



# Liturgical Thought

## EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY<sup>1</sup>

### Why do we confess the Creed after hearing the Gospel?

*“Having heard the Word of God, we confess our faith in His Name. **The Creed is our saying back to God what He has first said to us.** In the Nicene Creed, we acclaim **the truth** of the **Triune God** and His work of salvation **accomplished for us in His Incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.** Since the Creed is a **summary of the faith**, in confessing it we are saying ‘**Amen**’ to the main content of the entire Gospel.”<sup>2</sup>*

The **Nicene Creed** is normally our confession of faith on feasts days and services in which we celebrate Holy Communion (the **Mass** or **Divine Service**) which is, thankfully, every Sunday here at Redford. It is omitted during any other weekday celebration of the Mass. The **Apostles’ Creed** is usually confessed in **prayer offices** such as **Matins** and **Vespers** etc.. (The **Athanasian Creed** is traditionally confessed on **Trinity Sunday**.)

Our confession of the **Nicene Creed** unites us with the whole **Christian Church**, past, present, and future. The origins of the **Nicene Creed** are from a **baptismal creed** with certain phrases added to **combat Arianism**, an early **Christian heresy** which claimed that Christ was a creature, the first created of God before all creation. The **Nicene Creed** confesses Christ as **“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”**— **Jesus is God, not a God, or one of many Gods.** The Creed identifies who Christ is and why He came down from heaven. The original version of the Creed was given to us in **325 A.D.** Other heresies came to the fore over time and various phrases were added to the Creed in **381 A.D.** to affirm the **divinity of the Holy Spirit.** **Arianism** did not die an easy death and the **“filioque”** (**“who proceeds from the Father and the Son”**) was added and would later divide the Church, East vs. West.

In confessing the **Creed** we are, as Professor Pless so succinctly states above, **confessing our agreement to the truth as it is given us in Holy Scripture.** Depending on the **setting of the Mass**, the **Creed** may be confessed **before or after** the Sermon. When we confess the **Creed** before the Sermon we are expressing our **conviction**

<sup>1</sup> Much of the content of this series on the Liturgy of the Church is found in *Why? A Layman’s Guide to the Liturgy*, by Rev. Burnell F. Eckardt Jr., Repristination Press, (Malone, TX.), and first published in *Gottesdienst, The Journal of Lutheran Liturgy*, in a series by the same name between the years 1985-2005. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> Pless, John, T., *“A Narrative Commentary on the Divine Service.”*

that what follows the **Creed** is to be in **full agreement with the Scriptures just read and heard and the faith just confessed in the Creed**. When confessed after the Sermon there is an assumption that this conviction has been the case. Some would say that confessing Creed after the Sermon makes for an even stronger conviction while also **implying that the Sermon is as much the Gospel as when it is heard in the Pericope (readings)**. Confessing the Creed immediately following the hearing of the Word is to acknowledge that **“faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ”** (Romans 10:17).

One of the most **emotionally laden issues** to confront the Church in our time is the **issue of authority**. **Who has it, who can use it, and how is it to be used?** Though **doctrine and practice are never matters up for vote, the Pastor is accountable to the people he serves as a servant in the stead of Christ**. The Pastor may not **choose to preach or teach just anything that he chooses**. The people and the Pastor **are bound together by, and require of one another, allegiance to the standard of doctrine taught by the Apostles**. (See Matthew 28:20 and Acts 2:42) What does this mean? It means that **the laity, male and female, young and old, are required by God to hold their pastors to the standard of teaching that is set down in the Words of Jesus and the writings of the Apostles**. Confessional Lutherans have a tremendous advantage in this respect over other Christians. We have **clearly written statements of the faith that are entirely Scriptural**. Indeed, the agreement of the **Creeds and Confessions of the Church with Holy Scripture** is so very clear and compelling that we have no problem at all in **requiring our pastors to preach and teach nothing at all in opposition to those statements of faith**.

Therefore, when you confess the **Creed** you are **telling the Pastor what to do**. He is being told that **he must teach you the Apostolic doctrine**. He **must preach** to you the **Apostolic Gospel**. He **must give** you the **Gospel of Jesus without any additions or subtractions**. He is **not** there to **motivate** you, to **manipulate** you, to get you to **do something**, to **inspire** you, or to **raise money** to meet bills. He is there to teach you that **heavenly doctrine** that will give you the **mercy** your sinful heart desires and needs. His **Sermon** is to be an **absolution** because it is to be the words that **reveal Christ**. This **Gospel** must be the **very essence** of **every Sermon** he preaches.

\*\*\* Soli Deo Gloria \*\*\*