

I Believe In Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord (Luke)
Apostles' Creed: The True Confession of Our Triune Faith
Zionsville Fellowship | May 17, 2026 | Drew Hunter

The Heidelberg Catechism is a Reformed catechism written in the 1500s.

It teaches the Christian faith through a question-and-answer format. One of the questions asks, "What... must a Christian believe?" How would you answer that question? Here's how the catechism answers it.

Question: What... must a Christian believe?

Answer: Everything God promised us in the gospel. That gospel is summarized for us in the articles of our Christian faith—a creed beyond doubt, and confessed throughout the world.

The creed it's referring to here is the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed is a summary of the gospel. It is what all Christians in all times and all places must believe. If a teacher or group rejects any part of this creed, they are something other than truly Christian.

It was initially formed and refined in the early centuries of the church. It was used as part of what we could call a church-membership course. Converts would learn the essentials of the faith for one-to-three years. Then at their baptism, they would confess this creed. And then they took the Lord's Supper for the first time.

One theologian named Philip Schaff said, "As the Lord's Prayer is the prayer of prayers, the Decalogue the law of laws, so the Apostles' Creed is the creed of creeds. It contains all the fundamental articles of the Christian faith necessary to salvation, in the form of facts, in simple Scripture language, and in the most natural order—the order of revelation—from God and the creation down to the resurrection and life everlasting."ⁱ

Last week we looked at the first section, which focused on God the Father.

Today we focus on the second section, which focuses on God the Son. This is a concise summary of the story of Jesus.

Here is how the central section tells the story of Jesus:

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

We'll walk through this in four parts, and we'll use the Gospel of Luke as our explanation.

1. The Son's Identity, Conception, and Birth (Luke 1)

The first part focuses on the Son's identity, conception and birth.

We confess: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary."

Jesus's identity is given first.

Before we see what he did, we see who he is. The Creed gives us four titles:

1. His name is Jesus, which is drawn from the Hebrew name, Joshua, which means "God saves," or "savior." This is his name—he is the one who saves.
2. Second, his title is Christ. That's not his last name. It means, "anointed one." It's drawing from the Old Testament promises of the messiah. This refers to the king who would come to rule over Israel and all nations in an eternal kingdom.
3. Third, he is called the Father's "only Son." But the "only" here refers to Jesus's *unique* sonship. It is his divine and eternal sonship. This creed doesn't spell it all out here. The Nicene Creed clarifies and expands on this—making Jesus's divinity clearer.ⁱⁱ But it's signaled already here.
4. And then the last title is "our Lord." This is a personal confession. When we confess this, we are acknowledging that he is the king. And not just the king, but my king. And not just my king, but our king. There is a lot here, then: To confess this is to say that Jesus rules over all, he rules over my life, and I am part of the people who confess this.

And then the creed says it is *this* Jesus who was conceived in Mary and born to her.

We see this mysterious and miraculous moment unfolded in Luke 1:26–35. Luke begins the story of Jesus with the prophecies about his conception and birth. Let's read this together and then see how the creed draws out the key points.

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

35 And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

Remember the four titles for Jesus we saw in the creed—we see most of them right here.

- Notice in verse 31, that Mary is to name this child “Jesus.”
- Then “Christ” refers to the anointed messiah, the coming king from David’s line. Verse 32 says that Jesus will receive the throne of David and rule over an eternal kingdom.
- He is also God’s Son in verse 32, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” And then notice verse 35 says, “therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.”

Then we see his conception.

In verse 31, Gabriel announces to her that she will conceive in her womb and bear a son. But Mary is a virgin, so she doesn’t understand how this will happen.

So verse 35 says the Holy Spirit with “come upon” her and “overshadow” her. The word for “overshadow” probably connects back to the Old Testament when God’s glory-presence hovered, or overshadowed like a cloud. That glory-cloud traveled with Israel through the wilderness, then appeared in the tabernacle and the temple. Then when Israel was judged with exile, the glory-cloud left the temple. It never returned. But now here is the Holy Spirit—overshadowing Mary like the glory cloud as she conceives of the Son of God. And then it says—this is why the child will be called holy.ⁱⁱⁱ

Now, here are two questions: Can we believe this today? And why does it matter?

