

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Orthodox Church is the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, founded by Jesus Christ and His apostles. It is organically and historically the same Church that came fully into being at Pentecost (Acts 2), which we will be commemorating next Sunday.

During the first 1000 years of the Church's existence there was more or less unbroken unity among different groups of Christians. All were formally united in the one, undivided Body of Christ. Throughout the history of the church, there have been many men who have tried to draw the followers of Jesus away from the teachings handed down through the apostles. Various groups and individuals separated themselves from the Church by teaching what was referred to as "heresies" which literally means "differing opinions". The term, as used by the church, means teachings that distort revealed Truth.

Usually most of these false teachers were handled by the local patriarch. They would call a council of the local bishops to evaluate the teaching that was causing debates within the church. The bishops would gather together to determine what was the correct teaching which had been handed down to them from the apostles. If it was determined to be a false teaching, the teaching would be declared a heresy and the teacher forbidden to teach it. Sometimes it would be necessary to excommunicate the false teacher and possibly exile him to a foreign land.

The word creed comes from the Latin *credo* which means "I believe." In the Orthodox Church the creed is usually called The Symbol of Faith which means literally the "bringing together" and the "expression" or "confession" of the faith.

In the early Church there were many different forms of the Christian confession of faith, there were many different "creeds." These creeds were always used in relation to baptism. Before being baptized a person had to state what he or she believed. The earliest Christian creed was probably the simple confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, i.e., the Messiah; and that the Christ is Lord. By publicly confessing this belief, the person could be baptized into Christ, dying and rising with Him into the New Life of the Kingdom of God, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

As time passed different places had different credal statements, all professing the identical faith, yet using different forms and expressions, with different degrees of detail and emphasis. These credal forms usually became more detailed and elaborate in those areas where questions about the faith had arisen and heresies had developed.

Today, we commemorate The Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea held in the year 325 A.D.

In about the year 318, a priest named Arius, began to teach that Christ was not God incarnate, but a lesser godlike being; sort of a glorified angel, but not God incarnate.

Arius reasoned that since there is only one God and that God was one, the son had to be something else. He argued that since the son was begotten, he had a beginning. Thus, there was a time when

the son did not exist. Since God had no beginning, but the Son had a beginning when he was begotten of the father, Arius reasoned that the Son could not be fully God but is "a creature and a work of God."

This new teaching led to major controversy because it challenged the central teaching of the Christian faith as inherited from the Apostolic Church. Since Arius was from North Africa, the Bishop of Alexandria called a council of his bishops and they condemned Arius in the year 320.

Arius then fled to Palestine and continued to teach his new ideas. He managed to convince the Bishop of Antioch that he was correct. The Bishop of Antioch then rejected Arius's condemnation by the Council of the Bishop of Alexandria.

This led to more conflict.

Emperor Constantine saw that this conflict within the Christian church was causing great strife in his empire. At the beginning of the year 325, he sent his chief adviser on church affairs, to Antioch to resolve the issue. There the adviser called a council of the bishops of the area, and they also condemned Arius and his teachings. Unfortunately, this did not settle the issue.

Later on in 325 he called all of the bishops in the Empire to a Council in the city of Nicaea.

After much debate they agreed to adopt a baptismal creed which was in use in Syria and Palestine as the basis for a Universal Creed, as a confession of faith for all Christians. This became the basis for the creed which we say at each Divine Liturgy.

Following the controversy about the Son of God, the Divine Word, a similar dispute about the Holy Spirit arose. Was the Holy Spirit Divine or a creature? In 381 a council was held in Constantinople. The bishops modified the creed to include a statement of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Although The Symbol of Faith is most often called the "Nicene Creed", in reality it should be called the "Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed".

This modified Symbol of Faith was ultimately adopted throughout the entire Church. It was put into the first person form "I believe" and used for the formal and official confession of faith made by a person (or his sponsor or godparent) at his baptism. It is also used as the formal statement of faith by a non-Orthodox Christian entering the communion of the Orthodox Church. In the same way the creed became part of the life of Orthodox Christians and an essential element of the Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church at which each person formally and officially accepts and renews his baptism and membership in the Church. Thus, the Symbol of Faith is the only part of the liturgy which is in the first person. All other songs and prayers of the liturgy are plural, beginning with "we". Only the credal statement begins with "I." This is because faith is first personal, and only then corporate and communal.

To be an Orthodox Christian is to affirm the Orthodox Christian faith—not merely the words, but the essential meaning of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol of faith. It means as well, to affirm all that this statement implies, and all that has been expressly developed from it and built upon it in the history of the Orthodox Church over the centuries down to the present day.

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed remained unchanged until a change was made to it by some of the bishops in the western part of the Roman Empire. During the sixth century an anti-Arian council, which was held, in Spain had inserted into the Creed the word *Filioque*, which was not in the original Creed. *Filioque* is a Latin word meaning "and the Son". This inclusion in the Creedal article regarding the Holy Spirit thus states that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." This new version of the Creed spread to Gaul and the Frankish lands in the eighth century. At a council in 809, Pope Leo III forbade the use of the *Filioque* clause and ordered that the original version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed be engraved on silver tablets and displayed it in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome so that his conclusion would not be overturned in the future. Pope Leo rejected the *Filioque* not only as an addition to the Creed, but also as doctrine, claiming that the Fathers left it out of the Creed neither out of ignorance, nor out of negligence, nor out of oversight, but on purpose and by divine inspiration.

An unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of Pope Leo III. Pope Leo was then accused of immoral conduct. Charlemagne, the Roman Emperor, took a personal and active interest in the investigations. Charlemagne required finally that Pope Leo swear his innocence on the Bible, which he did on December 23, in the year 800. Two days later Pope Leo crowned Charlemagne "Emperor of the Romans." Charlemagne had arranged to get the title "Emperor" in exchange for Leo's exoneration. Charlemagne caused the *Filioque* to be added to the Creed, without consulting the pope. When the controversy over this addition broke out in Jerusalem, Charlemagne convoked a Council and decreed that this addition was a dogma necessary for salvation. With this fait accompli under his belt, he tried to pressure Pope Leo III into accepting it, but he was unable to. The Church of Rome finally accepted the change to the Creed in the year 1014.

There has never been a specific conciliar statement in the Orthodox Church which defined the *Filioque* as heresy. However, it has been regarded as heretical by multiple Orthodox saints, including St. Photius the Great, St. Mark of Ephesus, and St. Gregory Palamas. At the Third Ecumenical Council and the Eighth Ecumenical Council (both of which Rome signed onto), all changes to the Creed are anathematized or condemned. Further, it is explicitly denounced as heretical by the 1848 *Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs*.

There are a number of reasons traditionally cited for the definition of the *Filioque* as heretical. One of the primary reasons is that it is contrary to Scripture, particularly in John 15:26 where Jesus says: "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." Thus, Christ never describes the Holy Spirit as proceeding from himself, but only mentions the Spirit's procession in terms of the Father.

Changes to the teachings and traditions of the church are not made lightly. As many of you have heard, a Holy and Great Council is to be held in Crete, June 16-27, 2016. As of this time, the Patriarch of Antioch, as well as others, have declared that they will not attend. There are issues that they say must be resolved prior to their participation. Let's pray for our Patriarch and all the bishops that they are guided by the Holy Spirit concerning this council. If you want to know more about our Patriarch's concerns, please go to the [Antiochian.org](http://Antiochian.org) web-site and read the [Statement of the Secretariat of the Antiochian Holy Synod](#).