Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed was the Church's answer to Arianism. It was hammered out in several stages, but the text (given here) usually identified as "the" Nicene Creed is the "eastern form" adopted at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. It is sometimes referred to as the "Creed of the 318 Fathers" in distinction from the later, expanded form, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, adopted in AD 381, which is known as the "Creed of the 150 Fathers." (The number refers to the number of delegates who sat on each of the respective councils.) The texts of the three creeds given below come from Philip Schaff's *The Creeds of Christendom,* 3 vols. (6th ed.; Harper & Row, 1931; reprint, Baker, 1983). Reading this text requires more than BDAG; LS is essential, as is G. W. H. Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (5 vols., Oxford: Clarendon, 1961–68; cited as PL below). (LS does not include much patristic information; Lampe *assumes* the user will have LS at hand for non-theological words.) The vocabulary list below includes the necessary material from these sources.

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν, πατέρ παντοκράτορα,	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
ποιητήν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς,	Maker of heaven and earth,
ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων.	And of all things visible and invisible.
Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν	And [we believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ
τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ	the Son of God
γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μονογενῆ·	begotten of the Father, the only-begotten;
τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐκ οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς·	that is, of the essence of the Father;
Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ	God of God
καὶ φῶς ἐκ φωτὸς,	and Light of Light,
Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ·	very God of very God;
γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα,	begotten, not made,
ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ·	being of one substance with the Father;
δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο	through whom all things came into being;
τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ·	the things in heaven and the things on earth;
τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρωπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν	the one who for us men and for our salvation
κατελθόντα και σαρκωθέντα, καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα·	came down and was incarnated, and was made man;
παθόντα καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῇ ἡμέρᾳ,	suffered and rose the third day,
ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς,	ascended into heaven,
ἐρχόμενον κρίναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκροὺς.	coming to judge the living and the dead.
Καὶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα.	And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit.
Τούς δε λέγοντας,	But the ones who say,
ὅτι ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν	"There was [a time] when he was not,"
καὶ πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν,	and "Before being begotten, he was not,"
καὶ ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο·	and "He came to be out of not being";
ἢ ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας φάσκοντας εἶναι, *	or claiming that "He is of another substance or nature,"
ἢ κτιστόν, ἢ τρεπτὸν ἢ ἀλλοιωτὸν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ,	or "The Son of God is created, changeable or alterable,"
ἀναθεματίζει ἡ ἁγία καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία.	the holy, catholic, and apostolic church anathematizes.

ἀληθινός, ή, όν, *true, genuine, authentic* (Traditionally this is translated "very" in the Creed, which is another way of saying that Jesus is genuinely God: "very God of very God.")

ἀλλοιωτός, ή, όν, *subject to change* (LS 70), cf. ἀλλοιόω, *to change* (B 46)

ἀναστάντα, PAPMSA > ἀνιστημι

ἀνελθόντα, AAPMSA > ἀνέρχομαι

γεννηθέντα, APPMSA; γεννηθῆναι, APN > γεννάω

ἐγένετο, 3SAMI > γίνομαι

ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, AAPMSA > ἐνανθρωπέω, *to take on human form* (B 330)

κατελθόντα, AAPMSA > κατέρχομαι, *to come/go down*

κτιστός, ή, όν, *wrought, built, created* (LS 1003)

μονογενής, ές (adj), *only begotten, one and only, unique, only* (M&F sg declines: -ής, -οῦς, -εῖ, -ῆ)

ὁμοούσιος, ον, *of the same substance/stuff, consubstantial,* ctr. ὁμοιούσιος, ον, *of like [i.e., similar] substance* (Muller, *DLGTT,* 139; PL 958–60). These terms are absolutely essential to the significance of, and, indeed, the existence of the Nicene Creed. See below.

ὄντων, PAPNPG > εἰμί (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, "from non-being"? note the neut., one might have expected an article: "the things which did not exist"? The neut. is at least impersonal, whether the abstract "non-being" or nonexistent things.)

οὐσία, ας, ἡ, "that which exists and therefore has substance, *property, wealth"* (B 740), but used theologically (patristic and later) of *essence* (e.g., οὐσίας τοῦ πατρός, 'the essence of the Father')

σαρκωθέντα, APPMSA > σαρκόω, *to make fleshy* (LS 1585)

παθόντα, AAPMSA > πάσχω

τρεπτός, ή, όν, *liable to be turned or changed* (LS 1813), cf. τρέπω, *to turn* (B 1014)

πρίν (adv), *before*

φάσκοντας > φάσκω, *to say, assert, claim* (B 1050)

ὑπόστασις, εως, ἡ, *substantial nature, essence, subsistence, being, reality, individual, person* (B 1040; PL 1454–61)

*The infinitive εἶναι is used here in indirect discourse; it is also to be supplied/understood in the following line, which explains the accusative cases used there (objects of the inf, but υἱόν is acc of gen ref, so-called subj of inf).

