

# Religious Studies

## Christianity Revision Guide



Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## Christianity – Beliefs

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- The Trinity

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### Key Concepts



**Omnibenevolent** The state of being all-loving and infinitely good – a characteristic often attributed to God.

**Omnipotent** The all-powerful, almighty and unlimited nature of God.

**Trinity** The three persons of God: God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Incarnation** God becoming human in the form of Jesus.

**Atonement** The belief that Jesus' death on the cross healed the rift between humans and God.

**Resurrection** The belief that Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, conquering death.

**Sacraments** An outward sign of an invisible and inward blessing by God, for example baptism, Eucharist.

**Evangelism** Preaching of the gospel to others with the intention of converting others to the Christian faith.

### The nature of God

Christians believe there is only one God, this belief in one God is known as **monotheism**, so Christianity is a monotheistic religion. Christians use a variety of words to describe the nature of God. These are known as the attributes of God. They believe that He is:

- omnipotent (all powerful)
- omnipresent (everywhere)
- omniscient (all knowing)
- omnibenevolent (all loving)
- transcendent (outside of this world).
- Immanent (close to humans)

Christians also believe that God is timeless and eternal. All of these ideas are found in the Christian Bible, which is made up of the Old and New Testaments and believed to be part of God's revelation to humanity.

- God is the creator and the giver of all life: *'In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth.'* **Genesis 1:1**
- All Christians believe that God created everything and is still involved with the world in a mysterious way. In the Genesis text God is clearly seen as the creator of the universe and all that it contains. Humankind is made in a special way in the image of God. *'Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..."'* **Genesis 1:26**

This spiritual likeness enables all human beings to have some understanding of God's nature. Christians believe all we know about God is through God showing or revealing himself to people and this process is known as 'revelation'.

### God is omnipotent

Many of the stories in the Old Testament are a revelation about the power of God. The most obvious is that he was a powerful enough being to create the world from nothing (*ex nihilo*). Others include:

- In the Book of Exodus, which tells the story of God's relationship with the Jews, one of the most well-known stories is the story of the ten plagues. God instructed Moses, who was a Jew living in Egypt, to lead all the other Jews (who were slaves in Egypt) out of the country. The Egyptian pharaoh refused to let them go and God sent a series of plagues down on the Egyptian people. When the pharaoh sent his army to stop the Jews leaving Egypt, God parted the Red Sea to let the Jews cross, but brought it crashing down on the Egyptian army. The account shows that the Jews believed God was all powerful and in control of nature.



*'Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided ...'*

Exodus 14:21

## God is omnibenevolent

Christians believe that God is all loving. Here are three texts about the importance of God's love:

- Psalm 86 was attributed to King David and in the quotation the writer expresses the idea that God is merciful and is rich in love. *'But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.'* **Psalm 86:15**
- The Gospel of John expresses the fundamental belief that because God loved humanity he sent Jesus to earth so that people could have eternal life. *'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'* **John 3:16**
- In this passage St Paul writes of how God's love is more powerful than anything else. *'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'* **Romans 8:37–39**

## Why is there evil and suffering?

For many people, the idea that God allows evil and suffering in the world is one of the reasons why they find it difficult to believe in God. Such people will often describe themselves as atheist (believing in no god) or agnostic (unsure whether there is a god). It appears difficult to believe in any god who allows evil and suffering in the world. If God is all powerful or **omnipotent**, then why does he not stop evil and suffering? If God is all good or **omnibenevolent**, then why would a god who is kind and a god of love allow evil or suffering to be created in the first place? Or allow suffering to continue? These are difficult questions for all people of faith.

Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher (341–270 BCE), wrote the following about God and the idea of evil and suffering.

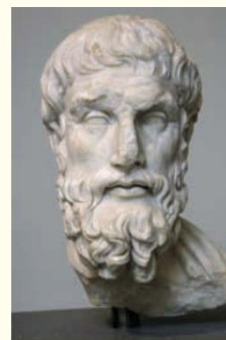
*'Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.*

*Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.*

*Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?*

*Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?'*

Epicurus lived at a time when the Greeks believed in many gods but the question about the relationship of God and suffering is very well expressed in this quotation.

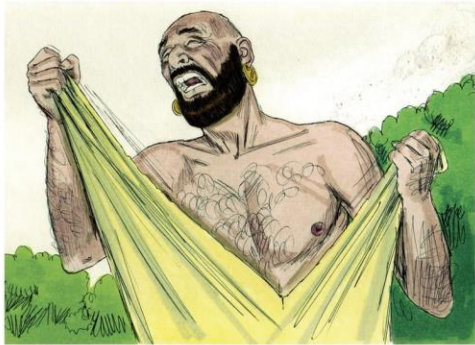


For Christians, suffering is seen as an essential part of human life and there are a number of arguments about why evil and suffering exist in the world. The arguments are known as 'theodicies'. It is a complex topic. In very simple terms some of the reasons given for the existence of evil and suffering are:

- God has given each person free will and people must make their own choices. Some of the choices people make cause evil events and suffering.
- There is a force for evil in the world, sometimes characterised as the devil/satan. Traditionally the devil was believed to be a fallen angel, thrown out of heaven when he disobeyed God.
- God shares in our suffering.
- Suffering is a test.
- Suffering is a result of sin.
- How we deal with suffering gives us the opportunity to become better people—it is soul-shaping.

Don't forget this topic also comes up in the themes paper in issues of good and evil. Check out your theme's revision guide for more information on this topic.

### The story of Job



‘Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord’

Book of Job 1:8–12

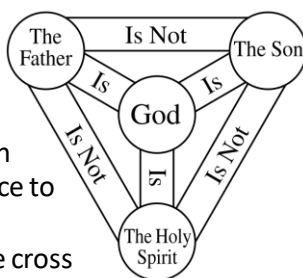
In the Old Testament there is a ‘case study’ of a man called Job. In the Book of Job we read of a wealthy man who lives in a land called Uz, with his large family and flocks. He is described as a blameless and upright man who is always careful to avoid doing evil. In the story Satan appears before God in heaven. Satan argues that Job is only good because God has blessed him. Satan challenges God. He claims that if he is given permission to punish Job, Job will turn and curse God. God allows Satan to torment Job to test him and see if he turns from God. This is described in Job 1:8–12. The two questions, ‘Why do we suffer?’ and ‘Why do good and innocent people suffer so much?’ are part of this story as it considers the universal theme of the good person who suffers.

In the story, Job receives the news that his flocks, servants and ten children have all died. Job still blesses God in his prayers. Satan appears in heaven again and God allows Satan to test Job again. Job is afflicted with terrible sores and his wife encourages him to curse God, but Job refuses. Three of his friends visit him and they discuss why Job is suffering. Job questions humankind’s relationship with God. He laments the injustice of God allowing wicked people to prosper while he and other innocent people suffer so much. However, in Job 42:1–6 Job shows that though God’s ways are beyond human understanding, he has faith in God and understands his own place in the world.

### The Trinity

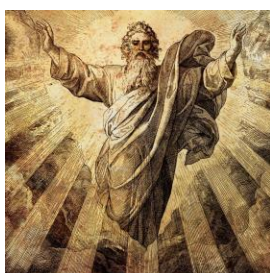
Christians believe in the ‘oneness’ of God. However, they often speak of the **Trinity**. This is the belief that God is one but is made up of three persons:

- God the Father
- the Son Jesus Christ
- the Holy Spirit (or Paraclete).



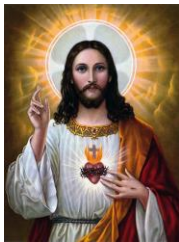
Christians are often blessed in church services by a minister with a reference to this belief. Catholics will often bless themselves by making the sign of the cross and reciting this prayer.

*‘In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.’*



#### God the father

Jesus taught his followers to refer to God as the Father. This refers to the all-powerful, all-knowing part of God, who created the world. Christians also believe that it shows the caring, personal relationship between humans and God, like that between a child and their father.



### God the son (Jesus Christ)

Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God. For Christians, he is God in human form. This belief is known as the **incarnation**. Christians believe that through becoming human as Jesus, God revealed something of himself to the world.

