



EFCA Statement of Faith: Article 4
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Jesus Christ

4. We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

3. We believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, having been conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. Further, He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where at the right hand of the Majesty on High He now is our High Priest and Advocate.

I. Introduction

II. Change of Order in Articles 4 and 3

- A. This follows the biblical narrative, the unfolding plan of God's redemption.
- B. It follows theologically and logically in that the truth stated at the end of article 3 on The Human Condition, viz. "Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed" is spelled out further here.
- C. This article focuses on the person of Christ, and it will be followed by the work of Christ (article 5).

III. Article 3

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Person

- A. We believe Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:21; 16:18) is God incarnate (Jn. 1:14, 18; 1 Jn. 4:2), fully God (Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:6; Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Col. 2:9) and fully man (Matt. 4:2; Lk. 2:40, 52; Jn. 11:35; Heb. 5:7-8; 1 Jn. 1:1-3), one Person in Two natures (Jn. 3:13; 10:30; 17:5).

- B. We believe Jesus is Israel's promised Messiah (Gen. 3:14-20; 12:1-3; 49:8-12; 2 Sam. 7:11b-16; Matt. 1:1, 17; Lk. 4:16-22; 24:25-27; Jn. 1:41; 4:25-26; Acts 2:36; 13:23,32; Rom. 1:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:8,9).

Incarnation

- C. We believe Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Lk. 1:34-35) and born of the virgin Mary (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20; Lk. 1:34-35).

Sinless Life

- D. We believe Jesus lived a sinless life (Rom. 5:19; Gal. 4:4-5; Matt. 3:15; Phil. 2:7-8; Heb. 4:15).

Crucifixion

- E. We believe Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate (Dt. 21:23; Ps. 16:10; Matt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:16; Jn. 19:16; Acts 2:27, 37).

Resurrection

- F. We believe Jesus arose bodily from the dead (Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-8; Lk. 24:39; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:20, 44-45; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5).

Ascension and Session

- G. We believe Jesus ascended into heaven (Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:6-11; Eph. 1:20; 4:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:16) and sits at the right hand of God the Father (Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22).

Ministry

H. We believe Jesus is our High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 6:20; 8:1) and Advocate (Rom. 8: 34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn. 2:1).

Summarizing connection to the gospel: *“God’s gospel is made known supremely in the Person of Jesus Christ.”*

IV. Specific Ways the Article on the doctrine of **Jesus Christ** has been strengthened, or new issues addressed

- God incarnate
- One Person in two natures
- Israel’s promised Messiah
- Holy Ghost restated as Holy Spirit
- Virgin Mary becomes virgin Mary
- He lived a sinless life
- Crucified under Pontius Pilate
- He sits at the right hand of God the Father

V. Importance of Reaffirming the Biblical/Doctrinal Truths of **Jesus Christ** Today (which also carries with it denials)

- God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two Natures – hypostatic union – Jesus is the second person of the Godhead from eternity; this was not a truth determined after the fact at the Council of Nicea (325)
- Jesus lived a sinless life – active obedience
- He was crucified – passive obedience
- Jesus arose bodily from the dead – over against a spiritual resurrection only
- Jesus resurrected body is the first fruits – this emphasizes the importance of the body, not only Jesus’ body, but our body as well.

VI. Additional Resources

Questions for Further Study

1. Why is it important to spell out more fully what it means to say that “Jesus Christ is God incarnate”? What does this expression mean today, to those outside the church, and to those who are the church?

2. What is the significance of the statement “Israel’s promised Messiah”? How is it that this reference to Jesus connects the two testaments, the Old and the New? How will this affect our understanding of the Bible?
3. What is unique about Jesus conception? Though not an immaculate conception, would it be accurate to refer this as a miraculous conception? Why? Why is the miraculous conception important, i.e. what does it mean for Jesus?
4. How is it Jesus was able to live a sinless life? Were His temptations real, i.e. could He or could He not sin?
5. Jesus was obedient both actively in His sinless life, and passively in his crucifixion. What is the importance of His obedience in both realms?
6. What does Jesus’ resurrection mean? What is the importance for understanding who Jesus is, and what are the implications to those who are in union with Christ? Why is it important to emphasize Jesus’ bodily resurrection?
7. Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, He also ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father. What does this mean to the earthly work of Jesus? What does the posture of “sits” mean, and what is the meaning of sitting at God the Father’s right hand?
8. Jesus now carries on a ministry of High Priest and Advocate. This means though His earthly ministry is complete, He carries on a heavenly ministry. Who does this ministry affect? What does it mean? Why is it vital?

