

We Believe in One Lord, Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ.

! In Acts chapter 11, verse 26, we read, in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.

! For nearly 2,000 years, the term Christian has been in circulation. Christian. Followers of Christ. Disciples of Jesus. There are many reasons followers of Christ may be called Christians, but chief among them is that they talk about Jesus Christ, and they sing to Jesus Christ, and they teach about Jesus Christ. For Christians, the world begins and ends with Jesus Christ.

He is the Christian's salvation, hope, and security, the Christian's forgiveness, meaning, and destiny. 1,700 years ago, in the small town of Nicaea in modern-day Turkey, the Roman Emperor Constantine called a council of bishops to pronounce once for all on the issue of Jesus. He wasn't asking the 318 bishops who made up the council to invent a new narrative, but rather with the Bible and tradition central to once for all proclaim the historic truth all Orthodox Christians had believed up to that point and proclaimed. At that time, there was an elder from the church in Alexandria, modern-day Egypt, called Arius, who was teaching that Jesus, although he was a very special being, was created. He was a super angel. Arius and his followers talked about Jesus being of a similar substance to God, but not of the same substance as God. This controversy with Arius led to the publication of the Nicene Creed, the declaration of what all Christians everywhere must believe about

Jesus if they are to be known as Christians. The creed as we saw last Sunday morning begins with the words, we believe in one God, but proceeds to describe that one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Father Almighty, one Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit. And in doing this, the Nicene Fathers were restating the doctrine of the Bible and the Orthodox position of all Christians up to that point, what they believed and what they proclaimed. We may not understand how God can be one and yet three, but we believe it because it's clearly taught in the Bible. Because it was a council convened to deal with the issue of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, the vast bulk of the Nicene Creed talks about Jesus.

[3 : 16] And this evening before our communion service, when we celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord, we want to explore in summary form the teaching of the Nicene Creed concerning Jesus. And we want to do it under two headings. First of all, the dignity of Jesus, and second, the design of Jesus. The dignity of Jesus. Hear the creed. 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, being of one being with the Father. Now, these words may be familiar to you given that one of the verses of the Christian hymn, O Come All Ye Faithful, is a quote from this creed. God of God, light of light, lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb, very God, begotten, not created, O Come Let Us Adore Him, O Come Let Us Adore Him, O Come Let Us Adore Him,

O Come Let Us Adore Him, Christ the Lord. After all, what else can be our response to the teaching of the creed? But that we bow before Christ, but that we bow before Christ and adore Him. Modern-day followers of Arius, including the Mormons, are happy to sing, O Come All Ye Faithful, but will not under any circumstances sing that verse because it unmistakably declares that Jesus is God. So, for that reason, the Apostles' Creed, although we give it our wholehearted respect, is vastly inferior to the Nicene Creed.

A Jehovah's Witness, a Mormon, even Arius himself, could recite the Apostles' Creed, but not the Nicene Creed. This is the Jesus of whom we read in the Gospel of John, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld His glory. This is the Jesus of whom we read at the end of John's Gospel, when the disciple Thomas, seeing the risen Jesus, says to him, My Lord and my God.

This is the Jesus of whom the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 2, verse 6, who being in the form of God. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, the Bible clearly teaches Jesus is God.

Now, the writer of the Da Vinci Code, Dan Brown, tried to make out that it was only at Nicaea the church decided to divinize Jesus, that before that Christians thought of Jesus as merely a good man.

[6 : 29] How wrong he is. Brown's facts are as fictional as his books. From the earliest times, the church believed that Christ was God. The Creed piles statement upon statement to leave us in no doubt as to the orthodox position on Jesus. God from God, light from light, true God from true God, of one being, substance with the Father.

This is the divine dignity of the Lord in whom we believe, and whose name we confess, Jesus Christ. Whatever is true of the essence of God the Father is true of the essence of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit.

