

We believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth

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

Introduction

The Christian Church over the centuries has used basic statements of belief or summaries of the faith to teach new converts or as a summary for more mature believers to assist them in sharing their faith with other people. The Bible alone is the written revealed Word of God. II Timothy 3:16-17 states: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* Creeds, catechisms or confessions of faith can all have their place in helping Christians learn more about the faith or help them memorise some key principles from the Bible. The Apostles Creed is one that in its various forms has been in use for most of the last two thousand years.

There are churches who recite The Apostle’s Creed as a regular part of their Sunday worship services. This creed does not go back to the first Apostles of the Church in the first century AD, but it is likely that there were churches in the second century AD that used summaries of Christian belief that were beginning to resemble the majority of this statement of Christian convictions. All the individual statements of The Apostle’s Creed are found in the Bible and were taught from the earliest years of the Christian Church, but the way the Bible was taught varied from generation to generation, especially in different religious contexts. For example, the first Jewish followers of Jesus were already in possession of what we call the Old Testament and had a good knowledge of its contents. For them, the key point of learning was in understanding who Jesus is and the purpose of His coming to earth. By contrast, new converts from other non-Jewish backgrounds could have very different beliefs and take far longer to learn and understand what the Bible teaches about the Christian faith. Today, we will explore very briefly the opening declaration from this Creed. What does it teach about our faith in God?

There are three things highlighted about the first person of the blessed Trinity. What is it we believe?

1. God the Father

There is a very significant difference in the Christian understanding of who God is compared with Orthodox Judaism and Islam, despite all three faiths believing in One true God. It is the revelation Jesus gave to His followers about their relationship with the living God. He did not want them to have a perspective of a distant unfeeling being as their primary understanding of who God is.

(a)**It is a special relationship** *This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven... (Matthew 6:9a). This is a unique privilege available to children of God. We by God’s undeserved favour have a right to come directly into the presence of our Father in heaven. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews exhorts us in this way: *Let us then approach the throne of grace **with confidence**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need* (Hebrews 4:16). We can take this for granted because we know that as Christians we can come directly into His presence. Paul put it this way in Romans 5:1-2: *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²**through whom we have gained access by faith** into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.* Can you remember a time when you entered His family by putting your faith and trust in God through Jesus? Or could today be the day you take that step of faith?*

(b) **It was a sacred relationship** In Galatians 4:6 Paul wrote: *‘Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”* In his letter to the Church in Rome he wrote: ¹⁵*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father”* (Romans 8:15); what an extraordinary privilege we have been granted by God. *Abba* (a respectful form of Daddy) was the first word spoken by a Jewish child and is an incredibly intimate form of address. We stand on holy ground and should seek to grasp a glimpse of how remarkable this is. How amazing it is that mere creatures can address their Creator with such tender affection and extraordinary devotion. As a Christian have you retained some sense of this incredible privilege?

(c) **It was a social relationship** *This is how you* [plural] *should pray: Our Father...* our faith although personal is in communion with fellow believers, reflecting in pale imitation the communion between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Western culture we have since the eighteenth century ‘enlightenment’ emphasized the individual and their rights at the expense of the place of the individual in community and their responsibilities to other people. We have a lot to learn, for example, from Asian or African cultures where there has been retained a much greater respect for elders in the family and other people in the extended family and in other social contexts. Here Jesus assumes His followers are part of a local gathering of His people who worship God together, pray together, share their faith together and serve their community together in an organisation called the local church. The New Testament assumes each follower of Jesus is committed to a local community of believers – are you? In lock down during the Covid-19 pandemic, for some months in 2020 in particular, our contacts were limited to virtual fellowship on line, but it helped us appreciate how valuable in-person contact is, as families or as a church family, together with other ties in the local community.

