

What Lutherans Believe



I. THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS

With the “angels and archangels and all the company of heaven,” the Lutheran Church confesses the faith of the historic Christian Church as expressed in the three ecumenical creeds.

THE APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker 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 into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

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

THE NICENE CREED

I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried.
And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures
and ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead,
whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified,
who spoke by the prophets.
And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
and I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith.
Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally.
And the catholic faith is this,
that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor
dividing the substance.
For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another.
But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one: the glory equal,
the majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit:
the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, the Holy Spirit uncreated;
the Father infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite;
the Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal.
And yet there are not three Eternals, but one Eternal,
just as there are not three Uncreated or three Infinities, but one Uncreated and one Infinite.
In the same way, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty;
and yet there are not three Almightyies, but one Almighty.
So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;
and yet there are not three Gods, but one God.
So the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord;
and yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord.
Just as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge each distinct person as God
and Lord, so also are we prohibited by the catholic religion to say that there are three Gods
or Lords.
The Father is not made nor created nor begotten by anyone.
The Son is neither made nor created, but begotten of the Father alone.
The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but
proceeding.
Thus, there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not
three Holy Spirits.
And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another;
but the whole three persons are coeternal with each other and coequal, so that in all things, as
has been stated above, the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is to be worshiped.
Therefore, whoever desires to be saved must think thus about the Trinity.
But it is also necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the incarnation of our
Lord Jesus Christ.
Therefore, it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of
God, is at the same time both God and man.
He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man, born
from the substance of His mother in this age:
perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh;
equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to His
humanity.
Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ:
one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the
humanity into God;
one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.
For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ,
who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead,
ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from
whence He will come to judge the living and the dead.
At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their
own deeds.
And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into
eternal fire.
This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved.

II. THE ARTICLES OF FAITH

1. There is one God who has revealed Himself in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are equal in essence, power and glory. (Deuteronomy 6:4, John 20:17, I Timothy 2:5, Acts 5:3-4)
2. God is the maker of all things visible and invisible. By His powerful Word, God called into being that which was not and gave life to all living creatures. Furthermore, God created man (male and female) in His own image (referring to God's righteousness and holiness), breathing into him the breath of life. God created man to be in a perfect relationship with Him. This means that man had a perfect fellowship with God, a perfect knowledge of God, and a will that was in conformity to God's will. (Genesis 1:1-2:2)
3. This relationship was forever destroyed when Adam and Eve, the world's first parents, fell into sin. When tempted, they doubted God's Word and corrupted every aspect of God's order of creation. This sin is called Original Sin and refers to the hereditary guilt and hereditary corruption with which all people are conceived. Hence, all people are born at enmity with God and are by nature sinful and unclean. As a result, the curse that was affected by the Fall has ruined man's relationship with God, his relationship with others, and his relationship to nature. (Genesis 3:1-19)
4. Man would be forever lost to eternal death and separation from God if it were not for the grace of God. At the time of the Fall, God gave Adam and Eve the promise that He would send the Messiah to redeem and restore that which was lost. This promise was fulfilled by Jesus' sinless obedience to the Law of God and by His death and resurrection by which He has defeated the powers of sin, death and hell and offers forgiveness and life to all who believe in Him. (Genesis 3:15, I John 2:2, Galatians 4:4-5)
5. This Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, who, in perfect humility, took upon Himself the flesh of humanity so that as true God and true man He could redeem this lost and fallen creation. In His baptism, Jesus took upon Himself the sin of the whole world and carried it to the cross where He died, suffering the punishment of sin which all men deserved. On the third day, Jesus rose in victory over death and thus accomplished God's plan of salvation. After His ascension into heaven, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God the Father until that time when He shall return and gather all those who have faith to bring them into God's eternal kingdom. (John 1:14, Hebrews 2:14, Isaiah 53:4-5, John 14:2-3)
6. This salvation of God is a free gift of God's grace and is obtained by faith alone which itself is a gift of God. There is nothing that any man can do to overcome his sinful nature or earn God's grace and favor. It is only by believing that by Jesus' death on the cross and that by His resurrection from the dead sin, death and hell have been defeated can a man be saved. (Ephesians 2:8-9, John 20:31)
7. In order to instill, sustain and strengthen this faith, God has given to His church the means of grace, that is, His Word and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

8. In Holy Baptism, man is connected to Jesus' death and resurrection in that the Old Adam is put to death and the New Adam is raised to new life. In this life-giving water, the guilt of Original Sin is washed away and the person is claimed by God's gracious adoption to be a child of God. (Romans 6:3-5, Titus 3:5, Galatians 3:26-29)
9. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus offers His very body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine. Whoever eats and drinks of His body and blood through faith receives the forgiveness of sin and is renewed in the promise of eternal life. (Matthew 26:26-28, I Corinthians 10:16)
10. The Holy Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God in which the person and work of Jesus Christ are revealed. In this holy Word, God's Law is given to instruct His people how to live and to communicate the punishment that any transgression of His Law justly deserves. It also contains God's Gospel, that proclamation of God's forgiveness of all sin by Jesus' death and resurrection. The Bible is the only source and norm of the Christian faith and contains all the knowledge that is necessary for man to obtain God's gracious salvation. It alone testifies to Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. (II Timothy 3:15-17, John 5:39)
11. In order to help God's people understand His Word and will, God has given His Holy Spirit who calls, gathers and enlightens every believer to confess the one, true faith of Jesus Christ and who sustains every believer in that faith unto life everlasting. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the people of God are led to live sanctified and holy lives in service to one another in order to fulfill the mission of God's kingdom. However, the good works that are done are not done in order to earn God's favor but are performed as a testimony of the new life brought about by the work of the Spirit. (Romans 8:9, I Corinthians 2:6-16 and 12:3, II Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 11:6, Ephesians 2:10, Galatians 5:13)
12. The church, now living in the last days, patiently and faithfully awaits the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to return at which time He will gather both the living and the dead and pass judgment on the whole world. Those who have lived in the one, true faith of Jesus Christ will be ushered into His eternal kingdom but those who have lived outside the faith, that is, those who have denied Jesus, will be dismissed into eternal death and condemnation. Until that day, Jesus has said that there will be increasing turmoil and distress for both the church and the world. But, when He does return, an everlasting peace and a renewal of that perfect fellowship with God which existed before the Fall will be established. The day and hour of Jesus' return is not known by anyone but the Father and will come, as Jesus says, when He is least expected. Thus, following the encouragement of the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids, it is important that the church, in hope and joy, remain steadfast in the faith and thus be found well prepared. (Matthew 25:31-32, II Corinthians 5:10, Mark 13:32, Matthew 24:4-8, Luke 21:28)