First, *Can we believe this today?*

It seems like the most common reason to doubt this is because of its miraculous nature. It seems like a miracle that is just too hard to believe actually took place.

But I appreciate what Luke shows us happened after the angel told Mary this would occur. She asked in verse 34 how this could happen, since she is a virgin. The angel explained it and then adds in verse 37, “Nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary says, basically, “Okay, I’m your servant. Let this happen as you said.”

It’s actually not unreasonable to believe this miracle. Think about it. If you already believe that God exists, and that he created everything, is this too hard to believe? It’s not hard to believe that a God who created the world can also do this.

And the fact that the early Christians put it in the creed is itself compelling. We may want to skip that part to save some embarrassment or extra explaining. But the early Christians thought it was so important, that they put it there. And it's been universally affirmed as central to the story of Jesus. So we should humbly embrace this as well.

So, yes, we can believe it. The second question is, *Why does this matter?* It matters for two reasons.

First, this shows us that Jesus is both divine and human.

This is part of what makes sense of Jesus's divine and human nature. If the eternal son was going to become a human being to save us, this seems to be the best way to do it.

Think about the alternatives.

- If he was conceived through a father and mother having intercourse, we would question his *divine* nature. We would think he was human, but not divine.
- But if he just showed up out of nowhere, rather than being conceived and born by a woman, we would question his *human* nature. We would say he's divine, but not a real human.

The virgin conception and birth is God's brilliant way of bringing this about. So, this is why it matters—it shows that Jesus is truly God and truly human.^{iv}

Second, this matters because it helps us understand how he saves us.

If he was just a human, and not divine, he could not save us. No human being could offer himself as a sinless sacrifice for the world.

And if he was just divine, and not truly human, he wouldn't have a true connection to us. He could not then die as one of us, on behalf of us.

This is why the Nicene Creed expanded this to add the reason why the Son of God became a human being. It says God the Son, "for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man."

So, when we confess this creed, we are summarizing the truth and teaching of Luke 1. We are affirming Jesus' identity, his miraculous conception, and his birth.

2. The Son's Suffering, Crucifixion, Death, and Burial (Luke 23)

The second part of this section of the creed affirms the Son's suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial.

It says, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried."

Now, why not just say “he died?” *Why add that he suffered? Why add the way he died specifically through crucifixion? Why add that he was buried? And why mention Pontius Pilate by name?*

You have a thirty-second summary of the Christian faith—and you mention Pontius Pilate. Not Abraham, not Moses, not Peter or Paul—but you mention Pilate by name. Why?

Let’s look at how the gospel of Luke describes these events—and we’ll consider why each of these is important to the story of Jesus.

The first event is Jesus’s suffering under Pontius Pilate.

Luke tells us what happened in the first half of chapter 23. Jesus had already been arrested, mocked, and falsely accused by the Jewish leaders. Then he was handed over to Pontius Pilate. The reason the Jewish leaders did this is because they didn’t have the legal authority to execute Jesus. But the local Roman Ruler did. So they brought him before Pilate.

Pilate examined Jesus and found him innocent of any charges. He didn’t see him as guilty of anything worthy of death. But the leaders kept pressuring Pilate to crucify him. So he handed Jesus over to them and led him to be crucified. The Romans reserved this form of execution for the worst criminals and revolutionaries. It was the most public, painful, and shaming form of execution. And Jesus was first flogged—which means he was whipped with leather strips that had bone or porcelain balls at the end.

Then he was led to the place of crucifixion. Those who were crucified had to carry the crossbeam to the execution site. But they were often so exhausted and weak from the flogging that they couldn’t carry it. So they had to enlist someone to carry the crossbeam for them. That’s what happened here—verse 26 says, “As they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.”

So, why mention Pontius Pilate in the creed? Why not just say Jesus suffered?

I think the reason they put it in the creed is the same reason Luke draws so much attention to it. It is to make the point that this is public, verifiable history. This is not a myth. It didn’t happen without eyewitnesses. It happened on a particular day, in a particular place, with a particular ruler. Even Simon of Cyrene is mentioned by name in Luke—it was an ancient way of footnoting eyewitness testimony.

