

The Creed: What We Believe and Why It Matters

4. We Believe...

... in One Lord Jesus Christ

**Sunday, February 6, 2005
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.**

Everyone is welcome!

**O God, who wonderfully created,
and yet more wonderfully restored,
the dignity of human nature:
Grant that we may share the divine
life of him who humbled himself to
share our humanity, your Son
Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns
with you, in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.**

**Book of Common Prayer
Collect of the Incarnation, p. 252**

THE CREED



WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE
AND WHY IT MATTERS

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

**The Creed. What
Christians Believe
and Why It
Matters, Luke
Timothy Johnson,
Doubleday, 2003,
ISBN 0-385-
50247-8**



JON ROU © EMORY UNIVERSITY PHOTOGRAPHY

Luke Timothy Johnson

- **former
Benedictine monk**
- **Robert W.
Woodruff
Professor of New
Testament at
Candler School of
Theology, Emory
University**

Introduction

- **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**

Introduction

Lord Jesus Christ

- The longest part of the **Nicene – Constantinopolitan Creed** proclaims Jesus is simultaneously fully God and fully human.
- Today we will focus on that portion describing the relationship of Jesus to God the Father.
- Next week will take up Jesus' involvement in humanity.

Introduction

The Son of God and the Father

- Earlier Creeds spent much less time trying to describe the precise relationship between Jesus and God the Father. For example in Hippolytus' (170-235 AD) *Apostolic Tradition*:
 - **Do you believe in God the Father almighty?**
 - **Do you believe in Christ Jesus, Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit out of the Virgin Mary and was crucified...**

Introduction

The Son of God and the Father

- In the 3rd and 4th centuries however, the precise relationship between Jesus and God the Father became an issue of great debate and conflict.
- This caused the authors of the **Nicene – Constantinopolitan Creed** to try to define the relationship in a somewhat lengthy and elaborate fashion.

**How Did the Early
Christians Discover
The Nature of Jesus as
God?**

The Discovery of Jesus as God

Humanity, Then Divinity

- During his ministry, neither Jesus' disciples or his enemies fully appreciated who he was.
- Some confessed him as:
 - The messiah (Matt. 8:29)
 - The Son of God (Matt. 16:16)
 - A prophet (Luke 24:19, Luke 6:14)
 - A king (John 1:49)
 - The Son of Man (Mark 14:62)
 - A savior (John 4:42)

The Discovery of Jesus as God

Humanity, Then Divinity

- In the Jewish world of First Century Palestine, all of these terms – even “Son of God” – could be used to describe a person who played some special role among God’s people.
 - They did not necessarily imply the person was divine.
- Only *after* the experience of Jesus’ resurrection did his disciples begin to understand:
 - His unique relationship with God, and
 - The meaning of these titles in the light of Jesus’ divinity.

The Discovery of Jesus as God

Humanity, Then Divinity

- How do we know this?
- The Gospels:
 - (1) Clearly describe actions and behaviors of his disciples and opponents that would be hard to fathom if they truly believed Jesus was God.
 - (2) Candidly tell us that their accounts were written looking back after the experience of the Resurrection and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Discovery of Jesus as God

1. Nature Unappreciated

- During Jesus' ministry:
 - His miracles and exorcisms frequently evoked scorn and rejection.
 - His public behavior scandalized those who sincerely believed that anyone who was righteous would follow the strict commands of Torah.
 - Important Jewish leaders rejected him as a false prophet and some even sought his death.

The Discovery of Jesus as God

1. Nature Unappreciated

- During Jesus' ministry:
 - One of his disciples (Judas) betrayed him.
 - His "chief" disciple Peter denied him during his trial (Mark 14:54-72); the rest of his disciples fled (Mark 14:50-52).
 - His disciples remained doubtful and confused even after they heard reports of the empty tomb and appearances of Jesus.