Preaching/Teaching Texts

Genesis 3:15

Romans 1:1-6

Hebrews 1:1-2

Memory Verses

Isaiah 7:14

John 1:14

Hymns

All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Choruses

Praise the Name of Jesus

Jesus, Name Above All Names

Appendix 1

EFCA Statement of Faith Commentary¹

Jesus Christ

4. We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

[3. We believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, having been conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. Further, He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where at the right hand of the Majesty on High He now is our High Priest and Advocate.]

is God incarnate—

This language of incarnation reflects the Biblical teaching as given expression in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (A.D. 381): God became a man in Christ, the second person of the Godhead.

fully God and fully man—

This statement affirms the full deity and humanity of Christ in agreement with the Bible, and affirmed by the early Christian creeds.

one Person in two natures—

This statement, rooted in Scripture, reflects the language of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) in which the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ was established. This formulation assured that in being fully human and fully divine, or true man and true God, Jesus Christ was not a mixture of the two, forming a third kind of being, and that the subject of the Person of Christ was the divine Logos in which the two natures found their existence.

Israel's promised Messiah—

This puts the story of Jesus Christ in its proper Old Testament context. The God who is incarnate in Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the promised Messiah. Implicit here is the notion that the Messiah of Israel is the Savior of the world (cf., e.g., Jn. 4:22; 1 Jn. 2:2). The early Church quickly ruled out an understanding of the Christian gospel apart from the Old

¹This commentary will only highlight changes from the 1950 Statement of Faith and not expound the theological truth common to both statements.

Testament.² Although Christians recognize two testaments, they embrace one Bible, with Jesus being the key that holds them together.

conceived through the Holy Spirit—

This is an updating of archaic language in the use of "Spirit" instead of "Ghost." We have chosen to use "through" rather than "of" because it carries more meaning, yet does not suggest that the Holy Spirit simply plays the role of the "father" in this conception. In this we have sought to reflect the language of Matt. 1:18 (which uses the preposition *ek* [reflected in the wording of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed]).

born of the virgin Mary—

The word "virgin" is no longer capitalized, emphasizing that this is a description of Mary and not a part of a proper name. This follows the practice, for example, of the Lutheran *Book of Concord* (Tappert edition, 1959) in its translations of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

He lived a sinless life—

This phrase points to the saving significance of the "active obedience" of Christ throughout His life and not just at the point of His crucifixion.

was crucified under Pontius Pilate—

This phrase echoes the Apostles' Creed, anchoring our own statement in the historical statements of the Church. It also grounds the life of Jesus in real history. This is also a reference to Jesus' "passive obedience."

sits —

This reflects the biblical emphasis on the completed work of Christ—cf. Heb. 1:3; 8:1,2; 12:2.

at the right hand of God—

This simplification is a recognition that the language of the King James Version (cf. Heb. 1:3), "on the right hand of the majesty on high," which the 1950 statement echoes, is no longer as recognizable among us.

²Cf. the language of the Chalcedonian confession: "such as he was announced formerly by the prophets".

Appendix 2

Frequently Asked Questions – Article 4

I notice that a few different names are used for Jesus.

We attempted to use various names and titles of Christ. For example, here are the references throughout the SOF: the Son (1), Jesus Christ (3, 4, 5), God incarnate (4), fully God and fully man (4), one Person in two natures (4), Jesus (4), Israel's promised Messiah (4), High Priest and Advocate (4), representative and substitute (5), Lord Jesus Christ (6, 9, 10), Christ (6, 7, 8[2x], 9), Head (7), Lord Jesus (7), Lord (10). As you can see, we did not use the full expression in each of the occurrences. But taken as a whole, which is intended for the SOF, it has a very strong cumulative statement regarding Jesus.

What does the expression "Israel's promised Messiah" mean? It is not a common expression. Moreover, does this mean He is not the Messiah of the world?

Here is a more complete statement of the expression in question: "We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus – Israel's promised Messiah –"

Here is what is contained in the commentary on this statement: "This puts the story of Jesus Christ in its proper Old Testament context. The God who is incarnate in Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the promised Messiah. Implicit here is the notion that the Messiah of Israel is the Savior of the world (cf., e.g., Jn. 4:22; 1 Jn. 2:2). The early Church quickly ruled out an understanding of the Christian gospel apart from the Old Testament (cf. the language of the Chalcedonian confession: "such as he was announced formerly by the prophets"). Although Christians recognize two testaments, they embrace one Bible, with Jesus being the key."

