



Why do we say we believe in the holy *catholic* church in the baptismal rite?

This is a great question. One that has come up quite a few times. At first glance it doesn't seem to make sense that the word "catholic" is in the creed used by Lutherans - until you know what the word means, and that it is not the same as the word "Catholic" with a capital "C."

Normally in our worship we use one of two ancient statements or summaries of what Christians believe: The Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed. The Apostle's Creed has traditionally been known as the "baptismal creed," since it is made up of statements given in answer to questions about the beliefs of the person to be baptized. The Apostles' Creed states: "I believe in the holy *Christian* church." The Nicene Creed states, "[I believe] in one, holy, *Christian* and apostolic church." But you'll note that there's an asterisk (*) by the word "Christian" in both of those creeds as printed in our hymnal. Our hymnal states that the ancient (original) text of the creed says "catholic" not "Christian." So, when we say "I believe in the holy catholic church" in the baptism ceremony, we're simply using the original form of the baptismal creed (Apostles' Creed).

It needs to be noted that the word "catholic" (with a lower case "c") simply means "universal." So, (using the Nicene Creed as an example), when we say, "I believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church," we are saying that we believe that there is only "one" true church. We are saying that we believe this one true church has been made "holy," by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for our forgiveness. We then go on to add that this one, holy church is a "catholic" or "universal" church. That is, this one, holy church exists *everywhere* that people believe what is stated in this creed.

So, the word "catholic" (small "c") as used in our creeds has NOTHING to do with the Roman Catholic (upper case "C") church. The word "catholic" was a part of our baptismal creed hundreds of years before the Roman Catholic branch of the Christian church ever existed. (They took the name "catholic" to try to indicate that they were the "universal" church as opposed to the Eastern branch of the church that took the name "orthodox" to try to indicate that they were the "correct" church.)

The bottom line: In saying we believe in the holy catholic church, we are simply using the same words used since the beginning of Christianity. We are not making any claims to any affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net