

Zion Lutheran Church, 15 S 4th St., Harrisburg, PA 17101

Tuesday Bible Study: February 22, 2022 – Athanasian Creed

Historic Creeds of the Church: Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian

Opening Prayer:

Anyone who wishes to understand the mind of the sacred writers must first cleanse his own life, and approach the saints by copying their deeds. Thus united to them in the fellowship of life, he will both understand the things revealed to them by God and, thenceforth escaping the peril that threatens sinners in the judgment, will receive that which is laid up for the saints in the kingdom of heaven. Of that reward it is written: 'Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared' for them to live a godly life and love God and the Father in Christ Jesus our Lord, through whom and with whom be the Father himself, with the Son himself, in the Holy Spirit, honour and might and glory to ages of ages of ages. Amen.

- Athanasius (c. 296-373)

2000 Years of Prayer, compiled by Michael Counsell; Morehouse Publishing, 1999.

Brief Biography of Athanasius:

Athanasius was born in Alexandria in Egypt and became its bishop. He believed that the teaching of Arius, that Jesus was only of a similar substance to the Father, destroyed the possibility of our redemption, for Christ cannot reconcile humans with God unless he is truly God and truly human. He defended the decision of the Council of Nicea in 325 that Jesus is of the same substance as the Father, and for this he was driven from his diocese into exile...

2000 Years of Prayer, compiled by Michael Counsell; Morehouse Publishing, 1999.

Athanasius died in 373 a.d., and the epithet that appeared on his tombstone is now famous, as it captures the essence of his life and ministry. It read simply, "Athanasius contra mundum," that is, "Athanasius against the world." This great Christian leader suffered several exiles during the embittered Arian controversy because of the steadfast profession of faith he maintained in Trinitarian orthodoxy.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/athanasian-creed>

A History of the Athanasian Creed

Though the name "Athanasius" was given to the creed over the centuries, modern scholars are convinced that the Athanasian Creed was written after the death of Athanasius. Certainly, Athanasius' theological influence is embedded in the creed, but in all likelihood he was not its author. The present title, *Quicumque Vult*, follows the custom in the Roman Catholic Church that is used for encyclicals and creedal statements. These ecclesiastical affirmations get their name from the first word or words of the Latin text. The Athanasian Creed begins with the words *quicumque vult*, which means "whoever wishes" or "whosoever wishes," inasmuch as this phrase introduces the first assertion of the Athanasian Creed. That assertion is this: "Whosoever wishes to be saved must, above all, keep the catholic faith." The Athanasian Creed seeks to set forth in summary version those essential doctrines for salvation affirmed by the church with specific reference to the Trinity.

With respect to the history of the origins of the Athanasian Creed, it is generally thought now that the creed was first written in the fifth century — though the seventh century is also given its due, since the creed does not show up in the annals of history until 633 at the fourth council of Toledo. It was written in Latin and not in Greek. If written in the fifth century, several possible authors have been mentioned because of the influence of their thought including Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo, but it likely was the French saint, Vincent of Lérins.

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The Athanasian Creed in the Twentieth Century:

... during the course of the twentieth century there was a radical, though unofficial, change in the status of the Creed in the Church of England... it became the neglected creed, the creed that was increasingly simply not used in the Church's public worship.

In the absence of any detailed research on the topic, we cannot precisely say why this change took place. However, six reasons seem likely.

First, during this period any notion of eternal damnation became increasingly contested and for this reason, the damnatory clauses have continued to be a stumbling block preventing people from accepting or using the Creed...

Fourthly, during this period there was an increasing emphasis on the importance of ecumenism and the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, rather than the Athanasian Creed, came to be seen as the two key ecumenical statements of faith which the churches should employ...

The Athanasian Creed (Anglican Foundations) by Martin Davie; Latimer Trust, 2019.

Biblical References for Selected Lines of the Athanasian Creed

Compiled by <http://www.redeemedsb.org/blog/2016/6/23/assessment-of-the-athanasian-creed>

The above blog lists Scripture references for the entire Creed. The Bible verses are ESV translation.

1) Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith.

John 14:6- ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12- ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Romans 3:23- ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 10:13- ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Hebrews 11:6- ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

2) Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally.

Matthew 25:46- ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Mark 9:43- ⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

Romans 2:6–8 - ⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Romans 6:23 - ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:18 - ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 - ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

Revelation 21:8 - ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

29) *Those who have done good will enter eternal life; those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.*

Matthew 16:27 - ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Matthew 25:31-46

John 5:28-29 - ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

2 Corinthians 5:10 - ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Revelation 20:12 - ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

30) *This is the catholic faith: One cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully.*

John 3:18 - ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Galatians 1:8 - ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 - ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Jude 3 - ³ Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.