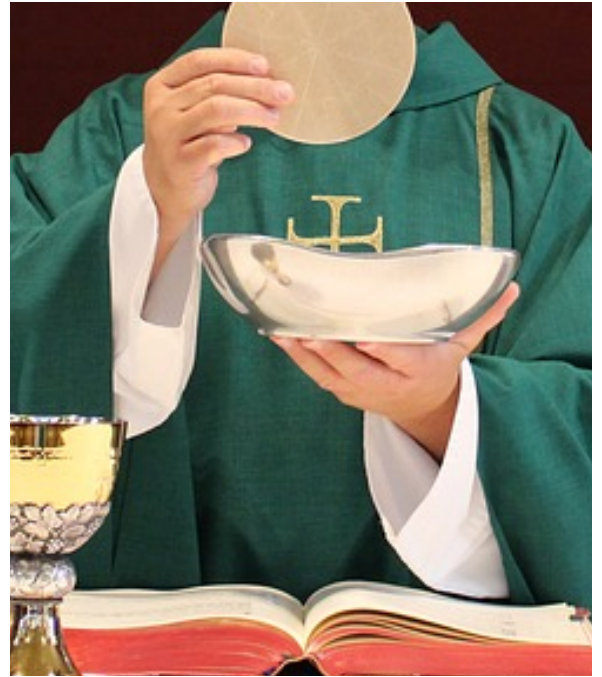


I believe in God

The Apostles' Creed



'I believe'

Faith is more than believing that God exists. Faith is believing in God, trusting in God, founding your life on him. It is getting to know Jesus Christ and walking in his way, with him beside you.

God also believes in you: 'You are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you' (Isaiah 43.4). God reaches out to each of us before we even begin to think about him. This is one reason why we welcome tiny children to baptism who aren't yet able to choose for themselves. The stirring in my heart to turn towards God comes from God.

The story of God's people, in both the Old Testament and the New, the story of Jesus, shows us that God chooses to draw near to humankind. Faith is the way we respond to this mysterious God who draws near and yet is hidden. He makes his will known to us, and by orienting our life on him we respond as best we can.

'Through doubting we come to questioning and through questions we perceive the truth.'

Peter Abelard, d. 1142, from the Prologue to *Sic et Non*

Doubt

Doubt is a sign that your faith is a growing, living thing. As you grow and change throughout your life, your faith will grow and change too. When painful things happen and God seems far away, or when we have got too busy and forgotten to spend time with God, we doubt and we feel alone.

Like a coal taken out of the fire, a Christian alone will quickly grow cool. We need the support, the prayers, the encouragement of other Christians, and the encounter with the living God in shared prayer and worship; and we need it even more when we are questioning our faith. Not in order to shout down the inner questioning, but to be held safely while we explore.

It takes time to develop a faith that has the theological tools to answer questions such as 'Where was God when innocent children were killed?' or 'Why have I got a life-threatening condition?' Often a painful time strengthens our faith, when we experience for ourselves that God is there with us in the loss, the grief, the turning upside-down of our expectations. When we suffer, we can look at Jesus, who shared our human suffering and used it to demonstrate God's unshakeable faithfulness.

Christians live in the same world with everyone else, and suffer the same things as everyone else. But they give them a different meaning. Faith looks at the world and sees God's expression of love, and his promise that nothing can ever separate us from him, not even death. The gift given at our baptism is eternal life. Baptism is the Yes to God's invitation, and that never ends.

Saying Yes to God



The faith Christians share is summed up in short texts known as **creeds**, which are the same for all the mainstream Christian churches. It is a simple way to say to God that we trust him, and a framework to which we can attach explanations that grow more sophisticated and more wide-ranging as our faith grows. This booklet goes through the words of the Apostles' Creed.

'Scripture is a pool in which lambs may wade and elephants may swim' was a saying in the early Church. The same is true of the creed: you will still say at 95 the same creed you repeated when you were a child, but your understanding of what is meant by it will have developed as your life experience has developed. And when you say the creed on a Sunday morning, you will be consciously taking your place in the ranks of the saints of all times and places who share the faith with you.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.
(Gen 1.31)



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'I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.'

