



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The next section of the Nicene Creed is about Jesus and how He relates to our redemption, as opposed to how He relates within the Trinity:

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
At the words that follow up to and including and became man, all bow.
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was
buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Here the Creed recounts the Incarnation – how God became one of us. Remember the great hymn in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians: Jesus "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus emptied Himself for our sake – "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16). He loved us *that* much, and desired our salvation. At the heart of our faith is the understanding that we are broken (Original Sin), but God had a plan for restoring us to His divine life. He loved us so much, Jesus came into our humanity.

In reverence to the utter humility of God, we bow at the words "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man." In this sentence, we see the human origins of Christ – the father of His human nature is the Holy Spirit, and the mother is Mary. This reminds us of the truth that no human fathered Jesus – He was a gift from God the Father to us. Yet, He took on our human nature in all things, becoming man. Looking back at the question in the early Church – how can Jesus be two yet one, we see in the Creed that faith that He truly was God ("true God from true God"), and yet fully man ("became man").

Then we look at the work Jesus did for our salvation – His crucifixion. The Creed skips over the rest of Jesus' life. Does that mean it's not important? No. But, while His teaching was important, it was only so that we could be open to the gift of Himself He was to give us on the Cross.

The Creed mentions Pontius Pilate. Why? Because our faith is not "Once upon a time..." or "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." Our faith is not myth, but is grounded in fact, in history – at a specific time in a specific place. The Creed is also clear to mention that He "suffered death and was buried, and rose again." He didn't just seem to die. If He only pretended to die, we would still be stuck in our sins, for the resurrection would not have defeated death – it would have been God playing pretend. He really had to die, and really had to rise in order for us really to be saved. This all happened "in accordance with the Scriptures" to show us that this was not an accident, a miscarriage of justice. No, God planned for this, and prepared the world for this salvific work He was going to do. God didn't have to pull a "Hail Mary Play," He knew this was the way that would win our salvation.

The last section shows us Jesus' glory. He not only rises bodily from the dead, He then ascends into heaven, bringing humanity into the very Heart of the Trinity, so now we have "space" to enter into God. This is the incredible thing about our humanity: we are embodied souls, or ensouled bodies. Our bodies are not secondary to our nature, but an integral part of us, and God took on our bodies in the Incarnation, redeemed them in the Resurrection, and draws them into heaven through the Ascension.

Next week, we'll look at the Last Judgment and the Holy Spirit.