

Lesson 25: Three Ecumenical Creeds

“Yet I do as a child who is being taught the Catechism. Every morning, and whenever else I have time, I read and recite word for word the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Psalms, etc. I still read and study the Catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and I do it gladly.”

- Dr. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*: Preface

Keys to Lesson 25:

Topic: The Three Ecumenical Creeds

Thesis: The Ecumenical Creeds help pass on the faith with clear, simple statements.

Key question: Of what value are the Ecumenical Creeds?

Catechism: Three Ecumenical Creeds

Accompanying Bible Story: Psalm 78 – Asaph Recalls History

Warm-up or review:

As students enter the classroom, have a task posted for them.

Options:

Finish paragraph from Lesson 24

Finish questions from Lesson 24

Finish Lesson 24 summary

Lesson 24 quick quiz

Read and summarize Psalm 78

Introduce new lesson:

Options: See how many of your students have memorized the Apostles’ Creed.

The Nicene Creed?

The Athanasian Creed?

Have a conversation about how you use these Creeds in worship.

Read and discuss the student worksheet text

NOTE: Your students will need copies of the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. You can find them in the *Ambassador Hymnal* and in the Ambassador Publications *Luther’s Small Catechism and Explanation*. They are also included at the end of this lesson in the Teacher Edition.

While the people of Israel were encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God gave them the Law. Forty years later, before sending them into the Promised Land, Moses reviewed the Law with them. He reminded them of the Ten Commandments. Then he also told God’s people how important it was that the faith be passed on from fathers to children: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Some 400 years later, after God's people had been through many cycles of rebellion and rescue, God allowed the people to have a king. The second of those kings was David the son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah. Over half of the book of 1 Chronicles is the story of David's reign. One of David's main accomplishments was establishing Jerusalem as his capital city. Chapter 16 recounts the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Named among the Levites appointed to lead the worship into Jerusalem was Asaph.

Among the twelve Psalms we know Asaph wrote is Psalm 78. As he himself said at the beginning of the Psalm, this poem was written to teach about God's faithfulness

*"Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
We will not conceal them from their children,
But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done" (3, 4).*

Moses reminds us of the importance of passing down the faith from parents to children. Asaph reminds us of the value of doing the same. In the same way the Church has developed statements that summarize what we believe. These statements of belief, or creeds, help us pass on the faith in simple but clear ways.

Lesson:

Help the students work through the text and Bible passages in the student material.

*** Read the three Ecumenical Creeds aloud.**

See *Ambassador Hymnal* and in the Ambassador Publications *Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation* or make copies. See also end of this lesson.

*** How are the three Creeds similar?**

Help your students find similarities which might include:

All three talk about the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

All three have a large focus on Jesus, the Son. The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds particularly emphasize the divinity of Jesus.

*** What is unique about the Apostles' Creed?**

Answers might include:

It is the shortest of the three.

There is little explanation of either of the Persons of the Trinity.

The second article is mostly biographical.

*** What is unique about the Nicene Creed?**

Answers might include:

Each article is more complete.

The First Article includes what the Father Created.

The Second Article confesses how Jesus is God particularly in His relationship to the Father.

The Third Article has more information about the Holy Spirit himself before the confession about the Church.

*** The Athanasian Creed has two main parts. What titles might you give each part?**

Answers might include:

“The relationship of the Person's of the Trinity”

“The Divinity of Jesus”

*** What is unique about the Athanasian Creed?**

Answers might include:

This Creed asserts that the content must be believed in order to be saved.

There are two main sections instead of three.

The focus of the first section is on who the Trinity is and how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are related to each other.

The focus of the second part is on how Jesus is God. This section also includes what Jesus did for us to save us.

*** Summarized the following verses. As you do, think about what we are to either do with the content of our faith or what we should believe.**

*** Jeremiah 6:16**

Thus says the LORD,

“Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths,

Where the good way is, and walk in it;

And you will find rest for your souls.

But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'”

It is good for us to be firmly grounded in the long held beliefs of the Church. It is in believing these truths that our souls will find rest.

*** Genesis 1:1**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Confessing God as Creator is key to our faith.

Point out to your students that Genesis 1 is both history and creed.