They are co-eternal, they are co-glorious, and co-infinite. And yet, even though they are one in essence, we read that what distinguishes the Father from the Son is that the Son was, to use the words of the Creed, eternally begotten from the Father, and that He was begotten, not made.

The bishops at Nicaea here were using the language of the Bible, but in places like John 3.16, Jesus is described as being the only Son, the monogamous, the only begotten of the Father who loves the world.

And by using this word begotten, the Nicene Fathers want us to understand Jesus was not made. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, He made the animals, He made the angels, and He made us, but He did not make His Son.

[8 : 24] He is not a created being. Furthermore, by using the word begotten, the Nicene Fathers want us to understand that the nature of God the Father and God the Son are the same.

Just as there was never a time when the Father was not, neither was there a time when the Son was not. From eternity, along with the Holy Spirit, they have existed as the Trinity of love and of glory.

And again, we say these are mysteries our finite minds cannot understand. How the Jesus we meet in the Gospels can be, at the same time, human and divine.

But it's the plain truth of the Bible, as always believed and always proclaimed by the Christian church, but it at least means two things.

First, because Jesus is true God of true God, of one substance with the Father, He is to be worshipped and glorified even as we worship and glorify the Father.

[9 : 33] Just like we approach God the Father with reverence and awe, so we approach the Lord Jesus Christ with that same reverence and awe.

He ain't our boyfriend. We bow down to worship Him. In Isaiah chapter 6, a vision is recorded of heaven, where the Lord is seated on the throne, and before Him all the angels of heaven are flying.

And they've all got six wings. With two, they cover their feet. With two, they fly. And with two, they cover their eyes, because even they cannot look directly at the supreme holiness of the Lord on the throne.

Rather, they cry out to one another, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Heaven and earth are filled with His glory. But later on in the Bible, in John chapter 12, verse 41, we learn that the Lord Isaiah saw seated on that throne in His vision was not the glory of the Father, was not the glory of the Spirit, but the glory of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are to afford to the Lord Jesus the same worship and glory as we afford to the Father. But secondly, if Jesus is true God of true God, and He is, if we want to know what the one God is like, we need to study the life, the words, and the works of Jesus.

[11 : 09] In all He said and did, the one God reveals Himself. Remember what John says of Him? The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.

We beheld His glory changing water into wine. We beheld His glory in raising the dead to new life, in feeding the 5,000, in touching the untouchable, in loving the unlovable, and giving hope to the despairing.

We beheld His glory preaching to vast crowds and teaching His disciples how to pray. We beheld His glory being tortured, crucified, and buried.

We beheld His glory in resurrection presence with us and His ascension into the heavens. In a world where everyone has his or her own belief about God, how amazing it is that our vision of God as Christians is shaped like the Christ who spoke lovingly to the broken and to the confused.

This is the one God. If you want to know who the one God is, study the life, the words, and the works of Jesus because in all He did, in all He said, in all He was, the one God reveals Himself.

[12 : 35] To Christ be glory, for He's our Lord, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, true God from true God. We worship Him.

And through Him, we come to know who God is. The God who even tonight, in this mid-November evening, says to us, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened, I will give you rest.

So we have, first of all here, the dignity of Jesus. But then secondly, the creed statement on Jesus reveals to us the design of Jesus.

The design of Jesus. Having established the identity of the Jesus whom we profess, Jesus Christ, the creed moves on to describe His works and starts with the words, through Him, all things were made.

Through Him, all things were made. And in saying this, the creed is merely restating the words of John chapter 1, verse 3, all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

[13 : 48] God the Son was not merely present at creation. All things were made through Him. The stars, the seas, the animals, the trees, and we human beings as the apex of His creation.

Creation was a Christological event with Christ entirely involved with creation as He was on the cross. Whenever we examine the intricacy of a butterfly's wing, whenever we see footage of the mighty blue whale, whenever we see pictures of galaxies far beyond our range of vision, we see the work of Christ.

