

This booklet is one of a series of faith editions produced by St Philip's Centre.

Other beliefs covered include:-

Bahá'í, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism

Please contact the Centre to receive copies of other faith editions.

✚ CHRISTIANITY

St Philip's Centre is a charity set up in 2006 with the support of the Diocese of Leicester and is rooted in the multi-faith environment of Leicester, the UK's most plural city.

We have a strong track record of promoting positive community relations through our religion and belief training, community events, charitable activities, dialogue and community engagement.

St Philip's Centre works closely with local and national public sector organisations including central and local government, Police, schools, colleges and universities. We welcome many international visitors and groups.

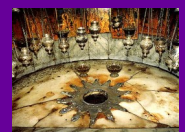
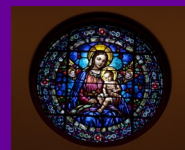
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COVER PICTURES

Top to bottom: The Nativity, Mary and Jesus, St Peter's Rome, Crucifix, Bethlehem birthplace of Jesus. Main: icon of Jesus Christ.

Some photos used are from Google images.



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What is Christianity?

Christianity has the largest number of adherents in the world with over 2 billion followers. Christianity is a monotheistic religion (belief in one God) focussed on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christians believe him to be the 'Son of God' and the Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Bible, often referred to as the Old Testament.

Christians believe that Jesus was born miraculously of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem in modern Israel. The so-called Common Era (CE) begins with the birth of Jesus and is also called the year of Our Lord (Anno Domini or AD).

Christians believe that there is only one God but that he is revealed to people as Trinity (one in three, three in one):

- God the Father
- God the Son
- God the Holy Spirit

Christians model themselves on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus taught people to love God and love their neighbour. Jesus did not lay down a precise pattern for a new religion or a church; these were developed by his followers, most notably St Peter and St Paul.

At first they formed a movement within Judaism but after some time, the church separated from the synagogues. Their fundamental beliefs were centred on the person, the actions, the teaching, the death and the resurrection of Jesus.



The Nativity of Christ painted by an unknown Chinese artist.



The Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit

Saints

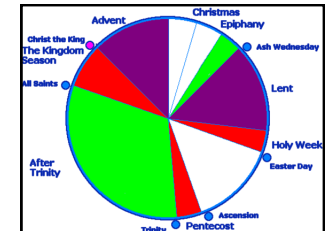
The word saint is most commonly used to refer to a Christian who has lived a particularly good and holy life on earth and with whom miracles are associated before and after their death. The formal title of Saint is conferred by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches through a process called canonisation.

Some Christians (notably Roman Catholic and Orthodox) believe that Saints created in this way can intercede with God on behalf of people who are alive today. This is not practised by most Protestants. In the Bible however, the word 'saint' is used as a description of anyone who is a committed believer, particularly by St. Paul in the New Testament (e.g. Ephesians 1.1 and 1.15).

Festivals

The Christian year follows a regular pattern:

- Advent: Penitential season in preparation for Christmas;
- Christmas: The celebration of Christ's birth and looking forward to his second coming. Christmas leads into:
- Epiphany: The visit of the Magi;
- Lent: Penitential season before Good Friday (when Jesus was Crucified) and Easter—a time of preparation of the believer through prayer, repentance, almsgiving and self-denial e.g. fasting.
- Easter: The celebration of Jesus' resurrection;
- Ascension: The celebration of Jesus' return to his Father in heaven;
- Pentecost: (Whitsun) when the disciples and other followers of Jesus experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit, the sense of God with them, leading them through difficulties and strengthening them. From being frightened followers, they became inspired leaders, most of whom followed Jesus to martyrdom.
- Trinity: Celebrating the threefold nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity Season (also known as Ordinary Time) continues until the next Advent and the cycle repeats itself, with readings and celebrations appropriate to the season.



This pattern is followed by Roman Catholic, Orthodox and some Protestant Churches e.g. the Church of England. Newer church groups tend to only celebrate Christmas and Easter.

Place of Worship

The Christian place of worship is called a Church. Churches usually face East towards Jerusalem. Altars are normally at the East end for churches which have them. In the majority of churches, Bishops, Priests and Deacons form the leadership. They are also called Ministers. Christian worship can involve praising God in music, readings from scripture, prayers, sermons and other holy ceremonies. Church architecture varies enormously, from large warehouses to elaborate Cathedrals.



The Christian holy book is the Bible. It is divided into the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is a collection of selected writings passed down, written and edited from about 2000 BCE and the beginning of the first millennium. It includes such diverse materials as prophetic oracles, teachings of wise men, instructions of priests and ancient records of the royal courts. Some material is historical, some legendary, some poetic, some for worship and some is law.

The New Testament explains how God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to restore the broken relationship between people and God which had been caused by human wrong doing. Jesus was executed on a cross as a criminal by the Romans. After three days he rose from the dead (the Resurrection) and appeared to his disciples and many others before returning to his Father in heaven (Ascension). The New Testament was compiled during the first 100 years after Jesus' resurrection.

There are four accounts of Jesus' life and teaching, called The Gospels (which means 'good news'). They were originally handed down by oral tradition and then written down by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The Book of Acts records the life of the early church and importantly the sending of the Holy Spirit (celebrated at Pentecost). The other books include a series of letters to early Christian communities, mainly written by St Paul. They centre on Jesus' teaching and the main events of his life and are a response to those events. Jesus himself left no writings.

Why are there so many translations of the Bible?

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek but has since been translated into hundreds of different languages and there are more than 40 different English translations, from the King James version which was translated in 1611, to modern translations. Some are more literal and follow the original text word-for-word. Others focus on putting the Scriptures into more understandable language so that the *meaning* and sense is clearer. Then there are English paraphrases of the scriptures to help the reader grasp the flow of the story, for general reading and inspiration rather than for study purposes.