It is important to know that the title "Messiah" of the OT equals the title "Christ" of the New Testament. Here are a few passages that address this, and these kinds of passages could be multiplied.

1. Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).
2. The mocking on the cross: ""Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe" (Mk. 15:32).
3. Nathanael's response to Jesus: Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel" (Jn. 1:49).
4. Paul clearly connects Jesus with David, Israel's great king: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ . . . set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David, according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3).

Here are some of the key purposes (and strengths) of including this expression.

1. This makes a clear connection between the Old and New Testament, the promised Messiah (OT)/Christ (NT) is Jesus!
2. It ensures that we remember we have one Bible. Yes there are two testaments, but one whole, unified Bible.
3. It reminds us that the unifying truth of the testaments is the person of Jesus Christ, who (which) is, in fact, the climax of God's revelation. If there is any interpretative key, this, or more accurately, He, is it.
4. It recognizes that this "Jesus," who is the Christ, is a historical figure, a Palestinian Jew. This addresses the "scandal of historical particularity."
5. This Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, is the only Savior of the world. Here is what John wrote: "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:1b-2).

In the Statement of Faith (*adopted June 2008*), the reference is made to Jesus "crucified under Pontius Pilate." Why was it considered necessary to add Pilate's name?

There are four main reasons for listing specifically Pontius Pilate's name. First, it is explicitly stated in the Bible (cf. Matt. 27, Mk. 15; Lk. 23). Second, he is a specific historical person, which gets at the heart of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, which is referred to as the "scandal of historical particularity." And this gets at the heart of Christianity in general, in distinction from virtually all other world religions (cf. what Paul writes of this in 1 Cor. 15). Third, he is listed specifically in the early creeds of the Church, the Apostles' and the Nicene-Constantinople Creeds. With the Bible as our fountainhead, this is part of the faithful evangelical stream of which we are a part today. Finally, it is also intended to speak strongly about the hypostatic union, i.e. that Jesus was fully God and fully man. He is the one who suffered, died, buried and rose again – two natures, one person. It speaks against any docetic understanding of Christ, any adoptionist understanding of Christ and any Gnostic understanding of the body.

Why not delete the words "under Pontius Pilate?" Our salvation depends on what Christ did, not what Pilate did. Certainly this reference is stated in the Apostles' Creed, but so is the statement "descended into hell," which has no biblical support whatsoever.

The reference to Pontius Pilate is there for a number of reasons. This does not undermine the fact that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone at all. Yes, it is contained in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, and that is one of our connections with the evangelical movement through history as spelled out in two of the early church's first creeds. But the main reason it is included is because it is biblical (included in all the gospel accounts of Jesus' trial, e.g. Matt. 27; Mk. 15; Lk. 23; Jn. 19), and it is another reference anchoring this to

history (it is also recorded by Josephus and Philo). The same cannot be said regarding the phrase “He descended into hell,” which is why we do not include that expression in the SOF. It is not taught in the Bible (though the following passages are used to support the idea Christ literally descended into hell - Ps. 16:8-11; Acts 2:27; Rom. 10:6-7; Eph. 4:8-9; 1 Pet. 3:18-20; 4:6 – but unconvincingly), and many of the earliest manuscripts of the Apostles’ Creed do not even include this expression. This, however, is a reminder that no Creed is on par with the Bible, and all Creeds ought to be revisable.

Why is the burial of Christ not mentioned?

We recognize Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” We also know the words from the Apostles’ Creed: “He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. . . . On the third day he rose again.” As you know, a SOF is not intended necessarily to quote verbatim from the Bible, but rather to be an accurate summary of the teaching of the Bible. The SOF states, “He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.” By not stating that Jesus was buried does not deny that He was, nor does it deny the truth of 1 Corinthians 15. You will also notice that the term “died” from 1 Corinthians is not used but rather the SOF says He was “crucified.” The point is that what is stated in the SOF summarizes the biblical teaching of 1 Corinthians 15 and a number of other passages of Scripture by referring to the fact that the resurrection was “bodily,” that He “ascended into heaven,” that He “sits at the right hand of God the Father,” that He is our “High Priest and Advocate.” There are references to numerous biblical passages in this brief, condensed, biblically rich statement.

In the earlier drafts of the Statement of Faith, this heading, which has been deleted, read *“God’s gospel is made known supremely in the Person of Jesus Christ.”* What did this mean?

The key expression is “is made known supremely.” This specifically and explicitly places Jesus in history. He is the climax of special revelation. The word “supremely” also means “absolutely,” “definitively,” carrying the meaning of finality as addressed by the author of Hebrews: “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (1:2).