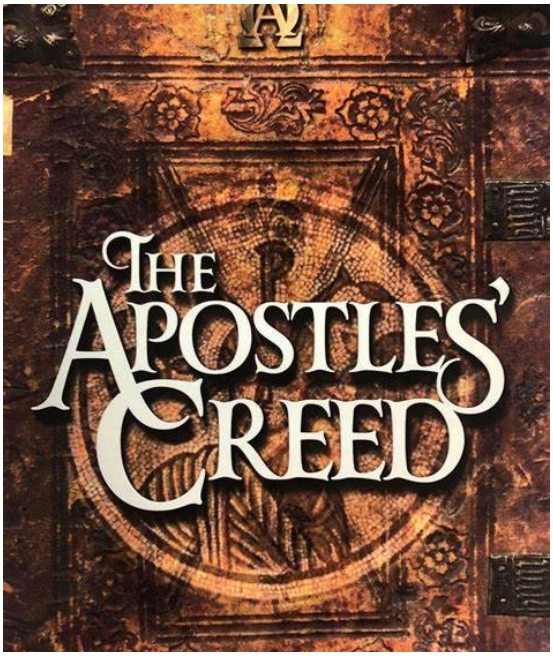
The Apostles' Creed
Part 1 – Background and history

Most weeks at worship at East Fork and Canyon Day, we speak the words of what we call a "Creed", usually either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. In this study we want to take a look at these ancient sentences – to learn a little bit about how they came to be, to see how they teach us some of the Bible's most important teachings, and to take those teachings to heart for ourselves. May God bless our study!

What is a "creed?"



What do you think are some reasons why the early church began using "creeds?"

What is an additional reason/benefit for us using these creeds today?

Some churches prefer not to use creeds at all. Below are some of the possible reasons why a church would not want to have a creed – respond to each of them.

- *"We don't need a creed because the Bible is our creed."*
- *"We can't trust a creed because only the Bible is perfect and inerrant."*
- *"Creeds tend to divide people, and we're all about uniting people together and not dividing them."*

The story of the Apostles' Creed

> *"The symbol of our faith and hope which is handed down from the Apostles is not written upon a chart and with ink, but upon tables of flesh."* (church father Jerome, 400s A.D.)
>
> *"By hearing is the symbol learned, and it is not written upon tablets or upon some other material, but in the heart."* (church father Augustine, about 400 A.D.)

Based on these quotes, why might discovering the history of the Apostles' Creed be difficult?

Contrary to popular legend, the creed was not written by the apostles themselves. But it is very old.

- The predecessor of the Apostles' Creed is what is called "Old Roman Symbol" – a creed in use in the church in Rome in the 4th century A.D. (300s) that is very similar to the Apostles' Creed.

How far back can this "Old Roman Symbol" be traced?

- Tertullian of Carthage – (c. 200 A.D.) makes this statement: "'The Rule of Faith is altogether one, sole, immovable, and irreformable—namely, to believe in one God Almighty, the Maker of the world, and His Son. Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, on the third day raised again from the dead, received into the heavens, sitting now at the right hand of the Father, coming to judge the quick and the dead, also through the resurrection of the flesh."

- Irenaeus of Lyons (Gaul) – c. 175 A.D. also seems to be quoting from the same confession of faith (in Greek)

- From the fact that these two church fathers from quite separate geographies both use these terms, scholars conclude that a confession of faith that is fairly similar to our Apostles' Creed was in place in the church, and quite widely known, by the middle-to-late 2nd century A.D.

Why would the creed have been written?

Some scholars think that the creed was a *polemic* creed – in other words, written specifically to refute false teachings. The early church was troubled by false teachings that denied the truths of the Trinity (more on this on the Nicene Creed). However, it seems more likely that the Apostles' Creed originated not as a response to heresy, but simply as an expansion of the formula for baptism and was used in connection with baptism.

> **Matthew 28:19-20** – Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

If the Creed wasn't written by the Apostles, why is it still called the Apostles' Creed?

Let's take a look at the creed and its sentences!