

LESSON 9

Creeds, Doctrines, Symbols, and Seasons

Creed and Doctrines

Before your Confirmation, find some time to better understand some creeds and doctrines of the church. That way, you will know why we say some of the things we say and do some of the things we do in the church. We're going to look at some Christian creeds, doctrines, symbols, and seasons. To really get it all, though, we have to hop back into history (think Lessons 1 and 2) and think about the early church.

If you remember, back in the day, Christians were going through all kinds of hard times as they grew in their churches. They were being persecuted by the Romans and attacked for their beliefs. In addition to all of this, various false teachings, or heresies, were all around. People were starting to believe all kinds of wrong things about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit! This was really dangerous because wrong thinking was starting to shape the Church!

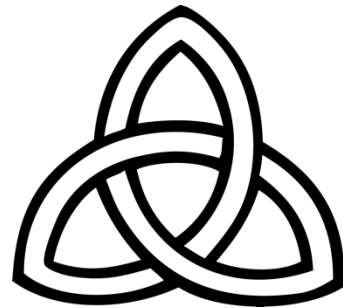
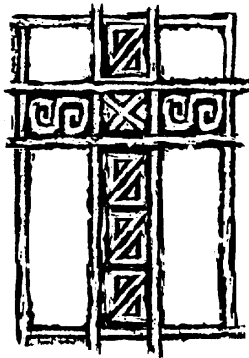
There was so much chaos going on that the Christians quickly realized they needed some order and guidelines in their faith. It was important for them to be able to state exactly what they believed so that their faith and beliefs would not be compromised or misunderstood. Church leaders got together to form Councils and wrote down the basic Christian beliefs based on what they had read in Scripture. The result is what we know as creeds, or *statements of belief*. The most well known creed is the Apostles' Creed. Weird, but it was not actually written by the apostles. It was written about 500 years after the time of Jesus. You've probably heard or said *The Apostles' Creed* before. It is:

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord:
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen*

See? That pretty much tells the basics of what we believe as Christians – simple and clear. The Apostles' Creed is probably the most traditional and well-known of the creeds. There are more modern creeds than the Apostles' Creed, though. An example is below:

We believe in God, whom we call by many names and experience in countless ways. God calls us into being, guides, and protects us, judges us, forgives us, loves us, nurtures us. We believe in Jesus Christ, from who we receive true freedom: freedom from fear and loneliness and freedom for love and self-giving. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the power of God reaching out to renew and refresh us; to teach and guide us. We believe in the church and its ministry, the continuing incarnation of God's love on earth. We believe that we are a people called by God to works of justice and mercy, and we pledge to become the people God has called us to be.

Notice that these creeds both state belief in the same things – God the Creator, Jesus who died and rose again, the Holy Spirit who lives within us (the Trinity!), the Church, and eternal life. The words are different, but the meanings are the same. This goes for all Christian creeds. They all say the same things, just in different words. Want to see more creeds? Feel free to check them out in the United Methodist Hymnal, pages 880-882!



Symbols

Now, let's shift gears and get into some of the symbols in the Christian Church. You'll see these around churches on banners, bulletins, and/or stained glass windows, so let's figure out what they mean! Keep in mind that a symbol is *an object or sign that stands for something else*. It can often be a physical representation of something we can't see, like an idea. Symbols help remind us of things unseen (which is cool because *God* is unseen!). Some symbols that you see all the time are:

1. A red heart, representing love.
2. The American flag, representing the United States of America and freedom.
3. A wedding ring, representing the vows and commitment of marriage.

**Can you think of other symbols that are common in our lives?*

Symbols have been an important part of Christianity from the beginning. For example, the Bible often refers to Jesus as the “Lamb of God,” and “shepherd.” The Bible is full of visual symbols of the Church. Many of them are below!



What do you think of when you see a snake? Due to the stories in Genesis, the snake often stands for the *sinfulness of humans* or *evil*.

In Genesis 6-9, we read of the Flood and Noah’s Ark. The ark represents *salvation* since Noah and his family found safety from the flood there. Do you remember the dove that returned with the olive leaf to show that land was near? A dove with an olive branch is now the symbol of *peace*. A final symbol which comes from this story is the rainbow assures us of *God’s love and covenant with us*.



The Cross is the most common symbol of the Christian faith. Although we remember *Christ’s suffering* on the cross, Protestants leave the cross empty to symbolize *Christ’s resurrection*. There are more than fifty forms of the cross used in Christian art.