The Discovery of Jesus as God

2. New Understanding after Resurrection

- His disciples began to understand who Jesus really was through the “Resurrection experience,” through:

“the constantly repeated expression of the resurrection as the ongoing, personal, and transcendent presence of Jesus among his followers through the power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 107)

The Discovery of Jesus as God

2. New Understanding after Resurrection

- Because they were “in the Spirit,” they could proclaim Jesus is:
 - **Lord** (1 Cor. 12:3)
 - the **“Son of God in power according to the Spirit of Holiness by his resurrection from the dead.”** (Rom. 1:4)

The Discovery of Jesus as God

2. New Understanding after Resurrection

- The Gospels writers candidly admit they and the other disciples understood who Jesus was only in the light of the resurrection and “in the Spirit:”
 - Luke 24:44-45 (the Resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples at a meal):

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures... (NRSV)

The Discovery of Jesus as God

2. New Understanding after Resurrection

- John 14:25-26 (Jesus at the Last Supper):

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

(NRSV)

The Discovery of Jesus as God

2. New Understanding after Resurrection

- The gospel writers interpreted Jesus' sayings and deeds in the light of the experience of his resurrection, and paint a picture in the Gospels of a Jesus who is both:
 - Vividly and utterly human, and
 - God's only Son, marked by the presence of God in and through him during his time on earth.

The Discovery of Jesus as God

2. New Understanding after Resurrection

- This picture of Jesus was the dominant conviction of the early Church during its first three centuries, with the exception of:
 - Some forms of Jewish Christianity that denied Jesus' divinity.
 - The movement of **Gnosticism**, which emphasized almost entirely Jesus' divinity.

The Scandal of Divinity

The Scandal of Divinity

Arianism

- Early in the 4th century (about the time that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was written), a priest **Arius** (250-330 AD) in Alexandria and his followers begin to claim:
 - Jesus was not divine and was not God, but instead,
 - Jesus was a creature like us, and was simply “first” among all creatures.

The Scandal of Divinity

Arianism

- The orthodox saw Arianism as:
 - A reduction of the *mystery* of Jesus to something more appealing to limited human reason, to something that seemed more “*reasonable*”
 - One-sided, emphasizing some Scriptures and ignoring others.
 - Denying the full Christian experience of Jesus.
- The lengthy section on Jesus in the Nicene Creed we say each Sunday (the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed) resulted from the orthodox defense of Jesus’ divinity against the claims of Arius.

The Scandal of Divinity

Arianism

- At stake was the orthodox understanding of Jesus as Savior:
 - Our salvation is that someday we will share in God's own life, and
 - Only God can give us a share in God's own life.

The Scandal of Divinity

Modern Arianism

- **Arianism** has considerable appeal today in an age that places the *human reason* upon a towering pedestal.
 - Many “Christians” today are committed only to religion that stays within the boundaries of “human reason,” and
 - Subscribe to a modern Arianism, reducing the *mystery* of Jesus to a more “*reasonable*” belief in a merely human historical Jesus, a man who was just a powerful prophet, or a great ethical and moral teacher.

The Scandal of Divinity

To Be a Christian

- Dr. Johnson suggests that to be Christian in any significant sense is:
 - To entrust **“oneself to a world that is not entirely defined by what can be seen and counted, heard, and accounted for.”** (p. 45), and claim **“the way of knowing called faith”** (p. 113)
- and

The Scandal of Divinity

To Be a Christian

- To be willing to look at the human Jesus and also see God's only Son, and say with Paul:

... it is the God

who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"

who has shone in our hearts

to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

(NRSV 2 Cor. 4:6)

The Scandal of Divinity

Why We Are Christians

“We are Christians because somehow in Christ

– through the sacraments,

through prayer,

through our suffering,

through the words of our neighbors, or

through the encounter with strangers –

we have, in Christ’s name, been touched

and even transformed by God.” (p. 114)

**One Lord Jesus
Christ**

- 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

One Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus

■ Jesus

- The angel Gabriel tells Joseph:
“**You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**” (NRSV Matt. 1:21)
- A translation of the Hebrew name **Joshua**
- Joshua in turn is derived from **Yaheshua** (meaning “Yahweh saves” = “the Lord saves”).
- The name thus connects his relationship to God and his role in our salvation.