So, a fifth century scholar named Rufinus made this point about Pilate’s name in the creed: “Those who handed down the Creed showed great wisdom in emphasizing the actual date at which these things happened, so that there might be no chance of any uncertainty or vagueness upsetting the stability of the tradition.”^v

So, he suffered under Pontius Pilate, then he was crucified, died, and buried.

Luke describes these events in the second half of chapter 23. It's interesting that Luke is very restrained with describing the physical pain of the crucifixion. He just says, in verse 33, "And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him." And then it describes mockery from the soldiers.

Then he took his last breath in verse 46: "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last." Then his body was taken down, wrapped up, and placed in a tomb of stone. The main point of all these details of his burial is to say that he really was dead.^{vi}

Now, at this point in the creed, some versions add another line: they add, "he descended to dead."

That line is not in all the ancient versions of the Creed. But it's not a problem. We don't include it in the version we use, but I have no problem with it at all. But it isn't totally clear what those who added it meant by it.^{vii}

- Some think it is another way of simply saying, *he really did die*—he descended to the dead, to the place of death, to the grave.
- Others like John Calvin take it as a statement of what Jesus experienced on the cross—he descended to hell, that is he endured God's judgment.
- Others think it refers to Jesus—in spirit—going to the realm of the dead, or hades, where the spirits of the dead dwelt. And he went perhaps to proclaim his victory through his death and resurrection.

We're not going to sort this all out today—but my point is that it's not in all the versions, but it's not a problem. Even if we aren't sure exactly what it means, there are reasonable ways to understand it.

So this is what the creed affirms—Jesus suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Why? He did this for us and for our salvation. He did this as a substitutionary sacrifice for us. This is why the creed will say in a few lines—"I believe in the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting." It is the death of Jesus that purchased everything that comes later in this creed.

And why was he a substitutionary sacrifice for us? To reconcile us with God. He did it so that we would not endure eternal judgment, but so we would have eternal life and joy with God.

3. The Son's Resurrection, Ascension, Reign, and Return (Luke 24)

The story of Jesus continues in the creed with the third part: his resurrection, ascension, and reign.

It says, “The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.”

The first part of this is his resurrection, which Luke shows us in chapter 24. Several women went to the tomb early Sunday morning to anoint Jesus's dead body with spices. But they didn't find him. The tomb was empty, and angels announced that he rose.

The story is, again, very restrained—not at all how we would expect it to read if it was a myth. The account comes across as simply transparent and honest. It even includes details that would have been embarrassing to early Christians. It's hard to imagine them writing it like this if they were making it up.

For example, notice verses 10–11, “Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

The first witnesses of the resurrection were women—but women would not have counted as eyewitness testimony in that time. And then right here and throughout the chapter when Jesus even appears to them—the disciples don't believe. They doubt it.

Details like this reinforce that this isn't myth, or legend, or made up. It is honest history, with eyewitness testimony. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that the risen Jesus appeared later to over 500 people.

After he rose, he remained for 40 days, and then the creed says he “ascended to heaven.”

This is the event Luke closes his gospel account with. Read with me the last paragraph of the gospel of Luke: “And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God” (Luke 24:50–53).^{viii}

Now, why was he carried up to heaven? Why ascend like this? Why not just disappear. I like J. I. Packer's answer: he had to go *some* way. Up, down, left, right. Why not up and to the sky? Not as a space man, but upward because that portrays exaltation. And the sky is a symbol of the vastness of the heavenly realm.^{ix}

And how did the disciples respond to his ascension? They worshipped him. They went from doubting that the resurrection even happened—to, by the end of those 40 days—worshipping Jesus. They understood by this point that Jesus was not just a teacher. Not just a prophet. Not just a good man. He was God incarnate, God in the flesh, God embodied.

And what is he doing now that he is ascended?

He is reigning and ruling over his church and the nations. That's why the creed says he is "seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty." To be seated at the right hand refers to exercising authority. It is a way of saying he is ruling and reigning as king.