*** John 1:1-5, 14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word is preexistent God. He already was when our beginning began. He is creator. He is light that shines in our darkness. He is life. He became a human and lived among us. His glory was seen full of grace and truth.

*** Colossians 1:15-20**

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

This paragraph about Jesus tells us that He is God, that He is creator, that He holds all things together, that He is head of the Church, that He is risen from the dead and has first place in all things. Jesus' purpose is to bring us back into friendship with God by His death on the cross.

*** Colossians 2:8-10**

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

We need to take care that we know the truth so that we are not led astray into false teaching. Key in our faith is that Jesus is God, that we have been made complete in Him, and that He is in total and full authority.

*** Titus 3:3-8**

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

We can confidently believe that though we are born sinners, God has been kind to us and has saved us. He did this not based on any merit in us but completely based on what Jesus did for us in grace. In baptism, we are recreated, made new, and given eternal life.

Summary:

Options:

Students write questions in their question column

Students write a three to four sentence summary: What did I learn in this lesson?

Students write a SEE paragraph

Possible paragraph prompt:

Of what value are the Ecumenical Creeds?

Sample paragraph:

The Ecumenical Creeds are clear and simple statements that affirm the content of our faith. According to Colossians 2:8-10 we are to “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.” The Creeds help us know the truth taught in Scripture. The Creeds help us stay in the truth taught in Scripture. We can rely on the Creeds to teach us how to live according Christ.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church, The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body; And the Life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made: Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, And was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And is seated on the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge both 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 and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to come. Amen.

The Athanasian Creed

Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold the true Christian faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish for eternity.
This is the true Christian faith, that we worship one God in three Persons and three Persons in one God without confusing the Persons or dividing the divine substance.
For the Father is one Person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is still another, but there is one Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, equal in glory and coequal in majesty.
What the Father is, that is the Son and that is the Holy Spirit: the Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated; the Father is unlimited, the Son is unlimited, the Holy Spirit is unlimited; the Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal; and yet They are not three Eternals but one Eternal, just as there are not Three Who are uncreated and Who are unlimited, but there is One who is uncreated and unlimited.
Likewise the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty.
So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but

one God.

So the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord, and yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.

For just as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Christian religion to say that there are three Gods or three Lords.

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten by anybody.

The Son was not made or created, but was begotten by the Father.

The Holy Spirit was not made or created or begotten, but proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Accordingly there is one Father and not three Fathers, one Son and not three Sons, one Holy Spirit and not three Holy Spirits.

And among these three Persons none is before or after another, none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are coequal and coeternal, and accordingly, as has been stated above, three Persons are to be worshiped in one Godhead and one God is to be worshiped in three Persons.

Whoever wishes to be saved must think thus about the Trinity.

It is also necessary for eternal salvation that one faithfully believe that our Lord Jesus Christ became man, for this is the right faith, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at once God and man:

He is God, begotten before the ages of the substance of the Father, and He is man, born in the world of the substance of His mother, perfect God and perfect man, with reasonable soul and human flesh, equal to the Father with respect to his Godhead and inferior to the Father with respect to His manhood.

Although he is God and man, He is not two Christs but one Christ: one, that is to say, not by changing the Godhead into flesh, but by taking on the humanity into God, one, indeed, not by confusion of substance but by unity in one Person.

For just as the reasonable soul and the flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ, Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, is seated on the right hand of the Father, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

At His coming all men shall rise with their bodies and give an account of their own deeds.

Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will go into everlasting fire.

This is the true Christian faith. Unless a man believe this firmly and faithfully, he cannot be saved.

Psalms 78

1 Listen, O my people, to my instruction;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
2 I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
3 Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
4 We will not conceal them from their children,
But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.
5 For He established a testimony in Jacob
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
That they should teach them to their children,
6 That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born,
That they may arise and tell them to their children,
7 That they should put their confidence in God
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments,
8 And not be like their fathers,
A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not prepare its heart
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.
9 The sons of Ephraim were archers equipped with bows,
Yet they turned back in the day of battle.
10 They did not keep the covenant of God
And refused to walk in His law;
11 They forgot His deeds
And His miracles that He had shown them.
12 He wrought wonders before their fathers
In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.
13 He divided the sea and caused them to pass through,
And He made the waters stand up like a heap.
14 Then He led them with the cloud by day
And all the night with a light of fire.
15 He split the rocks in the wilderness
And gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths.
16 He brought forth streams also from the rock
And caused waters to run down like rivers.
17 Yet they still continued to sin against Him,
To rebel against the Most High in the desert.
18 And in their heart they put God to the test
By asking food according to their desire.
19 Then they spoke against God;
They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"

20 "Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out,
And streams were overflowing;
Can He give bread also?
Will He provide meat for His people?"

