



The Greek is pronounced Christos.

portrayed as the fulfilment of specific prophecies made in the Jewish Scriptures about the Messiah.

The next phrase about Jesus in the Apostles' Creed refers to him as God's 'only Son'. The Nicene Creed goes into more depth about this belief concerning Jesus Christ being the Son of God. It contains such phrases as 'eternally begotten of the Father, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father'. Many Christians find it helpful to meditate on these phrases.

To Gentile Christians, the words 'Son of God' may not have been a very staggering idea. They were used to emperors and heroes being dubbed son of this god or that god in a system which was polytheistic. They needed to acknowledge Jesus as the ONLY Son of God.

Christians believe that, by some miracle or by some mystery, Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate. This means God was in Jesus in a very special way. God became flesh and blood. For Christians, the doctrine of the incarnation means that the theological idea of the immanence of God takes on a whole new dimension. God really does know what it is like to be human.

'Our Lord' is the next title in the Apostles' Creed. At the time when it was written, the word 'Lord' meant far more to Jews and to Roman citizens than it means nowadays but this title remains the key statement in all Christian creeds. It is not simply a matter of saying that Jesus is Lord but being willing to live a life which shows that Jesus is Lord.

'Go forth to love and serve the Lord' is what Christianity has always been about.

Christians accept Jesus as Lord because, to them, Jesus is the perfect example and they try to follow him.



The Birth of Christ by Giotto di Bondone.

The Apostles' Creed starts with the birth. On the one hand, Jesus is God's Son, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by normal sexual intercourse. On the other hand, Jesus was born from a human mother named Mary. According to the creed, she was a virgin.

For many Christians, Mary is very important. Some Christians, however, have found the Virgin Birth to be a belief that they feel they cannot take literally.

A TEXTUAL DEBATE

Matthew 1:23 (NIV) quotes from the Jewish Scriptures 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel', which means 'God with us'.

Matthew liked to use Old Testament texts to support Christian beliefs about Jesus as Messiah. Matthew was quoting from the Greek version of Isaiah 7:14 but in the Hebrew original the word simply means a young woman, not necessarily a virgin. Some scholars think this is how the doctrine of the virgin birth started. Others point out, however, that it is not only in Matthew's gospel. The Virgin Birth is a main feature in the nativity story in Luke's gospel too.



Crucifixion of Christ by Fra Giovanni da Fiesole.

The creed moves to the end of the life of Jesus. Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor in Jerusalem from 26–36 CE who judged Jesus and ordered that he should be crucified, is named in the Apostles' Creed.

The suffering, crucifixion, death and burial are important items in the creed. There was a popular heresy in the early church which said that Jesus was divine so he could not and did not die on the cross. Some people even suggested that Simon of Cyrene who helped carry the cross was crucified in the place of Jesus. To Christians the crucifixion of Jesus is very important because they believe that Jesus died to make it possible for people's sins to be forgiven. All people fall short of God's standards and the result is separation from God. The New Testament teaches that the death of Jesus was part of God's plan for reconciling the world to himself. Christians believe that Jesus Christ took the punishment for the sins of the whole world so that God and humanity could be made as one. This teaching is called the Atonement.

The Apostles' Creed says that Jesus descended to the dead. The reason it uses the word 'descended' is because people at the time thought that the world was flat. Heaven was up above the earth and there was a place below the earth where the dead waited till the end of time. It was called 'Sheol' by Jews and 'Hades' by Greeks.