**Incarnation** the way in which God becomes 'flesh' or human in the form of Jesus.



The symbols of the Holy Spirit are: **Dove, Fire, Oil, Wind and Water.**

### God the Holy Spirit

Christians believe that after his resurrection Jesus rose up to heaven. They believe that God then sent the Holy Spirit or 'Paraclete' into the world. Christians believe the Holy Spirit guides Christians to live their lives in the best way possible. The Holy Spirit is able to give comfort, courage, inspiration and guidance to all Christians, and helps people to believe in Jesus and strengthen their faith. It also helps Christians to understand and interpret the Bible. as the word of God. Christians believe the Holy Spirit intervenes in the world in a miraculous way and is present during worship. In special church services, such as baptism and marriage, Christians believe they are really in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

**Charismatic Christians** (Christians who emphasise the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and miracles.), such as Pentecostals, believe the Holy Spirit empowers people to **speak 'in tongues'** (someone is filled with the Holy Spirit during worship and is able to talk in an unknown language). This type of worship may be very lively as people feel they are directly moved by the spirit of God.

## Why do Christians believe in the Trinity?

The belief in the Trinity is based, on passages from the New Testament and, in the two examples which follow, on the words of Jesus himself.

*'I and the Father are one.'*

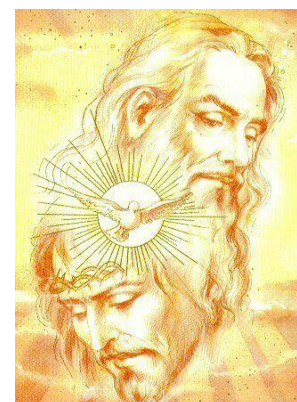
John 10:30

*'Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."*

*Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."*

*Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves."*

John 14:6–11



Both of these passages are taken from the Gospel of John. In the first passage Jesus clearly says that he is one with God. In the second, Jesus talks about his special and unique relationship with God.

## The Apostles' Creed

The most important Christian beliefs about the nature of God are contained in a creed, which is a statement of beliefs written by the 12 Apostles. The Apostles' Creed may be recited in church either on Sundays or at solemn occasions, such as a baptism. On some occasions the more detailed and longer Nicene Creed may be recited.

### The Apostles' Creed

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.*

*He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.*

*He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.*

*He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.*

*He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*He will come again to judge the living 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.*

The creed is a simple statement of the most important Christian beliefs which all Christians adhere to. Whatever the Christian tradition or denomination, all Christians sign up to the beliefs stated in the creed. The most important beliefs in the Apostles' Creed are as follows:

- God is an all-powerful creator.
- Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus was crucified, buried and rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.
- There will be a Day of Judgement when God will judge how each person has lived their life.
- There is one holy and universal Church.
- God will forgive our sins.
- There will be resurrection of the body and an eternal afterlife.

## Creation

'How was the universe and earth made?' is one of the so-called fundamental questions.

Many people today look to scientific explanations, such as the Big Bang to give an answer to this question. For all Christians what is important is that God is the creator of the universe. They believe that whatever the exact process was that created the universe, God is the overall architect of that creation. It is the 'spirit of God' which is the source of all life and creation.

There are two accounts of creation in the Bible; Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. There is a slightly different order of creation in both accounts and there are some differences between the stories and parts where the stories contradict each other. See the table for examples:

### Comparisons and Contrasts

Genesis 1:1 – 2:4	Genesis 2:4 – 25
Man and woman are created at the same.	God created man first and then later created woman so that man may have a companion.
God creates the Earth (heavens, vegetation, animals) everything in it before He creates man.	God creates man first and then fills in the universe with plants, animals, etc.
God creates man in His own image.	Man is made from dust before God breathes life into him. Then, God creates woman from the rib of man.
On the seventh day, God rested.	God created the Tree of the Forbidden Knowledge.
Man is given dominion over all of God's creations.	God gives man dominion over the garden of Eden but cannot eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

## Genesis 1

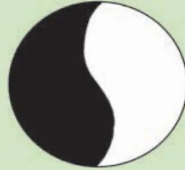
The biblical account of the creation in Chapter 1 of the Book of Genesis, begins:

*'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.'* **Genesis 1:1–3**

This is why Christians believe that God created the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Genesis 1 shows how God created the universe over seven days. 'And God saw that it was good' is a phrase used to describe each stage of Creation.

### Day 1 – God created night and day:

God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.



### Day 2 – God created the heavens:

And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven.



### Day 3 – God created land and plants:

And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. And God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.'



### Day 4 – God created the sun, moon and stars:

And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also.



### Day 5 – God created birds and fish:

And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.'



### Day 6 – God created living creatures including man:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'



### Day 7 – God rested:

And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.



## Genesis 2

- In Genesis 2 Adam lives in paradise in the Garden of Eden. God creates a companion for Adam from his rib, and his companion is Eve:

*'Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man"'*

**Genesis 2:22–23**

- God gives Adam and Eve one command which is not to eat from the tree of knowledge that grows in the Garden of Eden:

*'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."'*

**Genesis 3:2–3**

The Genesis creation story is clear that humankind is unique among God's creation as humans were created in God's image.



## Genesis 3: The Fall

The nature of humankind is that people are made in the image of God but sinful and in need of God's forgiveness. Humankind has a clear purpose in the creation account. People have 'dominion' or power over the earth but this must be exercised through stewardship on God's behalf.

Genesis 3 describes an event which Christians call the 'Fall', when Adam and Eve are tempted by the devil, in the form of a serpent, to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge against God's will. The devil or serpent claims that the only reason God doesn't want Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge is because it would make them as knowledgeable as God. Although Eve first resists the serpent, eventually she gives in to temptation and eats the fruit and then gives some to Adam. They confess to God what they have done and as punishment he sends them out of the Garden of Eden to live somewhere else on the earth. They are no longer allowed to eat from the tree of life, which has given them eternal life, so death enters the world.



This is very significant for Christians as it represents the point when the perfect relationship between humans and God was broken. Because of this event most Christians believe all humans are born with 'original sin'. It is the reason why it was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross, as his death paid for human sin and restored the broken relationship with God. This topic is covered in more detail in the issues of good and evil.

## Literal and non-literal interpretation of the creation story

Christians have a wide range of different views on how the Genesis account should be interpreted:

- **Literal:** Some fundamentalist Christians believe the story to be absolutely true in every detail. They are said to have a literal interpretation of the creation story.
- **Non-literal:** Some Christians believe the story is more symbolic (metaphorical) and myth-like in nature and that the account needs to be interpreted. They do not believe every detail of the story to be literally accurate or true.

These different understandings of the creation story are due to diverse opinions between Christian denominations about how the Bible should be read and interpreted: literally or non-literally.

For example, there are diverse views on how the word 'day' in the Genesis creation story should be interpreted. A literal Christian may accept the term 'day' in the literal sense so that a day becomes 24 hours. They would therefore reject any scientific theory that said the universe has developed over millions of years. Many Christians, however, may see the term 'day' as representing a longer period of time, so the seven 'days' of creation could actually represent millions of years. This means they can believe in both the creation story and the scientific theory that the Big Bang started the development of the universe. This would be a non-literal interpretation. Regardless of whether Christians believe in the Big Bang theory, all Christians believe that God was the ultimate creator of the universe.

## The role of the Word and the Spirit in creation

There is also an account of the creation in the Gospel of John:

*'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'* John 1:1–5

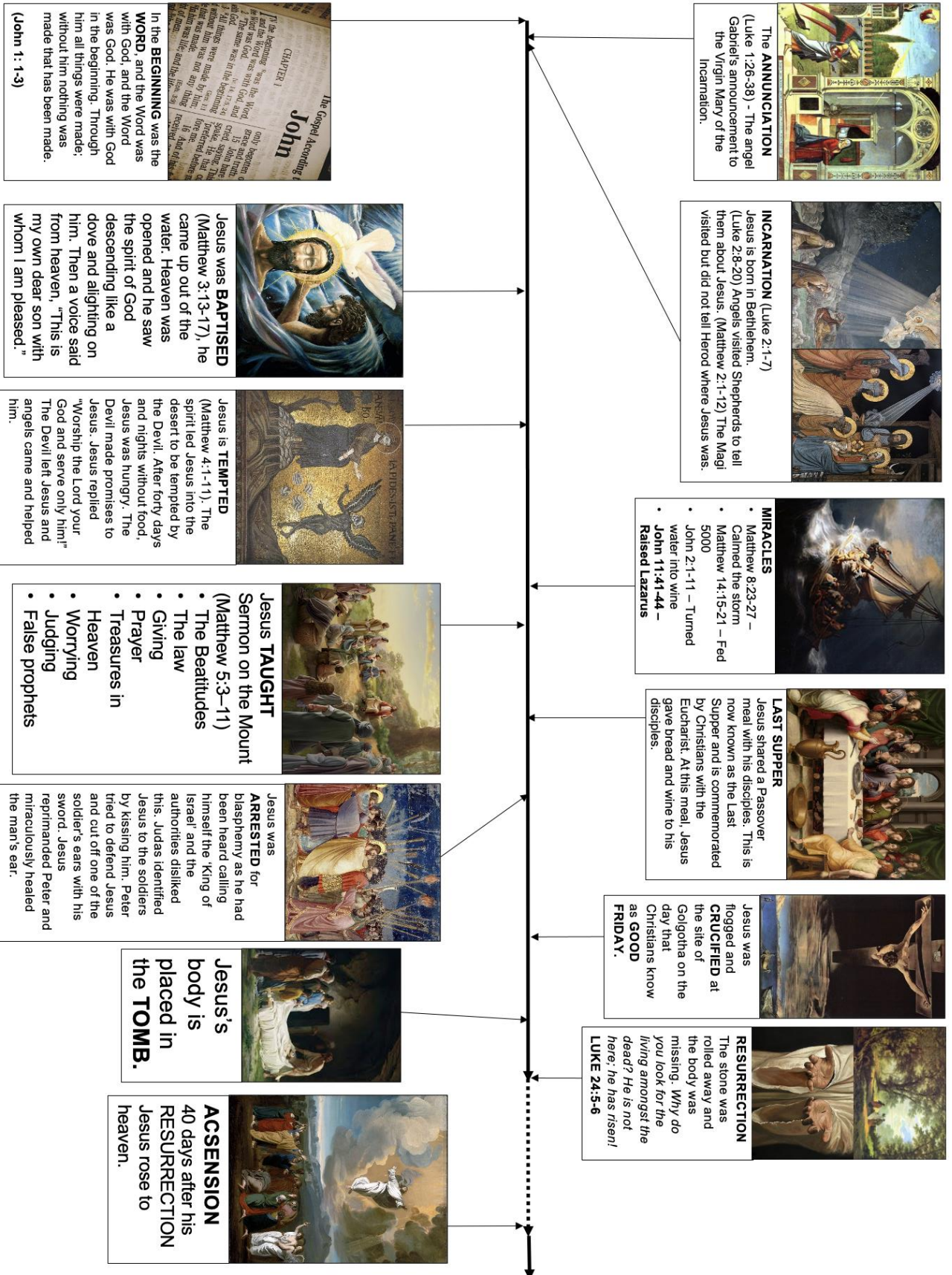
You will see the repeated use of 'Word' in the text of John. There are different views within Christianity as to what is meant by it. Some people believe that 'Word' refers to God's creative self-expression and the purpose and plans that he put in place as he created the universe. However, most Christians understand the 'Word' to be a reference to Jesus, the second part of the Trinity. For the majority of Christians, John 1:1, and the belief that the 'Word' is Jesus, are central to the belief that Jesus is God as part of the Holy Trinity.

*'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'*

They believe this line clearly states that Jesus (the Word) was present at the beginning of creation and that he is God.

## Jesus Christ – timeline

Christians believe there are a number of important events in the life of Jesus. Four of the most important events are, the Incarnation (God becomes Man), the crucifixion and death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus and Jesus' ascension to heaven. All of these events are recorded in the Gospels. See the timeline below for an overview:



## Incarnation

Some Christians believe that Jesus was God **incarnated**. This means ‘God made flesh’ or God in human form. Jesus was not conceived in the same way as other humans, through sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. Mary, Jesus’ mother, was told by an angel that she would give birth to a child named Jesus. She was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

This passage from the Gospel of Luke describes Mary being told that she will give birth to Jesus:

*‘The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.”*

*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.*

*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”* **Luke 1:28–33**



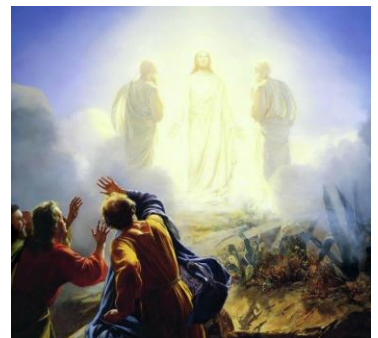
In the Gospels, Jesus is often referred to as the Son of God, as in this passage from the Gospel of John:

*‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.’* **John 1:14**



For many Christians there are many events or miracles from the life of Jesus which provide evidence that he was divine, such as:

- the miracle of the Virgin birth
- the voice of God was heard at the baptism of Jesus
- Jesus’ ability to perform miracles
- the transfiguration of Jesus, when he was transformed in front of some of his apostles and shone with glorious light
- the resurrection of Jesus



## Crucifixion

Jesus’ teachings brought him into conflict with the Jewish authorities. The Jewish authorities viewed Jesus with suspicion and accused him of **blasphemy** because he claimed to be able to forgive sin. His followers believed he was the **Messiah** and this was seen as a challenge to the authorities, this led to his eventual arrest and execution. The Jewish authorities used the argument that in claiming to be the Messiah, Jesus was in fact claiming to be a king and this was treason.

The Roman form of execution was crucifixion. This was a common form of the death penalty used throughout the Roman Empire. Its purpose was to ensure a criminal died in agony and it was a powerful way to intimidate the civilian population. In the Gospel account Jesus is one of a number of men crucified in Jerusalem at the same time. However, an unusual feature in the account of Jesus’ crucifixion is when the soldiers plait a crown of thorns and place it on Jesus’ head. Because Christians believe Jesus was both truly God and truly human, they believe that when he died on the cross he suffered like any other human being. Jesus participates in the suffering of humanity and this is important to Christians because it means that God understands human suffering.

**Blasphemy** showing a lack of respect to God or other holy things.  
**Messiah** or ‘Anointed One’, a title given to Jesus by the early Christians who believed Jesus’ life had been foretold in the Old Testament.

A summary of the main points of the crucifixion story are:

- Jesus is executed by the Romans.
- The soldiers mock Jesus and put a crown of thorns on him.
- He is crucified at a place called Golgotha.
- Two criminals are crucified with him.
- Jesus is mocked by people in the crowd.
- Jesus prays while on the cross.
- Jesus dies on the cross.

## Salvation and atonement

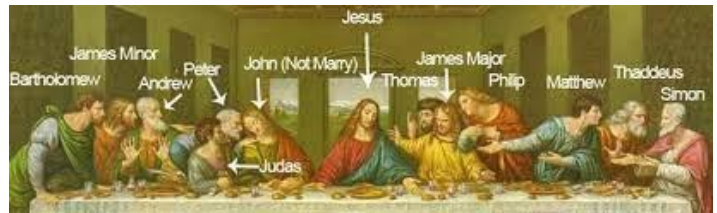
For Christians, Jesus' death on the cross is an act of **atonement**. This is the belief that Jesus' death on the cross healed the rift between humans and God. The Fall, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, destroyed the perfect relationship between humans and God and introduced sin into the world. Some Christians believe that because of this all people are born with sin, which they call 'original sin'. The sins which people commit in their daily lives take them further away from God.

Christians believe that God sent Jesus to earth to repair the broken relationship and that through his death Jesus paid the price, 'atoned', for human sin. This offers humankind salvation, which means they can live on for eternity with God in heaven after death. Before Jesus, the Jews often used animal sacrifices to 'atone' or make up for the sins they had committed. This is shown in passages of the Old Testament. However, Christians believe that the sacrifice Jesus made by dying on the cross meant he became the sacrifice to atone for the sins of humanity. Jesus became a 'sacrificial lamb' to take upon himself the sins of the world. His sacrifice meant that there was no longer any need to sacrifice animals as he paid the price for human sins once and for all.



## The last Supper

The Gospel of Matthew refers to the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples before his death. Jesus is celebrating the Jewish festival of the Passover with his disciples but he gives the shared meal a new significance. He tells the disciples that the bread they are eating represents his body and the wine they are drinking represents his blood. He predicts his death on the cross and says that by sacrificing his body and blood, human sins will be forgiven. This quotation forms the basis of the Eucharist, in which Christians share bread and wine in worship today.



*'While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'*

Matthew 26:26–29

## Ressurrection

For Christians, the **resurrection** of Jesus is fundamental to the Christian faith. It is when Jesus rose from the dead after his crucifixion. The belief that Jesus rose from the dead is the greatest miracle recorded in the New Testament and is evidence that Jesus was God.

The following passage outlines some of the events that happened after the resurrection:

*'But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.'* 1 Corinthians 15:12–14

The different Gospels disagree slightly on the exact events of the resurrection, but they agree that on the Sunday following Jesus' crucifixion, some of Jesus' followers went to his tomb. They found that the stone covering the mouth of the tomb rolled away and Jesus' body was not inside. The following passage outlines some of the events that happened after the resurrection:

Jesus appears to the eleven disciples.

Paul, an apostle, also claims Jesus has appeared to him.

