

APOSTLE’S CREED
EPHESIANS 2:1-10; HEBREWS 10:1-22; 1THESSALONIANS 4: 13
2025-01-12

Well, it’s quite the mess to let Christmas and Advent interfere with our sessions on the Apostles’ Creed! But not doubt, everyone remembers what we looked at back in Nov., right? So, let’s try to reestablish what we’ve considered. Early Christians saw the need to create an agreed upon statement of what they believed and how they came to believe it. The creed protects us and helps us evaluate truth from heretical belief. We looked at many early heretical beliefs which our fore-fathers addressed and repudiated. Much of what Paul wrote in his letters is a defence against heresies—which aren’t included in the Bible. Paul’s one way conversation forms what we believe.

1. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of the heavens and earth.
2. and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;
3. who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary;
4. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell
5. on the third day He rose from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
7. from where He will come to judge the living (quick) and the dead.
8. I believe in the Holy Spirit (Ghost);
9. in the holy catholic church; the communion of saints;
10. the forgiveness of sins;
11. the resurrection of the body
12. And the life everlasting.

From the first statement: “I believe in God the Father Al-mighty, Maker of heaven and earth”, we focused on the Father as Creator. Surprisingly, that was all that was said about Him. The bulk of the Creed considers Jesus. That makes sense when we understand that it was really written because of Jesus. Jesus is no more important (nor less important) than the Father or the Holy Spirit, yet He is the theological/spiritual lightning rod. All the venom from the world gets directed to Him. Jews can’t come to grips with the fact that His presence as God seemed to contradict their understanding of God from the Shema: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” So, they didn’t believe the Messiah could be fully divine (as in equal with God). Moreover, the Messiah would have surely freed them from the shackles of Rome. Muslims look at Jesus as a prophet—but a failed prophet because He died—and not THE prophet Mohammad.

We never come to the end of people trying to define who God is according to their own gospel. Jesus revealed God to us. He underscored God’s love for people. He emphasized God’s desire to save them from their misdeeds (sins) and establish a peaceful divine reign. He emphasized God’s willingness to forgive, but also people’s need to confess their faults and turn toward the good. He urged people to love God with their whole being and their neighbours as themselves. Many followers believed they had encountered not just another prophet that God had

sent, but that in Jesus they had experienced God's actual presence on earth. All the Gospel writers affirmed this, summed so beautifully by John: "In Jesus, the Word of God—who was in the beginning with God and indeed was God (John. 1:1) took flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14).

Jesus provides us with some of our most basic beliefs about God: care for the marginalized and outcast, deep compassion and a willingness to forgive, the refusal to adopt strategies of violence and revenge, and a desire that all people should live in community and be at peace with each other. We believe these things to be true of God because we've been seen at work in Jesus' life.

We also believe that through Jesus, God was on a mission. God was redeeming the world from its fallenness into sin, reconciling the world and strengthening its relationship with God—not different from what had been previously. God has always pursued us relentlessly. But in Jesus, something radically different occurred. God actually entered His creation, fragile and suffering, even willing to die at our hands—all to reconcile us to God. (2 Corinthians 5).

So, to the specific statements about Jesus: **And in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord.** Even to this day, people from different faith backgrounds play games with this. Jehovah's Witnesses refer to Jesus as "a" son of God rather than "the Son" of God. You need look no further than John 10:30 - "I and the Father are one." It was very clear what Jesus was saying, because the Jews immediately picked up stones to stone Him—"a mere man claiming to be God". John. 8:48-59 - "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am." It's the same language that God spoke to Moses when Moses asked who he should say God was: "Tell them 'I AM' sent you." Again, the Jews tried to stone Him. It's evident He's not just THE SON but also Lord—i.e. God.

"Who was conceived by the H.S. and born of the Virgin Mary". Luke lays this out in the Christmas story. It's also confirmed in Isaiah 7:14 - "The virgin will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel—God with us." Mary's response to the angel's announcement is astonishment, as is Joseph's. It had to be this way. If Jesus were totally human, there was no possibility He could take our sins upon Himself, for in that case, He too, would be a sinner—with a sinful nature. But, if He was totally God, then there was no way He could identify with our sin nature and human suffering. So, Jesus is perfectly 100% human and 100% God. A mystery for sure; nonetheless true.