Study Questions for Nicene Creed

1. What are the two main verbs that structure the entire creed?

2. Into what three sections do the first twenty lines divide?

3. What verb must be supplied (& where?) twice to make this division obvious (in both Greek and English)?

4. Why are there so many accusatives in lines 4–19?

5. In line 6, why *can't* the last three words be translated "the only-begotten Father"? (Give a *grammatical* reason, not a theological one.)

6. What word/s does the article τόν in line 15 govern?

homoousios (ὁμοούσιος): *of the same substance; consubstantial;* the term central to the argument of Athanasius against Arius and to the solution of the trinitarian problem offered at the Council of Necaea (A.D. 325). It ultimately indicates the numerical unity of essence in the three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, against the Arian contention of three distinct substances.... The Nicene usage of the term *homoousios* was probably limited to the refutation of Arianism and the affirmation of the substantial equality of the Father and the Son. In the theological development of trinitarian theology, however, the Nicene language was rapidly interpreted as pointing to the concept of the oneness and indivisibility of the Godhead; in addition, it was read in terms of the Western, Latin usage inherited from Tertullian, *unius substantiae,* of one substance. Both the Latin understanding of *homoousios* and the development of Greek doctrine typical of the Cappadocian fathers and of the Council of Constantinople (381) argue a numerical unity of indivisible divine essence in which the three divine persons subsist and which is fully present in each of the persons. Thus, *homoousios* indicates the fullness of the indivisible *ousia,* or substance, of the Godhead in each of the divine persons and implies the essential coinherence (*circumincessio...*) of the three persons" (Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* [Baker, 1985], 139–40).

ὁμοούσιος (PL 959, col. 1, I.B.1.), "In pre-Nicene usage, expressive of belief that what the Father is, that also the Son is."

(I.B.2.b.), re. 4th C. Christological controversies, "term was used as definition of full and absolute deity of Son; but acc[ording to] Athanasius it implied also substantial identity of Father and Son as solution of problem of divine unity.... [col. 2] Ath. balances two senses of ὁ.: *of one stuff* as against Arius, and *of one content* as against objection that former means existence of two gods...."

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν, πατέρα παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων. Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ· τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρός γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων· φῶς ἐκ φωτός, Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ· δι᾽ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο· τὸν δι᾽ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου, καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα· σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπέρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, καὶ παθόντα, καὶ ταφέντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τούς οὐρανοὺς, καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ πατρὸς, καὶ πάλιν ἐρχόμενον μετὰ δόξης κρίναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς· οὗ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται τέλος. Καὶ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, τὸ ζωοποιὸν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρός ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ προσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν. Εἰς μίαν ἁγίαν καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν· ὁμολογοῦμεν ἓν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν· προσδοκῶμεν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος. Ἀμήν.

The Creed of Chalcedon

The Chalcedonian Creed was adopted in AD 451, so this is technically out of the range of koine Greek proper; we are now in the era of Byzantine Greek. There are some characteristic changes in these alter forms of the language, such as perfects becoming practically equivalent to the aorist, εἰμί forms are changing from an irregular –μι verb formation to a more regular middle (deponent) form (-ω verb). The syntax has perhaps changed more than the lexical or morphological elements of the language. The changes in language take place gradually, however, so even though we've crossed the official dividing line, you will not find this text much more difficult than the Nicene Creed written at the very end of the koine Greek period. The fact that this is a traditional creedal formulation may also tend to produce a "conservative" flavor in the language used.

Ἑπόμενοι τοίνυν τοῖς ἁγίοις πατράσιν ἕνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ὁμολογεῖν υἱὸν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν

Χριστὸν συμφώνως ἅπαντες ἐκδιδάσκομεν, τέλειον τὸν αὐτὸν ἐν θεότητι καὶ τέλειον τὸν αὐτὸν

ἐν ἀνθρωπότητι, θεὸν ἀληθῶς καὶ ἄνθρωπον ἀληθῶς τὸν αὐτόν, ἐκ ψυχῆς λογικῆς καὶ σώματος,

ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ κατὰ τὴν θεότητα, καὶ ὁμοούσιον τὸν αὐτὸν ἡμῖν κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα,

κατὰ πάντα ὅμοιον ἡμῖν χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας· πρὸ αἰώνων μὲν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθέντα κατὰ τὴν

θεότητα, ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν τὸν αὐτὸν δι᾽ ἡμᾶς καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν ἐκ

Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου τῆς θεοτόκου κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα, ἕνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν Χριστόν, υἱόν,

κύριον, μονογενή, [ἐκ δύο φύσεων *or* ἐν δύο φύσεσιν*], ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαιρέτως,

ἀχωρίστως, γνωριζόμενον· οὐδαμοῦ τῆς τῶν φύσεων διαφορᾶς ἀνηρημένης διὰ τὴν ἕνωσιν,

σωζομένης δὲ μᾶλλον τῆς ἰδιότητος ἑκατέρας φύσεως καὶ εἰς ἓν πρόσωπον καὶ μίαν ὑπόστασιν

συντρεχούσης, οὐχ εἰς δύο πρόσωπα μεριζόμενον ἢ διαιρούμενον, ἀλλ᾽ ἕνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν υἱὸν καὶ

μονογενῆ, θεὸν λόγον, κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν· καθάπερ ἄνωθεν οἱ προφῆται περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ

αὐτὸς ἡμᾶς ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐξεπαίδευσε καὶ τὸ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῖν παραδέδωκε*

σύμβολον.