Christ. But contra arius, Jesus was not Himself created. He was the Creator. He was God.

But the creed is desperate to move on from Christ's work of creation to Christ's work of redemption. And this is where we talk of the design of Jesus, the purpose of His work, the reason for all He did.

And I think this, for me, is the most powerful phrase in the whole Nicene Creed. We read, For us men and our salvation, He came down.

[15 : 06] For us men and our salvation. His divine mind and heart were wholly taken up with this design. All He did was with a view to us and for our salvation.

From before the creation of all things, our Lord had determined our salvation. Some time ago, in one of his sermons, David Parker said, The whole gospel is contained in two words.

For us. For us. The inner Trinitarian love overflowed for us. God didn't need anyone to love for His Father, Son, and Spirit.

He had Himself. But like a mighty waterfall, His love overflowed and so He demonstrated that love for us and for our salvation.

This is the design of Christ who for us men, by which is meant humanity, and our salvation. What is the purpose of all Christ has done, is doing, and will do for us and for our salvation?

[16 : 24] And there follows in the Creed the three stages of our salvation by Christ. If you like, being saved, being saved, will be saved.

What Christ has done, what Christ is doing, and what Christ will yet do. Let me quote.

For us men in our salvation, He came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He became incarnate of 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. This is what He has done.

So much truth in so few words. The birth, the life, the death, the resurrection, and ascension of our Lord. Virtually the entirety of the Gospels in three sentences.

[17 : 27] Let me draw your attention to one or two of its clauses. First, for us men in our salvation, He came down from heaven. He came down from heaven.

We've already spent a significant portion of time describing the supreme dignity of Jesus Christ as God. But now we read, He came down from heaven.

As John says, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He who had only ever experienced the infinite peace, love, and holiness of heaven became a human being and experienced for himself the violence, the evil of life on earth.

the crushing experience of grief, the repulsive feeling of rejection, the draining cruelty of exhaustion. From the moment of His incarnation, the life of Jesus was set on a downward spiral, down into anonymity, down into poverty, down into slavery, down, down, down He went.

I'm led to believe that the head of Tesla, Elon Musk, will, if he hits his performance target, be paid one trillion dollars next year.

[18 : 55] Buy a lot of McDonald's with that, couldn't you bet? Imagine Musk leaving one trillion dollars behind to live in one of Glasgow's sink estates.

Imagine how far down he would have to go to learn how to budget his money so he can heat his one-bedroom flat, to buy food to eat, to keep himself from being assaulted by frustrated drug dealers in his estate.

Imagine how far he would have to go down to endure the condescending glances of the middle classes and their people carriers when all the time he, Elon Musk, is so rich and so famous.

Imagine that. then multiply it by ten thousand and we're still infinitely far short of how far Jesus Christ came down.

And then plumbing the depths of human hatred, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried. He, though uncreated, through whom all things were created, died and was buried.

[20 : 06] But again, notice the language of the creed. For our sakes, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. For our sakes, why did he endure all these things?

Why did he go down so deep, deeper than any of us can fathom? For men and our salvation, for our sakes. When Christ, our Lord, was suffering so profoundly, it was for you and it was for me.

What love! But from the very deepest depths, the Lord rises to the very highest heights. On the third day, he rose again in accordance with the scriptures, he ascended into heaven, buried in a borrowed tomb.

On the third day, he rose to new life, and having been raised to new life, he ascends into heaven. He returns from whence he had come, but not the same as before, for he ascends into heaven as the Christ who has become flesh, the Christ who has become one of us, all in accordance with the scriptures, a reference from the creed to 1 Corinthians 15.

According to legend, the Buddha was cremated dead, and his ashes were scattered in northern India. Mohammed, the founder of Islam, died and is buried in Medina.

[21 : 35] Moses and David, upon whom the faith of the Jews rest, are both dead. But our Lord is alive, for he rose on the third day to new and never-ending life.

