

We O Believe

RESOURCE PACK



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

This Resource Pack is designed to support parishes, chaplaincies and small groups seeking to explore the Nicene Creed, particularly in this 1700th anniversary year.

It accompanies the We Believe: Exploring the Nicene Creed booklet published by Church House Publishing, available now individually or in packs of 10 via www.chpublishing.co.uk

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HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The Nicene Creed is part of our experience of going to church Sunday by Sunday. When we say it, we align ourselves with all those Christians across the world and back through all the generations who belong to God's 'household of faith'. And because we've said it so often, there is a danger we take the words for granted and overlook the radical content of what we are saying.

This resource is designed to help your church engage with the Nicene Creed, either around Trinity Sunday or at any other suitable time. You can use it alongside We Believe resources or on its own.

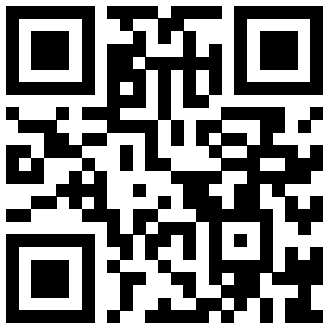
In this resource, you will find a plan for five sessions which can be used for sermons, in a group, or with children and young people. The sessions introduce the Nicene Creed and explore the key aspects of Christian belief: in the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. The appendix provides some ideas for creative engagement through art and music.

Contents

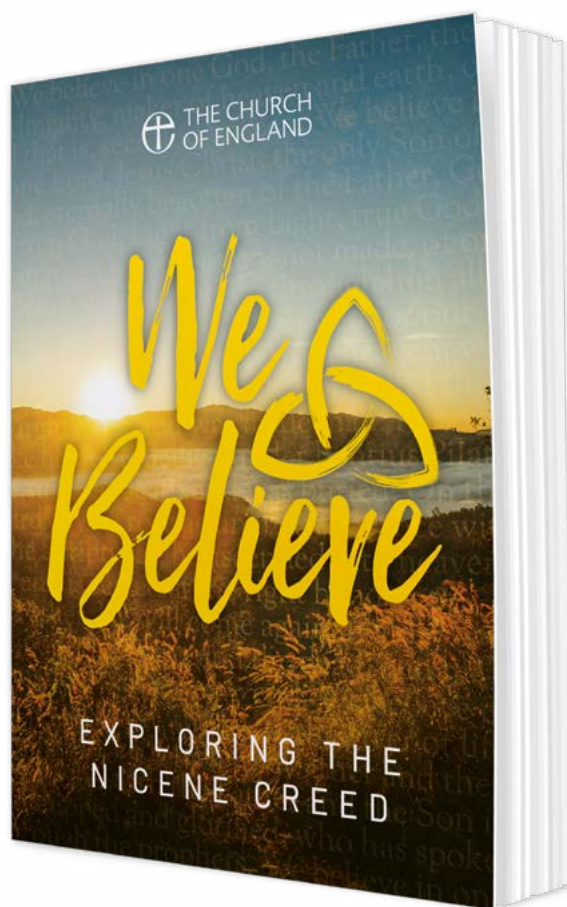
1	<i>What is the Nicene Creed?</i>	3
2	<i>The Father</i>	8
3	<i>The Son</i>	12
4	<i>The Holy Spirit</i>	18
5	<i>The Church, Baptism, Resurrection, and Eternal Life</i>	23
6	<i>Art and Music</i>	27
7	<i>The Nicene Creed: A Storyboard</i>	32

GOING FURTHER 39

Through Bible readings, questions for reflection, and activity ideas, we hope that this resource will help you find a way to celebrate the Nicene Creed that is right for your church or group, in this significant anniversary year.



Find details of all the
We Believe resources
and more via:
www.cofe.io/NiceneCreed



PART 1 WHAT IS THE NICENE CREED?

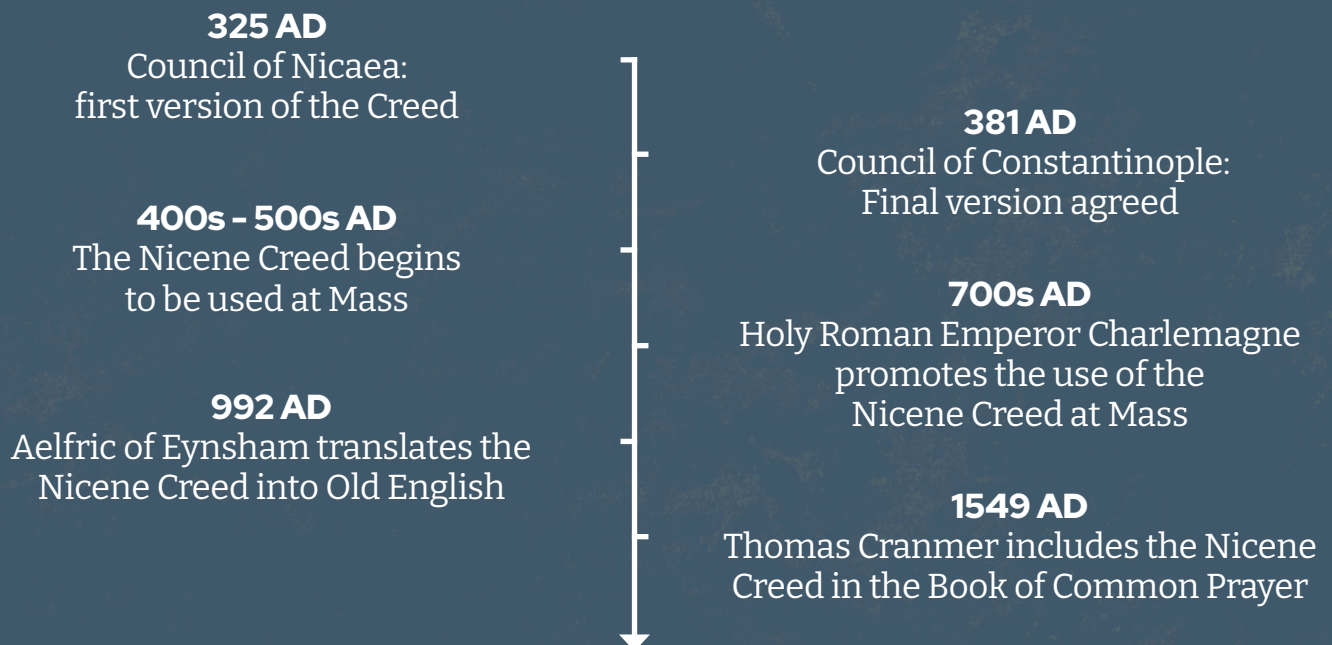
If using the 'We Believe' booklet, these sections correspond to pp. 4-63.

Background

There is a threefold shape to Christian believing, which arose through the experience of God in prayer and worship. The Nicene Creed was written to explain who God is and what it means for us as the Church. The threefold shape of Christian believing is explicit in the fourfold shape of the Nicene Creed.

It is one of three key Christian expressions of belief, and shares its main points with the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed.

The Creed was written in 325 AD and later became part of regular worship:



THE NICENE CREED

- ⌘ 325 AD
- ⌘ Originates from the Council of Nicaea, which explained that Christ is fully God and fully human (against heresies which said otherwise)
- ⌘ Focuses on the nature of Christ and his purpose

THE APOSTLES' CREED

- ⌘ Fifth century (based on fourth century Old Roman Creed)
- ⌘ Originates from professions of faith used in baptism and confirmation
- ⌘ Follows the structure of the Nicene Creed, but shorter

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

- ⌘ Fifth century
- ⌘ Uncertain origin
- ⌘ More detailed theology than the Nicene Creed
- ⌘ Focuses on the persons of the Trinity and the nature of Christ
- ⌘ Stresses the need for worship

The Nicene Creed proclaims our belief that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one. Below are some ideas to help you reflect on what that means.

Passages

Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6.12

Jesus said to him, 'If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'

Mark 9.23-24

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

‘You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.’

Revelation 4

Discussion Questions

- ⌘ Do we view faith more as a private matter, or as one that has a bearing on how we see the world? Why might that be?
- ⌘ What is the connection between what we believe and how we should act?
- ⌘ How might saying the Nicene Creed with others give us a sense of belonging to a wider community?
- ⌘ What prayers or songs we use regularly in our worship address God as the Trinity? When do we say them? Why might this be significant?
- ⌘ Have a look at the different images of the Trinity on p. 27 – or find your own! Which of them speak to you? Why?
- ⌘ What is the role and purpose of the Nicene Creed in the twenty-first century, when beliefs are considered above all ‘personal’ and individual spirituality is often considered more important than belonging to a community of faith?
- ⌘ What positive role does the Nicene Creed have for Christians engaging with people of other faiths and of no religious belief – especially those who seem to have a clear understanding of who Jesus was and wasn’t?

Suggestions for taking our discipleship forward

MUSIC STYLES: *Play a selection from the music resource section of the Nicene Creed in different languages and musical styles. Ask yourself individually, or in a group:*

- ⌘ *What impact does hearing the same ancient words sung or spoken in different styles and languages have on your relationship with these words in English?*
- ⌘ *How might hearing these words spoken and sung by diverse groups and individuals strengthen a sense of connection with Christians of other nationalities and traditions?*
- ⌘ *Were there any words or phrases that had particular impact as you heard them? If so, why do you think that was?*
- ⌘ *What do you think of the statement that 'No one part of the Church owns the words of the Nicene Creed – it belongs to everyone.'*

Activities for Children and Young People

THREE-IN-ONE WORDS: *Play a game of “taboo”, making others guess a word that has three possible meanings which look or sound the same. For example: Bank = a place to store money; the edge of the river; the turning of a plane in the sky.*

BIBLE THREES: *In groups give out the stories from the Bible which involve threes in some way. Each group could try to act out (in under one minute) this story without words and see if the others can guess which Bible story is being presented.*

Prayers

I vow and consecrate to God all that is in me:
my memory and my actions to God the Father;
my understanding and my words to God the Son;
my will and my thoughts to God the Holy Spirit.

I consecrate my heart, my body,
my tongue, my senses and all my sorrows
to the sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ,
who consented to be betrayed
into the hands of wicked men
and to suffer the torment of the Cross for me.

St Francis de Sales

Lord God, thou hast built in heaven and earth a single Church
of truth and love and holy Spirit;
one family and communion, whose temple is the Lamb,
one body indivisible, here and beyond,
the Body of thy dear Son.
Our souls are thine: gather them into one;
bring us into the one truth,
bind us by the one Love;
perfect us with the one Spirit;
and within thy single Church built of thy grace,
grant us thy peace.

Eric Milner-White

PART 2 GOD THE FATHER

***We believe in one God,
the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.***

Passages

The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding... [where were you] when the morning stars sang together, and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?'

Job 38.1, 4, 7

This, then, is how you should pray:

'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,'

Matthew 6.9

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,[a] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 John 3.2

This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

John 1.14

Commentary

The first section of the Nicene Creed takes us back to the beginning, in every sense of the word.

WE BELIEVE: The text of the Creed in Common Worship begins in the first-person plural, as in the original Greek text, 'We believe', and this recalls the fact that Christian belief is something that is shared, not only shared with other Christians around the world, but also a faith that stretches back in time to the early Church.

FATHER: The first tenet of belief speaks of God as Father, and here the word does not refer to fatherhood in a literal sense but reminds us that when we think or speak of God, we are speaking of relationships. Jesus called God 'Abba', 'Father', and we echo this as the adopted children of God when we pray: 'Our Father'.

CREATOR: The word 'Father' points us to who God is, namely that perfect community of creative love. And so, we move to affirm that God is the maker of all things: the vast cosmos as well as our common home, planet earth. In affirming God as our creator, we acknowledge our kinship with all the living things on earth (Genesis 2.18-19). The natural world is not given to us to do with as we please, for 'the earth is the Lord's' (see Psalm 24.1-2) and this, in part, is the meaning of the Greek word translated as 'Almighty' in the Creed. And so, the first line of the Creed takes us back to the beginning of creation, and in doing so takes us forward, as we shall see, to the working out of God's purposes for his creation in time and space, in human history and around the globe.

THE FATHER AND THE SON: John echoes Genesis 1 in the opening of his Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word'. The Gospel writer speaks of Christ as God's eternal word, 'by whom all things were made', affirming the Son's unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This 'beginning', this principal divine act, not only continues as God holds the universe in being, moment by moment, but points forward to God's promised future, when the Holy Spirit will renew creation, and all things will be perfected in Christ in a 'new heaven and earth'.

For further reflections, see the We Believe booklet, pp. 10-17.

Discussion Questions

- ⌄ What is it that makes you wonder at the marvels of creation, the vastness of space and the variety of forms and colours of life on earth? How does this help you to connect with God?
- ⌄ What do you think of the relationship between science and religion? Do they relate well together, or are they more in conflict?
- ⌄ In relation to the created world, what does it mean for us today: 'to till it and keep it' (Genesis 2.15)?

Suggestions for taking our discipleship forward

CARE FOR CREATION: *Get involved in, or initiate a community exercise to care for creation, such as a litter pick, or a nature conservation project. Be mindful of food waste, and get involved with an organisation that provides food for the homeless.*

SAY GRACE: *Say a grace before meals when you gather at table for a meal.*

BREADMAKING: *Bake bread to share with your church community.*

DRAMATIC READING: *Prepare and perform a dramatic reading of Genesis 1. Allocate a single reader for each 'day' in the passage, a narrator, and a chorus of voices to say the repeated refrains: 'and there was evening and there was morning' and 'God saw that it was good', as well as the announcement in the final verse that God's creation was 'very good.'*

Activities for Children and Young People

MAKE A COLLAGE: *Use magazines and newspapers to make a collage based on Genesis 1. If working in a group, you can split the days among children and young people.*

BUBBLE PRAYERS: *Blow bubbles while saying thank-you prayers for all different parts of creation.*

REMIX A PSALM: *Rewrite Psalm 148 in your own words to reflect what you see in your own local area.*

Prayer

O glorious God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
your whole creation sings your marvellous work;
may heaven's praise so echo in our hearts
that we may be good stewards of the earth;
through Jesus Christ by whom all things were made,
and in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.
Amen.

PART 3 **GOD THE SON**

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

Passages

[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. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1.15-20

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

Philippians 2.5-8

Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.’

John 8.58

Jesus answered, ‘... For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’

John 18.37

‘No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.’

1 Corinthians 12.3

Commentary

As the opening statement of the Nicene Creed emphasizes God’s ‘father-ness’, its second statement focusses on “the one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God”.

SON OF GOD: In the Gospels, the term “Son of God” is used 76 times (65 times by Jesus himself); Jesus proclaims that God is his father 54 times.

THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY: The background to the formulation of the Nicene Creed in 325 AD was the suggestion made seven years earlier by a presbyter named Arius that Jesus couldn’t be God, but merely a servant of God. One purpose of the Nicene Creed was to put an end to these ideas by gathering the universal church around a shared understanding that the Father and the Son are equal.

GOD IS ONE: In case some Christians might make the mistake of thinking that we now believe in two Gods (God the Father and God the Son), the statements, both literal ‘God from God’, ‘true God from true God’ and metaphorical ‘Light from Light’, make it clear: God is utterly and irrevocably One. As David Jenkins, a former bishop of Durham put it: “God is. God is as he is in Jesus, so there is hope.”

The Nicene Creed expands on the brevity of the older Apostles’ Creed, which described Jesus more simply as ‘[God’s] only Son, our Lord’ with six statements that show how Jesus’ nature precisely reflects the nature of God:

- ✠ Jesus is... **eternally begotten of the Father,**
- ✠ Jesus is... **God from God, Light from Light,**
- ✠ Jesus is... **true God from true God,**
- ✠ Jesus is... **begotten, not made,**
- ✠ Jesus is... **of one Being with the Father;**
- ✠ Jesus is... **through him all things were made.**

JESUS’ LIFE: After this, we move through the events of Jesus’ life in order. In the Nicene Creed, the events of Jesus’ life are recounted in the same way as in the Apostles’ Creed, but expanded and placed into a deeper context: they answer not just the ‘what?’ but the ‘why?’ and the ‘so what?’ questions surrounding Jesus’ life.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: The last statement about the historical life of Jesus takes us into the future – and it places us who say these words within the story of Jesus’ own life past, present and future: ‘He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.’

For further reflections, see the We Believe booklet, pp. 18-43.

Discussion Questions

- ✠ In the apostle Paul’s letters, the phrases ‘in Christ’, ‘in the Lord’, ‘in Christ Jesus’, and ‘in him’ appear more than two hundred times. What might living ‘in Christ’ mean? What might it look like – for you individually and for the community of faith in which you belong?

- ⌘ “Jesus was God spelling himself out in language humanity could understand.” - Samuel D. Gordon (1859 –1936) **How helpful do you find this statement trying to describe the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, God’s Son? How important is it to you personally and your own faith to define the relationship of God the Father and God the Son?**
- ⌘ Richard Rohr (b. 1943) wrote “You can only know anything by meeting it in its precise and irreplaceable thisness and honouring it there. Each individual act of creation is a once-in-eternity choice on God’s part.” How does the “thisness” of the story of the life of Jesus in the Nicene Creed make you feel? Do you think it makes seeing God at work in the particularities of your own situation more or less likely, and why?

Suggestions for taking our discipleship forward

JESUS PRAYER: *Pray and meditate on the words of the Jesus Prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner’.*

THE DREAM OF THE ROOD: Explore ‘The Dream of the Rood’, an early English poem on the Crucifixion. How does the way it presents Christ make you feel?

Activities for Children and Young People

JESUS BRACELET: *Use different coloured beads to represent parts of Jesus’ life (e.g. colours to represent King, cross, risen).*

SOCIAL MEDIA POST: *What if Jesus had [insert relevant social media app here] Design a social-media type post from the perspective of Jesus and his disciples.*

WINDOW DISPLAY: *Create a stained-glass style window at home using tissue paper to depict the cross and empty tomb.*

Prayers

Eternal God,
in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin
and the depth of your love:
in humble hope and fear
may we place at his feet all that we have
and all that we are,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect for Good Friday

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

From St Patrick's Breastplate

O Lord God, Son of the Father, everlasting word,
thou dost reveal the divine majesty
in whatsoever thou didst speak, do, and suffer,
the whole and very majesty of God:
the majesty of humility,
that laid thee in a manger,
and let the cross be paid upon thee,
meek and lowly of heart;
the majesty of love,
who, when thou lovest, lovest unto the end,
when thou forgives, blottest out the whole,
when thou givest, givest all, givest thyself.
O Glorious Lord, who still dost descend to us,
grant us by communion with thee the sight and knowledge of thy majesty,
and, by dwelling in thee, ascension into it.

Eric Milner-White

PART 4 GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

***We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.***

Passages

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

John 16.13-15

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Luke 3.21-22

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15.13

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Genesis 1.1-2

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Galatians 5.22-23

Commentary

The Nicene Creed affirms the unity of the Father and the Son with the third person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit, who renews the face of the earth and the life of the church. As Rowan Williams describes it, “it is the ‘current’ of divine activity that is here and now making us real” (*Tokens of Trust*).

GIVER OF LIFE: The Creed describes the Holy Spirit as ‘the giver of life’: it is the very breath God breathed into humanity, giving us not only a physical existence but a spiritual life. The Holy Spirit appears in episodes describing resurrection: e.g. God commands Ezekiel to ‘prophecy to the spirit (or wind)’ and breathe life into the bones of the dead (Ezekiel 37.1-14).

THE ‘FILIOQUE’ CLAUSE: The line ‘who proceeds from the Father and the Son’ has been a source of contention between Christians:

- ⌘ Added to the Creed in the sixth century and rejected by eastern orthodox churches.
- ⌘ Reflects Christ’s promise to his disciples to send the spirit to them as a helper (John 15.15-17).

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN LIFE: When we face difficulties, when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8.26).

COME, HOLY SPIRIT: Christians have long invoked God the Holy Spirit in prayer, especially when we ‘cannot bear the weight of [our] calling in [our] own strength, but only by the grace and power of God’. The ancient prayer *Veni Creator Spiritus* is prayed at ordinations, and many Christians invoke the Holy Spirit when preparing for work or study.

For further reflections, see the We Believe booklet, pp. 44-53.

Discussion Questions

- ⌘ Think of any teaching about the Holy Spirit you may have received – is there anything you found particularly helpful in that? How does this shape the way you expect the Holy Spirit to work in your life?
- ⌘ What do you think it means to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit?
- ⌘ Can you think of seasons of your life where you have been particularly aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit? And those where the Spirit has seemed more absent?
- ⌘ Can you think of images of the Holy Spirit that you find helpful? Do some images speak to you more than others? Are there some that you find more challenging?
- ⌘ What do we understand of the concept of the Holy Spirit's work of transformation?
- ⌘ Can you think of ways in which the Spirit is guiding you in your life, or the Church, today?

Suggestions for taking our discipleship forward

PRAY IN SILENCE: *Do you usually pray using words? Try praying without words: relax into the silence and let the Holy Spirit pray on your behalf.*

SONGS OF THE SPIRIT: *Dedicate a service or a portion of a service to songs that focus on the presence, power, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.*

SPIRITUAL GIFTS WORKSHOP: *Organise a workshop to learn about the different gifts of the Spirit, help people identify their own gifts, and discuss how they can be nurtured and grown in your church and wider community.*

Activities for Children and Young People

MESSY CHURCH: *Do some activities inspired by the **Messy Church Pentecost** resource.*

CREATE SOME ART: *Think about what Spirit looks or feels like to you and create it, using paint, poetry, drawing or anything else you can think of.*

MAKE SOME DOVES: *Cut out paper doves and write messages of encouragement or Bible verses. You can attach them to string and hang them up.*

PRAYER JAR: *Write down things that the Holy Spirit can help with and pray for one each day with your friends or family.*

Prayers

Come, creator Spirit, source of life;
sustain us when our hearts are heavy
and our wells have run dry,
for you are the Father's gift,
with him who is our living water,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Psalm prayer for Psalm 42, Common Worship

Holy Spirit
O Holy Ghost,
giver of light and life;
impart to us thoughts higher than our own thoughts,
and prayers better than our own prayers,
and powers beyond our own powers;
that we may spend and be spent
in the ways of love and goodness,
after the perfect image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Eric Milner-White

***We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen***

Passages

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4.4-6

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

1 Peter 2.9

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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Matthew 28.19-20

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

Ephesians 2.19-20

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3.27-28

Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

1 Corinthians 15.20-22

Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Philippians 3.20-21

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

John 14.1-3

Commentary

FOUR MARKS OF THE CHURCH: The Church, in the words of the Nicene Creed, is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These four marks are not mere aspirations but essential features of the Church as it is willed and founded by God.

ONE: The Church is one because it is drawn together by the unity of the Trinity. This unity is visibly expressed in one baptism, one faith, and one hope. Though the Church is made up of people from every nation, language, and walk of life, it is fundamentally a single body, animated by the one Spirit.

HOLY: The Church is holy because it is set apart by God, sanctified by Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Church is the assembly of those who have been called into the light of God’s presence: those who have been made saints, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Its vocation is to proclaim the mighty acts of God, to witness to the light of Christ in a world too often darkened by sin and division.

CATHOLIC: The Church is catholic—from the Greek *katholikos*, meaning ‘universal’. It is the Church for all people, at all times, and in all places. Christ’s mission is to the ends of the earth, and so the Church is not confined by culture, race, language, or geography.

APOSTOLIC: The Church is apostolic, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ himself as the cornerstone. The apostolic character of the Church is preserved through fidelity to the teaching, sacramental life, and succession of the apostles.

BAPTISM: Baptism is the sacrament through which a person enters the life of the Church and becomes a member of this one, holy, catholic, and apostolic body. It is the sign and means of rebirth in Christ. Baptism communicates the forgiveness of sins and the gift of grace. It unites each person to Christ’s death and resurrection, and thus to the whole mystery of salvation.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD: At the heart of the Christian proclamation is the belief in the resurrection: that Jesus Christ, who truly died, has truly risen. His resurrection is the first fruits of a new creation and the pledge of our own rising from the dead. Christians believe that those who die in Christ will live with him forever. On the last day, the faithful will be raised, and even their mortal bodies will be transformed, conformed to the glorious body of the risen Christ. Although the nature of our future life with God exceeds our present understanding, Christians affirm that this eternal life is a transfigured and redeemed life in the fullness of God’s presence. In the celebration of Holy Communion, believers already taste this future glory.

THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME: The phrase ‘the life of the world to come’ refers to this eternal communion with God in the new heaven and the new earth, as promised in Scripture. It is the life for which Christ has gone ahead to prepare a place. In this life, there will be no more mourning, no more crying or pain. God will dwell with his people, wiping every tear from their eyes.

Discussion Questions

- ⌄ How are the 'oneness' and 'catholicity'/universality of the Church represented in the world today? How might we fall short of this ideal? Why?
- ⌄ How can we as a local church embrace our calling to holiness and our inheritance from the apostles?
- ⌄ What does baptism represent for the believer today?
- ⌄ How does baptism unite us with our own community of faith and with Christians everywhere? What does this call us to do?
- ⌄ How does the promise of resurrection influence the way we live now?
- ⌄ What hope does this give us, given the inevitability of death and suffering in our earthly lives?
- ⌄ What does eternal life mean to you personally?
- ⌄ How should the promise of the new creation determine the way we behave in the here and now?

Suggestions for taking our discipleship forward

VISIT ANOTHER CHURCH: Visit another Christian church for worship and reflect on what feels familiar and what feels different.

STUDY THE SCRIPTURE: Read one of the suggested passages of Scripture above and study it with a friend or neighbour.

Activities for Children and Young People

CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD: Pin flags on a world map (online or physical) showing where churches are and Christians are found, discuss about being part of a global family.

UNSCRAMBLE: Give each group a scrambled version of the last times of the Creed. Ask them to reassemble it and discuss what each phrase means in today's context.

PAPER BOATS: Fill a tray with water, create small paper boats with the words "God loves me" or "I belong" written inside and float it in the water tray.

Prayers

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light, look favourably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery, and by the tranquil operation of your perpetual providence carry out the work of our salvation: and let the whole world feel and see that things which were cast down are being raised up and things which had grown old are being made new and that all things are returning to perfection through him from whom they took their origin, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gelasian Sacramentary

Blessed Spirit of God,
pour upon us such gifts of faith, purity, and love,
that we may have thy temple within us,
and thee in that temple,
and life everlasting in thee;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Eric Milner-White

ART AND MUSIC

The Trinity

ART

Compare these images of the Trinity from different Christian traditions. How do they make you feel? Why?



The Harley Psalter
(England, 11th century)



The Trinity by Andrei Rublev
(Russia, 15th century)



The Trinity
(Ethiopia, 19th/20th century)

MUSIC

- ♫ Credo - Sarah Kirkland Snider - (Official Video at youtu.be/FYZxAgcqDbE)
Sarum Chant: Credo I (Sarum Rite from Salisbury Cathedral)
Plainchant / English
<https://youtu.be/VH6VVrvszp8?si=v5PueqKGfPnlP8xY>
- ♫ John Merbecke: Communion Service - Credo (Gentlemen of Chapel Royal Hampton Palace) (S. Albans) chant / BCP / English
<https://youtu.be/PiVV1zMbhWI?si=QTYFWatzJk8ZRilu>
- ♫ Credo de Nicea – Constantinopla (aciprensa) spoken / Spanish
<https://youtu.be/Y4sbw9xUuZw?si=o-qiqA3GB6W8RuRd>
- ♫ Glaubensbekenntnis von Nicäa und Konstantinopel (detlef korsen) spoken / German
<https://youtu.be/7r5KZHxm76A?si=CYco4NuiJVf5BpSZ>

- ♪ Credo : symbole de Nicée (Prions) spoken / French
https://youtu.be/sLPtVJN0s8U?si=ZTb5MVwy6Lz2Q7_U
- ♪ Credo de Nicée Constantinople (Lyric) (Liturgical Chant) sung / French
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLmv_LK7yOI
- ♪ CREDO Niceno-Costantinopolitano (Canto Gregoriano) (Blog CATTOLICI)
 Gregorian Plainchant / Latin
<https://youtu.be/jKFynwbmIMQ?si=DFAcklPy6VG20dU6>
- ♪ Nicene Creed set to music by Sarah Brown (Grace Covenant EPC) Piano /
 Vocal / contemporary / English
<https://youtu.be/gSOCALbK1sg?si=F42dv2t5ZoQ4tvPz>
- ♪ Nicene Creed (Orthodox Chant) English
https://youtu.be/-PsRBO52dfY?si=Wxv9Inf_UXW5H9S5
- ♪ Nicene Creed Chant Orthodox Christian Chant
 (Orthodox Christian Chants) Slavonic
<https://youtu.be/bhK4FerWu-g?si=TJjPuQwHEMWOylNq>
- ♪ Creed in Honor of Saint Felix (Catholic Dioceses of the USA)
 Plainchant / English
<https://vimeo.com/928277169?share=copy>

The Father

ART

Compare these images of the Father from different time periods.
What qualities do they assign to him? How do they make you feel?



Creation
(England, 11th century)



The Ancient of Days
(William Blake, 1794)



Separation of Light from
Darkness (Michelangelo, 1512)

MUSIC

🔗 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsPne9Pijkk>

🔗 Creator of the Stars of Night
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83U-pVhnULM>

The Son

ART

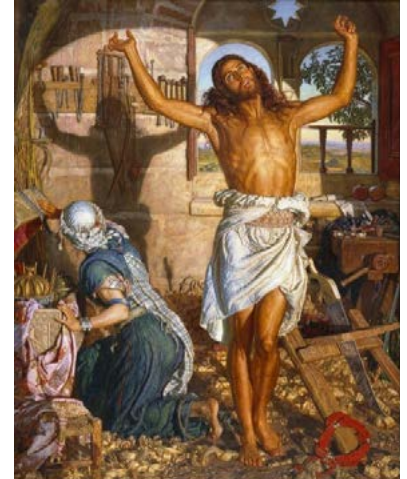
Compare these images of the Son from the early Christian period to modernity. How do they make you feel? Why?



Alexamenos Graffito
(Rome, 3rd century)



The Healing of a Paralytic
(Syria, 235 AD)



The Shadow of Death
(William Holman Hunt, 1873)

MUSIC

♫ I heard the voice of Jesus say

<https://youtu.be/74kyfROS4q8?si=H22IDOB3Hpw2HBN4>

♫ What if God was one of us? - Joan Osborne

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDdOnl0bHO4>

The Holy Spirit

ART

Compare these images of the Holy Spirit from different time periods.
How do they make you feel? Why?



Pentecost
(England, 10th c.)



Holy Spirit
(Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1660)



God the Father and the Holy Spirit
(Pompeo Batoni, 1734)

MUSIC

♫ Come down, O Love divine:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APvO08xjJR4>

♫ Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vdybr7ik41Q>

♫ Veni Sancte Spiritus – Taizé

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8yOAxWyfvA>

♫ Holy Spirit, living breath of God – Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDYjn-YdnD4>

Introduction

There's a shape to Christian believing and this arose not from abstract speculation, but through the experience of God in prayer and worship. The earliest Christians realised that Jesus was divine and that the Holy Spirit was Christ's promised gift from the Father. So, Christians were baptised in the name of the Trinity (Matthew 28) and had a vision of the constant worship of heaven.

Praying in Three Dimensions

The shape of Christian praying is trinitarian, and here are three examples:

1. *The Collect is a model of early Christian prayer and is invariably cast in a trinitarian shape – the prayer is addressed to the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.*
2. *The same trinitarian witness can be traced in both ancient and modern Eucharistic Prayers at the very heart of the Communion service. The Eucharistic Prayer, or Prayer of Thanksgiving rehearses the work of God in creation and redemption, and in so doing reveals a trinitarian shape in thanking God the Father, by focusing on Jesus Christ, and in invoking the Holy Spirit through whom the prayer (as every true prayer) is made.*
3. *The Gloria (not to be confused with the canticle of the same name!) The Gloria is said after the Psalms and Canticles in our daily prayer: 'Glory be to the Father...' (how this works, and avoiding any suggestion that there are three gods, may be seen in the version that reads: 'Glory be to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.'*

All these ways of praying witness to the trinitarian shape of Christian faith and believing. Christian belief is shaped in three ways, and this becomes quite explicit in the form and content of the Creeds. We shall look at these in a little more detail later, but first, and just to clear the ground, we might ask how we view the Creed. After all, for most of us, they're part of our experience of going to church for worship Sunday by Sunday.

