

The Apostles' Creed

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only
Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the
power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right
hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the
living and the dead.

The 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, one in Being
with the Father.

Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our
salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he was born of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered, died, and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in fulfillment of 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

The Apostles' Creed

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.

The Nicene Creed

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.

T W O

I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord

The second part of the Apostles' Creed focuses on our faith in Jesus. These christological articles (i.e., those dealing with Christ) make up the most substantial portion of the creed. This should not surprise us for "at the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father . . . who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever (CT 5)" (CCC 426). "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," Jesus said to the apostle Philip (Jn 14:9). The first Preface of Christmas refers to Jesus in this way: "In him, we see our God made visible, and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see."

Who is this Jesus? Pope Paul VI once said: "I can never cease to speak of Christ for he is our truth and our light" (*USCCA* 87). As Christians we are all called to say the same. We all have pinned our life and our very hope on Jesus. We see the world through "Christ-colored glasses."

There is a popular poem, written about a hundred years ago, that one occasionally sees in Christmas cards, "One Solitary Life."

He was born in an obscure village,
a child of a peasant woman.
He grew up in another obscure village
where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.
Then for three years

he was an itinerant preacher.
 He never had a family or owned a home.
 He never set foot inside a big city.
 He never traveled two hundred miles from the place he was born.
 He never wrote a book or held an office.
 He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness.
 While he was still a young man,
 the tide of popular opinion turned against him.
 His friends deserted him.
 He was turned over to his enemies.
 He went through the mockery of a trial.
 He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.
 While he was dying his executioners gambled
 for the only piece of property he had, his coat.
 When he was dead, he was taken down
 and laid in a borrowed grave.
 Nineteen centuries have come and gone
 and today he is still the central figure
 for much of the human race.
 All the armies that ever marched,
 all the navies that ever sailed,
 all the parliaments that ever sat,
 and all the kings that ever reigned,
 put together, have not affected the life of man
 upon this earth as powerfully as this
 One Solitary Life.

It is for us not enough simply to understand the historical life of Jesus, as important as that is. "We ponder Christ's person and his earthly words and deeds in terms of *mystery*. His earthly life reveals his hidden divine Sonship and plan for our salvation" (USCCA 79). He preached the kingdom of heaven, the breaking through of God into our very life and existence every day. "The Kingdom of God is his presence among human beings calling them to a new way of life as individuals and as a community" (USCCA 79).

The Catechism explains that “catechesis aims at putting ‘people . . . in communion . . . with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity’ (CT 5)” (CCC 426). The Jesus who now brings you and me into the new life of God is not merely the Jesus who once upon a time lived, died, and rose from the dead. His presence to us did not end with his resurrection and Ascension. The living Christ, in whom we believe and whom we constantly experience, and the historical Jesus are one and the same person. The Jesus of history is, after all, the Christ of faith.

During the Christmas season we encounter the living Lord as we celebrate his birth on Christmas Day. At the octave of Christmas (New Year’s Day), we share with Mary in the ceremony of circumcision and, the official naming of her Son. At the Epiphany we celebrate him as the light for all people and remember his baptism, which reveals our call to share in his mission. So our faith is indeed a faith in the living Christ whom we encounter in the liturgy.

When we profess this baptismal faith in the creed, we express it in these four titles: Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Lord. What do they reveal about our God?

Jesus

In Hebrew, *Jesus* means “God saves.” It was the angel at the Annunciation who told Mary that she would bear a son “and you shall name him Jesus” (Lk 1:31). His name reveals both his mission and his identity. His very name reveals his whole purpose—to save us. As Pope Benedict said in his Christmas homily in 2006, responding to the question whether modern man still needs a savior: “. . . In this post-modern age, perhaps he needs a Savior all the more, since the society in which he lives has become more complex and the threats

to his personal and moral integrity have become more insidious." What is the object of salvation? It is to save us from our sins. Thus to speak of Jesus without understanding the linkage to sin is simply to miss his whole reason for becoming man. Because sin is always an offense against God, only God can forgive sin. In the New Testament, the term savior is applied only to God (eight times) or to Jesus (sixteen times). No one else is called "savior." The name of Jesus is at the heart of all Christian prayer. "Nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Christ

Christ is not the last name of Jesus. No, he is Jesus, the Christ. *Christ* comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for messiah. *Christ* means "the Anointed One." As you and I were anointed at Baptism, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism by John and sent "to bring glad tidings to the poor / . . . to proclaim liberty to captives / and recovery of sight to the blind, / to let the oppressed go free, / and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk 4:18–19). Again, it was an angel who announced to the shepherds on Christmas Eve that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ: "For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord" (Lk 2:11).

The Only Son of God

The gospels report that at two solemn moments, Christ's baptism and his transfiguration, the Father's voice designated Jesus as his "beloved Son." Jesus also called himself "the Son"

(Mt 11:27) and by this title affirmed his unique relationship to God his Father: He is the only Son of God. You and I are “adopted” sons and daughters of God, with our own adoption taking place when we were baptized.

