

THE CREEDS AND ANCIENT PRACTICES

Choosing to be baptized is also to take on a particular set of beliefs. Creeds are statements of belief; in fact, the word “creed” comes from the Latin *credo* or “I believe.” The Episcopal Church uses two creeds in worship: the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed was developed at the Council of Nicea in 325 and is a sophisticated theological statement about basic Christian tenants. The Apostles’ Creed is more ancient, its very name deriving from a story that the first apostles themselves each wrote a line. What is known about the Apostles’ Creed is that it is not only a statement of belief, but also an ancient baptismal formula. In the early church, a Christian baptism might have looked something like the following:

Having spent several months or even years of instruction in the Christian faith and practices, an adult would be ready for baptism. On the day of the baptism, the converts would first be taken to a baptistry adjoining the main worship area. There, they would be asked about their belief, “Do you believe in God the Father?” They would respond with the formulaic lines that they had been taught, but which also encapsulated the theological understanding of the first person of the Trinity. Having answered, they would then be submerged into the water.

They would then be asked, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?” Their affirmative response would be followed by a second submersion. Finally, they would be asked, “Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?” and upon answering with the last part of the creed they would undergo a third submersion. Then the newly baptized would each be clothed in a clean white garment as a sign of new birth, and led in procession to the church where the community would already be gathered in prayer. There they would be welcomed and immediately join in the celebration of the Eucharist, receiving communion for the first time.

Even have spent up to three years in instruction in the Christian faith, the newly baptized did not consider themselves mature Christians. Rather they, and the community of believers, knew that they would continue to grow into the full stature of Christ. They were practicing Christians—followers of Christ who practiced every day.

Then, as today, what follows baptism is lifelong formation in the Christian faith as a disciple of Jesus.