

'We believe...' The Nicene Creed 1,700 years on

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- What I'm going to cover...
- 1. Defining some terms
- 2. Telling the story of the Nicene Creed
- 3. What kind of thing is a creed?
What are we doing when we say, 'We believe...?'

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1. Defining some terms

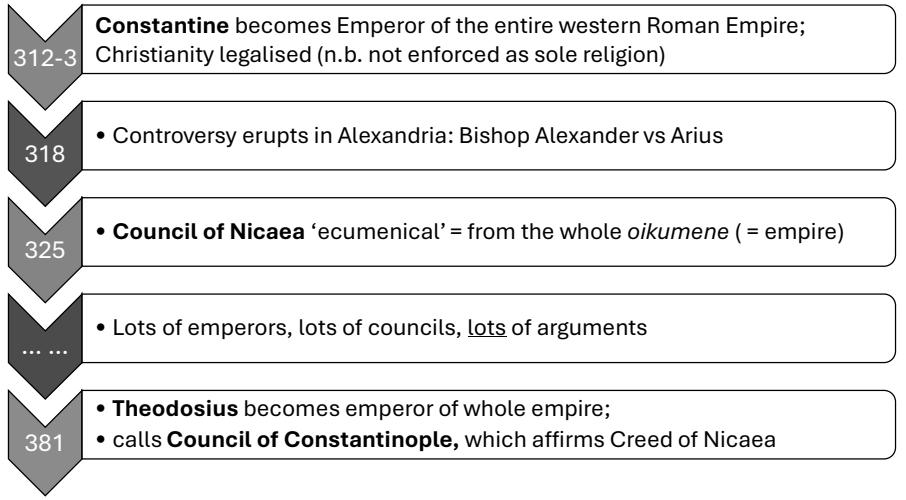
- **Nicene Creed:** agreed at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD
- **Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed:** a modified version of the Nicene Creed, agreed at the Council of Constantinople in 381AD
- The creed we say at Eucharist is in fact the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

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1. Defining some terms: some other creeds

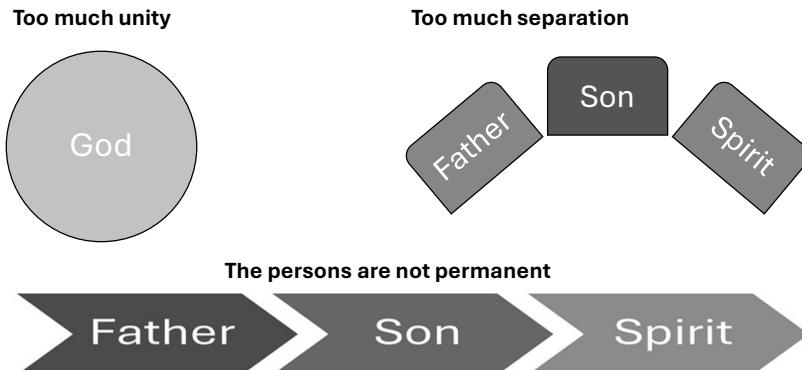
- **The Apostles' Creed:** expresses the 'apostolic faith'
- Western summary of faith; 4th century version of older 'Roman creed' (3rd century) deriving from questions used at baptism
- used in baptism, daily offices → BCP: baptism ('dost thou believe?'), Mattins, Evensong ('I believe')
- **The Athanasian Creed:**
 - not by Athanasius; probably late 4th – fifth centuries
 - considerably longer, less well-used, western creed
 - not formally accepted in the Eastern churches

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What were people worried about?

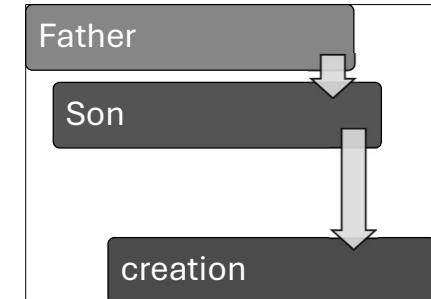


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2. Arius: distinct persons, united by causation

- Son came from the Father
- BUT 'there was a time when the Son was not'

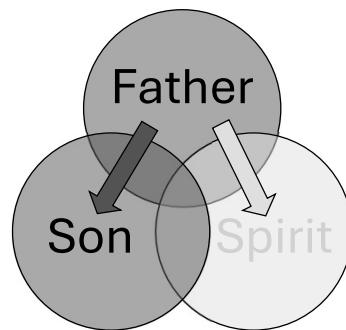
→ Son inferior to Father?
 → Son created by Father?
 (But not like the rest of creation)



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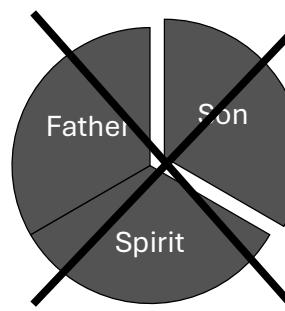
2. Nicaea: distinct **and equal** persons

- Son **came from** the Father but as an equal: 'God from God, light from light'
- Son begotten from the Father's own being/substance therefore...
- Son is 'of the same substance' of the Father
- Consubstantial / *homoousios*
- *ousia* = being, substance, essence



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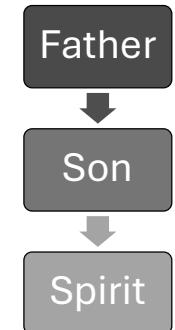
2. Nicaea: did it settle the dispute?



