

Unit Two

What Do We Believe? What Do I Believe?

Lesson 1

We're in This Together: The Nicene Creed

heart to Heart

Thank you, God!

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible.

Havadank ee mee Asdvadz, ee Hayrn amenagal, harareechun yergnee yev yergree, yerevelyatz yev anerevooteetz.

ՀԱՎԱՏՈՒԱՄՔ ի մի Աստուած՝ ի Հայրն ամենակալ, յարարիչն երկնի եւ երկրի, երեւելեաց եւ աներեւութից:



Below, left, write what you would consider five of your most basic beliefs about the Christian faith.

My Creed

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Our Creed

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

From "I Believe" to "We Believe"

Each and every Sunday in church, we openly declare our beliefs by reciting the Nicene Creed. During the sacraments of baptism and marriage we recite a version of it as well.

We say the Creed together, in unison, with our hands held in a traditional prayer position, thumbs crossed, right over left. It's a very significant moment! Why?

Imagine you lived at the time of Jesus, witnessed miracles, heard his stirring sermons, and listened to his very firm



Verse Master

“The Lord is God. Besides him there is no other.”

Deuteronomy 4: 35



direction about how to have “true” faith. Imagine that after his crucifixion - which filled you with despair - you heard of his appearances to the disciples and other followers. With new hope, you shared the stories of all you saw and heard.

Time passes and you and the whole generation of “witnesses” are gone. Younger generations of leaders in what are now organized Christian communities are faithful but differ in their understanding of Jesus Christ. Was Christ God for all time, or did he become divine at birth? *Was* he the Son of God? Was Mary really his mother? Did he truly rise from the grave? As debates became more heated, the larger church leadership knew it was time to “codify” the faith in a way that would stand the test of time and be true to God’s will.



But even in the earliest centuries, creeds were being formulated, specifically for baptism. (One such early form of the creed was known as “The Apostles’ Creed;” it is in use today in some Christian churches.) It was important for the new believer to declare his or her beliefs in a standard, formulaic way. These were often short statements of faith. We have a good example of such a creed in our own baptismal service.

Finally, in light of the newly-important position of the Christian Church as a national church, declared so by the Emperor Constantine in 313 in the Edict of Milan, unity of doctrine in the church became very important.

The Emperor convened what came to be known as the First Ecumenical Council in 325 in Nicaea, to begin this process. (Councils attended by delegates from every Christian denomination were considered “Ecumenical.”) The Council delegates, who came from every church in the then known world, debated many things, but above all a controversy concerning the teachings of the preacher Arius. Arius declared that Jesus became divine at birth and was not eternal God. This was disproved at the Council through careful discussion of the Scriptures and the teachings of the church in the previous centuries. An outstanding product of this Council was the Nicene Creed, slightly revised at the next Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381. Some historians rightly refer to the final product as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (and if you can pronounce that correctly, bravo!). But we call it the Nicene Creed because it was hammered out almost entirely at the Council of Nicaea.

The Creed very quickly entered Christian worship services, as it was important that all assembled be of one mind in their belief. After all, the entire purpose of praying together was to be of one voice, one heart, one mind as they received bread and wine, that became truly the body and blood of the Lord.

The Nicene Creed became a formal part of our service by the mid 5th century.



Remember

The Nicene Creed sums up all our basic beliefs; we recite it every time we gather to celebrate the Divine Liturgy (Badarak) and in the sacraments of baptism and marriage.



Scenic Overlook

One of the participants in the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 was none other than St. Aristakes, the son of St. Gregory the Enlightener. Aristakes was consecrated a bishop in 318 by his father and had been serving as his assistant. His brother St. Vertanes was also a priest. Both brothers eventually became Catholicos. Talk about a family business!



We believe....

We say..... Which Means to Me.....

We believe

In one God

Maker of heaven and earth

Of things visible and invisible.