One Lord Jesus Christ

Christ

- **The Christ =**
 - “the anointed one”
 - Used in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament to translate the Hebrew word **Messiah**.
 - Jesus is clearly identified as “the Christ” (the Messiah) numerous times in the New Testament.
 - He is thus the Christ, the Messiah promised in Scripture to fulfill the promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs. (Gal. 3:14-18)

One Lord Jesus Christ

Christ

■ The Christ

- Through Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Galatians 6:2 we find that the restoration sought by God in the Scriptures is the transformation of the human heart:
- **“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”** (NRSV Jer. 31:34)
- **“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”** (NRSV Gal. 6:2)

One Lord Jesus Christ

Lord

■ Lord

- = Greek *kyrios*
- *kyrios* was used in the Septuagint to translate YHWH (Yahweh), the holy name of the God of Israel, the maker of heaven and earth.
- Thus to say “**Jesus is Lord**” (Rom. 10:9, 1 Cor. 12:3, Phil 2:11) is to say that *Jesus is part of the being of the Lord God*, creator of heaven and earth.

One Lord Jesus Christ

Lord Jesus Christ

- The full title, “**Lord Jesus Christ**” is one of the most frequently used titles for Jesus in the New Testament.

One Lord Jesus Christ

Lord Jesus Christ

- When we proclaim we believe in **One Lord Jesus Christ**, we proclaim:
 - Jesus is the Christ and our Lord, our God,
 - Who has the right to our hearts
 - Who has the right to the worship and obedience we owe to God.
- We are also proclaiming:
 - That *no* other creature or thing is our lord.
 - That Jesus is the Lord God for every person, and thus no one else, including ourselves, can be lord over any other person.

The Only Son of God

- 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

The Only Son of God

God from the Beginning

- We now begin to see a “piling on” of phrases to emphasize that:
 - Jesus “came” from God and “returned” to God.
 - When he “came” from God he remained God, and when he “returned” to God he returned to his place within the Godhead.
- This “piling on” of phrases was needed to defend against claim of **Arianism** that Jesus was a creature made by God.

The Only Son of God

God's Unique Son, the Beloved

- Jesus was called in the Creed the **“only Son of God,”** or literally, the **“only-begotten Son of God”** in order to emphasize he was not just another “son” or “child” of God by adoption, like ourselves, who are (as Paul puts it): **“led by the Spirit of God ...”** (Rom. 8:14)

The Only Son of God

God's Unique Son, the Beloved

- He was God's Son in a *unique* way, as the scriptures testify:
 - At Jesus' Baptism (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22) a voice from heaven declares:
"This is my Son, the Beloved..." (NRSV)
 - At the Transfiguration (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35), a voice from heaven declares:
"This is my Son, the Beloved..." (NRSV)
 - Paul calls Jesus God's **"own son"** (Rom. 8:32) sent by God (Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4) **"so that we might receive adoption as sons."** (Gal 4:4)

Eternally Begotten of the Father

- 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

Eternally Begotten of the Father

Begotten of the Father

- Two passages in John contributed to the statement in the Creed that Jesus is “begotten of the Father.”

Eternally Begotten of the Father

Begotten of the Father

- (1) John 1:14:
- “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the **only-begotten of the father.**”
- (2) John 5:16-18:
- “But God so loved the world that he gave **his only-begotten son**, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”

Eternally Begotten of the Father

Eternally Begotten

- The Creeds then clarifies the meaning of “**begotten**” by adding “**eternally begotten.**”
- Literally in Greek: “**the one who was begotten out of the Father before all the ages.**”

Eternally Begotten of the Father

Out of the Father Before All Ages

- **“...begotten out of the Father before all the ages”** tells us:
 - The “begetting” is not a physical birth in time, but something within the Godhead, something within God’s own life
 - **“...this begetting is not a making by God but a sharing by the Father out of himself.”**
(p. 123)

Eternally Begotten of the Father

The Metaphor of Begetting

- Positive aspect of this language of “Begetting”:
 - Tells us the Son is “an extension or an expansion of the Father’s own existence.”
- Inhibiting aspect of this language of “Begetting”:
 - Our sense of “begetting” is bound up with a sense of biological birth, a single event fixed in time and space.

