

An Introduction to Our Faith

The Episcopal Church is part of the holy, catholic Church, which Jesus Christ established by his death and resurrection, empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and through which God works for the redemption of all creation. Members of the Episcopal Church, like Christians everywhere, follow Jesus, confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share in his eternal priesthood.

The Episcopal Church is a daughter of the Church of England and, together with churches in other nations around the world which share that heritage, is a part of what is called the Anglican Communion. Each national Church within this fellowship is independent of the others in matters of local governance and discipline, but all share a common heritage, a common understanding of Christian tradition and worship, the same creeds, sacraments, and ministry. They look to the Archbishop of Canterbury as the spiritual head and symbol of unity for the entire Communion. Although the Archbishop has no governing authority beyond his own Church of England, his moral and spiritual authority is taken very seriously throughout the worldwide Communion.

Members of the Episcopal Church are generally called “Episcopalians.” Members of any Anglican Church, including Episcopalians, can be called “Anglicans”.

Anglican Christians accept the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as “containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith. The apocryphal books of the Old Testament – which appear in the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, but not in the Hebrew Bible – are used and read in our churches, but are not used, as Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians do, to establish any doctrine.

The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, ancient summaries of the Christian faith coming to us from the time of the undivided Catholic Church, are received as sufficient statements of the Christian faith. The Apostles’ Creed, used in the Church’s daily worship, is especially associated with the profession of faith made by candidates for Holy Baptism. The Nicene Creed, recited during the Eucharist on feast days, proclaims the Trinitarian faith of Christians throughout the world and throughout the ages.

The sacraments ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are considered essential to Christian life and worship within our tradition. Holy Baptism can be administered at any age, and the sharing of the sacramental Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Communion takes place within the service of the Holy Eucharist, the Church’s chief act of worship on Sundays and Holy Days. Other sacramental rites are recognized and used in our Church, but are not considered necessary for all persons in the same way that Baptism and the Eucharist are.

The Episcopal Church considers all baptized persons to be ministers, with the duty and privilege of witnessing to Jesus Christ and to serving others in his name. Some Christians are called to the ordained ministries of bishops, priests, and deacons, to serve the Church by teaching, governing, celebrating the sacraments, providing pastoral care, and in servant ministry to the world. This threefold ministry preserves and continues the apostolic ministry empowered by Christ himself, and transmitted in unbroken succession from the time of the Apostles. It is the same ministry shared by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and certain other bodies within Christ's universal Church.

The Anglican Communion believes that all truth comes from God, and that new knowledge, if true, can only help our understanding of God, no matter whence it comes. We do not see conflict between "science" and "religion". In the interpretation of Scripture, we believe that the eternal spiritual truths it presents are not compromised by confessing that sometimes its statements regarding such things as sickness or the nature of the universe were limited by the understanding of its human authors. We believe that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the proper interpreter of Scripture, and that this process continues from generation to generation.

Our Church believes passionately that a living Christian faith must show itself in reaching out to others, particularly to those in any way disadvantaged or oppressed, sick, or in need. This is not an option for Christians, either individually or corporately. Therefore our Church has always been involved, locally and nationally, in issues which concern people's welfare. Local helping ministries engaged in by parishes, often in interdenominational cooperation, are numerous. All of us, as individuals, are urged and encouraged to share in some way in this kind of ministry.

The Anglican Communion possesses a deep and rich tradition of Christian spirituality, once again freely using resources from any part of the Christian Church, and inviting its members to grow in holiness within this tradition according to their individual spiritual personalities. One can find as deep and rigorous a Christian discipline among us as one can anywhere, but not a "one size fits all" mentality.

Finally, Anglicans seek to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness". The liturgical worship using the Book of Common Prayer is enriched by architecture, art, music, and whatever things of beauty each local congregation may be able to supply.

In all things we seek to glorify God, and to serve Jesus Christ by serving his people in the world.

Part 1 - What do we believe?

One defining aspect of being an is affirmation of the Nicene and Apostles' Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith, which we recite every Sunday.

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The Creeds speak of the Trinity

The Jewish idea of **monotheism** was unique in the history of religious thought. Judaism arose in the context of Near Eastern religions that knew many gods, each of whom controlled aspects of the world around us, like rain, or the fertility of the crops or flocks. The Hebrew people themselves once shared such a religious view but came to understand that they worshiped not simply the greatest among a host of gods, but **the only true and living God**.

God the Father

The first section of the Nicene Creed acknowledges the fact that a single God, called both **Father** and **Almighty**, is the **creator** of all that is. It is the acknowledgement of Judaism's monotheism at the very outset of the Creed.

God the Son

The Son and the Father each had **genuine, distinct personhood**, but were of the **same substance** with one another (and, again, with the Holy Spirit). Jesus became God **incarnate**, God's **Word**, and through his life, death, and resurrection, opened for us the way of everlasting life.

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit was originally **God's Power** in the Hebrew Scriptures, granted to God's servants and messengers, prominently the prophets. At **Pentecost**, God's Spirit was made available to all. We believe that God's Spirit is given to us in the gifts of Baptism.

When we are baptized, or renew our baptismal vows, we recite the Apostles' Creed.

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Father?

People I believe in God, the **Father** almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

Celebrant Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

People I believe in **Jesus Christ**, his only Son, our Lord.
He was **conceived** by the power of the Holy Spirit
and **born** of the Virgin Mary.
He **suffered** under Pontius Pilate,
was **crucified**, died, and was buried.
He **descended** to the dead.
On the third day he **rose** again.
He **ascended** into heaven,
and is **seated** at the right hand of the Father.
He will **come** again to judge the living and the dead.

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

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

Another defining aspect of the Episcopal tradition is our Baptismal Covenant, through which we lay out what we promise to do as followers of Jesus.

Continue: “Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

Persevere: “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?”

Proclaim: “Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?”

Seek and Serve: “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?”

Strive: “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?”

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new.” **Through the Incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, God has brought into being a new order and a new way of life.** This new order is defined by the grace and love of God in Christ that reconciles us to God and to one another.

This saving love makes us into a new humanity. Regardless of race, nationality, ethnic heritage, gender, orientation, or language, all have been reconciled and made one through the cross and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. **The Church is meant to be the embodiment of this new humanity.** In spite of our many imperfections, we are the new community where the love and reconciling grace of Christ are proclaimed and lived for the sake of the world.

Becoming this new humanity and new community of grace is a lifelong and ever unfinished process. **We are always becoming what we are in Christ.** Christian life is one of ongoing spiritual formation and continual transformation. As Paul wrote in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Additional Reading Suggestion:

[*Walk in Love: Episcopal Beliefs & Practices*](#); by Scott Gunn and Melody Wilson Shobe

[*The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters*](#); by Luke Timothy Johnson

[*The Apostle's Creed*](#); by Ben Myers

[*Being Christian*](#); by Rowan Williams

[*Being Disciples*](#); by Rowan Williams

[*Tokens of Trust*](#); by Rowan Williams

[The Catechism](#) in *The Book of Common Prayer*

[Historical Documents](#) in *The Book of Common Prayer*