

What Is The Orthodox Church?

The Church began on the Day of Pentecost, in A.D. 33, and later, to combat heresies, the First Ecumenical Council came together in the city of Nicea in A.D. 325 to formulate the faith by consensus of bishops, then the Third Ecumenical Council met in Constantinople in A.D. 381 and added the section on the Holy Spirit, resulting in what is known today as the...

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all worlds; Light of Light, Very God of Very God; Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And the third day He arose again, according to the Scriptures; And ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets;

And I believe in one holy, catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

You may notice that the Creed doesn't begin with something like "I believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God" (although we do believe this!), as is found in many Protestant doctrinal statements. Why? Because the Nicene Creed actually predates by 72 years the definition of the New Testament canon at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. In that semi-literate culture where parchments were rare and expensive, the Church mainly used oral tradition for almost 400 years before the New Testament was defined. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "hold the traditions received from us, both oral and in writing" (2 Thes. 2:15).

This is the only Creed that is confessed by Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants alike. Thus, it is the only Creed capable of reuniting all Christians. It declares clearly that God is One, and consists of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It emphasizes that Christ is both fully God and fully man, born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and that only by believing in His virgin birth, His death on the Cross and His resurrection can we have eternal life in the world to come. And in it we confess the unity of all true Christians in one Universal Church.

The word "catholic" above is sometimes translated "universal" in English. The Russian version of the Creed uses the word "conciliar," which refers to the Seven Ecumenical (Universal) Councils of bishops that hammered out the various doctrines of the Christian faith. It also refers to the "fullness" of truth and worship that is to be found in the one, united, real Church, the visibly united body of all believers that has existed since the first century, not an "invisible" Church that one can only imagine belonging to.

But we do not believe that there are no true Christians outside of the visible, true Church. Rather, as some Orthodox theologians have stated, "We know where the Church is, but we do not know where She is not." The Church is true, not in the sense of perfect, but in the sense of genuine: in spite of the tares among the wheat, the visible Church continues to faithfully confess Christ and practice His teachings from the first century to the present.