

WHAT WE BELIEVE

LIVING WORD IS A GOSPEL-FORMED, CREDAL¹ COMMUNITY OF CHRIST FOLLOWERS ON MISSION TO ENCOUNTER JESUS TOGETHER.

WE AFFIRM THE HISTORIC CREEDS OF THE CHURCH.

Creeds are formal statements of belief. The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning “I believe and trust.” Two creeds in particular were developed in the early centuries of the Church, which have remained important to the Church and are regularly used in our worship today.

People who were preparing for baptism in the early centuries of the Christian Church learned a short summary of what Christians believe. One version became accepted as the **Apostles’ Creed**, because it was thought to include the essential teaching of the 12 apostles, Jesus’ earliest followers. It was into that faith of the apostles that Christians were, and are, baptized.

The **Nicene Creed** is a more detailed summary of what the whole Church believes about the great doctrines of the Christian faith. It begins with the statement: “We believe ...” The Nicene Creed uses the same threefold structure as the Apostles’ Creed but goes into more depth and detail. It was first adopted at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 by a gathering of early Christian leaders.

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 at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

¹ The word “credal” indicates that we affirm and confess the historic creeds of the Church.



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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:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
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.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He 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.²

WE BELIEVE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY.³

What follows in this document are summary statements of our foundational beliefs.

² The Nicene Creed, The Book of Common Prayer – page 358

³ Theology is a word that means the study of and beliefs about God.

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1

We believe in the triune God.

At the heart of the biblical story is a God of love who reveals himself to be one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is what we believe when we say the word *Trinity*. Each person of the Trinity is fully God, yet distinct, without hierarchy. We believe this makes Christianity uniquely beautiful because not only is God in community with us, but also with himself (Genesis 1:26; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6; Matthew 28:19; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 1:35; John 5:20–23, 10:30, 14:10–13; 2 Corinthians 13:14; James 2:19).

The Father: The first person of the Trinity orders and directs all things according to his purpose and pleasure. He has created humanity to bring him glory and honor, through his grace. While he is transcendent, he is also actively involved in his creation—offering an eternal relationship with us through his Son, Jesus Christ. One of the ways we actively express our belief in God as Father is through the corporate and individual saying of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray called the Lord’s Prayer or the “Our Father” (Matthew 6:9; John 5:19–24; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2:1–10).

The Son: Jesus Christ is both the eternal Son of God and virgin-born Son of man. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. He surrendered nothing of his deity during his earthly life. As scripture puts it, the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (Hebrews 1:3a). The sinless, sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross was an act of obedience, satisfying the Father’s justice, offering mercy and atonement for all of humanity’s sins for all time. We believe in Jesus’ bodily resurrection, his physical ascension, and his imminent visible return to establish the renewed heavens and earth. We believe one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (John 1:14–18; Colossians 1:15–20).

The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit is described in scripture as the Advocate, the Counselor, the Comforter. The Holy Spirit brings about the will of God in this world through humanity by leading, guiding, filling, healing, empowering, teaching, quickening, comforting, and convicting. The Spirit is not a force, but a person, displaying the qualities of personhood (intellect, emotions, and will). The Spirit indwells and equips believers upon conversion by giving them gifts to be used for the building up of the Church and by bearing fruit through their yielded lives (John 16:7–11; Ephesians 1:13–14, 2:10; Galatians 5:22–25).

2

We believe the gospel of the kingdom.

The gospel is the good news that God loves the world and offers salvation from sin as a gift through his Son, Jesus Christ, who is our Lord and King (Psalm 103:1–13; Isaiah 52–53; John 3:16–17). The gospel has paramount importance for faith, doctrine, and discipleship; a theology that begins with the gospel will be defined and formed by the gospel.

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The gospel is the integrating point of all Christian theology and prioritizing the gospel guards against theological heresies and other miscellaneous errors. The Christian canon of scripture is bookended by gospel vignettes (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 14:6).

