



Step by Step

an introduction to the Small Catechism



The Apostles' Creed

study guide

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Welcome to Step by Step, our introduction to the Small Catechism. In this series, teachers from St. John's and around the church will guide you through the basics of the Christian faith and life. We'll be using a guidebook Martin Luther gave us 500 years ago, a field guide of tools, resources, truth, and wisdom on "how to distinguish right from wrong." There will be six stops on this journey. We'll begin with the Ten Commandment, followed by the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments of baptism and holy communion, and finally, confession. After each video clip, we invite you to pause, reflect, and answer the question posed, a question that will help you connect this tool of faith with your daily life.

Our hope is that this study will welcome you into a deeper understanding of the Christian faith. You can enter this journey alone or use it as a jumping off point in a small group setting. If you have questions along the way, please let us know. We'll be eager to walk alongside you, step by step.

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The Apostles' Creed

The First Article

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

Luther's Explanation: What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; that He richly and daily provides me with food and clothing, home and family, property and goods, and all that I need to support this body and life; that He protects me from all danger, guards and keeps me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I am in duty bound to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

The Apostles' Creed has been the church's statement of belief for nearly 1500 years.

The word Creed comes from the Latin word credo, which means "I ." When Christians recite this Creed, we are saying what we believe about God, who we know as Father, Son, and Holy .

In the first article/paragraph ("I believe in God the Father..."), we learn that the daily activity of God is to create, give, provide, and protect. That purpose of God is reflected in the very first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

How has this "daily activity of God" been part of your life this week? List some examples below.

God's first command was for us to "tend and care for" the earth (Genesis 2:15). The command was presented to Adam as a gift, not a burden, so that God's creation can be filled with abundance.

What are some active ways that you can "tend and care for" the earth?

Do you see your response as a gift or a burden? Explain why below.

The Apostles' Creed

The Second Article

"I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son."

Luther's Explanation: What does this mean? I believe that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary; and that He is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death; in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness; even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

Martin Luther's explanation of the second article is a particularly beautiful and personal statement of faith. Dr. Shore says: "This most ancient Creed tells you about your Lord and your life in Him. It says that he paid a huge ransom for you ... you, who were held in thrall by sin, the finality of death, the fear it evokes, and the loss it promises."

When have you felt "in thrall" (held captive by) sin?

Dr. Shore continues: Christ "freed us ... by his holy and precious blood and by his innocent suffering and death." Why? "To get you back where you belong: with him. To get you out of those kidnappers' hands forever."

Name some of the "kidnappers" Martin Luther might be talking about.

Can you think of other ways that blood is used as a saving, life-giving agent?

The Apostles' Creed

Article 2 Continued...

Why is Jesus so insistent that we be freed from the grip of sin? So that we can “live just as the Risen Jesus lives, in relationship to God and in loving service” to others.

Reflect on this verse from Ephesians: “We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

Luther and Dr. Shore – and St. Paul in the passage quote above -- say that we are freed in order to love and serve. When has serving others felt like a chore?

When has loving and serving felt life-giving for you?

The Apostles' Creed

The Third Article

“I believe in God, the Holy Spirit.”

Luther's Explanation: What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; just as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives me and all believers all our sins; and at the last day He will raise up me and all the dead, and will grant me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Bishop Smith says that this third article “is so definitively Gospel-centered and therefore so very, very Lutheran.” Why? Because “we believe that we can't believe.” What? Luther explains by saying that “I cannot by more own understanding or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, but that the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole church on earth.”

Is there any comfort in knowing that God has taken the first step in his relationship with you? Why or why not?

Luther ends his explanation by offering a powerful statement about eternal life: “On the last day, this Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life.”

Reflect on this passage from Revelation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.... I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband Then he who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new’” (Revelation 21:1-5).

N.T. Wright envisions Revelation 21 as a time when we will join hands with all those who have died and walk into the new Jerusalem together. Whose hands do you want to be holding?

The Apostles' Creed

Article 3 Continued...

What feelings does this "last day" evoke for you?

Did you notice that "catholic" is written with a lowercase "c"? Bishop Smith says that this beautiful word refers to the entire gathering of Christians, "one community present as one body," as brothers and sisters in "deep relationship with God and with one another."

Where have you seen this "catholic church" not acting as one body?

Where do you see it acting as one body?