Eternally Begotten of the Father

The Metaphor of the Word

- The Metaphor of the Son as the Word in John's prologue helped the Nicene theologians, and can help us gain a better sense of "begotten" as used in the Creed.
 - Before we speak, our thoughts are "begotten" as words in our brain.
 - When we speak, those "begotten" words "become flesh," but the words still remain our thoughts, now in a new "physical" form.

**God from God, Light
from Light, True God
from True God**

- **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**

God from God, Light from Light

Two More Phrases

- Two concepts here:
 - (1) “Light from Light”
 - (2) “God from God” virtually the same as “True God from True God.”

God from God, Light from Light

Light from Light

- “Light from Light” is thoroughly biblical.
- The *association of God with light* can be found throughout the Scriptures.
- Three particularly striking images of Jesus as the light of God can be found in:
 - John (several passages)
 - James 1:17
 - In Paul’s letter 2 Corinthians 4:4-6

God from God, Light from Light

Light from Light

- John 1:5: “in him [The Son] was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”
- John 1:9: The Son is “The true light that enlightens every man, coming into the world.”
- John 8:12: Jesus says: “I am the light of world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

God from God, Light from Light

Light from Light

- James 1:17. **“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”** (NRSV)
- In 2 Cor. 4:4-6, Paul speaks of the light of the glory of God shining on the face of Jesus.

God from God, Light from Light

True God from True God

- Calling Jesus “**True God from True God**” was one of the boldest strokes of the Creed.
- The Old Testament and most of the New Testament restricts the title of *theos* (God) to the Father.
- There are only 6 possible references to Jesus as *theos* (God) in the New Testament. The only unambiguous reference is Thomas saying: “**My Lord and my God.**” (John 20:28)

God from God, Light from Light

True God from True God

- The adjectives “true” distinguishes the authentic from the false.
- Jesus addresses the Father as “true God” in his final prayer (John 17:1)
- John 1:9: Jesus is the “true light.”
- John 6:32: Jesus is the “true bread”
- John 15:1: Jesus is the “true vine.”
- Revelation calls the resurrected Jesus “the holy, the true.” (Rev. 3:7; 6:10)

**Begotten, Not Made, of
one Being With the
Father**

- 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

One Being with the Father

Non-biblical Language

- Here we have:
 - probably the least intelligible part of the Creed for modern day Christians.
 - the first use of non-biblical language to describe the nature of the Jesus.

One Being with the Father

Non-biblical Language

- Desire was to make clear the unity of “being” of the Father and Son, that they were both of the **same** “substance”: Greek *homoousios*
- As opposed to saying that they were just **similar** in “being” or of a similar “substance:” Greek *homoiousios*.
 - The argument, some wits have noted, was over one iota (ι) of difference in the Greek.

One Being with the Father

Non-biblical Language

- For us today, this language does not really add anything to the language derived from Scripture, from saying Jesus is “**God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God.**”

**Through Him All
Things Were Made**

- **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**

Through Him All Things Were Made

- Arius said Jesus was a *part* of creation, first among God's creatures.
- In this line, The Nicene theologians make clear that:
 - Jesus had been present from before creation (“pre-existent”), and:
 - *Through* him, all things were made (so he is clearly not one of the things being made)

Through Him All Things Were Made

- Three biblical witnesses to Jesus' role in creation:
 - John 1:3 **“all things were made through him and without him was not anything that was made.”**
 - Paul in 1 Cor. 8:4-6 **“one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we are.”** (Also see Col. 1:15-16).
 - Prologue to Hebrews **“through him also he created the ages.”**

Through Him All Things Were Made

- God's creation is something on-going, continuous, for *every moment* is a *new act* of God creating.
- Therefore, Jesus becoming human and walking among us made *explicit* a deep presence of God in creation that had been present from the beginning and is continually present, through the continuous creation that is occurring moment by moment “through him.”