

LCMS

Frequently Asked Questions

Doctrinal Issues – The Creeds/Prayer

(To navigate the document, hold down your control key and click the appropriate heading)

The Creeds/Prayer	2
Who wrote the Common Table Prayer?.....	2
Why is the word “descended” not in the Nicene Creed?.....	3
Where in the Bible does it say Jesus descended into hell?	4
Can you explain why Jesus had to descend into hell?.....	5
Is Jesus God and God Jesus?.....	6
To whom shall we pray?.....	7

The Creeds/Prayer

Who wrote the Common Table Prayer?

Q: Who wrote the common table prayer used by many Lutherans, "Come, Lord Jesus" and where did it come from?

A: The *Hymnal Supplement 98 Handbook* ([Concordia Publishing House](#), 1998) notes on p. 156:

This is doubtless the best-known meal prayer among American Lutherans ...

The earliest known printing of the text is in a Moravian hymnal, *Etwas vom Liede Mosis, des Knechts Gottes, und dem Liede des Lammes, das ist: Alt- und neuer Brüder-Gesang*. . . (London, 1753). It is headed "Tisch-Gebetgen" (table prayer), and the text reads:

Komm, Herr Jesu! sey unser Gast;	Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest,
und segne, was du bescheret hast.	And bless what you have bestowed.

It is likely that the text has an earlier, possibly Lutheran, origin. In the 1753 hymnal it is placed not in the chapter containing "Old Moravian hymns" nor with the "eighteenth-century Moravian hymns" but rather with "evangelical hymns from the seventeenth century" ("evangelische Lieder im siebzehnden Seculo"). The editor of the facsimile reprint, Dietrich Meyer, has identified the authors of most hymns in this chapter, all or nearly all of whom are Lutherans, but for "Komm, Herr Jesu" he has simply indicated "author unknown."

More than one version of the second line of text is known among Lutherans in this country, including "Let these gifts to us be blest," "Let Thy gifts to us be blest" and "Let these Thy gifts to us be blest," as well as other variations. The same situation applies in Germany, where the line is variously said "und segne, was du bescheret hast," "und segne, was du uns bescheret hast," and "und segne, was du uns aus Gnaden bescheret hast" ("and bless what you have bestowed to us out of mercy"). The committee preparing HS98 has chosen the version that seems to be most widely used in this country; this version also avoids the problem of the archaic word "thy."

Within our own LCMS tradition, this prayer appears in *Evangelisch-Lutherischer Gebets-Schatz* (St. Louis, 1881, 15th ed.; originally published in St. Louis in 1864). This volume of *Evangelical-Lutheran Prayer Treasures* underwent numerous reprintings even as late as 1908. It attributes the authorship of "Komm, Herr Jesu!" to Martin Luther, although this is doubtful.

You may wish to read an article by David W. Loy titled, [Come, Lord Jesus](#), that was published in the 2011 June/July edition of *The Lutheran Witness*.

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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Why is the word “descended” not in the Nicene Creed?

Q: *The Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed contain the statement that Christ “--descended into hell.” Why is this statement not included in the Nicene Creed?*

A: Back in 1960 Dr. Martin H. Scharlemann of our St. Louis seminary wrote an excellent article on the *Descent into Hell*, and in particular on 1 Peter 3:18-20, the key text for the teaching. I mention this article because in the introductory section of it, Dr. Scharlemann reviews history of its inclusion in the creeds of the church. He points out, first of all, that the article on the Descent was added to the Apostles' Creed at a rather late date and that it did not come into general use until the sixth century (much after the Nicene Creed, adopted in 325 A.D. at Nicea; although the date of the Athanasian Creed has been much discussed, there is some agreement that it dates from about 428 A.D.). The earliest reference to the Descent is found in a document dating A.D. 359. Then Scharlemann observes, “Just why the reference to the descent into hell was included at all and why this should have happened in the time from the fourth to the sixth centuries are both mysteries.” Scharlemann then goes on to caution, however: “The fact that the statement on the descensus was incorporated in the Creeds at a rather late date does not mean to suggest that in the early church there was no doctrine of Christ's descent.” The remainder of the article then shows on the basis of 1 Peter 3 that the confession of Christ's descent is firmly rooted in this text of the Scriptures.