The different traditions within the Christian church will vary in the emphasis they place on the Bible. Some Protestants believe it is the highest authority within the church—the Word of God in its most literal sense, so a literal translation of the Bible is important to them, whereas the Eastern Christian churches place a higher emphasis on *tradition* they believe that God continues to speak to and reveal Himself within the church through worship and practice and scripture is a part of that.

Who are Christians?

As with many other religions, Christianity encompasses many denominations. Differences emerged with historical events, human rivalries and differences of emphasis in teaching and national boundaries.

The first major split in the unity of the church was the division between the Orthodox and Catholic churches in 1054 AD. The best known Orthodox churches are the Russian, the Greek and the Coptic (in Egypt). There are also Catholic Copts.

The second major split was the Protestant Reformation in the 15th and 16th centuries, attended by lengthy and bloody wars. Protestant churches include the Lutheran churches, Presbyterian churches, Methodist, Congregational, Pentecostal and Baptist churches and the Anglican Church, which includes the Church of England.

The main churches are:

Roman Catholic Church: This is the largest church worldwide. The Roman Catholic Church is governed from the Vatican in Rome under the leadership of the Pope.

Orthodox Churches: For example, Armenian, Egyptian, Greek, Russian, Serbian and Syrian.

The Anglican Church: The worldwide Anglican Communion was founded in the Reformation in the 16th century and is an international association of national and regional churches. The Archbishop of Canterbury is its symbolic head with the UK monarch acting as the nominal head of the Church of England. It has over 70 million global followers and describes itself as catholic and reformed.

Other Protestant denominations: These include Baptist, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, United Reformed Church and others.

Pentecostal Churches: Formed in the 20th century and growing everywhere. They emphasise experiencing the Holy Spirit and are very free in their worship. Groups include the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Assemblies of God.

Others: Include Quakers, Salvation Army and Seventh Day Adventist. Some may describe themselves as Christian including Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The movement towards church unity, called the Ecumenical Movement, gave rise in 1948 to the World Council of Churches, with headquarters in Geneva. There is a limited degree of collaboration between church denominations but a respect for one another's traditions and regulations. The emphasis on mission and evangelism, which received a new infusion of energy at the beginning of the 20th century at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, led to a vast expansion of church life throughout the world, building on the expansion of the 19th century through individual missionary societies.



✚ Sacraments

A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace. These are central to Christian life in most churches. They are:

Baptism: the initiation water rite for children or adults.

Holy Communion (also known as the Mass, the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist (thanksgiving')). On the night before Jesus died he instructed his followers to remember him by sharing bread and drinking wine together. This has continued ever since and has a deep meaning related to the presence of Christ in the church and the world today, the technicalities of which Christians differ over.

Marriage between a man and a woman

Ordination: the rite by which men (and now in some churches women), are initiated to become clergy. Clergy are known as priests, deacons, pastors, ministers, vicars. Leaders of clergy are called Bishops.

Confirmation: this is the rite by which a person accepts their adult faith, and the Holy Spirit confirms them in their faith.

Absolution: this means the giving of forgiveness in the name of God to those who sincerely repent of their sins.

Anointing of the Sick: this is the ceremony by which oil is used with prayer, for healing and also when someone is near to death.

These seven sacraments are recognised by some churches e.g. Roman Catholic, Orthodox, some Anglicans and some Lutherans.

Most other denominations and traditions including the Church of England typically affirm only Baptism and Eucharist as sacraments. Some Protestant groups, such as the Quakers and the Salvation Army reject sacramental theology, saying all life is a sacrament.



The Last Supper, Leonardo da Vinci

✚ Jesus Christ

Jesus was born a Jew and died a Jew. As a Jew, he felt called to challenge his own people to a renewal of faith in God and commitment to ethical values and a transformation of society. This involved repentance of sins, to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom or Reign of God. This centred on peace, righteousness, justice, compassion and inclusion of all, not least the poor and excluded.

At some point in his life, Jesus was attracted to the teachings of Joh the Baptist, who was preaching on the banks of the river Jordan, a day's walk from Jesus' home town of Nazareth. John placed special emphasis on the imminent end of the current sinful world and the establishment of God's kingdom. To enter this new world a person had to undergo the ancient Jewish purification ritual of baptism, or dipping in water. Jesus accepted John's message and his baptism.

John was arrested and executed, by which time Jesus had started preaching, developing John's message, performing miracles of healing and exorcism and exhorting his listeners to a radical egalitarianism, a breaking down of the religious and social hierarchies which divided people from one another. He attracted a group of followers, the inner group known as the twelve disciples (Peter, James, John, and Matthew, with eight others), together with other men and women.

Jesus eventually took his message to the temple in Jerusalem and found a larger audience with people making their pilgrimage for the Passover. Either because of an incident or his message, Jesus came to the attention of the religious and political authorities. He was crucified by the Romans sometime around 33CE.

Scholars debate what happened after his death but a small group of Jesus' followers began to witness to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. For some, Jesus was undoubtedly the Messiah as promised by prophets recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet if he was the Messiah, how could he die? The only possible answer was that he died and subsequently was raised from the dead. The gospels tell of Jesus appearing after his resurrection on a number of occasions. Jesus was therefore alive and as Messiah would soon return to usher in the kingdom of God of which he had spoken. Jesus' death atoned for the sins of the world, one massive, all-encompassing sacrifice. His death and resurrection simultaneously held the promise of individual salvation from death as well as salvation for all.



The ichthus (from the [Greek](#) *ikhthys*) was adopted by early Christians as a secret symbol.
ΙΧΘΥΣ means Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour