

The Apostles' Creed Explained

A phrase-by-phrase printable guide

The Apostles' Creed is a concise summary of central Christian beliefs. It moves from faith in God the Creator, through the life and work of Jesus Christ, to the Holy Spirit and the hope shared by God's people. Use this guide to read the Creed slowly, look up the passages, and make space for your own questions.

A NOTE ON THE SCRIPTURE

A note on the Scripture: the verse summaries in this guide are plain-English paraphrases, not quotations from a particular Bible translation. Read each passage in your preferred Bible for its full wording and context.

The Creed

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

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Churches use slightly different wording. The phrases 'he descended to the dead' and 'the holy catholic Church' (meaning the universal church) are understood differently. Some Christian traditions do not use creeds in worship.

God the Father

I believe in God

The Creed begins with trust in the one God. Christian belief is more than agreeing that God exists: it is placing our confidence in God's character and care.

Read: [Deuteronomy 6:4–5](#); [Hebrews 11:6](#)

Reflect: What helps you place your trust in God?

the Father almighty

Father names God's loving relationship with creation and, especially, with Jesus. Almighty points to God's sovereign power, not to a promise that life will be free from hardship.

Read: [Matthew 6:9](#); [Ephesians 1:3–5](#)

Reflect: How might God's power and care shape the way you pray?

creator of heaven and earth

Everything that exists depends on God. The created world is not divine, yet it is God's work and can be received with wonder, gratitude, and responsibility.

Read: [Genesis 1:1](#); [Colossians 1:16–17](#)

Reflect: What part of creation invites you to respond with gratitude or care?

THE STORY OF JESUS

Jesus Christ, our Lord

The Creed centres on Jesus: who Christians believe him to be, how he entered human life, and how he suffered and died. These lines hold together his identity and the events at the heart of the Christian faith.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord

Christ means God's anointed one. Calling Jesus God's only Son expresses his unique relationship with the Father; calling him Lord expresses allegiance and trust. Christians confess Jesus as fully central to their faith.

Read: [John 1:14](#); [Romans 10:9](#)

Reflect: What could it mean in daily life to call Jesus Lord?

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

Jesus' conception is described as the work of God's Spirit. The Creed presents his coming as God's initiative, while affirming that Jesus truly entered human life.

Read: [Matthew 1:18–20](#); [Luke 1:35](#)

Reflect: What does this line suggest about God's initiative in the story of Jesus?

born of the Virgin Mary

Mary is named as Jesus' mother, grounding the Christian story in a real human birth. The Creed holds together God's action and Jesus' genuine human existence.

Read: [Luke 1:26–38](#); [Luke 2:1–7](#)

Reflect: What stands out to you about God entering ordinary human life?

suffered under Pontius Pilate

Naming Pontius Pilate locates Jesus' suffering in public history. The line does not treat suffering as an illusion: Jesus faced political authority and a painful death.

Read: [Mark 15:1–15](#); [1 Timothy 6:13](#)

Reflect: How does the historical setting shape your understanding of Jesus' suffering?

was crucified, died, and was buried

The Creed plainly names the cross, Jesus' death, and his burial. Christians understand his death as central to God's saving work, and his burial confirms that he truly died.

Read: [1 Corinthians 15:3–4](#); [Mark 15:37–47](#)

Reflect: What does the Creed's honest naming of death mean to you?

he descended to the dead

This phrase is interpreted in different ways across Christian traditions. Some understand it as affirming the full reality of Jesus' death; others connect it with his presence among the dead or his victory over death. The guide leaves room for careful study rather than declaring one explanation universal.

Read: [Acts 2:27–31](#); [1 Peter 3:18–20](#)

Reflect: What questions would you like to explore about this phrase?

RESURRECTION AND HOPE

The risen and reigning Christ

After naming Jesus' death, the Creed turns to resurrection, ascension, and future hope. These claims shape Christian confidence that death and injustice do not have the final word.

On the third day he rose again

Christians proclaim that God raised Jesus bodily from death. The resurrection is the centre of Christian hope and the beginning of new life, not simply a metaphor for feeling encouraged.

Read: [Luke 24:1–8](#); [1 Corinthians 15:12–22](#)

Reflect: How does the resurrection shape the way you face grief or uncertainty?

he ascended into heaven

The ascension describes Jesus being taken into God's presence after the resurrection. It marks a new chapter in the disciples' life and mission, with Jesus no longer physically present among them.

Read: [Luke 24:50–53](#); [Acts 1:9–11](#)

Reflect: What might it mean to continue Jesus' work while awaiting his return?

he is seated at the right hand of the Father

This image speaks of honour, authority, and closeness to God. Christians trust that the risen Jesus reigns and intercedes for his people.

Read: [Ephesians 1:20–23](#); [Hebrews 7:25](#)

Reflect: How might Jesus' authority offer comfort or challenge?

he will come to judge the living and the dead

The Creed looks ahead to Christ's return and God's just judgement of everyone. This is a serious hope: evil is accountable, and the final judgement belongs to God rather than to us.

Read: [Matthew 25:31–46](#); [2 Timothy 4:1](#)

Reflect: What does the promise of God's justice mean for the way you treat others?

The Creed now turns from Jesus' story to the Spirit's work and the shared life of the Church.

THE SPIRIT AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

A shared hope

The final lines describe God's Spirit, the community of believers, forgiveness, and the future Christians await. They join personal faith to a hope that is shared across generations and traditions.

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God present and active, giving life, guiding, comforting, and empowering people to follow Christ. Christians understand the Spirit as more than an impersonal force.

Read: [John 14:26](#); [Acts 1:8](#)

Reflect: Where might you be seeking the Spirit's guidance or strength?

the holy catholic Church

Here catholic means universal, not a reference only to the Roman Catholic Church. The phrase points to the worldwide Church, gathered across places and generations; Christians differ in how they understand the Church's unity and boundaries.

Read: [Ephesians 4:4–6](#); [1 Corinthians 12:12–13](#)

Reflect: What could unity across Christian differences look like in practice?

the communion of saints

This describes fellowship among God's people. Saints here means those belonging to God, not only people formally recognised for exceptional holiness. The phrase can include the living Church and, in some traditions, fellowship with believers who have died.

Read: [Acts 2:42–47](#); [Hebrews 12:1](#)

Reflect: Who helps you grow in faith, and whom could you encourage?

the forgiveness of sins

God offers forgiveness and reconciliation through Christ. Forgiveness does not pretend harm is harmless or remove the need for justice and repair; it opens a way towards mercy and transformed life.

Read: [Acts 2:38](#); [1 John 1:9](#)

Reflect: What might receiving forgiveness make possible for you?

the resurrection of the body

Christian hope looks towards God's renewal of embodied life, not escape from being human. The Creed affirms that the whole person matters to God and that death will not have the final word.

Read: [1 Corinthians 15:42–44](#); [Philippians 3:20–21](#)

Reflect: How does bodily resurrection affect the way you value life now?

and the life everlasting. Amen.

The final words express trust in life with God beyond death. Amen means 'so be it': the speaker joins in the hope and faith voiced by the Creed.

Read: [John 17:3](#); [Revelation 21:1–4](#)

Reflect: What gives you hope when you think about life with God?