

GO DEEPER: ANCIENT DEBATES, MODERN FAITH

A Reflection Guide for "The Ancient Debate That Shaped Christianity Forever"

INTRODUCTION

In this week's episode of Making Sense of Faith, Adam Hamilton and Michael Carpenter introduce us to the Council of Nicaea and the creation of the Nicene Creed—a document born from passionate debate about who Jesus really is. As you reflect on this conversation, use this guide to explore how ancient theological wrestling can inform your own faith journey and help you navigate the questions and doubts that arise in modern spiritual life.

3 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take a moment to consider what stood out to you most from this historical exploration:

1. Adam mentioned that Arius was a faithful pastor trying to help his congregation make sense of confusing theological concepts. Think about a time when you've struggled to understand something about faith. How did that struggle shape your beliefs?
2. The Council of Nicaea declared that Jesus is "of the same being" as the Father, not just similar to God but fully God. How does this distinction—that Jesus isn't just God-like but actually God—impact how you view Jesus's role in your life?
3. Adam shared how teenagers memorized the Nicene Creed and recited it with joy and energy rather than as a rote exercise. What foundational truths or practices from your faith (or life philosophy) do you hold onto during difficult times?

2 KEY INSIGHTS

1. Explore Faith Questions in Community

"That's what we Methodists call holy conferencing too. That we're made to do this together. That when Jesus promises the Holy Spirit who will lead you into all truth, that's the Greek word for plural you, that He is leading us together to all truth and we find it together."

Question: How might your approach to doubt and difficult questions change if you saw them as opportunities for community exploration rather than personal struggles to solve alone?

Reflection: Consider the difference between wrestling with faith questions in isolation versus engaging them with others. The early church didn't settle major theological disputes through individual revelation but through collective discernment. What communities—formal or informal—help you think through life's biggest questions?

2. Mystery Doesn't Diminish Faith

"Trinity isn't a math problem, it's a faith solution. This isn't something we need to work out on paper. This is something that we've received and we can rest in."

Question: What aspects of life or faith do you feel pressure to "figure out completely" rather than accepting as mystery you can rest in?

Reflection: The Trinity remains mysterious even after 1,700 years of theological exploration. Sometimes the most profound truths can't be reduced to formulas or explanations. What would it look like to find peace in mystery rather than demanding complete understanding?

1 PRACTICE EXERCISE

The Ancient Words Daily Check-In

Choose one line from the Nicene Creed (provided below) to focus on each day this week:

Find a quiet moment each morning and:

- Read your chosen line slowly three times
- Ask yourself: "What does this phrase have to say about my next 24 hours?"
- Throughout the day, return to that line when you face decisions, challenges, or moments of doubt
- Before bed, reflect on how that ancient truth showed up in your modern day

Sample lines to choose from:

- "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth"
- "For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven"
- "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life"
- "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come"

Remember: As Adam noted, these aren't just theological statements—they're declarations about how God works in our daily lives.

QUOTES TO CONSIDER

"For it, for us to have a salvation that we can rely on, that can be a full salvation, it needed to be someone who is fully God to come do it."

"Even as they maybe move away from the faith at some point or other things happen in their life, they'll remember those things about the Creed... for us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven."

"There's only one thing that's holding me together right now... I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth."

CLOSING REFLECTION

The Nicene Creed wasn't created in a peaceful monastery but forged in heated debate by people wrestling with the same questions that keep us up at night. As you close this reflection time, consider how your own questions and doubts might not be obstacles to faith but opportunities to discover deeper truths.

Remember that the most enduring beliefs often emerge not from easy answers but from honest wrestling with life's mysteries.



The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic* and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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