The gospel is the lens through which we read scripture and engage in faithful Christian practice as disciples of Jesus. The gospel proclaimed in the New Testament is foreshadowed in the Old Testament and is the message of the kingdom of God that tells the story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. It announces that Jesus is Lord and King, calls for repentance and faith, and offers salvation as its chief benefit. Our faith and practice are *gospel-formed*.

3

We believe the Bible.

God's word is a precious gift to us because it points us to *the Word*, Jesus. The Son of God is the Word-made-flesh. The scriptures reveal Jesus, they bear witness to Jesus. In John 5:39, Jesus said: "You search the scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the scriptures point to me."

The Bible is the inspired, written word of God that tells the story of who God is, who we are, the relationship he desires with us, and his grand redemptive plan. The Bible is called the living word of God because it is full of life and has the power to transform. Hebrews 4:12 describes the Bible as "living and active." It is comprised of 66 books, written in several different genres, by dozens of people over thousands of years, yet inspired by one divine author. It is completely reliable and will not fail us. Because of this, we believe it has eternal significance and teaches us everything we need to know about how to love God and how to best love our neighbors.

One of the most powerful examples of how all of scripture ultimately points to Jesus—the Word made flesh—can be found in Luke 24:1–35. In this passage, the risen Jesus walks with two disciples and opens the scriptures to show how they all speak of him. The very name of our church, *Living Word*, reflects this truth. It honors both the written word of scripture and the Living Word at its center—Jesus Christ himself (Deuteronomy 4:1–2; Psalm 19:7–12, 119; Isaiah 40:8, 55:10–11; John 5:39, 17:17; Romans 7:12, 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16, 4:1–2; Hebrews 1:1–2, 4:12; 1 Peter 1:21–25; 2 Peter 3:15–16; Luke 24:1–35).

4

We believe humanity is created in the image of God.

Humanity was lovingly created by God in Shalom (goodness, peace, and wholeness). Humanity was also created in the image of God, which means that not only do we share common traits with God, but that each person has intrinsic value and worth—so much so that God gave his Son as a sacrifice to save us.

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The fact that ALL human beings are created in God's image is the foundational reason for why we so passionately reject all forms of racism, oppression, violence, and injustice.

Every human being who has ever lived or will live bears the image of our holy and perfect God. In union with the first human, Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God. Only through the gospel of Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled, redeemed, and renewed (Genesis 1:26–30, 2:7, 2:18–24; Psalm 8:3–6, 139:14; Matthew 6:26).

5

We believe in the reality of sin.

The gospel is only good news because it first tells us some bad news. It presupposes the story of a world gone wrong, humanity corrupted, and spiritual powers in open revolt against God.

Humanity was created in right relationship with God but, because of sinful disobedience, is now separated from God, under his judgment, and in need of salvation. God created humanity in his perfect wholeness or Shalom, and sin has rightly been called the culpable breaking, or disturbance, of Shalom. Because of our sinfulness, humanity has “missed the mark,” and no one can do enough morally good things to have good standing with God.

On the cross, Jesus, the Son of God, was victorious over the dominion of sin and death and fulfilled the righteous judgment on humanity by himself taking our place, undergoing the judgment that we deserve. In love, Jesus accomplished all this for humanity in order to bring about reconciliation and redemption as good news available to all by God's grace (Jeremiah 17:5–6; Romans 1:18–3:23, 5:12; Ephesians 2:1–3).

6

We believe salvation is only in and through Jesus.

Salvation is the word we use to describe the transforming power of the gospel applied to our lives—the restoration of relationship with the King and our welcome into his kingdom. This good news stretches all the way back to God's promise in Genesis 3:15, after humanity fell into sin. God chose a family—Abraham and Sarah—which became a people—Israel—through whom he would bring his saving plan to completion in Jesus, the Messiah.

Scripture shows us that salvation is a past, present, and future reality.