21 Therefore the LORD heard and was full of wrath;
And a fire was kindled against Jacob
And anger also mounted against Israel,
22 Because they did not believe in God
And did not trust in His salvation.

23 Yet He commanded the clouds above
And opened the doors of heaven;
24 He rained down manna upon them to eat
And gave them food from heaven.

25 Man did eat the bread of angels;
He sent them food in abundance.

26 He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens
And by His power He directed the south wind.

27 When He rained meat upon them like the dust,
Even winged fowl like the sand of the seas,
28 Then He let them fall in the midst of their camp,
Round about their dwellings.

29 So they ate and were well filled,
And their desire He gave to them.

30 Before they had satisfied their desire,
While their food was in their mouths,
31 The anger of God rose against them
And killed some of their stoutest ones,
And subdued the choice men of Israel.

32 In spite of all this they still sinned
And did not believe in His wonderful works.

33 So He brought their days to an end in futility
And their years in sudden terror.

34 When He killed them, then they sought Him,
And returned and searched diligently for God;
35 And they remembered that God was their rock,
And the Most High God their Redeemer.

36 But they deceived Him with their mouth
And lied to Him with their tongue.

37 For their heart was not steadfast toward Him,
Nor were they faithful in His covenant.

38 But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them;
And often He restrained His anger
And did not arouse all His wrath.

39 Thus He remembered that they were but flesh,
A wind that passes and does not return.

40 How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness
And grieved Him in the desert!

41 Again and again they tempted God,
And pained the Holy One of Israel.
42 They did not remember His power,
The day when He redeemed them from the adversary,
43 When He performed His signs in Egypt
And His marvels in the field of Zoan,
44 And turned their rivers to blood,
And their streams, they could not drink.
45 He sent among them swarms of flies which devoured them,
And frogs which destroyed them.
46 He gave also their crops to the grasshopper
And the product of their labor to the locust.
47 He destroyed their vines with hailstones
And their sycamore trees with frost.
48 He gave over their cattle also to the hailstones
And their herds to bolts of lightning.
49 He sent upon them His burning anger,
Fury and indignation and trouble,
A band of destroying angels.
50 He leveled a path for His anger;
He did not spare their soul from death,
But gave over their life to the plague,
51 And smote all the firstborn in Egypt,
The first issue of their virility in the tents of Ham.
52 But He led forth His own people like sheep
And guided them in the wilderness like a flock;
53 He led them safely, so that they did not fear;
But the sea engulfed their enemies.
54 So He brought them to His holy land,
To this hill country which His right hand had gained.
55 He also drove out the nations before them
And apportioned them for an inheritance by measurement,
And made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.
56 Yet they tempted and rebelled against the Most High God
And did not keep His testimonies,
57 But turned back and acted treacherously like their fathers;
They turned aside like a treacherous bow.
58 For they provoked Him with their high places
And aroused His jealousy with their graven images.
59 When God heard, He was filled with wrath
And greatly abhorred Israel;
60 So that He abandoned the dwelling place at Shiloh,
The tent which He had pitched among men,
61 And gave up His strength to captivity
And His glory into the hand of the adversary.
62 He also delivered His people to the sword,
And was filled with wrath at His inheritance.

63 Fire devoured His young men,
And His virgins had no wedding songs.
64 His priests fell by the sword,
And His widows could not weep.
65 Then the Lord awoke as if from sleep,
Like a warrior overcome by wine.
66 He drove His adversaries backward;
He put on them an everlasting reproach.
67 He also rejected the tent of Joseph,
And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
68 But chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion which He loved.
69 And He built His sanctuary like the heights,
Like the earth which He has founded forever.
70 He also chose David His servant
And took him from the sheepfolds;
71 From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him
To shepherd Jacob His people,
And Israel His inheritance.
72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,
And guided them with his skillful hands.