

The Divine Service: Creed *use in liturgy, 589–1014*

The word *creed* comes from the Latin *credo*, which means “I believe.” There are three creeds called *ecumenical*, meaning they were accepted by the whole Christian church: the Apostles’ (~150AD), the Nicene (325–381AD), and the Athanasian (c. 451–700AD) Creeds.

The Apostles’ Creed is so named because it very simply relates the teaching of the Apostles as contained in the New Testament. Historically it develops from an old Latin (Roman) baptismal creed, summarizing the essentials of the faith. It is still the Creed used for basic instruction in the Small Catechism, and is usually spoken in services where the Lord’s Supper is not celebrated, and devotionally—at least twice a day in the Catechism’s suggested prayer regimen. It serves a daily refresher in what one, in fact, believes (trusts) for forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.

The Nicene Creed was drawn up in the great ecumenical council at Nicea in 325AD and elaborated upon in an another council at Constantinople in 381AD. It was written originally in Greek, and began “We believe.” The Church wrote this Creed in response to the Arian heresy, the teaching that God the Son was not God the way the Father was. Its opening, “We believe” (now commonly assimilated to the “I believe” of the Apostles’ Creed) suggests its purpose: to state what the Church that follows the teaching of Christ and the Apostles believes, over against errors proclaimed by others. Its inclusion in the Divine Service reflects the Church’s desire to keep the doctrine that saves pure (Acts 20:29–32; Gal 1:6–9) and to teach it thoroughly to all people (Matt 28:20), keeping the Church united in it (Eph 4:4–16; Rom 16:17–20), especially as she is gathered in to eat the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17–19). Here we confess what we *believe*—not only what we think to be true, but what we *trust* for all we need: that this Jesus Christ is Lord, who has redeemed us...

Because the Nicene Creed goes into more detail as to the person of Jesus, especially his two natures as true God and true Man, it is particularly fitting for use when the Church eats the Lord’s Supper. As we do, and say the Creed together, we are reminded we are not alone in faith.

The lengthy and rather poetic Athanasian Creed (*LSB* 319) is used but once a year on Trinity Sunday. It reflects the precise doctrinal expressions of Athanasius, a church father who confessed the truth at Nicea in 325 and until his death in 373AD, during which time he spent 17 years in exile, under emperors who rejected the truth he taught about Jesus, the Son of God. On Trinity Sunday we rejoice in this Creed at the precision with which God has given us to know him, and take seriously what the faith means for us: “Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic (that is, the one, whole, apostolic) faith.”