

Learning by heart

by [Hannah Faith Notess](#) in the [June 27, 2006](#) issue

The service will be over in ten minutes, but we're stuck saying the creed. It's hot. Our voices run together, muddled, a swampy stream. We stick at the sibilants, slogging through, plodding on.

No clarity, except for when we all pause for the same breath, suck up all the air in the room, and use it to shape these worn-out words so many have already spent breath saying.

I believe—

—who was conceived by the Virgin married, I say, a slip I hope no one heard, but then a man behind me falters, mumbles something about light (that isn't in this one)

and I recall saying the Nicene Creed standing beside one of my college professors who quietly called the Holy Spirit "She"—

—She has spoken to us through the prophets, I tried saying once, but then all day, I couldn't stop thinking about Her, deep in those quiet conversations, handing over words

to be handed down, the ones we should have learned by heart by now. How disappointed she must be we still slip after all this time?

We're walking along the rickety edge of Babel

trying to learn by heart, without reading,

trying to walk by faith, still slipping.