The Apostles' Creed
Part 2 – Overview of its contents and teaching

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed is a wonderful summary of the Gospel itself! Each phrase in the creed is worthy of discussion and Bible study. In this lesson we are not going to attempt to thoroughly cover every teaching of the creed in depth, but we will do an overview of its contents to help us appreciate it more and more.

The First Article

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

The Apostles' Creed is written in the singular ("I believe"); the Nicene Creed is in the plural ("We believe"). Is there anything important about this difference?

Why do you think that the First Article is the shortest of the three articles? What Bible verse(s) does it reflect?

When we say "I believe in God", are we just saying that we believe that God exists? Explain.

What beautiful truths are contained in the word "Father"?

What other aspects of God's nature are we reminded of with the word "Almighty"?

If we were writing a new creed today, are there other truths about God's creative work that we might want to add, based on Genesis chapters 1 & 2, because of the false teachings and ideas that exist today?

When we say "maker of heaven and earth", what "heaven" are we referring to?

Below is Martin Luther's explanation to the creed from the Small Catechism. What things does he choose to highlight and expand upon? Notice especially the underlined phrases.

I believe that God made me and every creature, and that <u>he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities</u>.

And I believe that <u>God still preserves me by richly and daily providing</u> clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, cattle and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life. God <u>also preserves me by defending me</u> against all danger and guarding and protecting me from all evil.

All this God does <u>only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it</u>. For all this I ought to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.

The Second Article

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

- **John 1:1,14** – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

What is the Biblical answer to the question, "Who is Jesus Christ"?

How long has Jesus been God, according to the verse above?

How does the first phrase of the 2nd Article introduce the person of Jesus?

Jesus means _____

Christ means _____

How long has Jesus been God's Son?

What does it mean that he is our Lord?

The 2nd Article doesn't specifically say that Jesus is God. But how is it obvious from the way the creed it set up, that this is what we are believing and confessing?

How does the creed also confess that Jesus was truly human?

The rest of the 2nd Article contains 11 phrases to sum up the life and work of Jesus. We notice that they can be divided into two sections: 6 phrases that describe his *humiliation* and five that describe his *exaltation.* What do we mean by those two terms?

Look at the verse from Philippians 2:5-11 below:

> *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*
> *6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,*
> *did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*
> *7 rather, he made himself nothing*
> *by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,*
> *being made in human likeness.*
> *8 And being found in appearance as a man,*
> *he humbled himself*
> *by becoming obedient to death—*
> *even death on a cross!*
> *9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place*
> *and gave him the name that is above every name,*
> *10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,*
> *in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
> *11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,*
> *to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)*

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit

- **Luke 1:34-35** - "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" **35** The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

- **Matthew 1:20** - An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Born of the Virgin Mary

- **Luke 2:5-7** - He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

After this phrase there is a "jump" in the narrative to Jesus' suffering at the end of his life. What aspects of Jesus' earthly life are not specifically included in the creed? Why are they still important for our salvation?

Four phrases talk about Jesus' suffering and death: Why is it still helpful today to have that as a strong focus of the creed?

- **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** - For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

Suffered under Pontius Pilate

- **Matthew 27:26-30** - Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. [27] Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. [28] They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, [29] and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. [30] They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

In what two ways did Jesus "suffer" under Pilate?

Why does the creed mention Pontius Pilate by name?

Was Crucified

- **Luke 23:32-34** - Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. [33] When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. [34] Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

- **Galatians 3:13** - Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

What are some reasons why it was important for Jesus to be crucified, as opposed to some other form of death?

He Died

- **John 19:32-35** - The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. [33] But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. [34] Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. [35] The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

Why did John want to make it very clear to his readers that he could confirm that Jesus was actually dead? Why is this still important for us?

He was buried

- **Matthew 27:57-60** - As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. [58] Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. [59] Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, [60] and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

For most people, their death and burial would be the end of the story. But not so with our Savior! His 'biography' in the creed continues with his exaltation / glorification.

