

Understanding Episcopal Liturgy

#7. What is the reason we recite the Nicene Creed?

In Episcopal and Anglican worship, we recite a later version of the Nicene Creed, adopted in Constantinople in the year 381. The Nicene Creed comes from an era when there was great controversy within the church about Christ Jesus' nature as a divine or human being. At this time, and for many centuries afterward, charges of heresy were brought against individuals who held unorthodox beliefs, and different branches of the church were sometimes literally at war with one another.

For most Episcopalians today, the persecution of individuals for diverse beliefs and church fights over creeds appear to be directly contrary to the teachings of Jesus. Beginning with the Elizabethan Settlement (1559) the Church of England began to embrace a formal position of tolerance for religious diversity. This spirit of generosity and tolerance has become foundational for the Episcopal Church in the 21st century. Our 21st-century understanding is that our unity does not require each member to believe the exact same things about God, or Jesus, or the sacraments. Our unity derives from our communal worship and common use of the lectionary, prayers, and creeds.

So today we recite the Nicene Creed as an act of unity with Christians of many different denominations all around the world.