You know, Jesus actually said this when he was on trial. It is one of the reasons why they crucified him. They asked if he was the Christ, the long-awaited true king of the world. And he said, "from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69). And the Jewish leaders responded, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am" (v. 70). And now that he rose, and ascended, he took his throne. He is ruling over his kingdom—and he is the king of all nations and kings.

We may think now that Jesus ascended to reign, he is distant and aloof from our problems. He doesn't pay attention to us in our suffering. We saw his heart go out with compassion to people in his ministry—but we assume that he is not like that anymore—not toward each one of us, anyway. Do you ever feel that way? You read of Jesus in the gospel stories and you wish he treated you the way he treated those people. The truth is, he does treat you this way.

In fact, do you see what Christ did as his very final act before he was ascended? He lifted up his hands and blessed them. And Luke even adds that it was *while he blessed them* that he was taken up. He ascended while blessing them. This is how he leaves his people—and I this blessing remains on them and remains on us. Jesus is ascended to heaven, and he is putting his blessing on us.

The English Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, wrote a book to convince us of Christ's heart toward us. This book is titled, *The Heart of Christ*. That's a shortened version of the full title. The full one is *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth*. This is Christ's heart right now in heaven, toward you and me, right now, on earth. And he actually gave a secondary title, too.

The secondary title explains his burden in this book. "A Treatise Demonstrating the Gracious Disposition and Tender Affection of Christ in His Human Nature Now in Glory, Unto His Members Under All Sorts of Infirmities, Either Sin or Misery." He walks through text after text in the Bible to help us see Christ's heart of warmth, love, and compassion for us right now. Jesus is forgiving us, transforming us, relating to us, and sympathizing with us.

What else is Jesus doing? He is eagerly waiting to come again.

The creed says, "from there he will come to judge the living and the dead." He will return as he went. Luke continues the story of Jesus in the book of Acts—and there he said that after Jesus ascended, the disciples stood there watching the sky. And two men were there—probably angels—and they said, "why do you stand looking to heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

And when he comes—he will come to judge the living and the dead. He will judge every person who ever lived.

Throughout the New Testament, it is clear about two things: Everyone will be judged, and this judgment is according to our works.

That doesn't mean that our salvation is given on the basis of our works—we are saved ultimately by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But when someone becomes a Christian, they receive two gifts: they receive the forgiveness of sins, and they receive the Holy Spirit, who gives us a new heart and leads us to produce good works. And these works—even however few they be—will testify to the fact that we are united to Christ by faith.

And let us remember that the creed says it is *Jesus* who will judge us. If you are trusting in Christ, remember that the same Jesus who became incarnate for you, and who suffered and died for you, and who forgives you, and who intercedes for you—it is *this* Jesus who will judge. For those who trust Christ, he will forgive all that is bad in your works, and he will reward all that is good. As Paul says—we will receive a commendation. But for all who did not trust Christ, and have not been transformed to have faith-motivated, Spirit-produced good works, there will be everlasting punishment.

So, Jesus says we must be ready. We do not know when he will return. One of the few places in Luke's gospel where Jesus mentions his return, this is what he says: "Everyone to whom much was given, to him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

There are a lot of self-appointed experts on end-times and the return of Jesus these days. They look at all the geopolitical movements of the world. They connect it to random verses of prophecy read out of context. And they sell lots of books and make lots of videos. We would do well to be careful, and keep the main things the main things—as the Creed helps us do.

Jesus is coming. He will judge the living and the dead. We will all stand before him. Let's trust him, look forward to his return, and in the meantime—enjoy his forgiveness, grace, and transformation. And warn people of the judgment, and warmly invite them to trust this Jesus.

So, as we end this section of the creed, let's return to the first two words: This begins "I believe."

This frames everything we've seen today. This is a confession of personal faith. So, the question for all of us today is: Do you believe this?

What does it mean to believe this? True believe involves the intellect, the affections, and the will. Here's what I mean.

- It involves the intellect. To say, "I believe," means that I intellectually agree with this. I believe it is true.