How much greater, Jesus Christ, than any other supposed God? But why, we asked, was our Lord raised from the dead, and why did he ascend into heaven?

It was for us men and our salvation. It was for our sake. For our sake, he died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin.

For us and our salvation, he was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven to demonstrate his victory over condemnation and death, to demonstrate the triumph of God over his enemies, forgiveness over judgment, hope over despair.

This is what our Christ has done. The Christ who from the cross cried out, it is finished. The Christ whose death we shall be remembering tomorrow at his table.

[22 : 45] The Christ whose body is the bread and whose blood is the wine. Do you believe that Jesus Christ came down from heaven for you and your salvation?

Do you believe that he died on the cross for you? Is this the confession of your faith? Then you too should sit at the Lord's table professing your faith in Jesus.

Having described what Christ has done, the creed moves on to describe what Christ is now doing. And is seated at the right hand of the Father.

And is seated at the right hand of the Father. In the place of privilege and honor, flesh of our flesh sits in power and authority. There's a man on the throne of heaven, the man Christ Jesus, and he is there for us men and for our salvation.

Moment by moment his presence there as the Christ who gave himself for us pleads the Father's gracious provision and care for us. He's our advocate, our Savior at the right hand of God.

[24 : 02] Nothing shall we lack if he pleads for us. If as a Christian you are grieving, you need only pray and your Savior at the Father's right hand, we'll pray for your comfort.

If you're guilty, he'll plead for your peace of conscience. If you're fearful, he'll plead for your courage. If you're despairing, he'll plead for your hope.

His presence in heaven today ensures that the wasted years shall be transformed into years of satisfaction and fulfillment. Tomorrow as we eat bread and drink wine, we'll call it communion.

Communion not with a Christ who was dead, but communion with a Christ who today is seated on the throne of heaven. We need him every day. And the promise of the gospel is that we have him every day, but especially at the table of communion.

Do you want this Jesus? Do you want him? then come. You can have a bit of his table.

[25 : 17] Having described what Christ has done and Christ is doing, the creed concludes its section in Christ by describing what he yet shall do.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Christ will come again not in the descent and humiliation, but in his glory, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. Of course, this is a fearful prospect for those who deny and reject him, but for we who confess our faith in Jesus, it is a most wondrous hope because he shall come for us.

Whether we are dead or alive, when Christ comes again, he shall come for us to take us to be with himself. We shall see him in whom we have believed and whose name we have confessed.

Those 318 bishops at Nicaea, many of them had suffered grievously at the hands of the former emperor Diocletian's persecutions. They see today the Christ for whom they suffered.

[26 : 32] The martyrs of the faith shall be raised to new life. They shall see the Lord for whom they gave their lives. And we shall see him. Enthroned in glory, the dust of the earth exalted to the heights of the heaven.

There shall be no more pain or death, for, I quote, his kingdom will have no end. Our eternal experience shall be one of peace, love, joy, light, hope, and the glory of his presence as he calls us by name to draw close to him.

And he places his nail-marked hands on our heads and blesses us one by one, his eyes looking into ours, and his tender but powerful voice saying to us, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

to you who have overcome, I give the crown of life. As we gather around the communion tomorrow, we do so by looking back at the cross, looking up at the throne of Christ, but looking ahead to his return and the fulfillment of his kingdom.

We eat and drink in anticipation of a heavenly banquet with the Lord Jesus at the head of the table. Let's put all these truths about Christ from the creed together and we rejoice not in ourselves and in our achievements, but in him and in his.

[28 : 07] We would willingly die a thousand deaths just to live in Christ and with Christ. We praise and worship God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the council of Nicaea with its clear and bold proclamation of the dignity and design of Christ, his glory, and how for us men and our salvation, he came down.

Tonight may be the time that you join with the one, one holy, Catholic, and apostolic church in confessing your faith in Jesus, joining with the billions who have gone before, with the billions who today, and with the billions who are yet to come, proclaiming, we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christ.