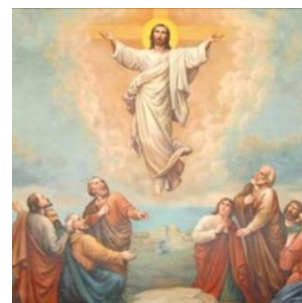
Jesus appears to many other people.

*'For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.'* 1 Corinthians 15:3–8

### Ascension

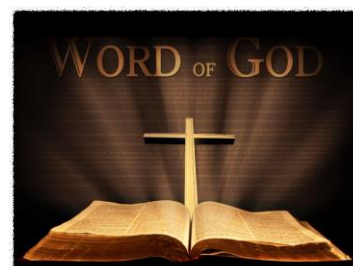
After Jesus rose from the dead there are few references in the Gospels to what Jesus did. It is important to understand that all of the accounts in the different Gospels record these significant events in the life of Jesus in very similar, but not identical, ways.

It is believed he appeared to the disciples and groups of other people but the account is very short and vague. After a period of time the Gospels record that Jesus ascended (rose up) to his father in heaven. There are different understandings of what this actually means. Some Christians believe that Jesus physically ascended to heaven in a literal sense. Others believe that the description of Jesus physically rising up to heaven are just meant to be symbolic, showing that Jesus' time in human form on earth was over. For Christians, it is a very significant event. It marks an end to the presence of Jesus on earth in a physical way but includes an acceptance of Jesus' spirit at work in the world. Jesus blessed his followers before ascending to heaven as described in this passage from the Gospel of Luke.

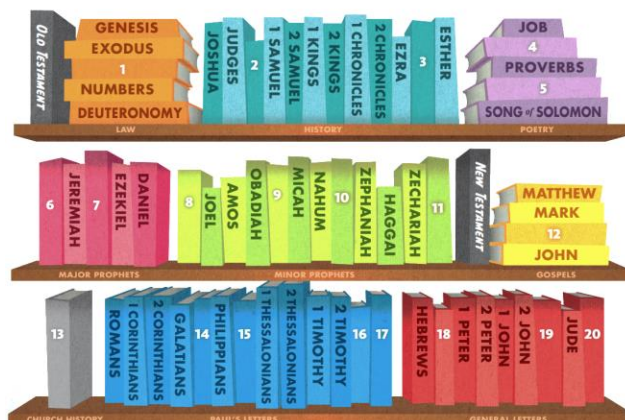


### Law: The word of God

- The Bible is the sacred text, or 'scripture', for Christians. It is made up of 66 'books' and was written by a number of authors over a long period of time. The authors write in different styles, but all were inspired by their experience of God.
- The Bible is split in to two sections: the Old Testament, written before Jesus' birth and the New Testament. The New Testament begins with the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These Gospels tell the story of Jesus' life and death.
- For all Christians the Bible is a book of revelation. This is because they believe that through the Bible, God is revealed and they can know more about him.
- Christians also believe that the Bible is a record of divine Law – the rules and law of God by which Christians choose to live. So the Bible is a source of authority for all Christians that they turn to for advice about how to live their lives. The teachings of the Bible and in particular the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life inspire Christians to live good lives.
- It has a major role in worship in all denominations. There is a reading from the Bible in every Christian service and many Christians read the Bible on a daily basis.



#### *THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE*



### **How should the Bible be interpreted**

There are different views on how biblical writings should be interpreted.

- Some Christians (Literalist/fundamentalists) believe the Bible is the directly inspired 'Word of God' and they take all of the Bible content as literally true because it is a divine revelation. This means that when science seems to contradict some of stories that appear in the Bible, for example the Genesis creation story, these Christians will believe the biblical account over the scientific one. For these Christians, it is the most important source of authority.
- Other Christians may take the view that the Bible is a book which requires interpretation. They believe that the Bible was written in a specific time and culture, and so some teachings may need to be adapted to apply in modern society.
- Some Christians take a more liberal view of the Bible, that is, they don't believe that all of the events it talks about actually happened, but that they are symbolic stories that show us how God would want us to live our lives.

## Sin and salvation

A sin is an immoral act that goes against God's law. The Bible contains ideas about human sinfulness and its link with salvation.

Human sinfulness separates humans from God. However, Christians believe that Jesus' death on the cross atoned for human sin and allowed them the hope of salvation. It is the chance to live with God for eternity after death. There are different views on exactly how Jesus' death achieved this:

- That Jesus was a sacrifice that paid for human sin. Just as the Jews that had come before Jesus sacrificed an animal once a year to pay for their sins, Jesus' death did the same thing but once and for all.
- That Jesus paid the ransom for human sin, which released humans from captivity and allowed them to be saved.

### **Original sin**

Christians believe that we are born with original sin (the tendency to disobey God). Original sin came in to the world as a result of the Fall when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Adam's sin has been passed down from generation to generation. It is original sin that causes humans to do things in their lives that go against God's law and it is this sin that separates humans from God. However, there are some problems with original sin. Many modern Christians object to traditional ideas about original sin since they believe it would be unfair for God to punish all humanity for an act committed by one man. Also, many Christians take a non-literal interpretation of the Bible and don't believe the events of the Fall actually happened. Even if it did happen as stated in the Bible, it's hard to explain biologically how original sin actually passed from one generation to the next. Many modern Christians now understand original sin to be a useful way of understanding that humans are prone to doing bad things and acting in a way that is against God's law.

### **How do Christians achieve salvation?**

Jesus' death allowed humans the chance of salvation, but different Christian denominations have different ideas about how they should act to receive that salvation:

- Catholics believe that by taking part in the sacraments they will be able to achieve salvation and go to heaven. They believe that baptism washes them clean of sin, and that by confessing (the sacrament of penance) the sins they commit in their life they are absolved (or freed) from them.
- Many Protestants believe that they must have faith in Jesus and repent their sins to achieve salvation.

## Grace and the spirit

In order to help them live a good life, Christians believe God sends the Holy Spirit to bring grace. This supernatural gift of grace means that Christians are able to pray for help from God, to turn away from sin and live good lives.

All Christians believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the world today.

- This gift from God of the Holy Spirit is recorded in the Book of Acts, when the Holy Spirit appears to the disciples after Jesus' ascension to heaven. This is known as Pentecost.
- Many Christians believe in special 'rites' called sacraments (we learn more about these in the practices section) and that the Holy Spirit comes down upon them as the sacraments are performed.
- The role of the Holy Spirit is particularly important in Evangelical worship. Evangelical Christians use a form of worship where worshippers are encouraged to be moved by the spirit. This means they believe the Holy Spirit is present and influences them in their prayers; they often shout out and praise God. Some Christians feel they are moved to speak in tongues, which they consider a gift from the Holy Spirit.
- Also, some Christians believe acts of 'faith healing' may take place within religious services, where the Holy Spirit works in a miraculous way to heal people. This may be a physical or spiritual healing.



## Eschatological beliefs

Eschatology refers to beliefs about the ‘last things’: death, judgement, heaven and hell. Christians believe that three days after Jesus was crucified and died, he rose from the dead and came back to life. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, summed up the importance of this to the Christian faith when he wrote:

*‘If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.’* **Corinthians 1:15–17**

There are a number of references in the New Testament concerning eschatological beliefs and the afterlife, and belief in an afterlife is stated in both the Apostles’ Creed and the **Nicene Creed**. Christians believe this life is a preparation for an afterlife to be with God in heaven. The Nicene Creed ends with a reference to resurrection: *‘I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.’*

This explains why the story of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection is so important to Christians, because it provides them with evidence that death is not the end and although physical bodies die, the immortal souls live on. The cross is so important in Christianity because it is symbolic both of death and resurrection.

### **The Gospel of John**

The Gospel of John was the last gospel to be written and is often referred to as the ‘eschatological gospel’. In the gospel there are frequent references to the afterlife.

In one account, Jesus raises a man called Lazarus from the dead. When Jesus performs this miracle it is a sign of his power and it has a profound effect on the faith of the people who witness the miracle. Jesus says that anyone who believes in him will never die.

The words of Jesus in the following passage offer an insight into heaven and explain that the way to heaven is through faith in Jesus.

*‘Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

John 11:25–26

*“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

*Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

*Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

John 14:2–7

## Judgement

Christians believe that there will be a Judgement Day when people will be judged by God for the quality of their lives. Christians believe that on this day Jesus will return to earth in a ‘second coming’. This will mark the end of human existence on the earth.

In the **Parable of the sheep and goats** (Matthew 25) Matthew describes how Jesus will separate the people who will go to heaven from those who will go to hell, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Those that have helped those in need will be rewarded with eternal life (sheep) and those that did not help those in need will be cursed to the eternal flames of hell (goats).



