

## Unpacking the Nicene Creed

### An Introduction for Lay Readers: SLIDE NOTES

#### SLIDE 2: THE NICENE CREED

*I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, visible and invisible.*

*I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day 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.*

*I 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 adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.*

**NOTES:** This creed is about how the Son and the Spirit relate to the Father. See handout titled "The differences Between the Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed."

#### SLIDE 3: THE NICENE CREED

*God from God, light from light, very God of very God, of ONE SUBSTANCE WITH THE FATHER, through whom all things were made."*

#### SLIDE 4: THE NICENE CREED

*"And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worship and glorified. Who spake by the prophets..."*

**SLIDE 5: –John 1:1-4; 14**

*“In the beginning was the WORD And the WORD was with God and the WORD was God He was in the beginning with God All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being that has come into being. ... And the WORD was made flesh and dwelt among us.”*

**SLIDE 6: John 1:1-4; 14**

*“In the beginning was the LOGOS  
And the LOGOS was with God and the LOGOS was God  
He was in the beginning with God  
All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being that has come into being.  
... And the LOGOS was made flesh and dwelt among us.”*

**NOTES:** LOGOS is Greek for 'WORD'. Logos was a word borrowed from the philosophical writings of pagans. The LOGOS (word) is the underlying logic that allows us to think rationally and make sense of the world (logic). Who is the LOGOS in relations to God? The early Church really struggled with who Jesus was in relation to the Father.

**SLIDE 7:**

What exactly is the relationship between God, the Father, and Jesus, the Word?

**SLIDE 8: Justin Martyr circa 100-160 AD**

- *God the Father is transcendent divinity.*
- *Jesus, the Word is imminent divinity.*
- *Two Gods “in number but not in will.”*

**NOTES:** Justin Martyr had a background of pagan philosophy. He said that God the Father and Jesus the Son are ‘two Gods in number but not in will.’ However, it isn’t entirely clear what he meant by this. Other Christians of the time were alarmed by Justin’s use of the phrase “two Gods” as they felt it could lead to the heresy of ditheism (namely, the belief in two Gods).

**SLIDE 9: DITHESIM**

*So are there TWO Gods*

## **SLIDE 10: MODALISM OR SABELLIANISM (Eastern Church)**

**NOTES:** Modalism is the idea that God the Father and God the Son are essentially interchangeable (Sabellious) something like Batman and Bruce Wayne. The description of God as Ice/Water and Steam is an example of modalism and it is a heresy. It made some believe that Jesus had a 'split personality'

## **SLIDE 11: THE PROBLEM WITH MODALISM**

- *In the NT, Jesus prays to his Father (Jn. 11:41-42) and hears his Father speak (Jn. 12:28; Mk. 1:11).*
- *Jesus is specifically said to have obeyed his Father's will (Jn. 6:38; Mt. 26:39).*
- *Jesus feels his Father's absence on the cross, saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34).*

**NOTES:** The relationship doesn't make sense. Early Christians deemed Sabellius a heretic.

Problem with Diatheses (one God)

Problem with Modalism (Heresy)

## **SLIDE 12: Arius and Arianism (Egypt)**

- *"There was when he was not."*
- *"Before the Word was begotten, or created, or defined, or established, he did not exist. ...The Son has a beginning but God has no beginning."*

**NOTES:** Arius felt that Jesus was not divine..that the 'Son has a beginning but God has no beginning'. Arius believed that the Word was the first and greatest creation of God but a creation nonetheless- NOT God himself.

## **SLIDE 13: Alexander of Alexandria**

- *"Always a God, always a Son."*
- *"with the Father co-exists the Son unbegotten, ever-begotten, begotten without begetting"*
- *"God neither precedes the Son in aspect or in a moment of time."*
- *"Always a God, always a Son, the Son being from God himself."*

**NOTES:** All throughout history Jesus has been worshipped as "God". Arius's own Bishop discovered what Arius was teaching and became incensed - he fired Arius.