We have the honour of calling God ‘Father’ because of His love for us reached out to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, His Son and our Saviour to bring us back into a living relationship with Him. Remember these words from John’s Gospel: In John 1:18, it states: *No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known.* Philip, one of Jesus’ disciples asked to see the Father. Jesus’ reply in John 14:8-11a was truly remarkable to Philip: *Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’* ⁹ *Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”?’* ¹⁰ *Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you I do not speak on My own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work.* ¹¹ *Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me;* as a devout Jew, Philip would never forget this statement of Jesus for the rest of his life. It was normative for Christians in the Early Church to refer to God as Father when they addressed God in prayer. For example, in Ephesians 3: 14-15, Paul prayed in this way: *For this reason I kneel before the Father,* ¹⁵ *from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.* In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul reminds us that though there are other faiths in the world that worship different gods: *yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live* (I Corinthians 8:6).

Take time to reflect on the privilege of knowing God as our Father in heaven. Take time to appreciate the access we have to Him in prayer and to rejoice in the direct access into His presence we have in the name of Jesus. May we never forget our blessings. Our God want to have a relationship with you and me. Has there been a time when you consciously turned from your sins and sought His forgiveness for them, acknowledging Jesus as your Lord and Saviour through the Holy Spirit’s enabling power? If you have never done that, I want to encourage you to take that step today. When you become a child of God by faith, you have the incredible honour of calling God ‘Our father in heaven...’

2. Almighty -The greatness of Our God (Isaiah 40:12-31)

Although, this passage speaks about God as Creator, the emphasis is primarily on the greatness of our God, of His awesome sovereign power. What does Isaiah highlight for the Jewish people of his day who felt so acutely their weakness and vulnerability?

(a) **He created the universe!** (Isaiah 40:12-17) ¹² *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?* ¹³ *Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as His counsellor?* ¹⁴ *Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten Him, and who taught Him the right way? Who was it that taught Him knowledge, or showed Him the path of understanding?* ¹⁵ *Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.* ¹⁶ *Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.* ¹⁷ *Before Him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by Him as worthless and less than nothing.* Who can guarantee that all this can happen when this little nation of Israel (or any other small nation at other times) has been brushed aside by the forces of superpower armies like trees and buildings in a raging flood? No mere earthly ruler even begins to fit the description! Isaiah 40:12 has the answer. Only one person, the Creator of the Universe who spoke and brought the world into being and who upholds it by the Word of His power can do it. The same point was made near the end of the book of Job when the subject of the book raised so many ‘why’ questions about what had happened in his life. We are creatures. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. This verse speaks of His **power** to deliver what He has promised. Humans can have aspirations that are beyond our power to accomplish, unlike God. The second thing that marks out the One who can accomplish all this is His **wisdom**, as Isaiah 40:13-14 highlights. To ask the question with respect to God - *or [who] instruct the Lord as His counsellor?* (Isaiah 40:13) is to realise the utter absurdity of the question. There are a very small number of geniuses in our midst, like Gail Trimble who could answer so effortlessly all manner of questions on University Challenge representing Corpus Christi College, Oxford, that dejected opponents referred to her as ‘the human google’. She scored more points than all her colleagues on the team combined (*Daily Telegraph*, 23 April 2018). Yet even these people are acutely aware of their limited knowledge. For most of us it is only as we get older that we realise how little we know of the total knowledge out there! God knows everything! Isaiah 40 verses 15 and 17 remind us of the **sovereignty of God**. How can we be in despair when we serve a God like this! We need to look up and **worship** such a great and almighty God (Isaiah 40:16). Yet how can we offer adequate worship to Him? He is worth so much more than any offering of praise and adoration we could bring! Yet He delights to receive the worship of His children. When we feel down, sometimes it can be encouraging to meditate on the greatness of God!

(b) **With whom would you compare Him?** (Isaiah 40:18-20) *With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken Him?* ¹⁹ *As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.* ²⁰ *A person too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot; they look for a skilled worker to set up an idol that will not topple.* What vocabulary is adequate to describe God? Isaiah looks around at the images used to represent the gods of the nations around them and asks- do you really think this is adequate to reflect the greatness of Almighty God? No! is the only answer we can give to such a question. We serve an incredibly awesome God. This is why the Ten Commandments contain these clear instructions; ³ *‘You shall have no other gods before Me.* ⁴ *‘You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below (Exodus 20:3-4).* Any representation of God would be inadequate to represent Him. Our God is greater than any words we could use to describe Him or any artistic or creative object we might make to represent Him. Do you and I have a big enough picture of the

greatness of God? Anything less than that is idolatry! To see God in His greatness puts our problems and challenges in perspective.