### **The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25)**

teaches that God will judge people not on how much wealth they have gained but on their treatment of the poor.

Jesus frequently used **parables** to explain a teaching. **The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man** (there is more information on this parable in your themes revision guide in issues of human rights) shows there is a clear divide between those who will be rewarded in heaven and those punished in hell, and the afterlife is only achieved by faith and good actions, regardless of success or wealth in an earthly life.

Essentially Christians believe that the quality and goodness of our lives will be judged by God. The Apostles’ Creed states quite explicitly that God ‘shall come to judge the living and the dead’. People will be bodily resurrected on this day but they will be transformed into some glorified state. Illness, pain and death will no longer exist and the world will be purified of sin.

## Resurrection

Christians believe that the spiritual part of a person, their soul, is able to join God in heaven when they die. However, they believe that at the end of time there will also be a physical resurrection. This means that people will be brought back to life with physical bodies, just as Jesus was.

This belief is stated in the Creeds. Jesus himself did not teach a great deal about the nature of the afterlife but the teaching of Jesus and St Paul refers to a physical resurrection. This quote from Corinthians describes that at the end of time a trumpet will sound and the dead will rise up.

*'So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

*If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit." The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.*

*I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*

**1 Corinthians 15:42–55**

## Heaven and hell

Although there are numerous references in the Bible to heaven, there are not many descriptions of it, which explains why Christians believe different things about it. Most Christians believe that it is where people go in the afterlife if they have the right to go there and that is where God and angels are located. However, Christians have different views on what it is:

- some believe that heaven is an actual, physical place
- others believe it exists in a more spiritual dimension, more of a state or condition.



Christians have different opinions, too, about what hell is although most believe that, whatever it is, it is undoubtedly a place of suffering. Again some Christians believe that it is a physical place where people burn eternally; others believe that it exists in a more spiritual dimension. Most Christians believe that the real torment of hell resides in absolute separation from God as he is not present in hell. To be in hell is not to be in the presence of God. Traditionally heaven and hell were thought of as real places. It was believed that hell was underground and heaven in the sky. Modern understandings of heaven and hell are more likely to see heaven as a place where God is and hell is a place where God is not. Contemporary beliefs about heaven and hell raise important questions. If God is a God of love and a God of forgiveness then would God not ultimately forgive everyone, which means nobody goes to hell forever?

### **Purgatory**

In addition to heaven and hell, Catholic Christians believe in purgatory. They believe that many people who die cannot gain immediate entry into heaven because they are stained by their sins. These people go to purgatory, a sort of waiting room for heaven, where they undergo a process of cleansing and purification before eventually securing entry to heaven. It is a temporary state of being. On Judgement Day all of those held in purgatory will go to heaven. Catholics believe it is important to pray for the souls of the dead and those in purgatory.





## Christianity – Practices

### Section 1: Forms of worship

- Forms of worship
- The nature and importance of prayer
- Worship across denominations

### Section 2: Sacraments

- Sacraments
- Baptism
- The Eucharist

### Section 3: Pilgrimage and celebration

- Christmas
- Easter
- Pilgrimage: Walsingham
- Pilgrimage: Taizé

### Section 4: Christianity in the UK and the Church

- Christianity in the UK
- The role of the church in the local community

### Section 5: The worldwide Church

- Evangelism
- Christian mission
- Church growth
- Tearfund
- Persecution of Christians
- Working for reconciliation: The Ecumenical Movement

### Forms of worship

Worship is an expression of adoration and praise for God. Acts of worship and their importance are referred to frequently in the Bible; *'Where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there with them'* **Matthew 18:2** There are many different forms of worship and different Christian traditions have different ways of worshipping God. Different forms of worship include:

#### Liturgical worship

This is when worship follows a very set structure which is more or less the same every time. An example of this is the Eucharist service (mass). It follows a set pattern and has established rituals as part of public church worship. This might be a set pattern of prayers, or the use of a set service book as in the Church of England.



#### Informal worship

This refers to worship that doesn't have a set structure and is more spontaneous than liturgical worship. Some Churches have moved away from liturgical worship to adopt a more informal approach which does not have a set structure. The modern charismatic and evangelical approach to worship has distanced itself from traditional Protestant rituals. They emphasise the importance of the Holy Spirit and spontaneous action, and this shows itself in services, in worship and in prayer. Although this informal worship may seem modern, it does in fact resemble the type of worship offered by Christians in the first decades of the Church before rituals and tradition had been established.

#### Individual worship

This takes place in addition to worshipping together in a church. Christians believe that it is important to form a personal relationship with God and worshipping alone is often part of this. Society has changed over the centuries, and given more responsibilities and freedoms to the individual, so the idea of private worship has become more popular. There are many people today who declare themselves to be Christians, with a personal relationship with God, although they do not go to church or take part in public worship.



#### Worship across different denominations:

##### Quaker worship

- Informal prayer tends to be private and involves more than just communicating with God. It can include meditation, contemplation, personal reflection and simply being in the presence of God. Quakers (the Society of Friends), for example, value this idea of simply being in the presence of God.
- Quaker 'services' do not consist of any set prayers. Instead they sit in silence and stillness. They believe that this allows them the opportunity to listen and reflect. This helps them to become closer to God and to the other members of the congregation.
- There is no official leader of the worship,

but occasionally someone might feel moved to speak, this is called ministry. Others may listen in silence or feel they want to speak too.



##### Evangelical worship

- In many Evangelical Churches, such as the Pentecostal Church, worship is also very informal.
- These Christians feel they are moved by the Holy Spirit during worship. This may involve them falling into trances or even speaking in unknown languages (speaking in tongues).
- Movement and participation is encouraged and there is often music, singing and dancing in the congregation.



## The nature and importance of prayer

Prayer was at the heart of Jesus' lifestyle. Christians believe it is an essential part of their faith.

In **John 4:23** Jesus says: *'Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.'*

Jesus states that Christians should worship God in the Spirit and in truth. Christians believe that this means worship should not be superficial, but that they should worship God with all of their thoughts, actions and words. Worship involves prayer and prayer is about developing a special relationship with God. For Protestants, the importance of individual prayer cannot be underestimated. One of the great principles of the Reformation, which led to the creation of Protestantism, was a belief that each Christian is in their own way a priest. This means that Protestants believe that all Christians have direct access to God through Christ; they don't have to go through a priest.

Prayer serves a number of purposes and is found in many different forms within different Christian denominations. Some of the most important types of prayer are:

- **Adoration** – deep love and respect for God
- **Confessional** – statement of faith through prayer
- **Contemplation** – meditation
- **Penitential** – saying sorry
- **Praise** – giving praise, which might include singing hymns
- **Thanksgiving** – saying thank you
- **Supplication** – asking for something

### Set prayers

Set prayers are one form of praying. They allow Christians to learn and repeat prayers that have a significant meaning for them. They allow prayer to become collective so when Christians recite the Lord's Prayer with others their single voices become a communal voice. One example is the Lord's prayer, which is recited in almost every Christian service. Jesus instructed the disciples to pray by using the Lord's prayer in response to the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to pray.

Like the disciples, many people find set prayers very useful. They are part of the tradition and ritual of worship that goes back hundreds of years. Set prayers were originally passed on by word of mouth before being written down

so that they could be repeated and used by more than one person. Many Protestant denominations in Britain use the set prayers in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

*Hail Mary,*

Full of Grace,  
The Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit  
of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary,  
Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners now,  
and at the hour of our death.

*Amen.*



*Our Father,*

Who art in Heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name;  
Thy Kingdom come,  
Thy will be done  
on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil

*Amen.*



## Sacraments

The word sacrament originates from the Latin 'sacramentum', an oath of allegiance made by Roman soldiers in a ceremony conducted in a holy place. By the second century CE it had started to be used to describe Christian **rites**. By the fifth century it was defined by the early Christian thinker St Augustine in his writings as a 'visible sign of invisible grace'. This means that the actions, words and objects involved in each sacrament are a sign that Christians are receiving God's grace or blessing. By the twelfth century it was used to describe seven specific rites that were seen as central to Christian life. These sacraments are still acknowledged by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions.

### Differences in denominations:

- Most Protestants only recognise two sacraments: **baptism** and the **Eucharist** (or Holy Communion). This is because these were the only two sacraments documented in the Gospels as being practised by Jesus during his life.
- Some Christian denominations, such as the Quakers (the Society of Friends) and the Salvation Army, don't even believe in these two sacraments. They both believe that sacraments are an inward spiritual experience and that there is no need for external services or rituals.
- Many Evangelical Christian churches carry out rituals like baptism, but don't believe they are especially sacred so don't consider them sacraments.

