

“Who is Jesus, and What is He For?”

The Athanasian Creed? Really? Holy Cow! Who in the world would use this Creed? I can't imagine what the visitors today are thinking. Who are these people? Even you members of Immanuel are probably thinking – “I'm glad we only use this once a year.” And what's this bit about “the catholic faith” and – “those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire”?

Let's get those last two questions out of the way first of all. The “catholic faith” is nothing but the “universal” faith – that's what the small “c” catholic means. This is the faith taught in Holy Scripture – and confessed in the Creeds of the Church (the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds).

Having already confessed that it is “necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ” – that He who is true God became true man and “suffered for our salvation” – Christians confess that “those who have done good will enter into eternal life ...”

The Creed does not say that our good works merit eternal life – that is solely the work of Jesus Christ. Saving faith means our sins are covered by Jesus' blood and righteousness. That means, on the Last Day, God will not see our sins and evil deeds. This is what Matthew 25 teaches when God praises our good works as the fruit of saving faith – but there is no doubt about it, it is faith in Jesus Christ alone that saves.

So, back to the use of the Athanasian Creed. Why? Are we just jumping through hoops by making use of it (because we're supposed to use in on Holy Trinity Sunday)? Are we being picky, trying to be so precise, in what we confess? Is it nothing more than a rote recitation?

All of those could be true – but we make use of the Athanasian Creed because it is efficacious – it is important, and beneficial, for the building up of the Church – which means it is good for your faith – and ultimately, for your salvation!

As we take a look at all three of our Scripture readings for today – we will see what God’s Word teaches – and the Church confesses to be true. As with the other Creeds of the Church, the primary focus is on the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit, working through these sacred writings – will teach you WHO Jesus is – and WHAT Jesus is for.

Who is God? In Isaiah, we see that He is a God who is present in the Temple – who promises to be present in the midst of His people. He who is above all things – who is holy, worshipped by the angels – humbles Himself to dwell within His creation.

Isaiah, however, realizing he is standing in the presence of the Holy Lord, cries out “Woe ... I am lost.” A sinner cannot be in the presence of the sinless God, and live. But atonement for sin comes from God, from His altar – to not only take away our sin – but to make it possible for the sinner to dwell with God. That is the Gospel that He sends His preachers to proclaim to the ends of the earth.

In the reading from Acts 2, Jesus is revealed as one who is “attested to [us] by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst.” This includes not only His miracles – in which we see that this man Jesus is truly God – but His crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.

This is all according to God’s plan of salvation – that Jesus would take the sin of the world upon Himself – sacrifice His life to pay their penalty – and yet, He would not be abandoned to the grave – because His forgiving death destroys death – and with His forgiveness there is life and salvation.

This is the Jesus promised to King David of old – that one of his descendants would sit upon his throne – and His reign would be from everlasting to everlasting. Folks, that’s what Jesus is doing, even now – ruling and reigning over all things for your good – ruling and reigning over your sin and death, so that you may live eternally!

With the Gospel reading for today we have that very familiar passage – the “Gospel in a nutshell” – “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus is the Son of God – sent into our world, taking on our human flesh and blood, and given into death on the cross of Calvary – so that all who believe in Him – who trust that He has done all that is necessary to deliver us from our sin – “whoever” believes this, has eternal life.

That’s WHO Jesus is, and WHAT He is for. He is our Savior. He is the only sacrifice that can redeem us from our sin. He is the Son of God who draws near to you – to forgive you, to reconcile you to the heavenly Father, to give you a life that knows no end.

That’s what He’s FOR – saving sinners. That’s why the Church confesses the Creeds – because if you have a Jesus that is not truly God, you are not redeemed and saved. If you have a Jesus who is only an example of how to make yourself pleasing in God’s eyes – if He is only a part of the salvation equation, but some of it is dependent upon you – then salvation is never a certainty.

But FOR YOU, and for your salvation – the Son of God has come down from heaven to earth – in order that the world might be saved through Him.

That, folks, is the “catholic” faith that we hold to – Jesus, the Savior of sinners – Jesus, your Savior and eternal life. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.