(c) **Awesome in power!** (Isaiah 40:21-26) *Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ²⁵ 'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.* The God who parted the waters of the Red Sea in Egypt to enable the fleeing slaves to escape the mighty Egyptian Army (Exodus 14:15-15:21) is the God who has plans for His people. The God who caused the walls of the powerful city of Jericho to fall down at exactly the right time (Joshua 6:1-27) when Joshua and the army of Israel went on a praise and prayer walk around its perimeter is the God who has plans for His people. The God who raised Jesus from the dead on the first Easter Sunday is the God who has plans for His people, for you and me! Do you know Him? Have you put your faith and trust in Him? Why not today take that first step of faith and acknowledge the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as King of your life.

(d) **The God who restores and renews** (Isaiah 40:27-31) *Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God'? ²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.* In every generation there have been times when God's people felt discouraged, or were acutely aware of a felt absence of His presence. Isaiah was well aware in Isaiah 40:26 that there were people of his day as well as ours who uttered similar words to make this claim. *Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God'?* What response does the prophet give to people of His day and ours? The answer is given in the familiar words found in Isaiah 40:27-31. God is the restorer of my soul, my hope, my vision for the future, because of who He is, our great and awesome God. This passage provides great encouragement for God's people when discouraged because it reveals to us an amazing and wonderful God whom it is our privilege to serve. This is the God who has plans for our lives, individually and collectively, if we will put our hands in His and go forward in faith exercising the calling entrusted to us.

3. **Maker of heaven and earth** (Psalm 33:4-19)

There are many passages in the Bible that speak of God as our Creator and as the Creator of the Universe. One example comes in Psalm 33. The Psalmist naturally highlights the character of our God in verses 4-5, prior to drawing our attention to God as the Creator, the maker of heaven and earth in verses 6-9; of course, the aim of the Psalmist is to draw us into God's presence to worship and adore His wonderful name.

(a) **God's word and work in creation** (Psalm 33:4-9) *⁴For the word of the Lord is right and true; He is faithful in all He does. ⁵The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of His unfailing love. ⁶By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth. ⁷He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; He puts the deep into storehouses. ⁸Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him. ⁹For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.* In Psalm 33:4 the focus is on the trustworthiness of God. God

can be trusted even in those times when we do not sense His presence near us. Even when answers to our prayers appear to be delayed (from our perspective); God is a trustworthy God. This speaks about the character of the One we come to worship. At the human level any meaningful relationship is based on trust. If we trust someone completely then we will rightly make all kinds of allowances for those circumstances where we have partial or no knowledge of what is going on. If we have no confidence in the character and conduct of a person then there is zero chance of a meaningful relationship with that person. Our author is very clear here how he views God. *⁴For the word of the Lord is right and true; He is faithful in all He does.* God has spoken and I believe it. God has acted in a manner consistent with His character in the past, therefore, in the present when I cannot see clearly what He is doing, I will by faith assume that he has not changed. As a result, I can depend on Him in the times of difficulty and darkness to know that He will stand with me and bring me through to better times.

Psalm 33:5 builds on the previous verse. It states: *The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of His unfailing love.* His conduct is consistent with His character. In a very mixed world where there are many good things taking place as well as lots of bad or sad things too, we are invited to look for the things taking place that reflect our Creator. In Hebrew here in the words *His unfailing love* is the word **hesed**. This is a covenant or agreement term in the ancient world by which two parties are bound to keep something they have promised to the other. In this case it is God and His people. We can trust Him because He has promised to do what He has stated He will do for His people, with our corresponding obligation to love and honour and worship Him each day of our lives. This is the secret of the security of God's people, based on our relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

