

Learning the Apostles' Creed

Four sessions of about 45 minutes. For confirmation and catechism classes, adult education and small groups.

EACH SESSION

1. **Say the creed together** (2 min). Once traditional, once in your church's modern form.
2. **Read the passages** aloud (10 min). Ask: which words of the creed come from here?
3. **Ask what the lines rule out** (10 min). Most phrases answered a real mistake about God or Christ.
4. **Discuss** two of the questions (15 min).
5. **Close** (5 min): each person names the line they find hardest to say, and why. Pray.

THE FOUR WEEKS

Week 1 · God the Father

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

Read: Genesis 1:1-2:3 · Deuteronomy 6:4-9 · Matthew 6:9-13 · Acts 17:22-31

- What does it change to call God "Father" rather than only "Creator"?
- Where do you find it easiest, and hardest, to believe God is almighty?
- Which mistaken ideas about God does this line rule out?

Week 2 · Jesus Christ, his birth and death

"And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; ... suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried"

Read: Luke 1:26-38 · Philipians 2:5-11 · Mark 15:1-47 · 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

- Why might a creed name a Roman governor?
- What does "Lord" claim, in the first century and now?
- What would be lost if the creed went straight from "born" to "rose"?

Week 3 · Risen, ascended, coming again

"he descended into hell; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven ... from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead"

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-20 · Luke 24:1-12, 36-53 · Acts 1:6-11 · Matthew 25:31-46

- How do different churches explain "he descended into hell"? (See the page for three readings.)
- Does the promise of judgment sound like good news or bad news to you, and why?
- Where does the creed place Christ now, and what does that mean for prayer?

Week 4 · The Spirit, the Church and the life to come

"I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting."

Read: John 14:15-27 · Acts 2:1-47 · Ephesians 4:1-16 · 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

- Why does the creed list the Church under the Holy Spirit?
- What does "catholic" (universal) mean for your own congregation?
- Why a resurrection of the body, and not only the soul's survival?

1. **“He descended into hell.”** Read as Christ’s preaching to the dead, his victory over death, or the depth of his suffering. Some churches say “to the dead”; some Methodist books leave it out.
2. **“The holy catholic Church.”** Catholic means universal. Some Lutheran churches say “Christian.”
3. **“The communion of saints.”** All agree on the fellowship of believers; churches differ on asking the departed for their prayers.
4. **Creeds themselves.** Some churches use no creed in worship and confess the faith in their own words. Invite members of those churches to say why.

1. Compare the Apostles' Creed with the Nicene Creed line by line. What did the Nicene Creed add, and why?
2. Read the Definition of Chalcedon (451). Which four words describe how Christ's two natures are united?
3. Find your own church's confession or statement of faith. Where does it quote or echo the creeds?