### Sacraments

These 7 sacraments are still acknowledged by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions:



#### Baptism

Initiates people into the Christian church. Catholics believe that it washes away sin. Many churches practice infant baptism, though some only allow adults to be baptised. The belief is that as an adult they can understand the commitment they are making.



#### Eucharist

In the Eucharist service worshippers share bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus' death. Many Christians believe that the Eucharist (also known as Mass or Holy Communion) is a sacrament instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, the final meal that he shared with his disciples before the crucifixion.



#### Marriage

The sacrament of marriage shows the spiritual union of the couple and God. See more information about this in issues of relationships in your themes revision guide.



#### Anointing of the sick

This sacrament is performed when a Catholic is seriously ill or dying. It is carried out by a priest who will apply oil to ('anoint') the sick person.



#### Confirmation

In churches that practice infant baptism, confirmation takes place when a person reaches an age when they commit to the church for themselves. They remake the promises that were made by their parents or guardians on their behalf at their baptism.



#### Reconciliation

Also known as the sacrament of penance or confession. Catholics are required to confess their sins to a priest and repent them. The priest will then 'absolve' (or free) them from their sins and ask them to carry out a penitent act to show they are sorry for what they have done. This might include praying or fasting.



#### Holy orders

The sacrament of Holy orders is the way people join the priesthood of the church. Joining the priesthood is called being 'ordained'.

Most Protestants only recognise two sacraments: [baptism](#) and the [Eucharist](#) (or Holy Communion).

This is because these were the only two sacraments documented in the Gospels as being practised by Jesus during his life. As these are the most common sacraments practiced in different denominations you could get a question on each of these sacraments.

### Baptism Different views on baptism:

- Christians believe that the rite of baptism must be carried out by an ordained minister or an authorised [lay person](#), but different denominations have different practices.

#### Infant baptism:

- In most Christian Churches, including the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, children and infants are baptised, celebrating the birth of a child and marking their entry into the Christian community.
- Parents and godparents of a baby make promises to bring them up in the Christian faith.

#### Adult baptism:

- Some denominations, for example Baptists, don't believe in infant baptism because they think that a believer should be able to declare their own faith, and obviously babies cannot do this. As a result, babies and children are not baptised because this type of 'believers' baptism' is for only for those who are able to state their faith. Indeed, Jesus himself was baptised as an adult.
- Some denominations, and certainly many Evangelical Christians, fully immerse the person being baptised in water.

### Baptism

#### The importance of baptism

Christians believe that baptism is important because:

- It is a rite of entry that allows people to become members of the Christian Church
- Many Christians believe **original sin** is removed through the action of baptism
- it follows the personal example of Jesus who was baptised as an adult by John the Baptist
- believers' baptism gives an individual an opportunity to publicly proclaim their personal faith.
- It is thought of as the first sacrament, acting as a 'covenant' or agreement between human beings and God.



Christians also believe very strongly in the importance of baptism and there are a number of important references to it in the Bible:

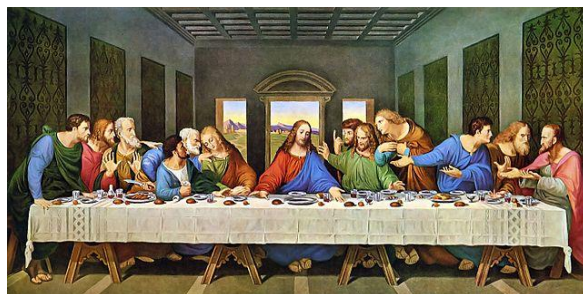
- St Paul suggests that baptism links us directly with the death and resurrection of Jesus when he states: *'We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.'* **Epistle to the Romans 6:4**
- Jesus himself was baptised. He gives the disciples a clear instruction to baptise people: *'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'* **Matthew 28:19–20**
- In Christianity, baptism is regarded as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The baptised Christian becomes united with Christ, including in his death and resurrection. Through being baptised they are able to enter heaven and live eternally with God after death, as this quote from John shows: *'Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."* **John 3:3–6**

### Eucharist

Many Christians believe that the Eucharist (also known as Mass or Holy Communion) is a sacrament instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, the final meal that he shared with his disciples before the crucifixion. At this meal Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples and told them that the wine represented his blood and the bread represented his body. He told them that they should share bread and wine when they gathered together after his death in his memory.



Christians today continue this tradition – taking bread and wine when they meet to worship in a sacrament that they call Eucharist. They believe this brings them closer to God. The word 'Eucharist' is a Greek word, meaning thanksgiving, and in one sense it is an act of thanksgiving for the life and death of Jesus and for the Christian faith.



### Eucharist

#### Different views about the Eucharist

Different denominations have different views about what happens in Eucharistic services:

Denomination	View
Catholic	Catholics believe that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ in a process called <b>transubstantiation</b> .
Lutheran	In the sixteenth century, Protestant Reformers the <b>Lutherans</b> adopted a position called <b>consubstantiation</b> . This is concept of 'sacramental union', that the body and blood of Jesus are somehow present 'in, with and under' the forms of bread and wine. This has been explained by using the analogy of an iron rod placed in fire. Both fire and metal are united within the red-hot iron and yet the fire and the metal retain their distinctiveness as well.
Protestant	Many Protestants reject the view of the Catholic Church and its belief in <b>transubstantiation</b> . They do not believe that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. The Reformed and Presbyterian view of the Eucharist is that Christ is present spiritually rather than literally in the bread and wine.
Baptist	Baptists, believe that Christ is not present in the bread and wine but that the ritual is simply an act of remembrance. This is known as <b>memorialism</b> .

### Christmas

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ – the incarnation. Christians do not believe Jesus was actually born on Christmas day but mark this day in the Christian calendar to focus on the incarnation.

#### Advent

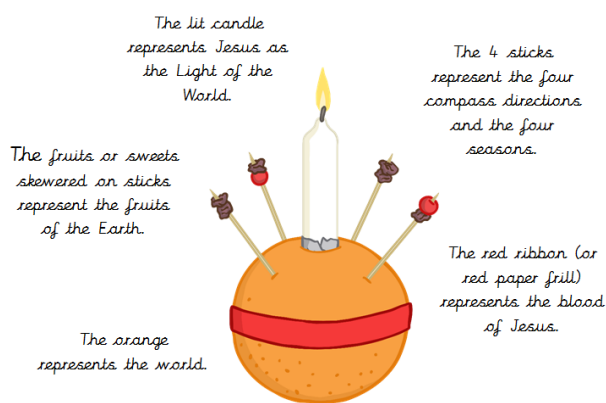
Because the celebration is so important, a period of time known as Advent was set aside to allow Christians to prepare for Christmas. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas day. Traditionally many Christians fasted during Advent, and the Eastern Orthodox Church still practises fasting, though the Western Churches no longer do. Many people have advent calendars or advent candles to count down the days until Christmas.

In the run up to Christmas Christians may celebrate in a number of ways:

- **Nativity** or crib scenes are very common in homes and churches.
- Nativity plays are acted out in schools and churches.
- Special Christingle services take place in church where children traditionally make a Christingle (orange with a candle) to show Jesus was the 'light of the world'.
- Carol concerts where people sing Christmas carols
- Exchanging Christmas cards with a religious image and greeting
- Decoration of houses inside and outside
- Advent wreath decorations
- Midnight Mass communion service takes place on Christmas Eve

#### Christmas day

- On Christmas day itself Christians may attend Church services as well as having family meals and exchanging gifts.



#### Christmas in the UK

Christmas is also celebrated by many non-Christians in the UK and, for these people, holds no particular religious significance. School nativity plays become winter concerts and the design of many Christmas cards show only the fun or wintry aspects of this time. Many people regard it as a 'wintertime' festival rather than a religious one.

**Easter** Easter is the most important festival in the Christian calendar. It remembers the death and resurrection of Jesus.

### Lent

- A period of 40 days, known as 'Lent' leads up to Easter.
- Lent remembers the time Jesus spent in the desert fasting and praying. The devil tried to tempt him several times during this period but he resisted the temptations.
- Lent begins with Ash Wednesday when there are special church services. Catholics, for example, attend a special service where they are marked with black ashes in the shape of a cross on their foreheads.
- Traditionally Ash Wednesday is a day of abstinence and fasting. To mark the fact that Jesus fasted in the desert, Christians often give up something for Lent.
- The day before Lent starts is known as Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day and was an opportunity to use up the foods that Christians would be giving up during Lent.