Christian faith says that the universe did not come about by chance, but by the will of God. There is no conflict between faith and science: science tells us *how* God made the world (the current best explanation being the big bang), faith tells us *why* God made the world (so that there could be creatures that could choose to love him freely - us). Material reality (the book of creation) is the means by which we learn to perceive spiritual reality, alongside the revealed truth of scripture (the book of the Bible).

If I am a creature, a being willed by God, and not the random product of genes, then that has consequences. I am responsible for relating to reality as it truly is, and acknowledging God's claim on me, his creature. If God loves me, he loves his other creatures too: I am called to respect them and share with them in restoring what has gone wrong in the world through human selfishness.

'In Jesus, every one of God's promises is a Yes.' (2 Cor 1.20)



'And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord.'

Out of love for humankind, God chooses to share their experience, which means experiencing things that are foreign to the divine nature, like death and suffering.

The human being Jesus the son of Mary is *fully human*: he suffered and died. But because he is also *fully God*, not just a representative or prophet, his death, offered in pure love and obedience to his Father, had the power to bring humankind back to God. He ended the estrangement brought about through sin and selfishness. For this reason Jesus is called the Christ, the anointed one of God, and also Lord and God. It is in his name that we are baptised, because we are called to grow into other Christs, by following in his way in loving God and neighbour.

**'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will
overshadow you.'** (Luke 1.35)

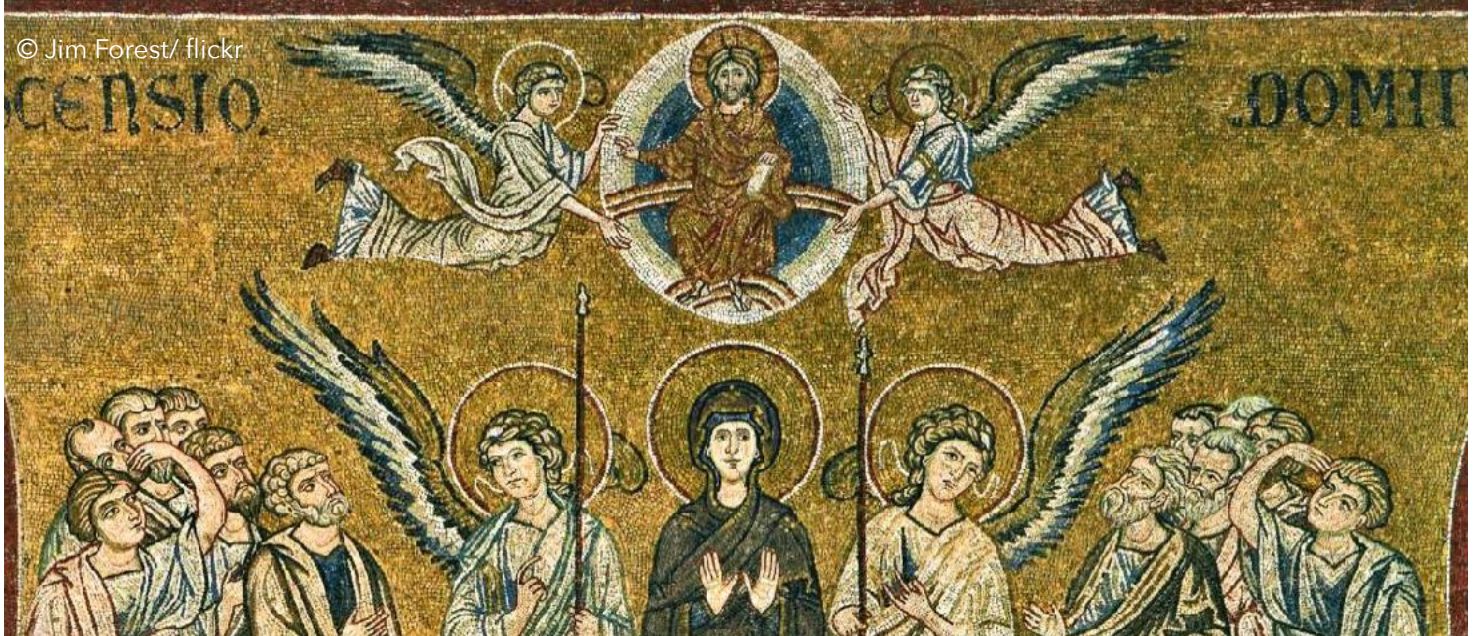


'He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.'

