

# AQA A Religious Studies Paper 1: Christian Beliefs and Teachings



## An Introduction to Christianity



Christianity is the world's largest religion with over 2 billion followers. It began 2000 years ago in present-day Israel, which was then part of the Roman Empire. The first Christians believed that a recently executed man called Jesus was their Messiah (saviour).

- Jesus taught about love and forgiveness. However, the Romans and the Jewish council disliked his beliefs, so he was crucified.
- A Roman Jew called Paul converted to Jesus' teachings and spread them across the Roman Empire.
- Paul and some of Jesus' followers met at the Council of Nicea and said that anyone, not just Jews, could follow Jesus: 'you are all one in Jesus Christ' (Galatians 3:28).
- Roman Emperor Nero blamed Christians for crimes and punished them harshly. Later, the new Emperor, Constantine, passed the Edict of Milan and legalised Christianity.
- In 1054, the Church split into Catholic and Orthodox. In the 1500's, Catholic ideas were criticised and new Protestant Churches developed, e.g. the Church of England.



## The Nature of God



Christianity is monotheistic (believe in one God): 'We believe in one God' (The Nicene Creed). There are 3 branches of Christianity:

- **Catholic**- based in Rome, led by the Pope.
- **Orthodox**- practiced in Eastern Europe.
- **Protestant**- believe the Bible is the only authority for Christians.

Christians believe God has the following qualities:



**Omnipotent**- all-powerful. God has unlimited authority.



**Omniscient**- all-knowing.



**Omnipresent**- everywhere all at once.



**Benevolent**- all-loving. God shows his love by creating humans and sending his Son.



**Just**- fair. God will never support injustice.

Would a just and loving God allow evil and suffering? Yes- if it's part of God's plan, or a test of faith (E.G. the Story of Job). Also, God gave humans free will (the ability to make their own choices).

## The Oneness of God and the Trinity



**Trinity**- there are three 'persons' all of which are God. Each is fully God, but each is different.



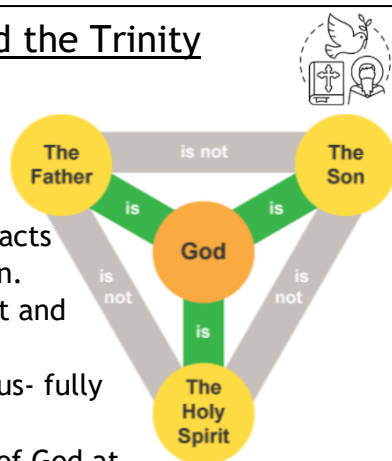
• **God the Father**- creator of all life, acts as a good father towards his children. Omnipotent, benevolent, omniscient and omnipresent.



• **God the Son**- incarnate through Jesus- fully God and fully human.



• **God the Holy Spirit**- unseen power of God at work in the world- influences, guides and sustains life on earth.



**Creation**- the act by which God brought the universe into being.



### Genesis 1:1-3

'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'.



God made the world and everything in it in six days and rested on the seventh. Fundamentalist Christians believe this literally happened and the Bible has no errors (infallible). Liberalists think it's a metaphor, and God took longer than six days to create the world. Liberals may also accept scientific views e.g. Big Bang. (God created everything out of choice and created everything 'good'. God the Father was present in creation, but so was the Holy Spirit: 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters'.

### John 1:1-3

'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'.

Suggests that the Son of God (the Word) was also present in creation.

## The Incarnation, Life and Teachings of Jesus

 **Incarnation-** becoming flesh, taking human form. 

### Birth



The Nativity Story: 'His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 1:18). Catholics believe this was because Mary was the immaculate conception (born free from original sin).

### Teachings

Performed miracles e.g. feeding the 5000, walking on water and healing the paralysed man. Taught forgiveness e.g. Sermon on the Mount ('eye for eye', 'love your neighbour', 'turn the other cheek' (Matthew 5-7).




## The Resurrection and Ascension

 **Resurrection-** rising from the dead. 

Jesus' female disciples came to visit the tomb three days after his crucifixion, but it was empty. An angel said: 'Why do you look for the living amongst the dead? He is not here; he has risen!' (Luke 24: 5-6).

Important because: Shows power of good over evil and life over death, means sins will be forgiven if they follow God's laws, shows Christians will be resurrected if they accept Jesus- don't fear death.

 **Ascension-** when Jesus returned to God the Father in heaven.

Jesus appeared to several people but after 40 days, he ascended to heaven: 'While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven' (Luke 24:51).

Important because: Shows Jesus is with God in heaven, paves the way for God to send the Holy Spirit to provide comfort and guidance.



 **Crucifixion-** fixed to a cross (a form of death penalty).


## The Crucifixion





The Romans and Jewish council disliked Jesus' teachings. He was deceived by Judas. When Jesus was being nailed to the cross, he said: 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'. He was crucified between two robbers. He then said: 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23:46). Jesus was buried in a tomb covered by a large stone.

Important because: the sacrifice on the cross gives them hope that their sins will be forgiven if they sincerely repent; God understands human suffering because Jesus (God) experienced it; Christians accept that suffering is part of life, just as it was for Jesus.



 **Day of Judgement-** when Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead.

 **Heaven-** eternal happiness and peace in the presence of God.

 **Hell-** eternal suffering or state of being without God. Seen as a fiery pit.

## Life after Death




Christians believe they will be resurrected and receive eternal life (depending on faith).


On the Day of Judgement, God will judge their actions and faith. This is described in the Parable of Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:35-36). They will then go to either heaven or hell.


Christians differ in their views on who is allowed into heaven E.G. only Christians, Christians and other religions or baptised Christians. Purgatory- Catholic belief. A 'waiting room' where souls are cleansed in order to enter heaven.



 **Sin-** any thought or action that separates humans from God.

 **Original sin-** built-in tendency to do wrong and disobey God (Catholics believe all have this).

 **Salvation-** to be saved from sin and its consequences and granted eternal life with God

 **Atonement-** removes the effects of sin. Jesus' sacrifice atoned (made up) for the sins of humanity.

## Sin and Salvation and the Role of Jesus in Salvation



Original sin comes from The Fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), when they ate the forbidden fruit. Christians believe God gave people free will but they should make choices God would approve of. Following the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-19) can help them to live good lives.

Salvation can come about by: doing **good works**: 'faith, by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead' (James 2:17) and by **grace** (not earned, a free gift of God's love): 'For it is by grace you have been saved' (Ephesians 2:8). Jesus had a role to play in salvation: his crucifixion made up for original sin, his death was necessary to restore the relationship with God, his resurrection means humans can now receive forgiveness for their sins. Jesus is: 'the atoning sacrifice for our sins' (John 2:1-2).