



**Diocese
in Europe**

A Lent Course

Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together



Nicene Creed
Celebrations 2025

Session Handouts

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Session 1
Setting the Scene

Handout

On the next two pages you'll find material to look at in the session.

First, the text of the Creed which emerged from the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, which here we call 'The Creed of Nicaea', set out side-side with the text of the Creed which emerged from a later Council, held in Constantinople fifty-five years later, which is 'The Nicene Creed' which we say in church..

When comparing the two texts it becomes clear that the second is an expanded version of the first. Dotted lines separate the different sections to make it easier to compare them.

Second, the words of a hymn composed by a previous Bishop in Europe, Geoffrey Rowell. Its words are theologically rich, and owe a debt to The Nicene Creed. We'll therefore be looking at them, verse by verse, in the coming weeks. We're also invited to sing it in our chaplaincies on Trinity Sunday, 15th June. This week, look at verse 1, and see if anything particularly strikes you.



A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

The Creed of Nicaea
from First Council of Nicaea (325)

We believe in One God,
Father, Almighty,
the Maker of all things visible and invisible.

.....
And in One Lord Jesus Christ,
the Son of God,
begotten from the Father, Only-begotten,
that is from the substance of the Father;
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten not made,
consubstantial with the Father,
by whom all things were made,
both things in heaven and things on earth;
who for us men and for our salvation came down,

and was incarnate, was made man, suffered,

and rose again the third day, ascended into heaven,

and is coming to judge living and dead.

.....

And in the Holy Spirit.

.....

Appendix

And those who say 'There once was when He was not' and, 'Before being begotten He was not,' and 'He came into being out of nothing,' or those who pretend that the Son of God is 'from another hypostasis or substance', or 'created', or 'alterable', or 'mutable', the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

The Nicene Creed
from First Council of Constantinople (381)

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

.....
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.

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.

.....

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.

.....

[*the words 'and the Son' (known as the filioque clause, filioque meaning 'and the Son' in Latin) were a later addition to the Creed, which caused great distress to the Eastern Orthodox churches, because of the way it was done. We explore this further in Session 5]

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Hymn to the Trinity
Bishop Geoffrey Rowell

To the tune of Abbot's Leigh ('Glorious things of thee are spoken') or Blaenwern ('Love divine') or Hyfrydol ('Alleluia, sing to Jesus') or Lux Eoi ('Alleluia! Alleluia! Hearts to heaven and voices raised')

Light of light, Love's radiant Glory,
 Blessed Trinity adored!
 Well of life, our shaping story,
 Source of beauty, life outpoured!
 As in heav'n the angels worship,
 'Holy, Holy, Holy!' sing,
 Let us now their praises echo,
 And our lives in homage bring.

God the Father, first Beginning,
 Fountainhead of life and grace,
 Love eternal, all-creating,
 Energising time and space,
 Seen in all creation's beauty,
 Fragile flowers and stars above,
 Particles whose hidden myst'ry
 Praise your all-creative love.

God the Son by Love begotten,
 Loved from all eternity,
 Life outpoured for our salvation,
 Through whom all was brought to be,
 Perfect image of the Father,
 God from God, and Light from Light,
 Healing through our human weakness,
 For sin's blindness giving sight.

Holy and life-giving Spirit,
 Bond of love, God's living Breath,
 Presence which the Church inherits,
 Raising us to life from death;
 Drawing us to deep communion,
 Kindling in our hearts desire -
 Longing prayer for perfect union,
 Tears of joy and tongues of fire!

Triune God we bring our praises,
 Low in adoration fall,
 Awesome Wonder that amazes
 As our hearts now hear your call,
 'Share in me the life of glory,
 Lives transfigured by my Love!
 Saints on earth and saints in heaven,
 In the Trinity above.

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Session 2
`One God`

Handout

Christian liturgy

Talk of 'one God' is familiar to us, not just in the Nicene Creed but elsewhere in our worship. For example, in one of our liturgies we have the words:

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
 with all your soul, with all your mind,
 and with all your strength.'

The words beginning 'Hear, O Israel' come from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verses 4-5. Known in Judaism as the Sh'ma (Hebrew for 'Hear'), they are central to Jewish daily worship, and would have been said daily by Jesus. They remind the Jews that they belong to God ('our God') and that this God is the sole true God ('the only Lord'). So, our liturgy chimes with the first part of the Nicene Creed, and each reinforces the other.

