. Our allegiance is to Jesus above all others. This sounds all very courageous and confident, but in the rough and tumble of life we are more often like the man who comes to Jesus and says, '*Lord I believe, help me in my unbelief*' (*Mark 9.24*). We realise that we live in accordance with what we believe, rather than what we *say* we believe. That doesn't mean we are being inauthentic, as long as we realise this, but acknowledges that we are people in process. Saying the Creed together enables Christians to encourage one another to grow in conviction. It also offers an opportunity, after the turbulence of the past week, to re-orientate our lives to the story we know is true, and in which there is life.

in God the Father

Galatians 4.4-7

Jesus spoke of God as ‘Father’ and expressed a unique relationship with him. Radically, he also taught his disciples to do the same, most famously in his teaching on prayer: *“This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven...”* (Matt 6.9). We get to relate to God in this intimate and personal way because we have been united with Jesus, by the Spirit, in baptism. Because we are joined to Christ we share his place at the table, enjoying the love of the eternal Father. We may struggle with this idea of God as ‘father’ because of the imperfections of human fatherhood, or the implication of gender. This is to read things in the wrong direction - to project our understanding and experiences onto God. He is the source of all good fatherhood, as he is the source of all good motherhood, but, sadly, not all fatherhood on earth is a true reflection of God’s. His fathering is always good.

almighty

Psalms 46

This relationship, because of Christ, is a personal and familial one. However, the Christian is not to forget that God is also almighty. Not one power among other powers but almighty over all. This is a great comfort. We are not in the hands of one who might at some point be overcome, but rest eternally secure in his arms. This permits us a life free from worry, even in the midst of a troubling and precarious world.

Creator of heaven and earth

Genesis 1.1

God’s goodness and power is first revealed in creation. In contrast to most ancient creation myths we affirm the goodness of creation. Material physicality

is God's idea for eternity. Matter matters. In contrast to eastern philosophy, God's creative work marks out the created as distinct from the Creator. In contrast to an age which presumes our freedom to define ourselves, believing in the God who creates all things, including our very selves, body and spirit, is to submit to him as our Maker. There is a profound 'givenness' to our life, which we humbly receive, trusting in his wisdom and purposes for us.

I believe in Jesus Christ

Colossians 1.15-20

Here is a fresh assertion of trust as we consider the second person of the Trinity. 'I believe' is not simply an acknowledgement of the existence of Jesus, but a confession that we are aligning our lives with his, relying on him in our lives day by day, and trusting his work to bring us into the eternal life and joy of the Trinity. Jesus is given the most space in the Creed, and his name stands at the centre of the story. For, it is he through whom we, in our humanity, relate to God (*Hebrews 2.1-18*). He is one of us, our champion, our representative and our mediator. He is also the 'Christ', the anointed King, chosen before the foundation of the world. At this point in the Creed there is not yet an indication that there is a problem with God's good creation, no outstanding question. Even so, he will be, and is, the answer. He stands as the answer to all our unanswered questions. He is the '*yes and amen*' to all the promises of God.

his only Son

John 17.24

Before we discover why a human name, 'Jesus', has been introduced into the story of God, we are put in no doubt as to who this Jesus is. Before he is born of a woman he is the Son of the Eternal Father. Indeed, if God the Father is eternal, he must, by definition, eternally have a son. This is how God can be

defined in apostolic teaching as love (*1 John 4.7-16*): for the Father is eternally loving the Son in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. All loving human relationships find their origin and fulfilment in this eternal community of love.

our Lord

Romans 10.5-13

The first Christian creed, and the core of the Good News proclaimed by the first apostles, was: 'Jesus is Lord'. And it is profoundly Good News. None can stand above or beside him. Instinctively, we react against those who would position themselves above us or others. Throughout history people have often used their positions of authority and power for selfish gain, the diminishment of others, or at best they have used it, imperfectly or for limited good. But as we read the gospels we see a different kind of 'lord'. One who lifts up the humble, reaches out to the marginalised, includes those cast-out, and judges the rulers of this world with equity and justice. Then he offers himself up in self-sacrificial love. Here at last, is one powerful *and* good whose power is subverted to the cause of love, and to the destruction of the evil in this world and in us. Here is one many have been please to call 'Lord'.