What signs have you seen this week *of His unfailing love*? We are created for relationships with other people. This can be in many spheres. We must also very quickly point out that we do not conform to the secular notion that 'everyone' must be in a one-to-one relationship with someone to be fulfilled. Relationships with family, church family, friends and work colleagues are more complicated but also more enriching than simplistic descriptions allow. There are times when we are blessed by the actions of a complete stranger. It can be little acts of kindness not necessarily something big. There are numerous ways in which we can show we care for others and them for us. The challenge we may need to address, though, is this: in my daily life do I focus primarily on the good things that happen in a day or the bad things? Our temperament will affect our perspective. Some of us will naturally for that reason have to work harder to have that primary focus on the good and positive things. Sometimes we may need someone or some other people to help us break a pattern of negative thinking based on past difficulties we have gone through, so that we can grasp afresh our blessings and the good things going on in our lives.

The big focus here is a sense of awe and wonder at the created world. It speaks of God's omnipotence, that He is all-powerful. There is nothing too hard for Him to do. Psalm 33:6-9 especially makes this point. *By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth. ⁷He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; He puts the deep into storehouses. ⁸Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him. ⁹For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.* How true and remarkable it is. The fine tuning of our universe to ensure life is possible on planet earth is absolutely incredible. The idea that it could happen completely by chance requires far greater faith than I possess. It is more natural to join the Psalmist in a sense of awe and wonder at the greatness of our God and give Him the praise and glory for the wonders of creation. Modern science in its development over the last few centuries has enabled us to catch a glimpse of more and more of the amazing world in which we live. From the microscopic level to see the extraordinary complexity of even the basic building blocks of life that are far too small to see with our eyes, to the vast expanses of space and galaxies. How great You are O Lord! How majesty is Your

name! The incredible power of God to bring all this into being from nothing! Hebrews 1:3 states; *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.* This is our God to whom we bring our praises and our prayers. This is why we can come with rejoicing before Him today with a sense of awe and wonder. Hallelujah! But our author has more grounds for our rejoicing:

(b) **God's counsel and care in providence** (Psalm 33:10-19) *The Lord foils the plans of the nations; He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. ¹¹ But the plans of the Lord stand firm for ever, the purposes of His heart through all generations. ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for His inheritance. ¹³ From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; ¹⁴ from His dwelling-place He watches all who live on earth – ¹⁵ He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. ¹⁶ No king is saved by the size of His army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. ¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. ¹⁸ But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, ¹⁹ to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.* These verses speak of His omniscience. There is nothing worth knowing that He does not know. His knowledge of the whole created order, including more details about you and me than we know ourselves; It is possible that within the next few decades scientists will have all the information needed to be able to predict who might be likely to suffer from certain inherited conditions. Knowledge like that is actually deeply problematic because of insurance implications and the psychological issues that will inevitably follow if we know with reasonably certainty of life changing circumstances coming our way within a few years or a decade or two. If the Government possesses increasing amounts of information on me or you, we might rightly be afraid of the potential misuse of that information. Yet there is nothing that God does not already know about us and we can be sure He will not misuse it because of His covenant relationship with us. He has demonstrated in the person of Jesus how much He loves us and so we need not be afraid that He knows us so well. There is a practical point here. There are people who say I couldn't become a Christian I am not good enough. Or they are afraid deep down that letting God into their lives will reveal things they know about themselves that they do not like. The good and bad news, depending on your point of view, is that God already knows everything about us! He will never love you or me because we are good enough. His love towards us is assured because Jesus His perfect Son was good enough and whose sacrificial death in our place on the cross was a substitutionary act so that instead of receiving the rightful punishment for our sins, Jesus paid our debt in full. Therefore, we can come with confidence to our heavenly father who already knows everything and welcomes us into His family. There is so much good news here in His Word to receive and to share with others. I hope and pray each one of us can declare that: 'I believe in God **the Father, almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**' Amen

Question for Reflection:

The Bible has revealed to us God as our Father, but also the knowledge of His awesome greatness. Which of these truths do you most need to reflect on today?

Song for Reflection: 'Behold our God'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSTH3SCQZlc>