Bible verses

There was a small number of verses that Arius focussed on in favour of his argument that Jesus could not be thought of in the same way, on the same level, as the 'one God'. Here are four of them, one from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament. Some of them will be more familiar to us than others.

Old Testament

Proverbs 8, verse 22-25

The Lord **created** me at the beginning of his work,
 the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was **set up**,
 at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

When there were no depths I was **brought forth**,
 when there were no springs abounding with water.

Before the mountains had been shaped,
 before the hills, I was **brought forth**.

(Italics added)

This is part of a long and beautiful chapter about Wisdom, the wisdom of God. Here divine Wisdom is depicted as a person - 'The Lord created me' - and was identified with the Word of God, the Logos, whom the church believes 'became flesh' in Jesus. However, there is a problem here, as

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Arius saw it. If we refer the words of these three verses to Jesus, then according to scripture he was 'created', 'set up', 'brought forth'. How are these words to be interpreted?

Arius inferred from the text that Jesus as the Son of God, the Logos, had a beginning - certainly before the earth, the depths, the springs, before the mountains and hills, and even before the time of the world (translated above as 'ages'); but he did have a beginning, and for this beginning of the Logos scripture uses not only the metaphor 'begetting' (which is common in the church) but also the term 'creation'.^[1]

Thus these verses from Proverbs lead Arius to the conclusion that Wisdom/the Logos/the Son of God cannot concern something about God made flesh, because God has no beginning. Instead, it must be about some great heavenly power becoming flesh. Thus, Arius concludes that 'the Logos was God's creature.'^[2]

New Testament

In the New Testament there are moments where Jesus apparently says he doesn't know what the Father knows, as in:

Matthew 24 verse 36

'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.'

Again, Arius believes that this opens up a separation between the 'one God' and Jesus, who is subordinate, not equal, to this God. The same is shown in another verse:

John 14. 28

'You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I am coming to you." If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.'

Arius interprets this verse as clear evidence that Jesus doesn't see himself as being on the same 'level' as his Father.

1 Corinthians 15. 24

'Then comes the end, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.'

For Arius, this is another example of the New Testament making it clear that Jesus is subordinate to God. This idea of subordinationism is a key part of Arianism: if Jesus is subordinate to the Father, he must also be separate, and therefore not divine.

The different way in which these texts and others were interpreted was the focus of the debate at the Council of Nicaea.

[1] Dünzl, Franz A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church, London: T&T Clark, 2007, p. 43

[2] Young, Frances From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background, p. 62.

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Hymnody

Verse 2 from Hymn to the Trinity by Bishop Geoffrey Rowell, speaks of the Father. In the light of what you've discovered in this session, which words strike you?

God the Father, first Beginning,
Fountainhead of life and grace,
Love eternal, all-creating,
Energising time and space,
Seen in all creation's beauty,
Fragile flowers and stars above,
Particles whose hidden mystr'y
Praise your all-creative love.

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Session 3
'One Lord' - Definitely Divine

Handout

Sections of the Creed

'We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ'

We are used to hearing the word 'Lord' in church to speak about Jesus. Stop to think about it. Try to sit with it for a few minutes, and feel what the word means to you in your relationship with God.

QUESTION: What does the word 'Lord' mean to you, and what does it mean to those outside the church?

'the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father'

The word 'begotten' may sound old fashioned to our ears, but we still hear it used occasionally. For example, if we say 'it is hoped that the King might beget an heir by his new Queen', we know that it is hoped that the King may bring a child into existence through a process of reproduction.

QUESTION: What do you think the writers of the Nicene Creed were trying to convey in the phrase 'eternally begotten'?

'God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God'

To our ears these words, too, are strange. We don't find the phrase 'God from God' in the Bible, nor 'Light from Light', nor 'true God from true God'. These phrases seem to be using words in a way that is half way between poetry and prose. Try simply to understand the words as conveying something relatively straightforward. And ask yourself once more, what did those who included them in the Creed wish to say?

QUESTION: At face value what do these three phrases say to you?

'begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.'

Three more phrases, familiar yet strange.

QUESTIONS:

- In the first phrase, here again we have that word 'begotten', but used in a slightly different way to say 'The Son is this, and is not that'. What's being specified here?
- In the second phrase we find an unusual word, 'Being'. What are the writers trying to tell us with this word?
- The third phrase is a very clear statement relating to the making of things, i.e. the creation. How does this differ from what Arius maintained about Jesus' relationship to creation?

