

The Nicene Creed

June 19

During the first three centuries of its life, the church suffered waves of persecution—the shackles, the lash, the sword, the teeth of lions. With the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312, the persecution ended, and the church considered a problem worse than persecution—heresy. A teacher named Arius from North Africa was denying that Jesus was both fully man and fully God. “There was a time when the Son was not,” taught Arius. He claimed that Jesus is not eternal, not divine, not God. The heresy grew, alarming Constantine. The emperor didn’t understand the debate, but he desired unity in the church. “These questions are the idle cobwebs of contention, spun by curious wits,” he said.

Constantine called a general council of the church in the small town of Nicaea. Eighteen hundred bishops were invited from across the empire, and each bishop was allowed to bring two other church leaders and three slaves. Traveling conditions were difficult, and fewer than 400 bishops assembled, most from the eastern realm. Many bore marks of persecution. Some were scholars; some were shepherds. Into this motley crew stepped Emperor Constantine, wearing high-heeled scarlet boots, a purple robe, long hair, and a short beard.

The delegates were soon at each other’s throats. Arius presented his views. Alexander and Athanasius retaliated with orthodox teaching. Finally Hosius, a bishop from Cordova, suggested drawing up a creed. The statement of faith was developed, and Hosius announced it on **June 19, 325**. It described Jesus Christ as “God from very God, begotten not made, of the same substance as the Father, through whom all things were made ... who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered and rose again. ... ”

The creed was adopted, and the doctrine of Christ’s divine nature—a belief both essential and unique to Christianity—was formally affirmed for the first time.

Christ is exactly like God, who cannot be seen. He is the first-born Son, superior to all creation. Everything was created by him, everything in heaven and on earth, everything seen and unseen, including all forces and powers, and all rulers and authorities. ... He is the head of his body ... the church. *Colossians 1:15,16,18a*



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¹Morgan, R. J. 2000, c1997. *On this day : 265 amazing and inspiring stories about saints, martyrs & heroes* (electronic ed.) . Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville. Used with permission.