

# THE ATHANASIAN CREED

The Athanasian Creed is one of the three ecumenical creeds of Christendom (along with the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed). It has two main sections, the first dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity, and second dealing with the two natures of Christ. It was written at a time where some in the Church rejected the teaching that Jesus was true God. Because of this it does include some harsh condemnations for those who held to such a false teaching.

It is included in the Book of Concord among the Lutheran confessions. It may therefore be used in Lutheran worship and has traditionally been used in some congregations on Trinity Sunday. However, there are problems with using this creed in congregational worship: it is long, it is difficult to understand, it is difficult to read in unison, and the condemnatory sentences can be a stumbling block to some worshippers unless explained – which is difficult in the context of worship. The full text of the Athanasian Creed is given below, with the condemnations and other extraneous phrases bracketed out for ease of reading.

*(Whoever wants to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and inviolate will doubtless perish eternally.)*

This is the catholic faith: that we worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.

For the person of the Father is one, that of the Son another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another, but the deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one - equal in glory, coequal in majesty.

What the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father is uncreated; the Son is uncreated; the Holy Spirit is uncreated. The Father is unlimited; the Son is unlimited; the Holy Spirit is unlimited. The Father is eternal; the Son is eternal; the Holy Spirit is eternal - and yet there are not three eternal beings but one who is eternal, just as there are not three uncreated or unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited. In the same way, the Father is almighty; the Son is almighty; the Holy Spirit is almighty - and yet there are not three almighty beings but one who is almighty.

Thus, the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God - and yet there are not three gods but one God. Thus, the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord – and yet there are not three lords, but one Lord. For just as we are compelled by the Christian truth to confess that each distinct person is God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to say there are three gods or three lords.

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten by anyone. The Son is from the Father alone, not made or created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made or created or begotten but proceeding. Therefore 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, greater or less than another, but all three persons are in themselves coeternal and coequal, so that *(as has been stated above)* in all things the Trinity in unity and the Unity in trinity must be worshipped. *(Therefore, who wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.)*

But it is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore it is the true faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at once God and a human being. He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages, and a human being, born from the substance of his mother in this age. He is perfect God and a perfect human being, composed of a rational soul and human flesh. He is equal to the Father with respect to his divinity, less than the Father with respect to his humanity.

Although he is God and a human being, nevertheless he is not two but one Christ. However, he is one not by the changing of the divinity in the flesh but by the taking up of the humanity in God. Indeed, he is one not by a confusion of substance but by a unity of person. For, as the rational soul and the flesh are one human being, so God and the human being are one Christ.

He suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose from the dead, ascended into the heavens, is seated at the right hand of the Father, from where he will come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all human beings will rise with their bodies and will give an account of their own deeds. Those who have done good things will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil things into eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith (*; a person cannot be saved without believing this firmly, and faithfully*).