### Holy week

Holy week is the week that precedes Easter Sunday, and it is when Christians remember the events in Jesus' life that led up to his death:

- **Palm Sunday:** Palm Sunday commemorates the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem. In some Christian traditions, for example Anglicanism and Catholicism, Christians receive crosses made of palm leaves to remind them of this event.
- **Maundy Thursday:** The Thursday before Easter remembers Jesus' last meal with his disciples. During the meal they shared bread and wine, which Jesus told them represented his body and blood. To commemorate this, Christians often have Holy Communion services (Mass). Jesus also washed his disciples' feet and in Catholic churches the priest will often wash the feet of some members of the congregation.
- **Good Friday:** On Good Friday Christians remember Jesus' death on the cross. It is a day of mourning and services will be held. Some Christians, for example Catholics, fast on this day. In some countries there will be processions or re-enactments of the death of Jesus.

### Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday marks the day of Jesus' resurrection, when those coming to his tomb found it empty. It is the most important day in the Christian calendar and is a day of celebration. Christians attend special services and churches are filled with flowers. As well as attending church, Christians may also celebrate Easter in the following ways:

- exchanging cards with family and friends
- exchanging Easter eggs
- attending church services in Lent
- visiting cemeteries to leave flowers for deceased family and friends
- personal reading of the Bible
- evening vigil on the Saturday of Holy Week.



## Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place, usually as an act of religious devotion. Pilgrimage has always been a practice in the Christian religion where many pilgrims have travelled to the Holy Land to 'walk in the footsteps of Jesus'. Today pilgrimage is still practised by many Christians worldwide. You need to study two sites of pilgrimage in particular: Walsingham in Britain and Taizé in France.

The reasons why people travel on a pilgrimage are many and complex and they have changed over time. Certainly, a modern-day pilgrim does not face the dangers faced by a medieval pilgrim. However, all pilgrims believe that life itself is a journey towards God. And a pilgrimage is faith in action, the journey representing the journey that all Christians undertake from earth to heaven.



## Walsingham

### History

Walsingham is in the county of Norfolk, 30 miles from

Norwich, in England. It has been a holy place since 1061 when the widow of the Lord of the Manor of Walsingham Pava, Richeldis de Faverches, had a dream in which the Virgin Mary asked her to build a replica of the house in Nazareth where the announcement of the birth of Jesus took place. This she did and then, around about 1150, a priory or small monastic church was built on the site. From this time onwards Walsingham became a shrine to which medieval pilgrims would travel from all around the world – until 1538 when the **Reformation** resulted in its destruction. People probably continued to travel in secret to this holy place but it was only in 1829, after the laws to allow Catholics to practise their religion fully in Britain, that people were able to travel openly to Walsingham again. Today there is also an Anglican shrine at Walsingham.

### Why is it important?

Walsingham is an important place of pilgrimage because our human journey begins with birth and what could be more special than the place where the announcement of the birth of Jesus took place?

**Reformation** when Henry VIII split with the Catholic Church and established the Church of England. He destroyed many of the monasteries in Britain.



## Taizé

### History

Taizé is a Christian site of pilgrimage in Burgundy in France. It was founded in 1940 by Roger Schutz and is an important **ecumenical** monastic order. The monks come from many different countries and live a life of communal prayer. The men who become monks at Taizé are from different Christian denominations. This is unusual and is what makes it an 'ecumenical' monastic community. Today there more than one hundred 'brothers', from both Catholic and Protestant Christian traditions. Reconciliation, the resolution of conflict, is at the heart of the Taizé community. By bringing together different Christian denominations the Taizé community promotes understanding and cooperation between them.

### Why do Christians go there?

The community today has become one of the world's most important sites of Christian pilgrimage for young people. It is estimated that over 100,000 young people make pilgrimages to Taizé each year. The reason so many young people go on pilgrimage to Taizé a year may include:

- Curiosity
- Adventure
- Holiday
- act of religious devotion
- an attempt to walk in the footsteps of people of faith
- historical reasons
- act of atonement
- act of supplication to ask God for something.

### What do Christians do when they get there?

- When the pilgrims arrive they join in the life of the monastic community by participating in the set times of prayer in the 'Church of Reconciliation'.
- They also spend time in private prayer, attend Bible-study discussion groups led by the monks and share in the communal work.
- The services are world famous for the use of chants and music, and Taizé chants have become popular in many churches.
- During the church services the monks wear white robes and all of the pilgrims who visit Taizé are required to attend the monastic church services three times each day.

**Ecumenical** representing or promoting unity within the different Christian Churches.

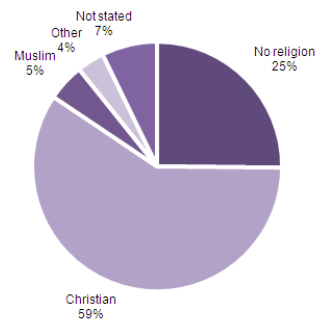




## Christianity in the UK

The Christian Church faces many challenges in twenty-first-century Britain. Increasingly many of the religious beliefs and teachings are regarded as either out of date or irrelevant. In Britain today many more people claim to be either **atheist** or **agnostic**. Also, Christianity is now only one of many religious traditions followed by people in Britain. This means the religious landscape is pluralist with people following a number of religions. Religious festivals like Christmas are being celebrated but have lost their religious meaning and church attendance has declined.

Figure 1: Religious affiliation, England and Wales, 2011



### The influence of religion in the UK

Despite these challenges, religion still has an impact in our society in the UK. Christianity was introduced to the UK by the Romans almost two thousand years ago. This long history means that it is deeply embedded in many of the laws, festivals and traditions of the UK. The Church of England is the ‘established’ religion of England. This means that it has links to the government and other official bodies such as the judiciary (the court system). In the sixteenth century King Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church and the authority of the Pope and made himself head of the Church of England. Today as well as being Head of State, the monarch is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. All monarchs are crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Influence	
<b>Traditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ ‘Keep holy the Sabbath day’ is a Commandment. Traditionally Christians go to church on a Sunday and it was regarded as a ‘day of rest’ so the hours shops can trade on a Sunday are restricted.</li> <li>➤ In a UK court of law witnesses giving evidence are asked to swear they are telling the truth. They often do this on the Bible but can use another holy book if they belong to another religion.</li> <li>➤ Christian hymns and readings are often made at public events.</li> <li>➤ Lots of people in the UK mark important life events, like marriage in a church, even if they are not religious.</li> </ul>
<b>Laws</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The UK parliament is made up of two ‘houses’. The House of Commons is made up of elected representatives, MPs. The House of Lords is not elected and its members are of two types. Lords Temporal are appointed by the monarch, but the Lords Spiritual are 26 of the most senior Church of England Bishops. For laws to be passed they must be approved by both houses of parliament.</li> <li>➤ Meetings of both houses of parliament open with Christian prayers and indeed, many of the laws of the UK reflect the teaching of some of the Ten Commandments, such as ‘Do not kill’ and ‘Do not steal’.</li> </ul>
<b>Festivals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Events like Christmas and Easter are celebrated widely across the UK and have become public holidays. School holidays fall over these periods and many businesses will close.</li> <li>➤ Religious festivals such as St. Valentine’s Day are also celebrated, though for most people the religious context of the day is no longer important.</li> <li>➤ Today people of other religious traditions may take time off school or work to celebrate their own festivals. For example, the biggest celebration of the Muslim festival Eid al-Fitr</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Today, about one third of state-funded schools in England and Wales are faith schools. Of the 7,000 faith primary and secondary schools in England and Wales, ninety-eight per cent have a Christian character.</li> <li>➤ All pupils must, by law, be taught religious education.</li> </ul>

### The role of the church

Primarily a church is a place of worship, but as part of living out the values Jesus demonstrated in the Gospels churches reach out into communities in a variety of ways.

Some of the services the Church provides to the community might be religious in nature, for example marking important rites of passage for individuals and families. Services such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funerals will be held in the church. Lots of churches have an attached 'church hall' and this may be used for a variety of activities, including:

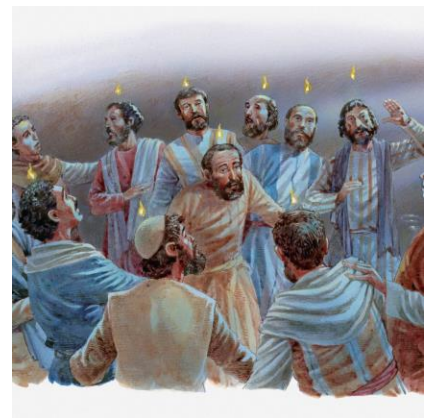
- refreshments after Sunday service
- a weekly meal for the homeless provided by money donated by a congregation
- food banks
- coffee mornings for the elderly
- youth clubs
- mothers' union meetings
- crèche facilities for young mothers
- summer fetes
- organisations like cubs and brownies
- fitness classes or slimming groups
- Christmas parties for old age pensioners
- birthday parties
- as family and community centres
- emergency shelters.