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Hymnody

Verse 3 from Hymn to the Trinity by Bishop Geoffrey Rowell, speaks of the Son. In the light of what you've discovered in this session, which words strike you?

God the Son by Love begotten,
Loved from all eternity,
Life outpoured for our salvation,
Through whom all was brought to be,
Perfect image of the Father,
God from God, and Light from Light,
Healing through our human weakness,
For sin's blindness giving sight.

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Session 4
'One Lord' - Wholly Human

Handout

1. **Sections of the Creed**

**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.**

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you think the two parts of this section of the Creed - concerning Christ's divinity and humanity - fit together? Does the second part make more sense in the light of the first?
2. What does 'For us and for our salvation' mean to you?

CHRISTMAS DAY (First major festival)

**'he came down from heaven;
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.'**

Good Friday

**'For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.'**

EASTER DAY (Second but greatest of the major festivals)

**'On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures'**

ASCENSION DAY (Third major festival)

**'he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.'**

Advent

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

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

QUESTIONS:

1. Some people struggle to say some of these statements, for example that Christ 'was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary', because they say they don't believe in the Virgin Birth. Do you struggle to say any of these statements of the Creed, and if so, can you say why?
2. Which of the festivals means the most to you?

2) Liturgy

In the liturgy of a service to celebrate the Baptism of Christ by John the Baptist in the River Jordan (The First Sunday of Epiphany) we find the words:

Today the Uncreated of his own will
accepts the laying on of hands from his own creature.[1]

These lines sounds complicated, but does our study of the Creed in the last two sessions help you to understand them? Can you see its connection to parts of the Creed we've been looking at over the last two weeks?

3. Hymnody

Bishop Robert Innes (Diocese in Europe) has recently reminded us[2] of the link between The Nicene Creed and the Christmas carol. 'O come, all ye faithful':

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,
Christ the Lord!

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:

1. Can you trace these words back to the Nicene Creed?
2. What difference does studying them make to the way you'll sing them at Christmas?
3. How has studying this section of the Creed changed the way you understand the Person of Jesus, and the significance of his life?
4. What does Christ being human mean to you? Do you behave differently as a Christian because of your understanding of Christ's humanity?

[1] Common Worship: Times and Seasons - Epiphany, A Service for the Festival of the Baptism of Christ: The Christ is Revealed in the Waters of Baptism

[2] Rt Revd Dr Robert Innes, Ad Clerum, Epiphany 2025

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Session 5
'The Holy Spirit' & 'The Church'

Handout

The Holy Spirit

**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.**

When you hear the words Holy Spirit, what do you think of?

Do you think it's important that the Spirit is mentioned in the Creed; what difference would it make if the Spirit wasn't mentioned?

The Church

**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.**

What makes the 4 'marks' of the Church so important?

- one** there is only one Christian Church, with one head, Jesus Christ from whom it derives.
- holy** the church is set apart for Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (although clearly imperfect)
- catholic** a word meaning 'universal' (not to be confused with Roman Catholic, a part of the universal Church)
- apostolic** the church comes through the apostles, the earliest Christians.

Hymnody

Verse 4 from Hymn to the Trinity by Bishop Geoffrey Rowell, speaks of the Spirit and the Church. In the light of what you've discovered in this session, which words strike you?

Holy and life-giving Spirit,
Bond of love, God's living Breath,
Presence which the Church inherits,
Raising us to life from death;
Drawing us to deep communion,
Kindling in our hearts desire -
Longing prayer for perfect union,
Tears of joy and tongues of fire!

A Lent Course
Celebrating Nicaea:
seeing afresh the faith which holds us together

Looking back...looking forward

In the very first Session of this course you were asked:

What is your understanding of the Nicene Creed?

What does it mean to you?

How do you feel about it?

How does it affect your life in the church?

3 questions:

1) As we come to the end of the course, how has your understanding of the Creed changed?

2) Which parts of the Creed have surprised you?

3) Are you already saying the Creed in a new way?

As we look forward to Holy Week and Easter, the final verse of **Bishop Geoffrey Rowell's hymn** expresses something of the joy which the belief expressed in the Creed creates in us:

Triune God we bring our praises,
Low in adoration fall,
Awesome Wonder that amazes
As our hearts now hear your call,
'Share in me the life of glory,
Lives transfigured by my Love!
Saints on earth and saints in heaven,
In the Trinity above.