

THE APOSTLES' CREED

“I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

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. Amen.”



Commentary: Today the similarities between major Christian denominations far outweigh the differences. Except for the differences in style of worship and a particular emphasis on one “doctrine” or another, all Christians share a common belief. Our basis for agreement goes back to the time of the early church when leaders discussed, debated and settled a number of theological issues. The result is the famous “Apostles’ Creed.” Whether Presbyterian or Baptist, Congregational or Lutheran, United Methodist or Roman Catholic, virtually all Christians agree on the fundamentals of Christian belief in this Statement of Faith.

Notes:

“holy catholic Church.” One point that constantly causes difficulty is the phrase “holy catholic Church.” Note that the “c” in catholic is lower case, not capitalized. This is NOT the Roman Catholic Church. The word “catholic” means “universal.” We affirm a basic unity in one “universal” church made up of many particular denominations. We are NOT pledging allegiance to the capital “C,” Roman Catholic Church. Jesus Christ is Lord over one family of believers, and we recognize this oneness, even though we are separated by differences into several Christian denominations.

“he descended into hell.” Another difficult phrase is “he descended into hell.” This is based on a few obscure Bible verses that are difficult to interpret. Without getting caught up in a lot of speculation on what exactly happened to Jesus between his death on Good Friday and his bodily resurrection on Easter Sunday morning, it is enough for us to affirm that Jesus really died. Whatever happens to dead people happened to him. Note that hell is not capitalized. We affirm simply that Jesus descended into the “grave” and not that he was cursed to suffer in the capital “H” of “Hell,” the place of God’s judgment.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Are there any parts of this statement that you find especially inspiring? Or confusing? Or challenging?

Is there anything you would change, add or delete as a basic statement of Christian beliefs for today?

Which parts of this Statement of Faith do you think are most difficult for non-church people to accept?

Do you know any people of a different religion that would disagree with particular lines in this creed?

How much do you think churches should require members to believe the same things and how much freedom of thought and belief should be allowed?