

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 Θεόν, πατέρα παντοκράτορα,
ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς,
ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀορατῶν.
Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν
τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ
γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μονογενῆ·
τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐκ οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς·
Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ
καὶ φῶς ἐκ φωτός,
Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ·
γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα,
ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ·
δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο
τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῆ·
τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν
κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα, καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα·
παθόντα καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ,
ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς,
ἐρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκροὺς.
Καὶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα.
Τοὺς δε λέγοντας,
ὅτι ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν
καὶ πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν,
καὶ ὅτι ἔξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο·
ἢ ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας φάσκοντας εἶναι,*
ἢ κτιστόν, ἢ τρεπτόν ἢ ἀλλοιωτὸν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ,
ἀναθεματίζει ἡ ἀγία καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
And of all things visible and invisible.
And [we believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ
the Son of God
begotten of the Father, the only-begotten;
that is, of the essence of the Father;
God of God
and Light of Light,
very God of very God;
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father;
through whom all things came into being;
the things in heaven and the things on earth;
the one who for us men and for our salvation
came down and was incarnated, and was made man;
suffered and rose the third day,
ascended into heaven,
coming to judge the living and the dead.
And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit.
But the ones who say,
"There was [a time] when he was not,"
and "Before being begotten, he was not,"
and "He came to be out of not being";
or claiming that "He is of another substance or nature,"
or "The Son of God is created, changeable or alterable,"
the holy, catholic, and apostolic church anathematizes.

ἀληθινός, ἡ, ὄν, *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, ἡ, ὄν, *subject to change* (LS 70), cf. ἀλλοίωω, *to change* (B 46)

ἀναστάντα, PAPMSA > ἀνίστημι

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, ἡ, ὄν, *wrought, built, created* (LS 1003)

μονογενής, ἐς (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 > ἐμί (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 πατρὸς, ‘the essence of the Father’)

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

παθόντα, AAPMSA > πάσχω

τρέπτός, ἡ, ὄν, *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 νιόν 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 Nicaea (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 according 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 Θεόν, 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 πατρὸς 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 ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, καὶ παθόντα, καὶ ταφέντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ πατρὸς, καὶ πάλιν ἐρχόμενον μετὰ δόξης κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς· οὗ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται τέλος. Καὶ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, τὸ ζωοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ προσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλήσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν. Εἰς μίαν ἁγίαν καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν· ὁμολογοῦμεν ἕν 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.

Ἐπόμενοι 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 αὐτὸν, 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, μονογενῆ, [ἐκ δύο φύσεων *or* ἐν δύο φύσεσιν*], ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαίρετως, ἀχωρίστως, γνωριζόμενον· οὐδαμοῦ τῆς τῶν φύσεων διαφορᾶς ἀνηρημένης διὰ τὴν ἔνωσιν, σωζομένης δὲ μᾶλλον τῆς ιδιότητος ἐκατέρας φύσεως καὶ εἰς ἕν 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*.]

ἀδιαίρετως, *without division, undividedly, inseparably, indivisibly*, adv of ἀδιαίρετος, *undivided, indivisible, undifferentiated* (LS 22; PL 33)

ἀνηρημένης, AMPFSG > ἀναιρέω, *to take away* (B 64)

ἀνθρωπότης, ἡτος, ἡ, *abstract humanity, mankind, human nature* (LS 142; PL 143)
 ἄνωθεν (adv), *from above, from the beginning, again* (B 92)
 ἅπας, ἅσα, ἅν, *all, pl all together, strengthened form of πᾶς* (B 98)
 ἀσύγχυτος, *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 ἀτρέπτος, ον, *immutable, unchangeable* (LS 272; PL 260)
 ἀχώριστος, *without separation/division, inseparably, indivisibly*, adv of ἀχώριστος, ον, *undivided, inseparable* (LS 298; PL 281)
 διαίρειω, *to divide, distribute* (B 229)
 διαφορά, ἄς, 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)
 ἐξεπαίδευσεν, 3SAAI > ἐκπαιδεύω, *to train, teach* (LS 515)
 ἔπομαι, mid, *to follow* (LS 678–79, = ἔπω B)
 θεότης, ἡτος, ἡ, *divine character/nature, deity* (B 452; PL 637–39)
 θεοτόκος, ου, ἡ, *God-bearing, God-bearer* (see below; LS 792; PL 639–41)
 ιδιότης, ἡτος, 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, ἡ, ὄν, *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, ἡ, ὄν (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.”