

*This sermon is based on the Diocese of Europe's Lent Course 2025,
'Celebrating Nicaea: seeing afresh the faith which holds us together',
written by Revd Dr Donald McFadyen, and the associated course resources.*

The Nicene Creed – 5

Readings

Colossians 1: 15-20

John 14: 15-20

We're nearly at the end of the journey – today's sermon is the fifth and last in a series we've had over the last few weeks about the Nicene Creed. And the question I'd like you to have in your mind today is, 'So what? What difference does the Nicene Creed make to how we live as Christians?'

Now, just in case (like me) you've missed some of these sermons, let me begin by reminding you where we've got to so far.

You might like to refer to a copy of the Nicene Creed while I'm talking.

In week 1

I talked about the history of the Nicene Creed, and the Council of Nicaea 1700 (and one) years ago that led to it being written. It was the result of passionate debate and it was about 60 more years until the Nicene Creed as we know it, was produced, and it's still the most widely used creed today. It unites us – unites Christians all over the world – and celebrates all that God is.

Next,

Ben and Jo B looked at the first section of the creed, 'We believe in one God' and all that this implies for the relationship between God the Father and Jesus. This 'one-ness' of God is fundamental to the Christian faith (and many other faiths too). The earth and our lives aren't subject to the whims of multiple Gods at odds with one another. All of creation is sustained, in love, by the one God who made it and made us. As Christians we believe not only in the one-ness of our Creator, but that this one God is someone we can know personally – who invites us into a relationship.

In our third sermon

Ben started on that big chunk in the middle of the creed which talks about Jesus, and in particular the first part of that, which concentrates on the divinity of Jesus.

Jesus is 'God from God' – and the phrase 'eternally begotten' is to help us understand that Jesus was always with God – he didn't come into being at Christmas!

Our reading from Colossians today explains that the Jesus Christ we see in the gospels is the image of the God we can't see. That Jesus has 'the fullness of God' dwelling in him.

And then, in the fourth sermon

Jane talked more about the humanity of Jesus. She talked about him being tired and asleep before calming the storm, and reminded us that in the gospels we hear of a very human Jesus, who gets

angry, disappointed, frustrated, is sad, has normal human problems with his family, gets distressed and anxious, and weeps...just like we do.

And Jesus' humanity matters in terms of God being among us and one of us, in order to redeem us and bring us back to Himself – and this section of the creed takes us through the key events of Jesus life (and death) which we mark over the course of a year in our cycle of festivals - Jesus came and lived and died 'for our salvation'.

So today, we come to the last two short sections of the creed, about the Holy Spirit and the Church – a lot packed into just a few lines – lines that were pretty much missing altogether from the first version of the Nicene Creed.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus is talking to his disciples shortly before his death, and he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit – he calls it 'the Counsellor' – in other words, one that gives guidance and wisdom – the Spirit of truth, Jesus calls it – and best of all, it's a gift to be with us for ever.

It's a gift we're called to treasure and allow to grow within us. The Bible uses lots of different images to illustrate the character of the Holy Spirit – wind, breath, fire, water, a dove; and the thing they have in common is energy and movement, and they help us understand the Spirit's role as the source of life.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, we say. Who proceeds from the Father and the Son (although that last part, 'and from the Son' has been contested in the worldwide church across the centuries). The important point we all agree on though, is that the Holy Spirit is God too – and this is the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity – the one God we understand and experience as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We're familiar with Pentecost being the day we celebrate the Holy Spirit descending on the disciples, and we sometimes think of it as the birthday of the Church – when the early Christian church first got going.

And so in the creed we come to the Church. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. Perhaps this sounds awkward – surely we don't believe in the Church in the sense that we believe in God or in Christ? The Church isn't another reality in the same way as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but it is a community we can trust, with Christ at its head. St Paul often uses imagery of the human body to describe the body of Christ – a body in which we all have our own unique part to play.

But what do all those adjectives mean?

one there is only one Christian Church, with one head, Jesus Christ.

holy the church is set apart for the purposes of Christ, sanctified or purified by the Holy Spirit – although that doesn't mean it's perfect

catholic this means 'universal' (not to be confused with Roman Catholic, which is a part of the universal Church)

apostolic the church comes through the apostles, the earliest Christians.

And we can read in the book of Acts (*chapter 2: 42-46*) that the early church was devoted to the **apostles' teaching**, which would have included Jesus' earthly teaching plus what he taught the apostles in his 40 days of resurrection appearances; **fellowship** including the sharing of material goods; the **breaking of bread**, which likely covers both the Lord's Supper and a larger fellowship meal, and **prayers** in house meetings and also in the temple.

So let's go back to that question:

What difference does the Nicene Creed make to how we live as Christians?'

In the Nicene Creed we are saying that what we see in the life and ministry of Jesus is nothing less than the life and mission of God on earth. The life of Jesus can be depended on completely to reveal God to us.

God chose to come and live within his creation, and in doing that, God gives the material creation a renewed significance as 'good' – the word used lots of times in the creation story in Genesis. The creed affirms that God's commitment to the material world is so great that God is willing to send his Son to die for it. God chooses to redeem and raise us and all creation.

This has far-reaching implications for ethics, the way we live in the world: our relationships with other people, and with our material surroundings. God becoming a human being in Christ shows us what made in the image of God truly looks like. We should treat *every* person as part of God's family; in each other we encounter Christ himself. The way we treat our material world is also profoundly affected, as we come to see our world as created by God for us to look after, not as an endless resource to consume.

As we come to the end of this series, I hope that this journey through the creed will have strengthened our faith and deepened our understanding, and that we may all feel inspired to live out its truths with renewed conviction and joy.

Our collect today (Trinity 9) is particularly apt this week as we've thought about the Holy Spirit; the Church, and how we might live in the light of the creed we profess.

*Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

Amen

Wendy Middleton, August 2026