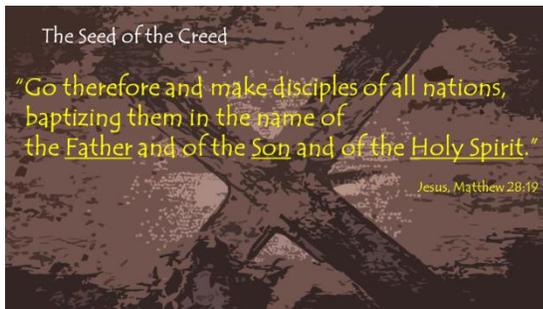


**CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH**

“This I believe!” - At Ascension this Lent we are focusing on the Apostles’ Creed, the baptismal creed of the church.

The *seed* of the *creed* goes back to Jesus himself when he commanded his disciples, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”



How do people come into the Christian church? Through faith in Jesus and baptism in the name of the triune God.

It wasn't only Christians who were doing some kind of baptism. There were other "baptisms" out there. A true Christian baptism is one that is done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus himself gave us these words to be used

It is true that later in the Bible, we read of examples of new Christians being baptized simply in the name of Jesus. But recall that fuller Christian understanding is that anytime we are talking about Jesus as God, the concept of the Trinity is also implied and understood.

Eventually, from Jesus' command and from other key verses of the Bible, the church's teaching on the Trinity took shape.

What eventually became the fully developed Apostles' Creed had its roots in what is an obviously earlier version of the same creed called "The Old Roman Creed." We have documented use of in Rome from AD 180, which means it is likely even older than that. It was the creed used for baptisms then just like the Apostles' Creed is still used for baptisms today.

The creed developed because the church needed it! Why? Several reasons. One was simply because we are called to teach the faith to others. The creed developed in order that new converts could learn the true faith and would confess the true faith at their baptism.

The creed was needed also because the church has always had two kinds of enemies - External and Internal.

- External enemies persecute the church.
- Internal enemies are preachers and teachers who mislead the church into close-yet-still false belief, heresy.
- The external enemies are typically the less dangerous of the two, that is, less dangerous to the spiritual health of the church.
- Already in those first centuries there were many heretical teachers seeking to corrupt and mislead the church with alien agendas. In the pages of the New Testament itself you can read how the Apostle Paul is already battling false teachers in the church.
- By the second century, the church had even more kinds of false teaching to defend against. Thus, the creed was needed in that defense.

You can see how the creed still retains the trinitarian structure of Jesus' command in Matthew 28 – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and then just adds some of the important basics of what the Bible teaches about each.

The section about God the Father is the shortest of the three articles.

- It's the shortest because there was not much controversy at the time over these basic ideas about God. So, not as much needed to be said.
- In that day, these beliefs about God were commonly held by many non-Christians as well. That God existed. That words like Father and Creator were so such obvious ways to describe God, they seemed self-evident.



In the modern world, however, each of these words – God, Father, and Creator - have become controversial in some way.

### God

- Of course, we believe in God, but now days many nonbelievers argue God does not exist.
- Even when people say they do believe in of "God," unless they add more definition, you have no idea what they might mean by that word, God. It sounds like the same word, but it can mean something completely different than what the Bible means by it.
- Trinity, the Three-in-One, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – That's what we as Christians mean by that word God.

## Father

- “Father” has become a controversial word as well. For two reasons. We need to be sensitive to both reasons.
- One reason is that for some people, the word father is an extremely painful word due to their own traumatic bad-father experience – an absent or abusive father.
- For them, what it is intended to be a good word, isn’t.
- The other reason that father has become a controversial word is because God is neither male nor female, but the word father, like many of our God words, is gender specific.
- It’s important to know that the Bible also uses feminine imagery for God and at least one feminine-form Old Testament name of God, “El Shaddai.”
- Gender pronouns are a hot topic, including when they are used for God, and for good reason. Following the lead of the Bible, we still often say “he,” but God is not really a “he,” nor a “she,” and “it” is also not fitting. This is not really a God-problem but a handicap of the English language itself.

Altogether, these issues leave us as the church in a tricky place.

- We need to be sensitive. Yet, using the words the Bible gives us to use is also important, and “Father” is one the most important God-words Scripture has given us.
- Moreover, Jesus himself instructed us to use this word. In the Gospel of John alone, Jesus calls God “Father” over 100 times!
- Overall, we want to continue to find a way to claim the good that Jesus intends by the word, Father, yet, we also want to do so as sensitively as possible... and hopefully, in such a way that helps even those of you wounded by your earthly father know that you still do have a good and loving Heavenly Father. You are not fatherless.

## Creator

- Creator also has become a controversial word due to the bad blood that has grown up in the creation vs evolution debates.
- In the Sunday adult classes I lead, we are able to take all the time we need to discuss issues in depth, and the science vs religion issue is one we’ve spent a lot of time on over the years. Please do talk to me if you want to talk about any of these in greater depth.

Have you seen any of those “keep calm” posters or t-shirts? The original was a WWII British poster from 1939 that said, “Keep Calm and Carry On.” There are many Keep Calm sayings now. My recent favorite is, “Keep Calm and Drop the Rope.” What does that mean?

- Well, have you ever been in an argument that has everyone all hot and riled up, and then suddenly you realize, this is a dumb argument? Why are we arguing about this?
- That’s what “Keep Calm and Drop the Rope” is all about. Just drop the tug-of-war rope if it’s a hurtful but unnecessary argument.

When it comes to the science vs religion arguments, please “Keep Calm and Drop the Rope.”

- Can a Christian be a scientist, and can a scientist be a Christian? Yes, of course.
- Can a Christian accept what science teaches about the processes involved in the formation of the universe and the evolutionary development of living beings? Yes, of course. Just drop the rope of that unnecessary argument.
- Can we as Christians be faithful to the biblically intended theological purpose and teachings of the creation chapters of Genesis and still be okay with science. Yes, of course. That’s a rope you can drop, too.
- Can God still be Creator of a universe of natural and scientific laws and processes? Yes, of course. Yes, we can still claim and confess that word, Creator, in a fully educated way.

“I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.”

- This is the faith we believe. This is the faith we eagerly teach and proudly defend. This is the faith in which we baptize. This is the faith that unifies as a Christian church. This is the personal “I believe” becomes our shared “we believe.”
- You are not alone in your faith. We are together in this one, holy, and apostolic faith.

Amen