- It also involves the affections. To say, “I believe,” means that I am happy to acknowledge this as true. You cannot truly say, “I believe,” if your heart says, “And I don’t care. I hate him.”
- And to say, “I believe” involves the will. It is a commitment of the heart. To say “I believe,” is to say, “I commit myself to this truth. I bank my life and eternity on it. I am following this Jesus.” It is to say, “Yes, I believe Jesus is the Lord, and therefore, I submit to him as my Lord.”

So, as we go now, I want to encourage each of us to use this creed in our daily life.

I shared last Sunday, use this in your personal devotions every day. Use it along with your Bible reading and prayer—either alone, or with your family. Read it out loud with faith. Reflect on what it means and why it matters for your life today. And respond to it with prayer.

I’ll share again how Martin Luther guides us with how to do this. He says to work through the Creed in three sections, pausing to reflect and pray after each one. The three sections are the three parts—the first on God as our Father and creator, the second on the Son as our redeemer, and the third on the Spirit.

So, when you come to this central section on Jesus Christ—here are four ways to respond.

1. First, you affirm this. So, Luther says, “Just as in the first article you were to consider yourself one of God’s creatures and not doubt it, now you must think of yourself as one of the redeemed and never doubt that. Emphasize one word above all others, for instance, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Likewise, suffered for us, died for us, arose for us. All this is ours and pertains to us; that us includes yourself, as the word of God declares.”^x

I love that—think of yourself as one of the redeemed, and never doubt that. You are reading about the identity of Jesus here—and it is teaching you about your own identity. He did this for you. He came for you. He gave his life for you. He rose for you. He lives for you. He is coming back for you. Reflect on each part of it and admire him for it.

2. Second, you thank God for this. You express gratitude that Jesus came to redeem us. That he became a human being, and he suffered for us, and died for us, and rose for us, and now reigns and intercedes for us. So, we rejoice in this salvation and thank God for it.
3. Third, you confess your unbelief and ungratefulness in light of it. Think about the ways that you have not trusted that Jesus’s work really is enough for you. Or how you have been ungrateful for his work. Or how you have worshipped other things above him. Or how you have doubted his affection toward you, especially in your sin and suffering. Or how you have set your heart on worldly things rather than on his return.
4. Fourth, you pray in light of this. Pray that God would keep you trusting in Christ and his perfect accomplishment of your salvation. And pray that he would extend this to other people through you. Pray for opportunities to tell the story of Jesus to those who don’t yet know him.

So, I'll end this message with how the Bible ends.

As far as I can tell, the last words of Jesus in Revelation are the last words we have of him. This is the last thing we know that he has spoken. It records his last words to us, and then it records our response to them. Jesus says, "Surely I am coming soon." And we respond, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

ⁱ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 1, "Of Creeds in General," p 14.

ⁱⁱ The Nicene Creed says, "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God."

ⁱⁱⁱ Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 238.

^{iv} This is also part of how we see the sinlessness of Christ. He was not conceived in the normal way the rest of us are. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is consistent with the way Paul talked about the incarnation of the Son. In Romans 8:3 he used very careful language to describe Jesus's likeness to us. He said Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh." In other words, he did come in the flesh, but only in the likeness of *sinful* flesh. He did not have a sinful nature like us, he was not inclined to sin like us. He took upon himself a truly human nature, but without sin. The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary in her conception, and therefore the Son would be called holy.

^v Quoted in Alister McGrath, *I Believe: Exploring the Apostles' Creed* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 55

^{vi} Gregory Lanier, *Christian Standard Commentary: Luke* (Holman Reference, 2025), 947.

^{vii} See Carl Trueman, *Crisis of Confidence* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2025), 76; J. I. Packer, *Affirming the Apostles' Creed* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008). See also Matthew Emerson, *He Descended to the Dead* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2019).

^{viii} The ascension is largely neglected today, but it is mentioned throughout the New Testament: Rom. 8:34; Phil. 2:9; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 3:22.

^{ix} J. I. Packer, *Affirming the Apostles' Creed* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

^x Martin Luther, A Letter to His Barber, Master Peter Beskendorf, Spring 1535.