"He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell" This statement locks Jesus in time and location, a real historical event chronicling how He died. Psalm 22 describes the death of Jesus written 700 yrs. before it happened—when crucifixion was unknown—a confirmation of God's transcendence of time.

Jesus was also dead. This is in the creed because so many insisted He never died; His death was faked. At the end of Matthew a tale was concocted saying Jesus' body was stolen—not under Roman guards it was not. Any guard failing to fulfill his duty would be killed. The disciples were too emotionally messed to even conceive of anything like that and why would they? He was already in a tomb. What would moving Him accomplish. John spoke of the spear in Jesus' side to confirm His death. Blood and plasma poured out separately—a sure sign of death. As for Him recovering and escaping Himself, whoever said that didn't realize how brutally He was beaten.

He descended into hell. More recently this was changed to “He descended to the dead.” As early as the third century. Christians affirmed that between His death and resurrection, Jesus went to hell (to the dead) to rescue the virtuous people of ancient Israel and take them to heaven with Him—a postmortem rescue mission. Jews before Jesus' birth looked forward to the coming Messiah. For us living after His resurrection we have the actual event to draw on.

On the third day He rose from the dead. Jesus appeared after His death on the road to Emmaus, to the disciples without Thomas, then a week later with him, to Paul on the road to Damascus, to James and then to over 500 people over 40 days. From those appearances we can rest assured the resurrection is a verified reality. Death was undone with Jesus; left behind.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. At whatever level of decision-making in the universe, Christ is present—the One who came into our world to the cross because of His love for us. Emmanuel—God is with us in Jesus. The Messiah that the Jews are waiting for will actually re-turn for a second time to judge the living and the dead.

We'll skip the statement of belief in the Holy Spirit and give it an entire session of its own. I believe in the holy catholic church; the communion of saints. A lot of our concerns about this statement disappear when we understand that catholic here means universal. Jesus established the church as His vehicle to further the work of His kingdom once He returned to be at the Father's right hand. We are part of that extension of His influence in the world. The communion of saints becomes obvious when we review what the Apostles' Creed accomplished—a common statement of faith for all Christians through all the ages. Insofar as we saints are thus connected, we are one in community through all places and all time. Communion is the bond that completes that connection. You may have noticed at the end of our Communion service I pray for those in the faith over the generations who have predeceased us—gone home to the Lord ahead of us. The blood of Jesus, shed for our sins enables and completes that for us all.

We probably don't need too much teaching about the forgiveness of sins. But it's critically important—at the very centre of the Gospel. Blood had to be shed on the altar for the

forgiveness of sins. And though it was commanded by God, it was equally clear that the sacrifice of animals could never take away our sins. If it were so, the sacrifices would have stopped rather than continuing day after day, year after year. It took the unblemished blood of the Lamb without sin to take our sins away once and for all. Until we confess our sins, we are dead in our sins. But if we confess our sins to Jesus He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). This separates our faith from all others. We have a Saviour who redeems us by cancelling our sin debt.

The other thing that separates us from all other faiths is the resurrection of the body. We don't just have a spirit that will one day be in heaven. At the judgment, our bodies will be resurrected—just like Jesus', renewed and glorified. Mysteriously, we'll probably look different (Jesus' disciples didn't recognize Him when He served them breakfast at the lakeside). This is a long-standing history of God with Israel. Throughout the O.T. God's people are more than spirits inhabiting a physical body. God is always concerned about our bodies. Paul reminds us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). This is in contrast to the Greek philosophy that treated matter (the body) and spirit as being two entirely separate entities. Just as Jesus' body was resurrected, so too will our bodies be resurrected. In heaven, we won't just be spirits dis-connected from body.

And finally, the life everlasting. "Amazing Grace! When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun (Son), we've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we first began!" John's word picture in the last two chapters of Revelation give us an inkling, but who knows exactly what it will be like—other than delicious and delightful beyond description!

Share this this week with someone else—here in the church or out in your personal mission field.