

In the beginning when God began to create...Gen 1 v 1

Then God said "let there be light and there was light....
God spoke it, willed it into being.

John 1 1-3a

How do you put into words what you believe in.
How do you put into words God, , who is the creative word

But how to put into words who you believe God is
Words will never be sufficient , and our amazing , but small brains can never be
able to hold it all together
But we have to try.
We have focussed on the Father , and amazingly that the creator is in some
way a relationship of self-giving love.
Moving into that this creator should choose to become a human.

But at the same time hold onto that Jesus is divine.

Most of us love simple statements , simple deductive reductionist arguments ,
to help us feel safe and in control. Even if we know it is always more complex.

in retracing the steps of the Nicene debate we can appreciate at a new depth the wonders of who
God is and what God has done in sending Christ.

Because this section of the Creed is so long and significant, we're going to look at it over two
sessions. In this third session we'll examine the words which relate to Jesus'
divinity, and in the
fourth session we'll consider his humanity.

'We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ'

We are used to hearing the word 'Lord' in church to speak about Jesus. Stop to think about it. Try to
sit with it for a few minutes, and feel what the word means to you in your relationship with God.

QUESTION: What does the word 'Lord' mean to you, and what does it mean to those outside the
church?

In human relationships the word Lord describes a person who has authority, control
or power over us. Few of us, however, use the word 'Lord' except in relation to our faith. Of course,
it is a vital word in the Bible, both in the Old Testament where it is used to identify and address God,
and in the New Testament where it is applied to Jesus. Here are just three examples:

i) Jesus' birth

The 'angel of the Lord' addresses the shepherds, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,

who is the Messiah, the Lord.' (Luke 2.10-11)

ii) Post-resurrection appearance to the disciples

Thomas the disciple exclaims to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20. 28)

iii) The post-Pentecost preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles

Peter the disciple, addressing Cornelius, an officer in the Roman army, announces, 'Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all' (Acts 10. 36)

The title 'one Lord' in the Creed is therefore consistent with Scripture and deeply significant: it is ascribing divinity to Jesus Christ.

In Roman times....

Medieval times... Lord-ship, kneeling, bowing down, also being brought on side, united, given a mission

'Eternally begotten of the Father'

The word 'begotten' may sound slightly old fashioned to our ears, but we still hear it used. For example, if we say 'it is hoped that the King might beget an heir by his new Queen', we know that it is hoped that the King may bring a child into existence through a process of reproduction. Here another of those differences of interpretation between Athanasius and Arius arises.

Arius reasoned that if Jesus was 'begotten of the Father', then God the Father must have come before Jesus. Literally, Jesus was secondary. Logically we would agree: if a son comes from their father, their father must already exist.

Psalm 2.7 shows us that the idea of the King of God's people being 'begotten' of God does not arrive with Jesus; it is much older. Yet, the writers of the Creed wanted to say something more about this Son to differentiate him from the kings who had gone before him. So, they added the word 'eternally' so that Jesus is not just begotten but is 'eternally begotten' of the Father.

The phrase 'eternally begotten' is very strange, trying to express what ultimately has to be

accepted as a mystery, the origins of Jesus Christ. Normally if you beget a child, it's an event that happens in the moment when the child is conceived. The word 'eternally' describes an action with no beginning or ending. Putting the two words together seems to make no sense.

Back to words. My brother – big brother, nearly 10 years old. I always looked up to him. He loved me and led me astray in so many great ways.

One that stuck with me. Juxtaposition of incongruities. Putting next to each other ,, of things that seem opposites. (The "juxtaposition of incongruities" is a powerful literary and philosophical technique where contrasting elements are placed side-by-side to provoke thought, highlight stark differences, or create humour. By forcing clashing concepts, eras, or ideas together, it challenges the brain's expectations, often revealing deeper truths or social contradictions)

There's something going on here to do with time and existence. The words are conveying that Jesus was indeed begotten of God the Father, but that this has been so forever. Unlike a human birth it did not have a beginning, it was simply always so: Jesus is the Son of the Father in eternity. This is how God

is. To grasp this reality requires that we engage our imaginations and allow ourselves to think in a new way, to think about a divine reality. This divine reality doesn't map neatly onto our human experience, our experience as creatures who inhabit space and time.

Arius would not or could not open his mind to this possibility. For him, if Jesus was 'begotten of the Father' then he was inferior to God, was part of the created order - a creature of God - and there had therefore been a time when he did not exist. The phrase, 'Eternally begotten of the Father' is in the Nicene Creed to say the opposite. Significantly, the Appendix of the 'Creed of Nicaea' (the early version of the Nicene Creed which we looked at in Session 1) is even more explicit in refuting the beliefs of Arius and his supporters, saying they should be put out of the church:

And those who say 'There once was when He [Jesus] was not' and, 'Before being begotten He was not,' and 'He came into being out of nothing'....the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

To reinforce the point, see if people can identify verses in the Bible where Jesus talks of himself, or is spoken of, in ways claiming preexistence.

