



# St Anne's Church Wandsworth

## UNDERSTANDING THE CREED

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*Most Sundays we say the Creed together in church.*

*Why does it matter? What is it that we are meant to be agreeing to?*

*“Creed” means a statement of belief. It is also a statement of belonging and of trust. It is not just about what I believe individually – what I hold special about God may not even be mentioned in the Creed, and I may well have personal doubts about other bits – it is about the story of the Church’s faith down the years, and in which we play only a small part. But it is where we belong.*

**A bit of history...**

*The Creed began as a statement of faith used by candidates for baptism. That is why it is structured around belief in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Originally it was quite brief, but it grew with time. Also when there were disputes about the correct view of God and Jesus, the agreed teaching was summarised by adding more technical jargon to a baptismal creed. The Creed we say most Sundays is often called the Nicene Creed, because an important stage in its development was at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD.*

### **I GOD OUR FATHER, THE CREATOR**

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

*The whole world and universe are made by God and, therefore, are a good thing. In different centuries and in various cultures many people have seen the world around us and even our physical selves as evil or insignificant, but that is not a true Christian view. The world and people are not to be devalued, shunned or exploited, but should be treated in a way which gives honour to God.*

### **Is God “he”?**

*We talk about God as “he” to keep the personal touch – God is not an “it”. But nor is God male or female. We talk about God as our Father because Jesus did and taught us to do the same. The point is that we can relate to God as a person. God is not out of touch or unknowable or indifferent.*

## **2 JESUS: GOD AMONG US**

**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,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.**

*These are the most jargon-filled lines of the whole Creed, and were inserted to affirm the true identity of Jesus with God. What is at stake here? It can be summarised by the question: what does Jesus show us about God? and the Christian answer: in Jesus God wears no masks, but reveals himself totally in the way most fitted to our human understanding. And, what is more, God himself is intimately involved in our human life, and enables us to share in God's life.*

*And so the careful language here – Jesus is not a pale imitation of God, or a bit like God, but is identified with God himself. We can know God and relate to God, because Jesus makes God known to us.*

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with 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.**

Jesus being “made man” of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary affirms his complete humanity as well as his divinity. (“Made man” means made a human being, not a male. And “incarnate” – “en-fleshed” - refers to his identity not just from his birth but even from his conception.)

The life of Jesus occupies the central part of the Creed, but there is a lot that is not included even then – the teaching, the parables and miracles, the stories of healing and forgiveness. That seems to be taken for granted, and the narrative concentrates on the most important part of the story: Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Jesus’ death on the cross, however terrible and shameful, was recognised by his followers as an act of love not just by Jesus but by God himself.

- God is with us in the most terrible things that happen to us. The crucifixion was the clearest demonstration of how and where God is present in the world – not so much in human ideas of greatness and magnificence but in where there is suffering and abandonment.
- Jesus showed total obedience to God, trusting that the terrifying path of suffering was the way of forgiveness and life.
- Jesus showed love and forgiveness to his followers who abandoned him and to his enemies who condemned and killed him.

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of a new faith and life

- When Jesus died, his followers initially reacted with defeat and dismay. They had abandoned him, one of them had betrayed him, and the hope they had placed in him had been destroyed. The story of Jesus should have finished there and then, like that of any other would-be leader of the time.
- It did finish not there. In a matter of days they were transformed as people, preaching a new life and forgiveness which they had themselves experienced through meeting Jesus raised from the dead.
- And so his followers recognised that this was God’s plan to show his nature and love; and that the path of love and obedience to God, even through suffering, is the path to true humanity.

### **3 THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT GOD IS WITH US NOW**

*We may think of the Holy Spirit as “God in us”, enabling us to relate to Jesus and God the Father. So this whole section is about the work of God the Holy Spirit, and includes aspects of the life of the Church and the individual Christian.*

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,  
who 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.**

*In this section of the Creed there is also a tying together of the Old and the New Testaments. The Holy Spirit spoke through the Old Testament prophets. Jesus did not appear out of nowhere, but in response to the hopes of generations of human beings. All sorts of things point us to God today: the universal hopes, joys and griefs of humanity, events in the world around us, both good and bad, the wonders of the world that lie before our eyes or are made known to us through scientific discoveries. In all of these we might see God leading us to know him.*

*The Creed speaks of the Church as the Christian community. The Church is called “one holy catholic and apostolic”. “Catholic” means “complete” or “perfect” (it is only secondarily the title of a Christian denomination) and “apostolic” refers to it being founded by the apostles and in direct continuity with them. It has been said that the “one holy catholic and apostolic Church” does not exist – it is what it is meant to be like, and is still trying to get there!*

*One baptism for the forgiveness of sins – by baptism we enter into life with God and Jesus, in which we grow to full acceptance of ourselves and others. Baptism is not only about forgiveness of what we have done beforehand but a sign of being forgiven – and forgiving others – for the whole of our life.*

*The Creed finishes with the hope of life beyond this life: for God who made and loves everything does not willingly abandon it, but wants to bring everything and everyone to the perfection for which he made us. What this might be like is beyond our imagining – we only have picture language for it – but our trust is in God and his infinite love, not in our frail abilities and limitations.*