Christian Believing

So how do we regard the Credal Statements or what today we might call an 'affirmation of faith'? When we're invited to join in saying the Creed, do we feel that we are being asked to 'believe six impossible things before breakfast', or being asked to rehearse a form of words from a very different age from our own? Or, can we see the recital of the Creed as a summary of what we believe, of the faith that we've inherited from the past and which we share with Christians in every place and at every time?

As we reflect on what believing may entail, we could reflect on the words of the Centurion in the Gospel, who says to Jesus: 'Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief'. The first thing to say is that it is grounded in trust. God is to be trusted. Secondly, Christian faith is a shared faith...others hold this faith, and so I don't have to put my hand on my heart at any one time and affirm every tenet of faith. It is not like signing up to the small print of belonging to the Church.

The Creed

The Creed, whose anniversary we celebrate in 2025 is the Nicene Creed, has long featured as an element in the Eucharist, the service of Holy Communion. However, the original version of this Creed was not written for this purpose.

THE NICENE CREED (325 AD)

- ✠ The Nicene Creed was originally drafted and agreed by the Council to oppose a heresy called Arianism, and to affirm belief the full divinity of Christ. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed was agreed at the Council of Chalcedon in 381 AD (commonly called the Nicene Creed). The Creed was first Introduced into the Eucharist in Syria in the late 5th century, then in Spain in the late 6th century when it was recited after the Lord's Prayer and before the receiving of Communion, as an expression of the shared faith.

- ⦿ The use of the Creed in the Mass was promoted by the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charlemagne in the 8th century, but wasn't adopted in Rome until 1014. It remained an element of the Mass throughout the late Middle Ages and was retained by Thomas Cranmer in the first English Prayer Book of 1549 and has remained in the Prayer Book tradition as a response to the reading and hearing of the Gospel. It continues today in our Common Worship services as a key 'affirmation of faith' made by the worshipping community Sunday by Sunday following the sermon. Interestingly, what began as a correction to the heresy that denied that Christ was the eternal Son of God, has become a regular feature of our worshipping experience, making it not so much a test of the worshipper's orthodoxy, but an expression of a shared faith, hence the reversion back to the original opening of the Creed in more recent revisions of the Communion service 'We believe...'

THE APOSTLES CREED

- ⦿ This may be a familiar element in daily prayer – as a part of both Morning and Evening Prayer in the BCP, but its origins are to be found in Christian Initiation – featuring as part of the teaching delivered to those preparing for baptism in the early centuries of the Christian Church, and as a profession of faith made by the candidates themselves in the service of baptism itself.
- ⦿ In saying 'I believe' in this context, we are doing more than rehearsing the tenets of Christian belief - we're making a personal commitment. It is not a check list, or simply a series of propositions which we must sign up to. The clue is in the repeated phrase, not 'I believe that', but 'I believe in.' Further, in saying 'I believe' (as we do in the Apostles Creed) we are committing ourselves to a particular outlook, perspective, and way of looking at God, the world, and yes, even ourselves, as well as joining our voice to the voices of those of the baptised people of God around the world and down the ages.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

(named the Quincunque vult in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer)

- ⌘ The exact origins and date of this 5th century western creed is lost in the mists of history, but within the whole set of Creeds the Athanasian Creed is the most theologically dense, and the one that was closely associated with Trinity Sunday. One could be forgiven for seeing this Creed as a doctrinal checklist regarding the relationships between the persons of the triune God and the person and work of Christ as fully human and divine, but interestingly, this creed acknowledges the primacy of worship. As one phrase puts it: 'This is the catholic faith, that we worship...'

From Trust to Belief, From Belonging to Believing

Returning to the Nicene Creed – in the Middle Ages it was recited in Latin, and only came to be voiced by the congregation, albeit it in the 'I believe' form at the Reformation. Nevertheless, it was a corporate proclamation of faith. This corporate sense is made explicit by the return to the original 'We believe', and in this, we may say that reciting the Creed together doesn't mean having to screw ourselves up to believe this or that, but aligning ourselves with all those Christians across the world and back through all the generations who belong to the 'household of faith', the community of the baptised who have made 'the good confession' (1 Timothy 6.12). The threefold shape of Christian believing is explicit in fourfold shape of the Nicene Creed.

GOD THE FATHER

- ⌘ Beginning here affirms that everything begins with God the Creator, not so much the 'when' or 'how', but the 'why' and the 'what for'. As such, it speaks of our dependency on God and keeps alive a sense of purpose, for the cosmos was not an accident, it came into being because God is God and says: 'let there be'. This is more than an affirmation of origins – the creation clause in the Nicene Creed uses 'personal language', named as 'Father', the language of relationship. Creation is therefore

not only a belief about origins, but a reassurance that all that is, is because God loves it and has a purpose for it. God is the one through whom 'all things come into being' and in God, all things are sustained, held in being, moment by moment, and find their ultimate fulfilment in Christ, in whom 'all things in heaven and earth' find their coherence and completion (see John 1.1-4 and Colossians 1.15-20).

- ⌘ So, the Creator God is not a God who set it all going and then stepped back to see what we would want to make of it, but entered the world, came to be 'within the world' (cf Rowan Williams) through the incarnation, the mystery of 'God with us'.