Two examples are:

i) The prologue of John's gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. (*John 1. 1-2*)

ii) Jesus talking of his relationship to the patriarch, Abraham:

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.' (*John 8. 58*)

In this second example, in using the phrase 'I am' Jesus was deliberately referring back to the encounter Moses had with God in Exodus 3. There God speaks through a burning bush, and tells Moses that his name is, 'I AM WHO I AM.' Scholars have debated the meaning of this name ever since, but amongst other things it is conveying the eternal existence of God, and his faithful nature to be with his people. When Jesus used the same words, people were so clear that he was claiming divinity for himself, and thus committing blasphemy, that 'they picked up stones to throw at him'. (*John 8. 59*)

'God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God'

To our ears these words, too, are strange. We don't find the phrase 'God from God' in the Bible, nor 'Light from Light', nor 'true God from true God'. These phrases seem to be using words in a way that is half way between poetry and prose. Try simply to understand the words as conveying something relatively straightforward. And ask yourself once more, what did those who included them in the Creed wish to say?

QUESTION: At face value what do these three phrases say to you?

DISCUSSION: These phrases are more straightforward than those immediately before. They are affirming as clearly as possible that Jesus is indeed divine. Taking them in turn:

God from God

Whilst Jesus is not part of God's creation, neither does he have his origin apart from 'the one God': He is "God from God," which is to say, he is God the Son from God the Father. The Son derives his being from the Father, in such a way that he is just as fully God as God the Father is - as a human son is just as fully human as his father is.[1]

Light from Light

This phrase is obviously metaphorical, and perhaps picks up on another phrase describing

Jesus in the book of Hebrews:

He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being
(Hebrews 1.3)

True God from true God

Again this phrase echoes a verse of Scripture, which is part of a prayer of Jesus to the Father:

This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. **(John 17. 3)**

'Begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.'

Three more phrases, familiar yet strange.

QUESTIONS:

In the first phrase, here again we have that word 'begotten', but used in a slightly different way to say 'The Son is this, and is not that'. What's being specified here?

In the second phrase we find an unusual word, 'Being'. What are the writers trying to tell us with this word?

The third phrase is a very clear statement relating to the making of things, i.e. the creation. How does this differ from what Arius maintained about Jesus' relationship to creation?

DISCUSSION:

Begotten, not made

Here we return to the word 'begotten', apparently to emphasise that Jesus is not part of all that God created but has instead existed forever. He is in a unique relationship to God, as God's one and only Son, and this has always been so. There never was a time when he did not exist, and a moment when he began to exist. Jesus has always existed. This distinguishes him from the rest of the creation which was indeed 'made'.

Of one Being with the Father

One of the strangest but most significant phrases in the Creed, what does this mean? Philip Cary explains its significance with helpful clarity:

The Son has every essential feature of divinity, and not some different kind of divinity than the Father. That is the sense [of 'of one Being'] that excluded Arius' teaching, as well as every other theology that subordinated the Son to the Father as if he were a secondary or lesser divine being.[2]

Through him all things were made

From our earlier sessions we can see that these words emphasise again Jesus' involvement in creation, a distinctly divine attribute. Perhaps these words surprise us a little because we have fallen into the trap (which we'll explore further in Session 5) of associating God much more with the spiritual aspect of life than the physical. Accordingly we have taken less notice than we should have of the New Testament's insistence on Jesus' involvement in, and even him being the very reason for, the material world. Two verses which make this point clear:
All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

(John 1.3)

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. (*Colossians 1. 15-16*)

Hymnody

Verse 3 from Hymn to the Trinity by Bishop Geoffrey Rowell, speaks of the Son. In the light of what you've discovered in this session, which words strike you?

God the Son by Love begotten,
Loved from all eternity,
Life outpoured for our salvation,
Through whom all was brought to be,
Perfect image of the Father,
God from God, and Light from Light,
Healing through our human weakness,
For sin's blindness giving sight.

To end

The central message and teaching of this part of the Creed, which can be lost in its somewhat forensic formulation, is something beautiful which originates in

love: Canon Dr Clare Amos

"The Father becomes Father - becomes himself - by eternally giving all that is his to the Son, as the Son becomes himself by eternally receiving all that he is from the Father.

This is the power of divine love, the one love of God in which the Holy Spirit too fully participates, receiving all that he is and has from the Father, who is the source of all that is divine.[4]

Finish with a prayer.

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