[*Schaff's text here reads καραδέδωκε, which is almost certainly a typographical error for παραδέδωκε.]

ἀδιαιρέτως, *without division, undividedly, inseparably, indivisibly,* adv of ἀδιαίρετος, *undivided, indivisible, undifferentiated* (LS 22; PL 33)
ἀνηρημένης, AMPFSG > ἀναιρέω, *to take away* (B 64)

ἀνθρωπότης, ητος, ἡ, abstract *humanity, mankind, human nature* (LS 142; PL 143)

ἄνωθεν (adv), *from above, from the beginning, again* (B 92)

ἅπας, ασα, αν, *all,* pl *all together,* strengthened form of πᾶς (B 98)

ἀσύγχυτως, *without confusion, unconfusedly* (i.e., without losing one's identity)*, while remaining distinct, without mixture,* adv of
   ἀσύγχυτος, ον, *not confused* (LS 264; PL 250)

ἀτρέπτως, *immutably, without change, unchangeably, not incurring/undergoing change,* ChristologicaL: "preserving both natures
   free from change," adv of ἄτρεπτος, ον, *immutable, unchangeable* (LS 272; PL 260)

ἀχωρίστως, *without separation/division, inseparably, indivisibly,* adv of ἀχώριστος, ον, *undivided, inseparable* (LS 298; PL 281)

διαιρέω, *to divide, distribute* (B 229)

διαφορά, ᾶς, ἡ, *difference, distinction, variance, disagreement* (B 239; LS 418; PL 363)

ἑκάτερος, α, ον, *both, each of two* (B 298)

ἐκδιδάσκω, *to teach thoroughly* (LS 504)

ἕνωσις, εως, ἡ, *union, unity,* "philos., *unity, simplicity,* of essence"; "Christol.; 1. *union* (term denotes both *act of union* in
   Inc[arnation] and the state of *being in union* of two natures in Christ" (PL 486–89; B 342–43)

ἐξεπαίδευσε, 3SAAI > ἐκπαιδεύω, *to train, teach* (LS 515)

ἕπομαι, mid, *to follow* (LS 678–79, = ἕπω B)

θεότης, ητος, ἡ, *divine character/nature, deity* (B 452; PL 637–39)

θεοτόκος, ου, ἡ, *God-bearing, God-bearer* (see below; LS 792; PL 639–41)

ἰδιότης, ητος, ἡ, *peculiar nature, property, specific character, attribute* (LS 818; PL 665–66)

παραδέδωκε, 3SRAI > παταδίδωμι, *to deliver, entrust, hand down, pass on, transmit* (B 761–63)

λογικός, ή, όν, *rational, endowed with reason, possessed of reason, intellectual* (PL 805; LS 1056; this use is somewhat different from
   NT's *thoughtful, metaphorical,* B 598)

μερίζω, *to divide, distribute* (B 631–32)

ὁμοούσιος, ον, *of the same substance* (see under Nicene Creed)

οὐδαμοῦ (note accent!), II. *in no way, by no means*, adv of οὐδαμός, ή, όν (LS 1268)

παρθένος, ου, ἡ, *virgin* (B 777)

πρόσωπον, ου, τό, *face, personal presence,* here = *person* (B 887–88; PL 1186–89), this term has a very wide range of usage in
   Patristic Greek, sometimes interchangeable with ὑπόστασις and/or φύσις.

συμφώνως, *harmoniously, unanimously, concordantly* (= adv form of σύμφωνος, ον, *harmonious*) (B 961; PL 1293)

συντρεχούσης, PAPFSG > συντρέχω, *to run together, concur, coincide, coalesce* (B 976; PL 1342)

τοίνυν, *then* (B 1009)

ὑπόστασις, εως, ἡ, *essence* (see under Nicene Creed)

On θεοτόκος, see Schaff, *Creeds,* 2:64 n. 3, "The predicate θεοτόκος, *the Bringer-forth of God ...* is directed against Nestorius, and
was meant originally not so much to exalt the Virgin Mary, as to assert the true divinity of Christ and the realness of the
Incarnation.... It is immediately after qualified by the phrase κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα..., in distinction from κατὰ τὴν θεότητα....
This is a very important limitation, and necessary to guard against Mariolatry, and the heathenish, blasphemous, and
contradictory notion that the uncreated, eternal God can be born in time."