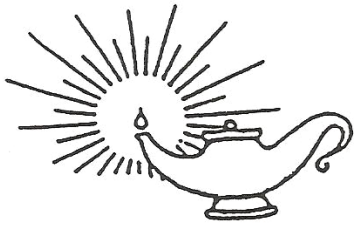
The IHS is a symbol derived from the 1st, 2nd, and last letters of the Greek word for *Jesus* (Ihsus). It is most often found on the center of the altar cross.



The XP (Chi Rho) comes from the two Greek letters for the name for *Christ* (Christos). This symbol is often found on the altar cloths, stoles worn by ministers, banners, or stained glass.

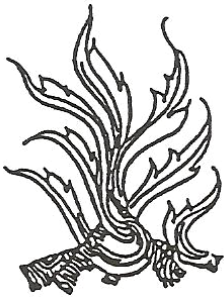
The descending dove is one of the best-known symbols for the *Holy Spirit* because of the gospel stories of Jesus’ baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon him. When we are baptized with water, we ask that the Holy Spirit might be active in our lives. The descending dove symbolizes that God comes to us and is with us always.





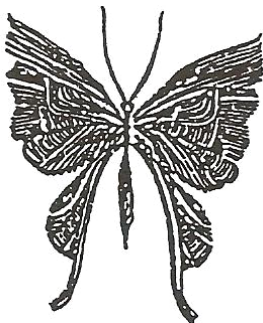
A burning lamp represents the *Bible*. A lamp helps us to see when it is dark. A lamp is a sign for study and learning. Christians believe that they learn about God when they study the Bible. It sheds light on our lives, and it can lead us, as light can. The lamp also refers to a quotation from Psalm 119:105.

During the Roman Empire, Christians were forced to meet in secret to protect themselves. The fish became a secret symbol for *Christianity*. When strangers met on the street, one might begin casually drawing half of a fish in the sand with his or her toe to show his faith. If the other person drew the other half of the fish, they both realized they were no longer strangers but friends in Christ! This symbol is rooted in the Bible when Jesus called his disciples to be "fishers of men."



Fire is a symbol for *what God does through the Holy Spirit*. Fire burns away impurities. It inspires us with awe. It gives power and causes us to be warm. In the second Chapter of Acts, the Bible states "...there appeared to them tongues of fires, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit . . ."

The bread and wine symbolize *Christ's body and blood*. They are visible ways through which Christ comes to us in our worship. As we celebrate communion with bread and wine/grape juice, we are remembering Jesus' last meal with his disciples, and his life, death, and resurrection.



The butterfly is a symbol for *resurrection*. This is because in an early state of growth, the butterfly grows in a smooth, hard shell which often rests on a leaf or branch. This is commonly known as a cocoon. The cocoon appears dead, but inside it, a butterfly is growing. In about two weeks, the butterfly breaks out of the cocoon, and flies away. What was thought to be dead is really alive, just as Jesus was dead but rose to new life!

The cross and flame are symbols of *the United Methodist Church*. The flame reminds us of John Wesley's faith, - "a heart strangely warmed" - and it represents the Holy Spirit. The cross reminds us of Christ, who loves us and calls us to serve in his name.





First United Methodist Church's logo helps us remember our connection to other Methodists around the world with its inclusion of the cross and flame. The heart reminds us to "share the heart of Christ from the heart of McKinney" which is our mission statement.

Seasons

Seasons are super important in our church because they remind us of the major stories in the Christian faith. Below are the seven Christian seasons and four liturgical colors.

Advent (purple): The four Sundays before Christmas. A time of preparation and expectation – we're getting ready for Jesus' birth! *Fun Fact: Purple is the color of royalty. Coincidence? We think not! ☺

Christmastide (white): Christmas Day and one or two Sundays afterward. A time of celebrating the gift of God's Son.

Epiphany (green): Four to nine Sundays between January 6 and the beginning of Lent. A time of remembering Christ's birth and the journey of the wise men.

Lent (purple): The 40 days leading up to Easter beginning on Ash Wednesday. A time of repentance and denial as we think about Jesus' suffering and death.

Eastertide (white): Easter Day and six Sundays afterward. A time of celebration of Christ's resurrection and the hope of new life!

Pentecost Season (red): Eleven to sixteen Sundays beginning with Pentecost Sunday. A time of celebrating the birthday of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Kingdomtide (green): Thirteen or fourteen Sundays ending with Advent. A time to consider the Kingdom of God.

*** Go The Extra Mile!**

Design your own personal stained glass window using your favorite colors and symbols of Christian belief.

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