#### **SLIDE 14: CONSTANTINE THE GREAT**

Emperor of Rome (A.D. 272- 337)

**NOTES:** Due to conflict in the Eastern church Constantine sent Hosius, Bishop of Cordova, his Ecclesiastical advisor out to learn more about the conflict. He ex-communicates a Bishop who supported Arius. Constantine disagrees with the Bishop of Cordova's decision to ex-communicate the Bishop, saying he had no right to do so. Under Constantine's authority, A council of delegates gathered at Nicea where over 200 delegates met.

#### **SLIDE 16: FACTIONS IN THE COUNCIL**

- *Small, pro-Arian minority.*
- *Small, pro-Alexandrian minority.*
- *Even smaller modalist minority.*
- *The clueless*

**NOTES:** The Council of Nicea met in 325 A.D.

#### **SLIDE 17: ALAN HAYES (Christian Historian)**

*“[I]t is not possible to know exactly how the Council proceeded; there are no records of the debates, and much of the historical evidence that does exist glosses over the disagreements. The outcomes were influenced not only by theological argument but also by the interventions of the Emperor, the interplay of the local interests represented, and personal relationships, among other things.”*

**NOTES:** Arius was not at the council of Nicea. Eusebius of Caesarea read his creed from his church. Constantine wanted the 'of the same substance' included.

#### **SLIDE 18: ὁμοούσιος Homoousios (Affirmed the Divinity of Christ)**

- *Homo- the same*
- *Ousios- Substance, Essence or Being*
- *Homoousios means- “of the same essence,” “of one being,” “of one substance,” or “consubstantial”*

**NOTES:** God the Father and Jesus the Word share the same divine substance. Jesus is God.

#### **SLIDE 19: Athanasius of Alexandria**

Champion of Nicene Theology

**NOTES:** Athanasius of Alexandria was a young man during the Council of Nicea. Only God can save humanity. If Jesus was not God then we are not saved. He is a giant in early church history.

**SLIDE 20:** *“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [ὁμοούσιος] with the Father, through whom all things were made, both in heaven and on earth, who for us humans and for our salvation descended and became incarnate, becoming human, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.”*

**NOTES:** 1st verse of the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.)

**SLIDE 21:** *“But those who say that there was when He was not, and that before being begotten He was not, or that He came from that which is not, or that the Son of God is of a different substance [ὑπόστασις] or essence [οὐσία], or that He is created, or mutable, these the catholic church anathematizes.”*

**NOTES:** The Bishop's were okay with worshipping Jesus as God (LOGOS) which had been practiced for centuries. They had no problem with the word 'substance' and worried it would lead to modalism.

### **SLIDE 22: THE AFTERMATH OF THE COUNCIL**

**NOTES:** The Nicene Creed didn't take hold right away after affirmed at the Council's conclusion. Thanks to the Capodician Fathers and Athanasius they eventually became comfortable with the word 'substance'. 'The Holy Spirit' is implied as Divine - which was a very old concept.

### **SLIDE 23: THE MACEDONIANS**

Those who Fight against the Holy Spirit

**NOTES:** It was inevitable that someone would come along to refute the concept of the Holy Spirit being Divine (Macedonians). Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers and defended the belief that the Spirit was divine against the Macedonians. The conflict eventually led to another Council being held.

### **SLIDE 24: THE COUNCIL CONSTANTINOPLE (A.D. 381)**

- *Reaffirms the doctrine of Nicaea regarding the divinity of the Son.*
- *Adds that the same ought to be said about the Holy Spirit.*

## **SLIDE 25: "I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT**

- *The Lord and giver of life."*
- *"Who proceedeth from the Father."*
- *"Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified."*
- *"Who spake by the prophets."*

**NOTES:** The Nicene /Constantinople Creed - took over 2 councils to complete.  
In 381 A.D. - 600 years before the Great Schism, the East and West split.

Arianism does not last in the East but does in the West.

The Father, the Son Begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.

After the Council of Constantinople, the creed stated that the Son is begotten of the Father and that the Spirit proceeds from the Father. According to some theologians in the West, this could potentially open the door to Arianism.

In the West, therefore, they reworded the Creed to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father AND the Son.

The Eastern Church didn't agree with these changes and said you couldn't add that unless the council met to decide as a group. However the Western church said it was okay and the split happened.

We use clumsy human language to explain something we don't understand.