So various groups suggested that the Son was:

- of **like substance** to the Father
- **like** the Father
- **unlike** the Father

Distinct, but not equal

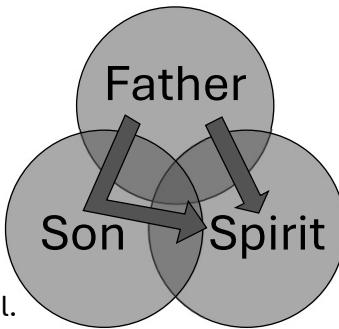


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2. Constantinople: distinct **and** equal

Changes to the creed of Nicaea:

- Son is begotten 'before all ages'; his 'kingdom will have no end'
→ Son is co-eternal with Father
- Holy Spirit 'proceeds from Father'
- Son is 'only-begotten' of Father
→ Each person is distinct but equal.

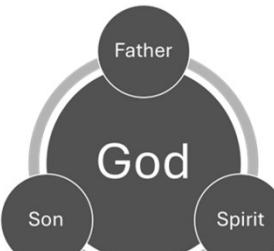
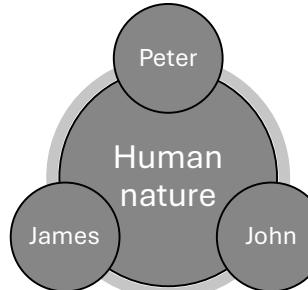


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The Cappadocians: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus

Their contribution: **1. A grammar for talking about God**

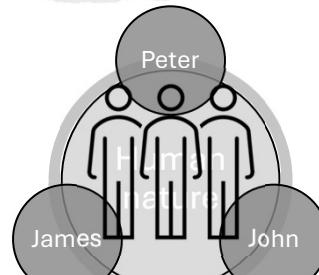
What is in common to x, y & z and what is particular?



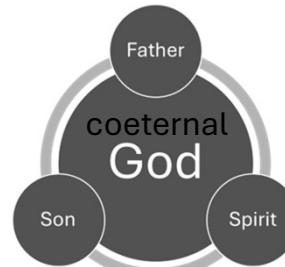
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1. A grammar for talking about God

Peter, James and John
separated by time & space



Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
indivisible in time & space



three men

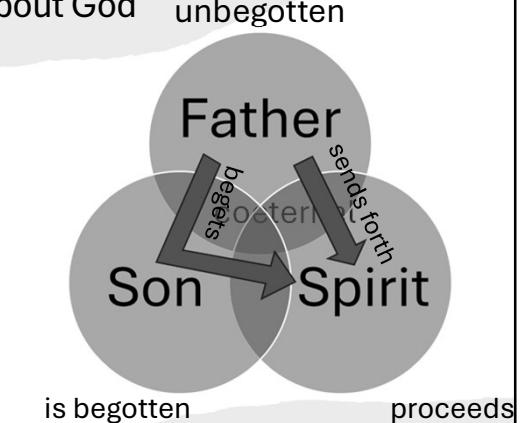
→ NOT three gods

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1. A grammar for talking about God

unbegotten

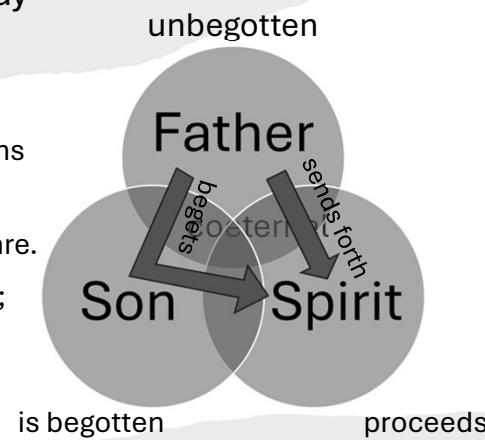
- if Father, Son, and Holy Spirit **indivisible** in time & space, how are they distinct?
- causal relationships in the Trinity unite and distinguish the persons



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2. Limits to what one can say about God

- Terms ONLY describe relationships between persons (from Scripture)
- do NOT define who persons are.
- A 'grammar', not definitions;
- The being of God is mystery (never fully comprehensible).



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Why does all this matter?

1. Absolute equality in God:
 - Father is cause, but not more divine
 - no theological justification for inequalities between human beings.
2. Secure grammar for talking about God, but caution about claims fully to understand God.

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Form and purpose of Creeds derive from three origins:

baptismal confessions

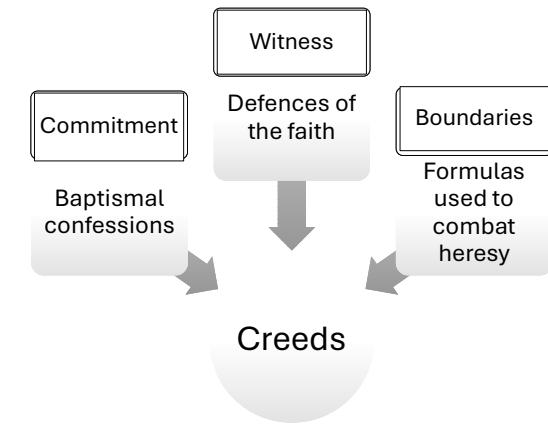
Defending the faith:

- Why is Christianity different from Judaism?
- from tradition Roman and Greek polytheism?
- e.g. Justin Martyr
Tertullian

Combatting heresy:

- As Christianity grew, a need to define its limits.
- e.g. Irenaeus of Lyons
Constantine
(stability of empire needed stable boundaries of Christianity?)

4. What are we doing when we say, 'We believe...?'



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