



# St. Andrew**Academy**

## *What Christians Believe and Why It Matters*

Week I  
Introduction  
“I believe in . . .”

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### *Introduction to this course*

- ❖ The syllabus
  - Course description
  - Our objectives
  - The class schedule
  - Howell’s book
- ❖ The index cards
- ❖ The St. Andrew Academy website
  - [www.standrewacademy.org](http://www.standrewacademy.org)
- ❖ Why are the overheads so wordy?
- ❖ How we’ll learn
  - Teaching the head and forming the heart

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## *What is a Christian creed?*

- ❖ A creed is a statement of faith, a succinct and sometimes poetic presentation of the essentials of the Christian faith.
- ❖ A creed lays out the basic public proclamation that Christians present to the world.
- ❖ “Creed” is based on the Latin *credo* which means “I trust . . .” or “I have faith that . . .”
- ❖ From the earliest days of Christianity, we have used creeds of one sort or another to present and clarify the essentials. The creed expresses our “oneness.” The creed’s own “oneness” can be seen its trinitarian outline: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.
  - “In the essentials, unity; in all else, liberty; in everything, charity” John Wesley and others

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## *Creeds: pro's and con's*

- ❖ Pro's
  - Creeds help us to clarify, proclaim, and protect the essential claims of our faith. Many creeds resulted from heretical threats to the faith.
    - The creeds help us to recognize inadequate or incorrect descriptions of our faith/
  - Creeds carry the tradition that we have received from the Christians who preceded us. Creeds remind us that there is one “cloud of saints.”
  - Creeds help provide with a framework for interpreting Scripture and for teaching the basic Christian beliefs, which is exactly what we are doing in this class.
- ❖ Con's
  - Creeds can be used to exclude and enforce. But we are guides who instruct and lead, not guards.
  - No creed can substitute for our engagement with Scripture.
  - No creed can be complete.
  - No creed can be final.

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## *The earliest creeds*

- ❖ See Philippians 2:6-11. This is a creedal hymn. See also Colossians 1:15-20. Also 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
  - These are examples of what seem to be early “creedal” pieces in Paul’s letter.
- ❖ Many of these early “creeds” were baptismal in nature.
- ❖ An example -- from a letter by Ignatius, a martyred Christian bishop
  - “Be deaf, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and [truly] died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.”

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## *The Apostles’ Creed*

- ❖ From Rome in about 200 AD:
  - "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?"
  - "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose on the third day living from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, the one coming to judge the living and the dead?"
  - "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh?"
- ❖ There are other similar versions, culminating in the version we have. We have a copy of it from the seventh century.
- ❖ Church tradition holds that the Apostles Creed was passed on from the original apostles, hence the name.

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## *The Nicene Creed*

- ❖ In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, a bishop, Arius, began to push the view that Jesus was not truly God, but was created by God. This view threatened the unity of the Christian faith. Constantine called a conference of bishops in 325AD in Nicea to consider the issue.
- ❖ The outcome of the Conference, adopted by nearly all the bishops, was the writing of the Nicene Creed, later expanded and clarified at a later conference. The result was the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. This is the one we occasionally recite in worship and is in the back of the hymnal.
  - Notice the careful attention paid in this creed to the divinity of Jesus – “begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father.”
  - This creed introduces philosophical language that is missing in the Apostles Creed and other early creeds.

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## *Methodists and theology*

- ❖ For United Methodists, our theological task is:
  - Both critical and constructive
  - Both individual and communal
  - Contextual and incarnational
    - “God’s supreme mode of self-revelation is in Jesus.”
    - Our theological reflection is energized by our involvement in the Church and the world.
  - Essentially practical!
- ❖ We read the Bible and contemplate God as a believing community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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## *UMC Articles of Religion & Confession of Faith*

- ❖ John Wesley took the 39 articles of the Church of England, cut out the anti-Rome articles and sent the remaining to America to be used by his “Methodists.”
- ❖ These are very standard fare when it comes to Articles of Religion.
- ❖ We also have a Confession of Faith from the EUB church (merged with the Methodists in 1968). It is very similar to the Articles of Religion but in more contemporary language.
  - When the churches merged, the General Conference specifically affirmed that the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith affirmed the same essentials.

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## *What does the creed do?*

- ❖ The creed narrates the Christian story.
- ❖ The creed gives us a lens to aid our interpretation of Scripture.
- ❖ The creed helps us to see the world for what it is.
- ❖ The creed guides Christian practice.
- ❖ The creed prepares the worshipping people.

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### *Why will we be studying the Apostles' Creed?*

- ❖ Because it is much more widely used by Protestants than is the Nicene Creed.
- ❖ Because we affirm it each week in worship.
- ❖ Because it is a statement of the “essentials” that Christians have been using for many, many centuries.
- ❖ Because it is narrative.
- ❖ Because it is trinitarian.
- ❖ Because it is short!

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### *“I believe in . . .”*

- ❖ *Credo* means “I believe”
- ❖ We say “I” but the Creed is still communal. We are affirming as individuals and as a body. I’ve never heard of anyone reciting the Creed regularly by themselves.
  - Together, we believe more and better than any one of us can or do individually.
  - This is why we rise and recite aloud – as one.
- ❖ This is not merely intellectual assent.
  - This is about affirming our full faith and trust (synonyms!) in the truth of the Christian proclamation.
  - This is head and heart.

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## *Faith in the New Testament*

- ❖ “Faith” translates the Greek noun *pistis*; “believe” translates the Greek verb *pisteuein*.
  - We have no verb form of “faith” – no one says I “faithed.” So we use “believe” instead. Often, when you read “believe” in the NT, you can understand it better by reading it as “have faith in.”
- ❖ The people of God are those who have “faith in Jesus Christ.”
  - We have faith when we abandon all reliance on our own efforts to obtain salvation and put our full trust and reliance in Jesus’ work on the cross – that Jesus has done for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. (Acts 16:30f.; John 3:16)
- ❖ **But this is not all there is to faith!!**

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## *Understanding Faith*

Intellectual acceptance of the Gospel – our worldview

Complete trust in God – “believing/faithing” is trusting

**Faith**

The “faith” is passed on from one generation to the next – what we believe

Having faith in God is also living in God’s way – “believing/faithing” is obeying

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