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary

Luke 1:26-38

This stops us in our tracks. We have been thinking of the eternal Father who made all things, and his eternal Son who is Lord of all. Now we are introduced to the profound humility of God as he enters a woman's womb. Across time and religion this is unprecedented and shocking. It is quite frankly beneath God to behave in this way. The powerful and privileged in this world always define their power through separation and elevation. God does the reverse. He lowers

himself, humbles himself and joins us in our humanity. A new creation is at work as the Spirit hovers over the womb of a blessed teenage girl.

suffered

Hebrews 13.11-14

Here is the first indication that something has gone wrong with God's good creation. In the book of Genesis we discover God's order has been disrupted by human rebellion and evil. This is the world we know. Suffering has become a defining problem of the human condition about which we have many unresolved questions. Scripture does not ignore or hide from those questions. It acknowledges and voices them clearly and without restraint. We do not, however, receive a satisfactory, intellectual answer but something much better. In the life of Jesus we see the full revelation of the God who enters into our suffering and existential pain, shares its weight, and carries it to the cross to bring forgiveness for his image bearers and healing to all creation.

under Pontius Pilate

Matthew 27.11-26

The faith expressed in the Creed points not to dogma but historical events. We have already met the young girl in whom the Messiah is conceived by the Holy Spirit, at a specific time, probably around 4BC; and who lived in a particular town, Nazareth. But the final suffering and humiliation of Jesus was put on public display during the rule of the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate. Unlike Mary, Pontius Pilate figures on the stage of world politics and power. This is no fable or loose legend. The story of God's redemption of the world is logged and referenced in the annals of human history.

was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead

Romans 6:1-14

We may often wonder if the incarnation would have been more wisely timed to coincide with mass communication and globalisation. Scripture argues that *'at the right time Christ died for the ungodly'* (Rom 5.6). This was the time in history when death was 'lifted up' in the practice of crucifixion. And having been lifted up we cannot ignore our mortality and the consequence of our rebellion and enslavement to sin. This is what separation from God looks like. Yet, when Jesus is 'lifted up' we also see our salvation. This is the heart of Christian faith. This is the fulcrum on which the history of the world pivots. Everything is different now as God tastes death and enters the hell that is ours. And he does it to the utmost. *'Having loved his own he loved them to the end'* (John 13.1). There is not one part of human existence that God, through his Son, does not enter into. He has entered the womb. Now he is placed in a tomb. The silence of the grave is embraced and the darkness of death. Even more, he descends to the dead. He meets us in the pit in which we have found ourselves so that he might raise us to his Father's side.

On the third day he rose again;

1 Corinthians 15:1--26

The most powerful force in the life of this world is death. Humanity has always lived with this truth. It undoes creation and returns it to chaos. We are powerless in its wake. It always has the last word. That is, until Jesus of Nazareth. Everything has now changed. The impossible has happened. Jesus descended far enough into the abyss until he broke through the other side. The Father raises his Son in triumph, never to see corruption again. The matter that will form the New Heavens and Earth walks out of the grave: physical matter, like our bodies, yet mysteriously different. The resurrected body of Jesus

becomes a guarantee of God's promises to renew all things. As we are plunged into the death of Jesus in baptism, and learn to follow him, denying ourselves and picking up our cross, we are "*born into living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.*" (1 Peter 1). This is what the Apostles preached. This is what the Christian declares. This is what we believe.