Past: Salvation was accomplished through the finished work of Jesus on the cross. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8–9: “By grace you have been saved through faith ... it is the gift of God.” The cross restores

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what was lost in the garden—our relationship with God—and it opens the way back to life under his rule and care.

Present: Salvation is also something happening now. Paul tells the Corinthians, “To us who are being saved, [the cross] is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). This ongoing work is carried out by the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to live as citizens of the kingdom, as sons and daughters of the King.

Future: Jesus also spoke of a salvation still to come: “The one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13). While salvation is assured for all who place their faith in Christ, we are also invited to live faithfully, allowing the Spirit to shape us into who we already are by grace—God’s beloved children.

Salvation is not just escape from judgment—it is a return to life with God, life in his presence, under his rule, and filled with his love. To preach this message, including the warning of judgment, is an act of mercy. Jesus came not only to save us from sin, but to bring us home—to restore what was broken, and to invite us into eternal life with him (Matthew 1:21; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:1–10; Revelation 20:15). We rejoice in this: Jesus is King, and through him, and him alone, we are saved.

7

We believe in the Church.

The Church is a community of hope and transformation. In the pages of the New Testament, we see that after the resurrection of Jesus, the first followers of Jesus were forged by the Spirit of God into called-out assemblies of ordinary, broken people who were then transformed into saints, set apart, equipped, and empowered to carry the hope of Jesus to a lost and hurting world.

We encounter Jesus together as we commit to practicing his way, sharing our lives together, and praying for one another and for the lost. As a church we are always a people *on mission*. Ultimately, the mission of the Church is an extension of the *missio Dei*, the mission of the triune God. This mission is certainly holistic, but the core is evangelism and making disciples.

The Church is the representation of Christ to the world and has a cherished unity through the Spirit. The Church of Jesus seeks justice, shows mercy, works to make peace, serves in humility, and radiates the love of God to all people. Additionally, the Church must strive to be a culture of honor and mutual accountability.

Jesus mandated two ordinances for the Church—baptism and communion—which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. When celebrated by the Church, these ordinances confirm and nourish all believers as a means of grace (Matthew 16:18–19, 18:15–20, 18:21–22; Acts 2:42–47, 14:23; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 1 Corinthians 9:11–14; Ephesians 2:20–22, 5:22–32; Colossians 3:16; Revelation 21:1–4).

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An Afterword:

We are a congregation that was launched very humbly in 1978 as a *non-denominational*⁴ church in the basement of a home in York, Pennsylvania. As we approach Living Word’s 50th anniversary in 2028, we may best be described as a *post-denominational*⁵ church. We are a church made up of people from many and varied Christian denominational backgrounds—and from no discernible Christian background. Living Word embraces the beliefs and practices of the historic faith, but with a generous orthodoxy and an ecumenical spirit.

Recognizing we are a “big tent” church that appreciates what has been called “Great Hall” Christianity, we hold to gospel-formed beliefs and embrace the historic Christian creeds. This serves to keep us operating in the Great Hall, not stuck in smaller theological anterooms.

Our mission is to encounter Jesus together—for the renewal of York County, Pennsylvania and beyond—as the Lord leads us. For this aim, we seek to join in redemptive participation with God in the work of his kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven. We do this through faithful beliefs put into wise practice as disciples of Jesus. We seek to serve and bless our community as a unified people with the hallmarks of transformed loves and transferred loyalties to Jesus and his kingdom.

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is essential to who we are, what we believe, and how we live. We understand there are differences in certain theological positions and in areas we would agree are nonessentials. We have always agreed with the wise assertion attributed to Augustine: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

This does not mean we must remain quiet or passive or that we are not allowed to speak of theological views or the differences that exist between views. *What it does mean is that we will be faithful to historic Christian belief and practice, while decidedly being guided by love, wisdom, good conscience, unity, and good will in allowing differences on nonessential views.*

⁴ Non-denominational churches are independent of larger denominations and are not accountable to an outside leadership group.

⁵ Post-denominational refers to a movement that transcends denominational divides and is not affiliated with a traditional denomination.