### Evangelism

**Evangelism** is the way in which the gospel is spread—it means 'preaching the good news' and is one way in which the Church grows. By telling others about Jesus' message, Christians hope to convert them to the Christian faith. All Christians are evangelists in the sense they are sharing the good news with other people in their everyday lives. However, for many Christians, evangelism is best shown through the way they live their lives rather than talking about religion.

During the festival of Pentecost, the disciples (followers) became apostles (messengers). Through the Holy Spirit they had the power to spread the good news. This is a great example of evangelism. Christians believe it is their **mission** to spread the good news just as the apostles did.



### Mission

- The mission is what the Church is supposed to do in terms of every Christian being an evangelist as 'a preacher of the Gospel'.
- At the time of Jesus it was important that the early Christians had a sense of mission to convert Jews and others to the new religion of Christianity.
- It is the mission of the Church to help Christians live a life of faith but also to tell the Christian message of salvation to all.
- Many Christians regard it as their duty or mission to convert other people to Christianity, whether they have no faith at all or belong to a different religion.
- Missionaries were also important for bringing education and health support to poor and disadvantaged people around the world.



Today missionary work and evangelism are more contentious, and many would debate the ethics of trying to convert people to Christianity. In an increasingly pluralist society many think that you should be respectful of different faiths (or non-religious beliefs) rather than trying to persuade people to change religion.

## Christian Charity

### tearfund

#### Why is Tearfund important?

- Tearfund has a role in raising public awareness of social issues, such as poverty and discrimination in the world.
- Tearfund campaigns against the causes of poverty worldwide.
- Tearfund gives practical help in order to act out the teachings of Jesus to help others.
- Tearfund encourages self-help for both individuals and communities.
- One example of how Tearfund put Christian beliefs in to action is their work with children and teenagers in Columbia. By working with partner agencies, churches and youth groups in the country Tearfund has set up 30 sports clubs where children can come for football training. These clubs provide safe spaces for young people, at risk of joining gangs, to come and socialise. They also offer mentoring to equip them with life skills.

#### What is Tearfund?

Their aim is to put Christian beliefs and Jesus' command to 'love your neighbour' into action as part of their mission. Christians believe they are putting into practice the unconditional or unselfish love Jesus talks about in the gospel. This sort of love is known as 'agape' love (agape in action).

The charity works through church groups giving help to the poor in many countries. Tearfund currently works in over 50 countries providing emergency aid when natural disasters occur and carrying out long-term projects to support local communities. In the UK many people support Tearfund by raising money through coffee mornings and buying Tearfund Christmas cards.

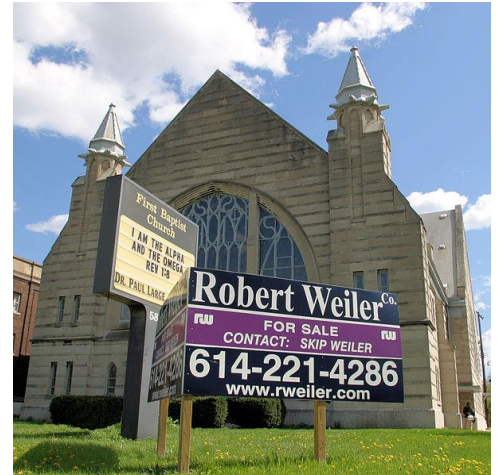
## Christian Mission

## Church growth

There has been a decline in attendance at Church of England and Catholic churches in the UK. In January 2016 it was reported that Church of England weekly attendance had dropped to its lowest ever level – below one million. Many churches are closing because of falling church attendance. When this happens there is an issue about what happens to churches, as they have been 'sacred spaces'.

It is important to remember Christianity is a world religion and it is spreading and growing very successfully in other parts of the world, for example Asia, South America and particularly Africa. The Pew Research Center estimates that by 2050, four in ten Christians will live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Also there are some churches are thriving in Britain. Evangelical churches in particular have grown in recent years. Some Christians have decided to leave their own denomination and join a more evangelical church. Evangelical church services are very animated and charismatic. Worship has a direct focus on Bible reading, hymn singing and preaching. There is no formal liturgy and services are spontaneous; people worship and believe they are moved by the Holy Spirit. This has left some denominations of Christianity such as the Church of England wanting to try to refresh their worship to encourage more people to attend.



### Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions refers to a movement in the Church of England to change the way some churches and congregations meet and worship. This is an attempt to attract people to the church who wouldn't usually attend church services. Groups often meet in less traditional settings and are more informal.

One type of fresh expression, is a café church. These might take place in a café linked to a church or in a commercial café. People will meet there to talk about their faith at the same time as having refreshments. Other locations for fresh expressions gatherings include workplaces, gyms and even a beach!



## Persecution of Christians past and present

**Persecution** of Christians has always taken place and the word ‘martyr’ is used for someone who dies or is killed for their religious beliefs.

**Persecution** persistently cruel treatment, often due to religion or belief.

Jesus himself was a martyr and he warned the disciples they would be persecuted for their faith; each one of them was eventually martyred. Christians believe they were given a divine commission from Jesus to spread the good news of the Gospel and this may be in the face of personal danger. Christian persecution continues into the twenty-first century in a number of countries throughout the world.

In some parts of the world Christians are treated unjustly in societies where the Christian faith is a minority religion. For example, terrorist organisations like Islamic State in the Middle East have targeted Christians, forcing them from their homes and subjecting them to violent attacks. Evangelical Christian organisations, such as Christian Freedom International and Open Doors, seek to help persecuted Christians. These organisations provide practical help to persecuted Christians, provide Bibles and work actively for the human rights of Christians suffering persecution.

## Christian Charity



**Open Doors**

### What is Open Doors?

Open Doors was established in 1955 when Brother Andrew, a Dutch missionary, smuggled Bibles into the Soviet Union. Under the communist system in the Soviet Union Christian Churches were persecuted.

Today Open Doors still supports persecuted Christians across the world in different ways and people in the UK and in Ireland support their work both practically and financially.

**Christian persecution**

### Why does Open Doors do to support persecuted Christians:

- They distribute Bibles and other resources to those who might not have access to Bibles, or may have had them confiscated.
- They train Christians and Church leaders to deal with the trauma they may be suffering while maintaining their faith.
- They provides practical support for Christians who have been the victims of disasters.
- They speak on behalf of persecuted Christians to raise awareness of their situation and gather support, for example by lobbying MPs in the UK government.

## Working for Christian reconciliation

Reconciliation is the idea that people should make up after an argument and move on. Within the Christian Church there are many different denominations and in the past these differences have led to conflict and tension. Many Christians believe it is important for the different Christian denominations to work together as much as possible. Today, living in a pluralist society, the need for the different Christian denominations to work together is greater than ever.

Two important organisations working for Christian reconciliation in the world today are the Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches.

### The Ecumenical Movement

‘Ecumenical’ means relating to a number of different Christian Churches and the Ecumenical Movement is an attempt to bring closer together the different Christian denominations and promote Christian unity throughout the world.

It began with the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. The movement aimed to unify the Protestant Churches of the world and ultimately all Christians. As a result of the work of the Ecumenical Movement there is much more cooperation between different Christian denominations, such as different Churches sharing a common building and joint ecumenical services. Although denominational differences still exist, today many Christians believe there should only be one church. At a local level, many churches actually cooperate and work together.

## Christian organisation



### Christian reconciliation

#### What is The World Council of Churches?

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches that seek to bring unity to Christianity. They believe it is what Jesus would have wanted.

The WCC brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 120 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 580 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific. There are now 352 member churches.

#### What does the World Council of Churches do?

For its member churches, the WCC is a unique space: one in which they can reflect, speak, act, worship and work together, challenge and support each other, share and debate with each other. Members aim to bring unity to the Christian religion. They work together to promote their common mission and evangelism.

Each year, the World Council of Churches holds a special week of prayer for Christian unity. It brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries. The Roman Catholic Church isn't a member of the World Council of Churches, but does take part in some national and local ecumenical organisations.

#### Why is The World Council of Churches important?

At a local level 'Churches Together in England', grew out of the work of the World Council of Churches and is a practical attempt to focus locally on the fellowship of those who share the Christian faith. The aim today is to offer practical ways of achieving greater unity. During the week of prayer for Christian unity each January, special ecumenical services are organised to help Christians come together