**he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,**

Hebrews 7:23-8:2

This is a doctrine of great comfort for the Christian. Jesus is crowned King of kings and is recognised in the heavenly places as the world's rightful ruler. We have a human representative within the court of the Trinity. So many precious truths flow from Christ's ascension. We have one who intercedes for us by the Father's side, one who sympathises with our weakness. We have confidence that God will not abandon his creation, for he has received new creation into himself. He will rescue a people for himself, for Christ will be the firstborn of many brothers and sisters. And though '*heaven must receive him for a while*' (Acts 3.21) Christ's ascension enables him to be powerfully present with all Christians through the gift of his Spirit.

and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

John 5.22-23

This affirmation of the Judgement of Christ is often less enthusiastically received than the cross and resurrection. It seems, in the West, we are offended by a God who dares to judge us. But this is seen in a different light by those who find themselves living under an oppressive regime, suffering injustice, or have been the victim of a great evil, or any evil come to that. The prospect of someone who will judge fairly and equitably; who will set things right once and

for all is good news. Even creation is yearning for the return to earth of the Righteous Judge (*Romans 8.18-20*). The psalmist paints the picture of jubilant fields and singing trees: *"Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth"* (*Psalms 98*). It will be like turning the light on in a dark place. Things will be seen clearly at last. This should not instill an unhealthy fear in the Christian who is clinging to Christ for our future is secure in him. It should, however, encourage every disciple of Jesus to live lives *"worthy of the Lord and please him in every way"*. (*Col 1.10*)

I believe in the Holy Spirit

John 14:15-26

The Holy Spirit was there at the beginning, brooding over the waters as the world comes to be; then hovers over the womb of Mary and the Lord of life is conceived; then rushes onto the disciples in the upper room and the Church is born. The Spirit, like a wind that blows where it will, touches our lives, sometimes unexpectedly, and we are born into the kingdom of God (*John 3*). The Spirit comforts, sustains, teaches, prays for us, and fills us. The Spirit is not an impersonal force for he is holy and easily grieved. The Spirit takes what is Christ's and applies it to the heart of every Christian, He makes the ascended Jesus real to us in our everyday lives. The Spirit is perfectly one with the Trinity, for when the Spirit dwells in us, there also we find the Father and the Son.

the Holy catholic Church

Ephesians 2.11-18

At Pentecost, the Spirit overcame the disciples and Peter preached the gospel of Jesus to those gathered in Jerusalem who were from many nations. In the old covenant given to Moses, there was a separation of Israel from the other nations in preparation for the coming Messiah. Now Christ's work is done and the

good news explodes onto the world stage. It is now truly catholic, which means universal. All dividing walls are down and everyone is invited to turn towards God and receive his eternal life. In the church kings worship alongside servants, professors alongside students, judges alongside prison inmates. Women take their place alongside men, and infants and children are welcomed by the command of Christ himself. There is no human plight, nor sin so grave, that we are barred from the healing and transforming goodness of God. There are none so lost that they cannot be found and, by the work of the Holy Spirit, gathered into the community of New Creation.

the communion of saints

John 10:11-30

As the Christian learns to follow Jesus, patterning their life after him, their story is woven into God's great tapestry of New Creation. We discover we are not alone. We are inextricably linked with others whom Christ has called, who know the voice of the same Shepherd. We are now family. We are brothers and sisters, for we are brothers and sisters of Christ. This communion is precious and will last into the New Creation in a way that supersedes our biological relationships. Jesus made this clear in his teaching (*Matthew 12.46-50*), not meaning that we are to neglect our family responsibilities in this world, but that our communion with Christ's family has a new and more lasting significance. It is a communion that even death cannot break. We are in communion with the saints who have gone before us. They are a '*great cloud of witnesses*' as we run *with endurance, the race set out for us*' (*Hebrews 12.1-3*). This communion is, again, the work of the Spirit, "*for we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body*" (1 Corinthians 12.13).

the forgiveness of sins

Luke 24:36-49

The forgiveness of sins stands right at the heart of the message the Apostles and first Christians proclaimed. They spoke of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, which calls forth repentance and bestows on us *the forgiveness of sins*.

