



Happy Birthday, Nicene Creed!

By the Rev. Erin Richardson Severin

Every Sunday and feast day, Episcopalians across the church stand and proclaim the words of the Nicene Creed. Did you know this profound statement of faith turns 1,700 years old this year? Yes, this Creed arose from the council of Nicaea in the year 325, as Christianity was just finding its footing after being legalized in the Roman Empire and spreading rapidly throughout the ancient world.

However, because we say it every Sunday, it is easy for these amazing words to become a matter of rote recitation, an unthinking habit we do without awareness. In celebration of the Creed's 1,700th birthday, we will return our awareness to this wonderful profession of faith not as mere rote, but as a love song to God, an expression of tender loving care for our faith and for the world.

You may be familiar with Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, which begins, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" In this brilliant poem, Shakespeare expresses his love for the recipient by describing in careful detail the specific characteristics that evoke such devotion. The Nicene Creed follows this same approach, naming the specific characteristics of God that provoke awe and wonder in the speaker.

The Creed follows three "articles" or sections, each relating to a person of the Trinity. Beginning with the Father, the first person, the Creed identifies God as the Creator of heaven and earth, all that is, seen and unseen. There is no other entity that is the ultimate source of all things.

The middle section names the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, the Son of God. Here, we notice the Son not just for who he is, but what he did for us - "he came down from heaven...became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man." Not content to simply be with us, he suffered and died in solidarity with humanity, and then rose again, defeating death.

Finally, we come to the Holy Spirit, the breath of life who gives the Good News to the prophets and brings us to the Kingdom of God through our baptism, and we marvel that this mysterious Spirit allows for the resurrection of the dead.

Although it is easy to say that we love God, naming the specific ways God manifests in our life through the Creed makes this love more real and tangible. We don't say the

Creed just because the Prayer Book tells us to, but because we can't help but wonder at the characteristics of God that continue to touch our lives each and every day. Next Sunday, wish the Creed a happy birthday as you sing your love song to God!

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