

Basics of our Faith: The Nicene Creed

Why is a Creed so important? At its core, it is the statement of faith of a community of believers. When you become part of the Armenian Christian community, you are among those who share the same belief in God. As a basic statement of our faith, a creed is an opportunity to remind ourselves and reaffirm before God all that we hold to be sacred and true. There are other Creeds in the Armenian Church, including the Apostles' Creed and the Creed of Orthodox Faith.*

The Nicene Creed (Հայաստանի *Havadamk* – 'We believe' in Armenian) is a proclamation of the basic and essential beliefs of the Christian faith. It was established in the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and finalized in the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. These two councils drew the entire Christian Church together to discuss pressing matters of faith in the first Christian centuries.

In the 5th century the Nicene Creed was formally included in the Պատարագ *Badarak*, or Divine Liturgy, and shortly thereafter the Nicene Creed was altered slightly to a form which is sometimes ascribed to Saint Athanasius, who was instrumental in its finalization. This is the version Armenians have been reciting together at every *Badarak*.

Reciting the Creed

The Creed is recited during the part of the *Badarak* known as the Synaxis, the teaching part of the Liturgy, at which time the Bible is read and the sermon was traditionally delivered, all to refresh and relive the Word of God. When we recite the Creed during the Divine Liturgy, we place the palms of our hands together with fingers closed and the right thumb folded over the left. This is a sign of professing our Faith and showing our unity as the body of Christ.

The following is a breakdown of the Nicene Creed. Think of each separate article as you recite the Creed, meditating on its meaning and its effect on your life.

We believe

Our statement of faith is a corporate one. The creed does not begin with "I believe" but "We believe," demonstrating that these are the beliefs of a *community*.

in one God

While we worship the Holy Trinity, we clearly state that we worship only one God.

the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible.

This part of the creed explains that God the Father is our Creator and source of life.

* Before the 4th Century there were a variety of creeds or confessions of faith, one of which is the Apostles' Creed, preserved by the Armenian Church in the service of Baptism. During *Badarak* the priest says a longer Creed, formulated by St. Grigor Tatevatsi in the 14th century, just after public confession and before ascending the altar.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of God the Father, only-begotten, that is of the substance of the Father. God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten and not made; of the same nature of the Father, by whom all things came into being in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Who for us (humankind) and for our salvation came down from heaven, took body, became man, was born perfectly of the holy Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. By whom he took body, soul and mind, and everything that is in (humanity), truly and not in semblance. He suffered and was crucified and was buried and rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven with the same body and sat at the right hand of the Father. He is to come again with the same body and with the glory of the Father to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom there is no end.

This part tells us who Jesus Christ is, showing that our Savior is fully human (born of the holy Virgin Mary, suffered, crucified, buried etc.) and fully divine (came down from heaven, born by the Holy Spirit, rose on the third day, ascended into heaven, etc.). It also states that Jesus' divinity is of the same essence as God the Father (God from God, light from light, true God from true God) so it is clear that we worship one God, and Jesus Christ is one in person and nature. Furthermore, it states what we know and expect of our Savior: that he will come again for a final judgment, as attested to in Scripture.

We also believe in the Holy Spirit, the uncreated and the perfect; who spoke through the Law and through the Prophets and through the Gospels; who descended upon the Jordan, preached through the apostles, and dwelled in the saints.

This part shows that the Holy Spirit also shares the essence of God (uncreated and perfect), again, to demonstrate the unity and oneness of the three persons of the one God. It also shows God's continual inspiration to the Old Testament Law and prophets, New Testament apostles, and all Christians who followed.

We also believe in only one catholic and apostolic holy church

These are the marks of the Church: that she is one (united), catholic (with a lower-case "c" meaning universal, applicable to all people), apostolic (the church descends from the apostles), and holy (purified by the Spirit).

in one baptism;

We believe that the effects of baptism are once and for all: that baptism welcomes the baptized into the family of believers, washes the baptized clean of all sin, and that the baptized is reborn of water and the Spirit.

with repentance for the remission and forgiveness of sins

While baptism cleanses a person of the stain of sin, as human beings we are fallen and continue to sin. For this reason, our sins continue to be forgiven each time we repent of them and receive Holy Communion and absolution.

in the resurrection of the dead; in the everlasting judgment of souls and bodies;

We believe that at the second coming, the dead will be raised not only in spirit but in body, and all people will be judged eternally by God.

in the kingdom of heaven, and in the life eternal.

We truly do believe that God's kingdom is at hand, as we profess in the Lord's Prayer. This last part of the Creed reminds us that Jesus has ushered in a new age, which provides eternal life to all who believe in Him; and that eternal life can begin here and now.