Forgiveness restores our relationship with God, it breaks the power of past mistakes and failures in our lives. The forgiveness of our sins restores our life, our worth and speaks to us powerfully of God's love for us that never ends. However, *the forgiveness of sins* is much bigger than the forgiveness of our personal sin and selfishness, as precious and vital as that forgiveness is. It is about a whole new start for the human race. The ruts along which the juggernaut of humanity has run since our first rebellion have enslaved us. The cross breaks us free, enabling us to fulfil our God given purpose and restore our true humanity. The forgiveness of sins ushers in a new beginning.

the resurrection of the body,

1 Corinthians 15:35-54

Christians' have traditionally buried their dead facing east. Their bodies are laid to rest awaiting the return of Christ who will appear in the east (*Zechariah 14.4*). They are laid like this so they will be ready to sit up and greet the returning Jesus when their bodies are raised in a resurrection like his. Such a prospect is extraordinary and, as the Apostle Paul puts it, a mystery. We have a habit of returning to a dualistic understanding of ourselves as a body, which is temporary, and a soul that lives on somehow. But this is not the hope we long for. A human is an embodied spirit and a human future worth its salt must include all of our humanity, including the body. Indeed, the Creed affirms physical matter line after line: the earth, the womb, a suffering, dying and raised body, a community of bodies, and future for the body. The belief in the

resurrection of the body, though mysterious, is a fundamental part of Christian faith. Our churchyards are witness to it. Our history also testifies to it in the courage of those who have laid down their lives at great cost in service of Christ. They did so in the same manner as Jesus - for the joy set before them (*Hebrews 12.2*).

and the life everlasting.

Revelation 21

Life that lasts forever is both something we have grasped for in myth, legend and cosmetics. It is also something from which we are repelled, either by the prospect of enduring the tragedies of life over and again, or by suffering the tedium of having nothing left for which to strive and in which to grow. The life everlasting, affirmed in the creed and promised by Christ, is so much more. It is something we are invited to receive in the present, not just in the future. It is the kind of life that comes from everlasting, in other words, from God. And as God gave us all that is fascinating, diverting, thrilling, beautiful and absorbing in our experience of life on earth, for he is the creator of the heavens and earth, then there can be nothing dull or mundane about it. This last phrase summarises the position of one who is plunged into the story of God, as laid out in the Creed. The one who aligns themselves with this God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; who is not ashamed to be associated with the Jesus of the cross, and the work of the Spirit, is caught up into the very life of the Trinity: the everlasting life.

Amen

Romans 11.33-36

Amen means something like 'let it be so'. Rather than just a full stop in the prayer of a Christian it is a springboard into the living of life as an apprentice of

Jesus.. We leave our thoughts and prayers in the safe keeping of God and move into living life in a way that accords with those prayers.

And so with the Creed. The Christian moves from affirmation of truth to living in light of that truth. We have rehearsed and celebrated the work of God in this world, and now we live in such a way that our own stories become tangled up with that great story. It does not happen overnight. It takes a continual recalling of God's ways so that we remember that he has already done all that is required for us to receive the life everlasting through his Son. After all, this is a story about him and what he has done, it is not about ourselves. It is also a reminder that we are invited to make it about ourselves, to join our stories to his; for the shape of our lives to imitate the shape of his story. To say the creed and not live the creed defeats the point of the creed. So we say 'Amen' and begin the adventure of life with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Further reading

The Bible

Christians never stray far from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark Luke and John where we read of the life of Jesus. The implications of his life, death and resurrection for the life of the Christian are unpacked in the Apostle's letters to the churches in the rest of the New Testament. If you're new to the bible you might like to start with the gospels.

The Apostles Creed: A guide to Ancient Catechism by Ben Myers

A longer reflection, but still not too long, on the Apostle's Creed. Much of this booklet was inspired by, and draws from, this book.

Cafe Theology by Michael Lloyd

Michael Lloyd is the Principal of a local Theological college but this book is accessible for everyone, appropriate for discussion around a coffee table!. The Apostles' teaching, as well as the teaching from the Hebrew Scriptures, is unpacked systematically and implications helpfully drawn out for the life of the Christian.