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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Where in the Bible does it say Jesus descended into hell?

Q: *In the Apostle's Creed, it says, Christ was "...crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again...." But in Luke, Jesus says to the thief next to him: "Surely today you will be with me in paradise." My question is, where in the Bible does it ever talk about Jesus descending into hell?*

A: Christ's descent into hell is described in 1 Peter 3:18-20. While this passage does not provide a great deal of detailed information about this event, it is clear that after Christ died he was "made alive in the spirit" and that in this state of exaltation he descended into hell—not to suffer, but to proclaim his victory over hell and the devil. The events of Easter (Christ's physical resurrection) then followed, and eventually (40 days later) his physical, visible ascension into heaven.

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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Can you explain why Jesus had to descend into hell?

Q: *I had been a Missouri Synod Lutheran for many years but never really understood a statement in the Apostles' Creed where it says that Jesus descended into hell. Could you explain this more fully to me? Did Jesus have to be tormented in hell as part of the payment for our sins or was the finished work of Christ completed on the cross through his death and shed blood for the full payment for our sins?*

A: Lutherans believe that Jesus descended into hell not to suffer for our sins but to proclaim his victory over sin, death, hell, and the devil (see 1 Peter 3:19). Thus, Lutheran theologians have always considered Jesus' descent into hell to be the first of Christ's works of "exaltation" mentioned in the Creed rather than part of his work of "humiliation." Christ's suffering for our sins ended with his death on the cross, and the final stage of his "humiliation" was his burial, not his descent into hell.

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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Is Jesus God and God Jesus?

Q: *Is it correct theology to say that Jesus is God, or God is Jesus? Do these phrases diminish the Holiness of the Three in One?*

A: Significantly, the Athanasian Creed, which summarizes the doctrine of the Trinity as confessed by the church through the ages, begins by stating: "And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance." It is clear from the Creed that to make statements such as "the Father is Jesus" or "the Holy Spirit is Jesus" is to confuse the persons of the Holy Trinity. At the same time, according to the Creed the three distinct persons of the Trinity are of one substance or essence. When the Scriptures speak of the three persons of the Trinity as God (the Father is God; the Son is God; the Spirit is God) they mean that each of the persons, though distinct, are of one divine essence: they are God. Specifically with respect to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creed states of Him that He is God (and man): "God of the substance of the Father." This language is very carefully chosen here, so that-as the Creed states at the outset-neither the persons nor the substance are confused.

As I know you agree, the Holy Trinity in Whom we believe is a profound mystery that is beyond human comprehension. This implies a twofold caution. On the one hand, we are bound only to what God has revealed about Himself in the Word, and thus we can say no more and no less than what the Scriptures teach. And on the other hand, we are unable on the basis of human reason to explain everything we may wish to know about this mystery.

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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

To whom shall we pray?

Q: *To whom should we pray? A fellow Christian recently explained that all prayers should be directed only to God the Father or the Trinity. She said that there are very few "ancient" prayers addressed to Jesus Christ and none to the Holy Spirit. I am having trouble with this. I believe that all three persons of the Trinity are present when I pray and all three hear and respond, no matter which Person I address. I have frequent prayers to Jesus. I ask the Holy Spirit's guidance in my faith life. When I pray, I pray to Jesus. And I can see nothing wrong in this. The Bible and the catechism have no restrictions.*

A: In answer to the question "To whom should we pray," [Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation](#) (Concordia Publishing House, 1986) clearly answers: "We should pray to the true God only, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." According to Scripture and the historic teaching of the Lutheran Church, Christians may offer their prayers to any or all of the three persons of the Trinity, each of whom is "true God." This is a clear and indisputable teaching of Scripture and of the Lutheran Church.

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[Return to Table of Contents](#)