Jesus of Nazareth was a real, historical person. His existence is attested in writings by non-Christians quite shortly after his death. But he came into being purely by the will of God, by means of the Holy Spirit acting in combination with the consent of the Virgin Mary, his mother.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each God; not three separate gods, but one single God. The Holy Trinity is hard to understand, but worth studying further. Each Person empties himself entirely to the others, which is how we can say that God is love; God the Father never ceases giving himself to the Son, God the Son never ceases giving himself to the Father and so on... And humankind is invited to join in that self-emptying, by loving and receiving God's love in return. The divine dance is one in which we can be a partner.

'Behold, I make all things new.' (Revelation 21.5)



'He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead.'

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judaea in 26-36 CE. He condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion, a customary punishment for slaves and enemies of the state, considered to be especially shameful. Jesus experienced the depths of humiliation and truly died. In this way God expresses his solidarity with the human race and heals the very worst that we can experience.

'On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven.'

God the Father raised Jesus from the dead to a life that is beyond reach of death and suffering. Heaven is being in the presence of God and receiving his love. Jesus belongs there in his own right; because he has died and risen for us and on our behalf, to reconcile us to God, we now share in that life and have citizenship in heaven. Although our material bodies must die, God's promise to us holds us safe through death into eternal life.



'For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ.' (2 Cor 5.10)

'He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.'

Each person will die one day, and the entire universe will not last for ever. But although our earthly existence is finite, life is neither meaningless nor random.

At the end of time, God will perfect his Kingdom that has already begun in Jesus Christ, making straight all that is crooked and lifting up the lowly. Whatever in our lives has gone wrong, God will make right. This process may be painful, but it is in the service of our healing.

God's judgement brings the truth to light, and will reveal his mercy in ways we cannot yet comprehend. We can trust him without fear, for his judgement shows how our little lives are precious in his sight. Our Judge is the one who died to give us life.

We can choose to turn away from him, but he will never turn away from us.

'Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you.' (1 Cor 6.19)



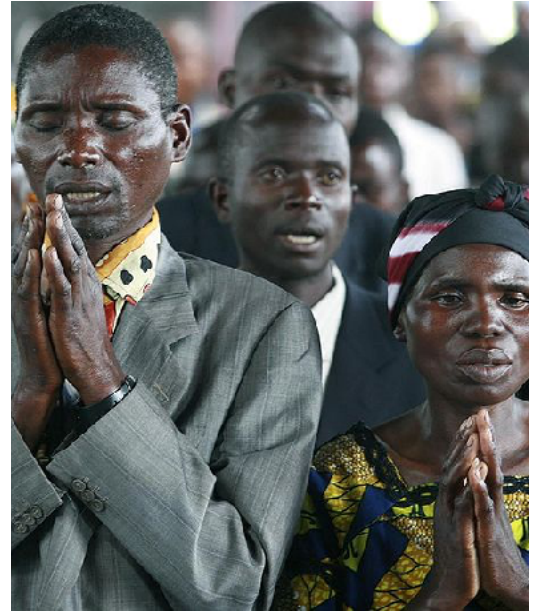
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'I believe in the Holy Spirit,'

The Holy Spirit is the way God works in our world and within our human hearts. The Spirit is a 'pledge of our inheritance... as God's own people' (Ephesians 1.14), a sign that the Kingdom of God is already working in the world. It is the Spirit that enables us to do our share towards building up the Kingdom, though the final revealing of the Kingdom in its fullness will be God's alone.