He descended into hell

This is probably the hardest phrase in the Apostles' Creed. The Bible says very little about it – perhaps just this single verse below.

- **1 Peter 3:18-20** - For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. [19] After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— [20] to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

Based on this verse, what do we mean when we say that Jesus descended into hell? What questions does the verse leave unanswered?

Three different words of Jesus from the cross all teach that Jesus' soul did NOT go to hell to suffer after his death. What are they?

On the third day he rose again from the dead

- **1 Corinthians 15:4-8** - He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas,[b] and then to the Twelve. [6] After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. [7] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, [8] and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

What day of the week was the 3rd day? Why was it important that Jesus rise then?

What other appearances of Jesus aren't listed in Paul's verse?

He ascended into heaven

- **Luke 24:50-52** - When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. [51] While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. [52] Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

Why did Jesus visibly ascend before his disciples? What lessons/promises are we to take from his ascension?

He is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty

- **Ephesians 1:19-22** - That power is the same as the mighty strength [20] he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, [21] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. [22] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church

What does it mean that Jesus is at God's right hand? What comfort does this give us?

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead

- **Matthew 25:31-33** - When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Notice the church's simple, straightforward confession of what is to come. Why is this valuable today?

Although the creed doesn't state this directly here, on what will Jesus' judgment be based?

As he expands on this article, what things does Martin Luther stress in the catechism? Notice the underlined words/phrases

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, <u>begotten of the Father from eternity</u>, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.

He has <u>redeemed</u> me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me <u>from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil</u>, not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death.

<u>All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him</u> in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.

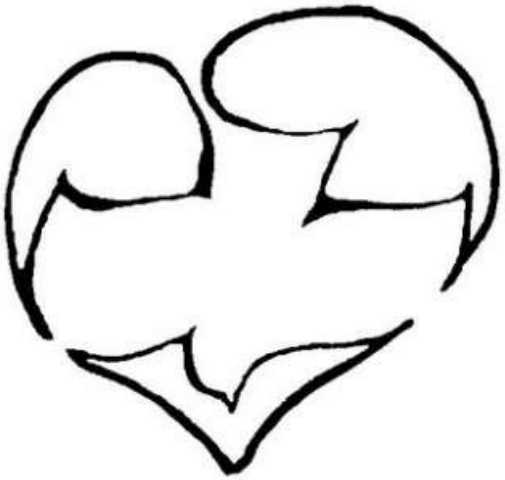
This is most certainly true.

The Third Article

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Without directly saying so, how does the 3rd Article confess that the Holy Spirit is God? Where does the Bible teach this?

1 Corinthians 2:10 – The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.
2 Corinthians 3:17 – Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
Acts 5:3-4 – Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit…? You have not just lied to human beings, but to God."



Why does the creed say "the Holy Christian Church" and not "the holy Christian churches"?

Ephesians 4:3-6 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 2:19-21 - Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. **21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

What is the connection between the Holy Spirit and the Holy Christian Church?

1 Corinthians 12:3 – No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.
John 14:15-17 - And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

The original Latin text of the Apostles' Creed uses the word "Holy Catholic Church" instead of "Holy Christian Church". What did the word "catholic" originally mean? How has the meaning of the word changed, and how does that explain why our churches use the term "Christian" here instead?

Another phrase added during the creed's development is "the communion of saints". Who/what are "saints"? Why do some Bible translations not use this term today?

> **1 Corinthians 1:2** - To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours. (The King James Version used the word "saints" instead of "holy people")

Why do you think the phrase "forgiveness of sins" was placed in the 3rd article, rather than in the 2nd?

> **Acts 26:17-18** - I am sending you to them **18** to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Why is the phrase "the resurrection of the body" an incredibly important thing to confess?

> **1 Corinthians 15:13-15** - If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. **14** And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. **15** More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

Writing during the Reformation, what things does Martin Luther stress as he explains the implication and meaning of the 3rd article (below)? Why is his first sentence especially important today?

> *I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.*
>
> *In this Christian Church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.*
>
> *This is most certainly true.*