Regarding the title Son of God, Gerald O’Collins and Mary Venturini write:

In all their simplicity these few words contain the essence of Christianity, the point where Christians are forced to leave their Jewish heritage behind. It is just possible that the old covenant could have embraced Jesus the savior as the longed-for and long-heralded messiah. But there was no room for the Son of God. God, for the Jews then and now, was and is without form or physical substance. God could not therefore become man without revolutionizing the whole Jewish faith. That God should have a Son was folly enough; that the Son should take human form was madness; that he should be both man and God was blasphemy.

Lord

The Hebrew name *Yahweh* is translated *Kyrios* in Greek, which means “Lord.” The title “Lord,” used for both the Father and Jesus, indicates divine sovereignty. To confess or invoke Jesus as Lord is to believe in his divinity and bow our knee in worship of him (Phil 2:10–11). “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

The prologue of John’s gospel expresses the truth of the incarnation in this way: “The Word became flesh /and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14). Why did the Word become flesh? Or, as Saint Anselm of Canterbury asked the question: *Cur Deus Homo?* Why did God become man? It is the

quintessential Christmas question, and it is a question we often ignore or simply fail to ask. With the Nicene Creed, we answer by confessing: “For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”

In a Christmas homily, I once sought to answer Anselm’s question in the following way: “In a word, he came to pitch his tent among us, to be with us forever, to demonstrate our inestimable worth and dignity as humans, to feed us on his life, to save us out of love that we might forever be with him.” The Son of God wanted to live among us, to show us just how uniquely valuable we are, to share his life with us and to bring us to our final home with him forever. I will always remember how John Paul II ended his Christmas homily a few years ago with the following words in Italian: “*Dio ci ama*” (God loves us). He pitched his tent among us, above all, because he loves us.

The Catechism gives us four reasons in answer to the “why” of the Incarnation:

1. “The Word became flesh for us *in order to save us by reconciling us with God*” (CCC 457), who “loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10).
2. “The Word became flesh *so that thus we might know God’s love*” (CCC 458), for “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).
3. “The Word became flesh *to be our model of holiness*” (CCC 459). “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). Jesus is the norm of the

new law: “Love one another as I love you” (Jn 15:12).

4. “The Word became flesh to make us *‘partakers of the divine nature’*” (CCC 460, cf. 2 Pt 1:4). Speaking of this “wondrous exchange,” Saint Gregory of Nyssa (d. around 395) wrote: “God takes on the poverty of my flesh so that I may receive the riches of his godhead.” He became man without ceasing to be God so that we might be divinized without ceasing to be human beings. In a certain sense, he united himself with each of us (CCC 457–460).

We speak of this mystery as the Incarnation, a word whose Latin root means “becoming flesh.” Our faith teaches us: “The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man” (CCC 464). During the first centuries the Church struggled to clarify this truth of faith against the heresies that falsified it. Some heretics affirmed Christ’s divinity while denying his true humanity. According to Docetism, for example, he only appeared to be human. Other heretics such as Arius (d. around AD 336) and his followers denied that Jesus was truly divine and of “one being” with God the Father.

The Catechism follows the early councils of the Church by teaching clearly that Jesus’ divine and human natures are inseparable. He is truly God and truly man. This teaching on Christ underlies our entire faith. In the words of the Council of Chalcedon (451): “We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation” (CCC 467).

The human nature of Christ was assumed, not absorbed. He worked with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted with a human will, and loved with a human heart (GS 22). He grew up physically and mentally, thought, made decisions, felt deep emotions, wept, ate, drank, entered into personal relationships, talked, suffered, and eventually died. These and further facts about him justify our recognizing him as fully human, even if he was virginally conceived. His conception through the Holy Spirit pointed to his personal identity as Son of God and showed that he was not and is not merely human. “The Incarnation is therefore the mystery of the wonderful union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Word” (CCC 483). “Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God who became man in the womb of Mary. The one who was born of Mary is the same one—the same person—who has existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity” (USCCA 82).

Reflect

1. We have pinned our life and very hope on Jesus.

In what ways are these words true for you? In what ways are they not?

2. Christ worked with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted with a human will, and loved with a human heart. He grew up physically and mentally, thought, made decisions, felt deep emotions, wept, ate, drank, entered into personal relationships, talked, suffered, and eventually died.

What aspect of Jesus’ humanity is most important for you at this time in your life?

3. What else in this chapter was important to you?

Pray

Radiating Christ

(A daily prayer used by late Mother Teresa and by the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity)

Dear Jesus,
help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go.
Flood our souls with your spirit and life.
Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly
that our lives may only be a radiance of yours.
Shine through us, and be so in us,
that every soul we come in contact with
may feel your presence in our soul.
Let them look up and see no longer us but only Jesus!
Stay with us, and then we shall begin to shine as you shine;
so to shine as to be a light to others;
the light O Jesus, will be all from you,
none of it will be ours;
it will be you, shining on others through us.
Let us thus praise you in the way you love best
by shining on those around us.
Let us preach you without preaching,
not by words but by our example,
by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what
we do.
The evident fullness of the love our hearts bear to you.
Amen.

—Cardinal Newman