Jesus Christ is present with us, through the Holy Spirit, wherever we live and act according to God's intentions, God's Spirit. Heaven has already begun there.

'you are built together in the Spirit into a dwelling-place for God.' (Eph 2.22)



'...the holy catholic Church,'

No-one can be a Christian on their own. God is love, which means relationship, and we live out our love for God in our relationships with other people. The Church is the community of those who believe. It has been willed and brought about by God through the working of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the Church itself is holy.

God's Spirit works not only in individual souls, but in corporate entities which have a treasure of experience and wisdom on how best to relate to God. Like individual souls, these corporate entities can fall into sin, but God's Holy Spirit works in and through them to renew them and recall them to holiness, for the flourishing of their members.

'Catholic' means 'universal': the Church of God is a community which is open to all, a hospitable space. Within the Church of God, the Body of Christ, are different denominations with specific theological emphases, each enriching the whole body in their characteristic way. All are called to work together towards unity; much has been achieved already.

'to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.' (1 Cor 1.2)



'...the communion of saints,'

The saints, in the New Testament, means the whole community of believers, those who have been made holy by Christ. Over time, martyrs and other admirable Christians began to be commemorated, to encourage others to follow their example.

Thinking of the communion of saints reminds us that we are part of a community that is living: all the saints of all the ages, from all over the world. The holiness of others can support and encourage us, whether they are contemporaries or not. We are not alone, but caught up in a broad network of prayer and grace, united in Christ.

The church on earth and the church in heaven are one, and together make up the Body of Christ.

'I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.'
(Romans 7.19)



'...the forgiveness of sins,'

We are familiar with failure, weakness and deliberate bad behaviour; it is our daily experience. God loves us anyway, and calls us to return to the way of following Christ. Admitting our own responsibility for wrong actions and harm done to others is the first step back on this way. Every service of Holy Communion begins with an act of confession, so that we may be reconciled to God.

When we pray alone at home we can always come to God for forgiveness, with complete confidence in his love and mercy. God's grace will help us to change our ways; we only need to ask for it. If it helps, we can make a more formal act of confession and reconciliation, with the help of a priest. This might be appropriate before a big step such as confirmation or marriage. Sometimes people get anxious about things that are not sins at all, and it can help to have someone else reassure you.

'anyone who hears my word...has passed from death to life.' (John 5.24)



'...the resurrection of the body,'

Belief in the resurrection is a core part of Christian faith and distinguishes us from other religions. We believe that death has no power over us. God wants us to have life in abundance. After our physical body dies, we have eternal life with God. At the end of time, God will make all things new, with a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21.1).

Baptism is the moment when we first receive eternal life; and so at a funeral, you might find a baptism candle burning as well as the Paschal (Easter) candle. Or the coffin might be sprinkled with holy water as a sign that the person was baptised, and now has passed from death to life in the same way as the Lord Jesus Christ, whose name and sign they bore.

The image on the left shows the tomb of Christ within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.

**'For now we see in a mirror, dimly; but then we will see face to face.'
(1 Cor 13.12)**



'...and the life everlasting.'

We do not know what eternal life will actually be like; we are called to trust in God. Since it will be a greater closeness to God, in his presence, beyond the boundaries of time and space, it is difficult for us to visualise. We can get some hints from our experience of love or mystery in this life; the times when we feel God is near. But we cannot fully comprehend it; which is why the Bible speaks in images, and why in our liturgy we use signs and symbols, to express what it is like to be near God.

We believe that eternal life will fulfil what humankind was created for, the greatest possible love and closeness with God and with each other, a communion which this present life only foreshadows.

'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.' (Revelation 22.20)



'Amen.'

Amen means 'so be it': faith is the attitude that says 'so be it' to God's action in his world: healing, saving, loving, sanctifying. When we say Amen, we are saying Yes with all our heart and soul, with our thinking, feeling and acting.

All our life long, every single day, we say Yes to God with our choices, our response to challenges, our relations with those around us, our action for good in the world. Our life and our love are our Amen.

