

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 Ap. 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 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.

(adapted from Dr. Robert D. Hosken's article *Our Homecoming*, at www.Discover-Original-Christianity.info)

An Overview of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

(From the beginning, Christian worship has been liturgical: St. James, the Lord's brother, composed the first liturgy. It was later shortened by St. Basil the Great, which we still celebrate during Lent and other holy days. For most services we use the even shorter version by St. John Chrysostom.)

I. Liturgy of the Word (Liturgy of the Catechumens)

1. Readings from the O.T.
2. Little Entrance
3. Reading of the Epistle
4. Reading of the Gospel
5. Preaching – the homily
6. "The doors, the doors!"

II. Liturgy of the Eucharist (Liturgy of the Faithful)

1. **"He took bread"** – Great Entrance
Kiss of Peace and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed
2. **"He gave thanks"** – the Anaphora
 - A. Thanksgiving to the Father:
 - a) for creation
 - b) Trinitarian praise – Sanctus
 - c) for redemption
 - B. Manifestation of the work of the Son:
 - a) institution
 - b) anamnesis – the remembrance or "calling forth again"
 - c) anaphora – the prayer said before the Eucharist
 - C. Invocation for descent of the Holy Spirit:
 - a) epiclesis – the invocation of the Holy Spirit
 - b) commemoration of the dead, hymn to the Theotokos
 - c) commemoration of the living
 - D. Final doxology
3. **"He broke it"** – the Fraction
 - A. Lord's Prayer
 - B. "Holy Things are for the Holy"
 - C. Fraction of the Bread
4. **"He gave it"** – Communion
 - A. "With the fear of God, draw near..."
 - B. "We have seen the true light"
 - C. "Blessed be the name of the Lord"

(adapted from Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's book *The Living God, a catechism*, p. 286)

The section in the Antiochian pew book for the Liturgy flows sequentially, with a table for the weekly variations for the eight "tones" and for the Church's feast days (see "The Typicon").

A Short Glossary of Orthodox Terms

(Many Orthodox terms come from Greek, just as many Western Christian terms come from Latin.)

Aer – the veil placed over the paten and chalice

Anamnesis – the remembrance or “calling forth again,” the continued actualization of the event celebrated at the Last Supper

Anaphora – the prayer said before the Eucharist, literally, a sacrifice of thanks, an ascent

Antidoron – (also called Evlogia) the bread symbolizing the agape meal, after communion

Antimins (Antiminsion) – the rectangular cloth the priest unfolds during the Cherubic Hymn on which are printed Christ in the Tomb with the Holy Trinity, Angels and Prophets looking down from above. Below is the Last Supper, the cock that crowed when Peter denied Christ three times, the dice the soldiers cast for Jesus' robe; above are the Cross and Resurrection.

Antiphon – the chant from the Psalms by the deacon with responses by the people

Apodosis – the conclusion or “leavetaking” of a feast, i.e. the final day of a feast

Arianism – the heresy that taught Christ was not divine, but rather a creature like us

Apolytikion – the dismissal hymn (troparion) said or sung near the end of Vespers

Asteriskos – the star-like cover placed over the bread

Axios – “he is worthy,” said by the people when the bishop ordains a new priest, or when a convocation of bishops appoints a new bishop; if the people disapprove they say “anaxios”

Compline – prayers after supper or at bedtime; Great Compline (Psalms 4, 6, 13, 25, 31 & 91) is celebrated in church to commemorate a saint; Small Compline (Psalms 51, 70 & 143) is a private service at home

Diskos – the paten or plate on which the cut bread is placed

Enarxis – the beginning of the Liturgy

Epigenotion – a special rectangular vestment indicating that a priest can hear confession

Epiclesis – calling down the Holy Spirit to consecrate the elements during the Eucharist

Epimanikia – cuffs “around the wrists” denoting the power of God manifested in the priest

Epitaphion – a moveable bier depicting the sepulchre of Christ

Epitrachelion – the stole the priest wears as a loop “around the neck” with two halves sewn together in front denoting the two natures of Christ and two holy offices: priest and deacon

Filioque – the phrase “and from the Son” added to the Nicene Creed by the Roman church, leading to the Great Schism of A.D. 1054

Great Entrance – procession by deacons, priest (and bishop) bearing the Gifts from the North Door through the nave and back to the Royal Doors, followed by the Cherubic Hymn

Great Ektenia – the litany chanted by the deacon, and the people reply “Lord have mercy”

Irmos – the first stanza of each of the nine songs, the “canon” from Matins

Kontakion – a hymn with a variable number of stanzas that is sung at Orthros or the Liturgy
Little Entrance – the procession by deacons, priests (and bishop) bearing the Gospel book to begin the Liturgy of the Word

Marcionism – the heresy of discarding the Old Testament, retaining only the New Testament
Megalynarion – a short hymn for the saint of the day, often: “It is truly meet to bless thee, O Theotokos, ever blessed and most blameless and the Mother of our God...”

Modalism – the heresy that denies the Trinity by stating that God is a single Person who has revealed himself in three forms, or modes; also known as Sabellianism or Patripassionism

Montanism – the heresy that ecstatic prophecies can supersede doctrines proclaimed by the Apostles and Tradition in interpreting the Scriptures; thus an early form of “sola Scriptura”

Nestorianism – the heresy that Christ exists as two persons, the man Jesus and the divine Son of God, or Logos, rather than as one unified person with two natures

Omophorion – a long strip of material adorned with crosses “borne on the shoulders” by the bishop, originally a sheepskin or fleece

Orthros – Greek for “Matins,” the early morning divine office

Parousia – the Second Coming of Christ

Phelanon – the cloak-like garment (chausuble) the priest wears over the tunic

Polyeleon – Psalm 134 (135): “Praise ye the name of the Lord; O ye servants, praise the Lord,” and the response: “Alleluia!”

Prokeimion – “that which goes before” the Epistle and Gospel readings

Proskomede – the Liturgy of preparation

Prosphora – the sacrificial bread offering used during communion

Prothesis (also called Proskomide) – the preparation table where and the priest and deacon prepare the bread and wine (not to be confused with a prosthesis)

Sticharion – the priest’s tunic that reaches the floor

Synaxarion – a book listing when on the church calendar to celebrate Feast Days and Saints

Synaxis – the Liturgy of the Word, or a gathering or feast one day after the day of a saint

Tone – one of the eight voices or melodies in which various hymns are sung

Tradition (Holy Tradition) – Greek: “paradosis” - that which is passed on; the doctrines agreed upon by synods and councils of bishops who are in Apostolic succession

Troparion – short, poetic sacred verses inserted between verses from the Psalms

Typicon – a book for “following the order” of the fixed and variable parts of the divine services for each day of the year

Zoné – the belt-like girdle that ties in the back and goes around the tunic at the waist

(If you come across other unfamiliar terms, just ask, or search at www.orthodoxwiki.org)