GOD THE SON

- ⌘ As one would expect, it is the figure of Jesus Christ who is the central figure in the Creed. After all, the original purpose of the Nicene Creed was to affirm the orthodox view that Christ was the eternal Son of God, and the one who was enfleshed by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Through the incarnate Christ God entered our everyday world of time and space, and so the Nicene Creed asserts that at the end of time our own lives, words and deeds, will be measured by Christ's compassion and love. This is the judgement (see Matthew 25.31-46) and these tenets of faith are the cardinal points in the story of salvation that hinges on the ringing assertion of 'God with us.'
- ⌘ And yet this story of presence also has an element of absence. The question of Mary Magdalene, "where have you laid him?" reverberates through history in times of pain and suffering when some cry 'where is God in all this?'. Similarly, there is the puzzlement expressed by the two disciples who walked on the road to Emmaus and exclaimed: "we had hoped", summing up so many disappointments and thwarted hopes. It may seem as though the firm rebuke to the grieving Mary Magdalene wasn't enough: "do not hold me", for there's the finality of the ascension, Jesus no longer with the original disciples. But Christ doesn't leave us bereft or abandoned, Christ promises another to accompany and guide us, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

- ✚ The Holy Spirit is the Spirit who brooded over the waters of chaos and at the dawn of creation, and who renews the 'face of the earth' (Psalm 104), and so the Nicene Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit as 'the giver of life'.
- ✚ The Holy Spirit is God's gift, promised by Christ (repeatedly in John's Gospel) who is poured into our hearts, so that God may dwell within and between us (Romans 5.5) and to build up our life together (1 Corinthians 12.7).
- ✚ A recognition that the Spirit was promised by Christ led to the later inclusion by the Church in the West in the ninth century of the so-called Filioque clause, asserting that the Spirit 'proceeded from the Father and the Son'. The Eastern Orthodox Churches objected to this addition, and today the clause is often omitted in ecumenical gatherings of Eastern and Western Christians.

God in Human Lives and Society

What is this community of faith, believing in the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'? A community that 'breathes in', is inspired, and guided by the Holy Spirit:

- ✚ *in word and action witnessing to the single supremacy of love, (one),*
- ✚ *in turning again and again and being open to the source of divine love and forgiveness, (holy),*
- ✚ *in building a community for all in every time and place (catholic), and,*
- ✚ *in being sent to witness to the truth of Christ and the Gospel of Reconciliation (apostolic).*

In these ways, the Credal confession is not only an expression of the inherited faith of the Church, but draws us into a pattern of living as a community of those who know their need for forgiveness – forgiveness from God, and forgiveness from others, in order to again and again walk in the way of Christ. This is why there is the specific clause in the Apostles Creed speaks of 'the forgiveness of sins.' But it does not end there, for faith

is inextricably bound up with hope, that expectation and orientation to God's future: 'the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.'

Some may feel that these final words of the Nicene Creed open to gates to all kinds of speculation, but it is probably wise not to say too much, and to be economic in what we say regarding eternal life. What we can say, and say with conviction is that God seeks to make all things new in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. This is the vision of 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Revelation 21.21) and regarding our hope of resurrection of the body we could do no better than recall a succinct and suggestive phrase of Rowan Williams: 'We have a future with God as persons no less.'¹

- *The Revd Canon Christopher Irvine*

¹ Rowan Williams *Tokens of Trust: an Introduction to Christian Belief* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007), p. 143.

GOING FURTHER

Given the significance of this anniversary year of the Nicene Creed, alongside the Church of England's resourcing there are many other churches, denominations, speakers and writers offering materials for people to engage with. Whilst this is not a complete list, here are some you and your church could look at to complement this booklet.

'WE BELIEVE' REFLECTION BOOKLET

Each reflection in this simple booklet explores a portion of the Creed through the lens of a short Bible passage and a simple reflection, accompanied by a treasury of prayers. These reflections will form a centrepiece of the Church of England's contribution to this year's celebrations marking the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea as well as providing a lasting resource for Christian education and formation.

Buy your copies here.

BBC RADIO 4

In its Daily Service, Radio 4 have curated a series exploring the Nicene Creed. You can listen back to these on BBC Sounds.

ALCUIN CLUB

The Alcuin Club are offering a Study Day and AGM on 2nd June at Christ Church, Oxford, which will celebrate 1700 years of the Nicene Creed.

Find out more here.

DIOCESE OF CHICHESTER – A NEW POEM

The Diocese of Chichester is celebrating its diocesan anniversary this year, Celebrating Faith, and is connecting with the Nicene Creed as its focus.

As part of this, alongside other resources, a new poem has been written by Laura Darrall, ***which you can read here.***

GROVE BOOKLET

Grove Books has produced a new workbook for disciples, exploring the Nicene Creed and the Bible. ***Buy your copy here.***

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL LAW SOCIETY FOR 2025

This year's annual conference is 'Nicaea Received: 1700 years of Canons, Councils and Ecumenism'. It is taking place 20th – 22nd June at Chichester Cathedral, with keynote addresses from:

- ✠ *His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople*
- ✠ *Professor Myriam Wijlens, Professor of Canon Law at the University of Erfurt*
- ✠ *The Rt Revd Dr Christopher Cocksworth, Dean of Windsor*

Find out more and book your place here.

PRAYING THE NICENE CREED, BY JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

In this book, poet, critic and scholar James Matthew Wilson considers each line of the Nicene Creed in turn, showing through stories, images and recollections that this prayer describes the living theological reality that is at the heart of personal devotion. ***Buy your copy here.***

