

# Christian beliefs & teachings

GCSE Religious Studies,  
Paper 2, Christianity.

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## Beliefs and teachings

Areas of Study	Specific Content
The nature of God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Omnipotent: Exodus 7-11, Exodus 14:21: Omni-benevolent: Psalm 86:15, John 3:16, Romans 8: 37-39. Evil and suffering: Quote on God and evil from Epicurus, Book of Job 1: 8 -12, 42:1-6</li> <li>➤ The Trinity, beliefs and teachings about the oneness of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit: John 10:30, John 14: 6-11</li> </ul>
Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Genesis 1-3; nature and role of humans, literal and non-literal ways of interpretation.</li> <li>➤ The role of Word and Spirit in creation: John 1:1-5</li> </ul>
Jesus Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Beliefs and teachings about Jesus' incarnation: John 1:14, Luke 1:28-33</li> <li>➤ Crucifixion: Matthew 27:28-50; Salvation and Atonement : Matthew 26:26-29, Leviticus 16:20-22, Isaiah 53:3-9.</li> <li>➤ Resurrection: Luke 24:1-9, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 12-14</li> <li>➤ Ascension: Luke 24:50-53</li> </ul>
Salvation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Law: Word of God; inspiration and revelation; differing ways of interpreting biblical writings; Bible in relation to other sources of authority.</li> <li>➤ Sin as preventing salvation.</li> <li>➤ Grace and the Spirit: Acts 2:1-6. The role of Holy Spirit in Evangelical worship.</li> </ul>
The afterlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Eschatological beliefs: John 11:25-26, John 14:2-7</li> <li>➤ Judgement: Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 16:19-31</li> <li>➤ Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:42-55</li> <li>➤ Traditional and contemporary beliefs about heaven and hell</li> </ul>



The philosophy and ethics paper also covers evil and suffering in theme 3. We won't study it twice!

Look at your notes on theme 3 to revise for evil and suffering.

The Philosophy and Ethics paper also has a section on the beginning of the world, so there is cross-over there too. It's fine to use learning from one paper for the other.

## Definitions

<b>Omnibenevolent</b>	the state of being all-loving and infinitely good- a characteristic often attributed to God
<b>Omnipotent</b>	the all-powerful, almighty and unlimited nature of God.
<b>Trinity</b>	the three persons of God; God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
<b>Incarnation</b>	God becoming human in the form of Jesus
<b>Atonement</b>	the belief that Jesus' death on the cross healed the rift between humans and God
<b>Resurrection</b>	the belief that Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, conquering death
<b>Sacraments</b>	an outward sign of an invisible and inward blessing by God. For example; Baptism, Eucharist.
<b>Evangelism</b>	preaching of the gospel to others with the intention of converting others to the Christian faith

## Introduction

Opening exercise: what does a Christian look like?

*Label the stickman with features you would associate with Christianity. What makes a person a Christian?*



Christians are a broad bunch! To do well at GCSE you will need to be really clear who you are talking about and why Christians sometimes take very different approaches to an issue or belief than other Christians. 3 ways of breaking it down are:

### 1) By denomination:

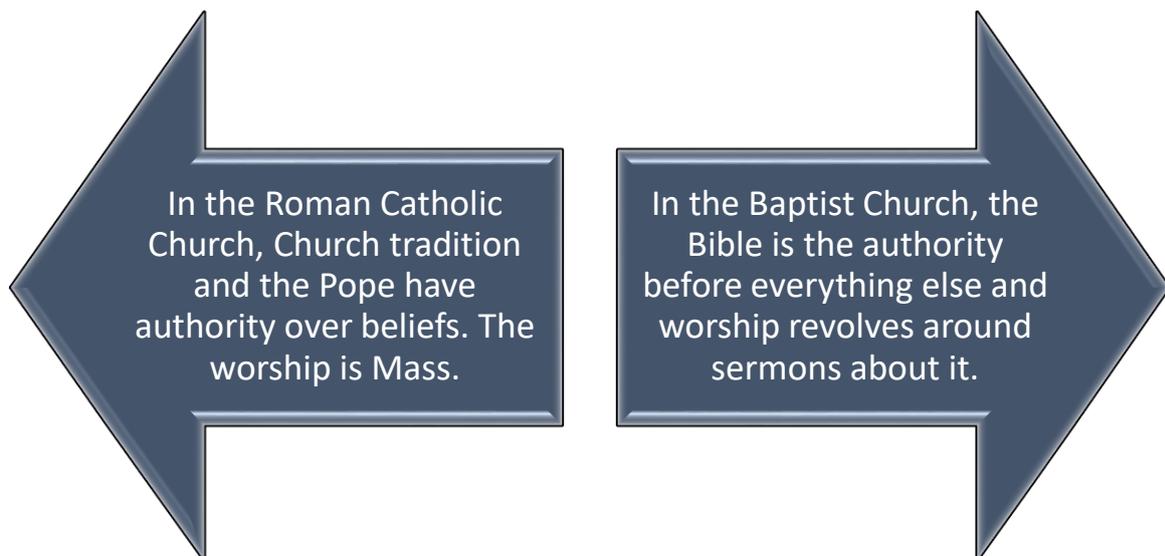
A *denomination* is the branch of the Church that a Christian belongs to. Examples include:

- Roman Catholic
- Russian or Greek Orthodox
- Church of England
- Methodists
- Quakers / Society of Friends
- Pentecostals
- Baptists.

Which denomination you belong to usually makes most difference to Christian practices, for example how Christians worship or celebrate key life movements.

So, the way that baptism happens in a Russian Orthodox Church is very different from in a Baptist Church; the way Roman Catholics see their priests is very different from Quakers who don't have priests or ministers at all.

The way services are held will be very different according to their denomination too. Roman Catholic Mass is very, very different from a Pentecostal Church where worship is very informal or in a Quaker service where worship is silent.



## 2) By their view of the Bible

The Bible is not a single book, but a collection of writings that would have been written over a period of nearly a thousand years between around 900 BC and 90 AD.

The Bible contains different types of writing by many different authors. We do not know for sure who most of the authors were. Some books weave writings by different people together. You find

- laws
- poems
- accounts of history
- stories – almost like the myths of ancient Greece and Rome
- letters
- visions of the future
- prophecy - speaking out about behaviour of people.
- Gospels – accounts of the lives of Jesus.

From a Christian perspective, the Bible can be divided into two parts:

God

### The Old Testament.

Originally the holy book of the Jewish people. Some of it is also followed by Muslims. You will sometimes see it called the Hebrew Bible.

### The New Testament

Telling the story of Jesus, this is only followed by Christians, although Muslim Scriptures also tell some of the same stories - eg when the angel comes to Mary to tell her she will have Jesus.

Some Christians, especially in America and Africa, believe that every word of the Bible is inspired by God and is literally the Word of God. Christians have a duty to follow exactly what the Bible says. These Christians can be described as **Literalists**.

Add your own example:



At the other end of the scale, for example among many members of the Church of England, the Bible is inspired by God, but written by humans who lived at particular times in history. Sometimes the writings are affected by the time they are written in and might not stand for all times. We can say that they are *culturally conditioned*. In the era when it was written, slavery was the way of life across the world. Today it is seen as completely wrong, the Bible doesn't rule it out, Christians living in our time would. **Liberal** Christians would want to look for the overall messages of the Bible, not every word.

Add your own example:



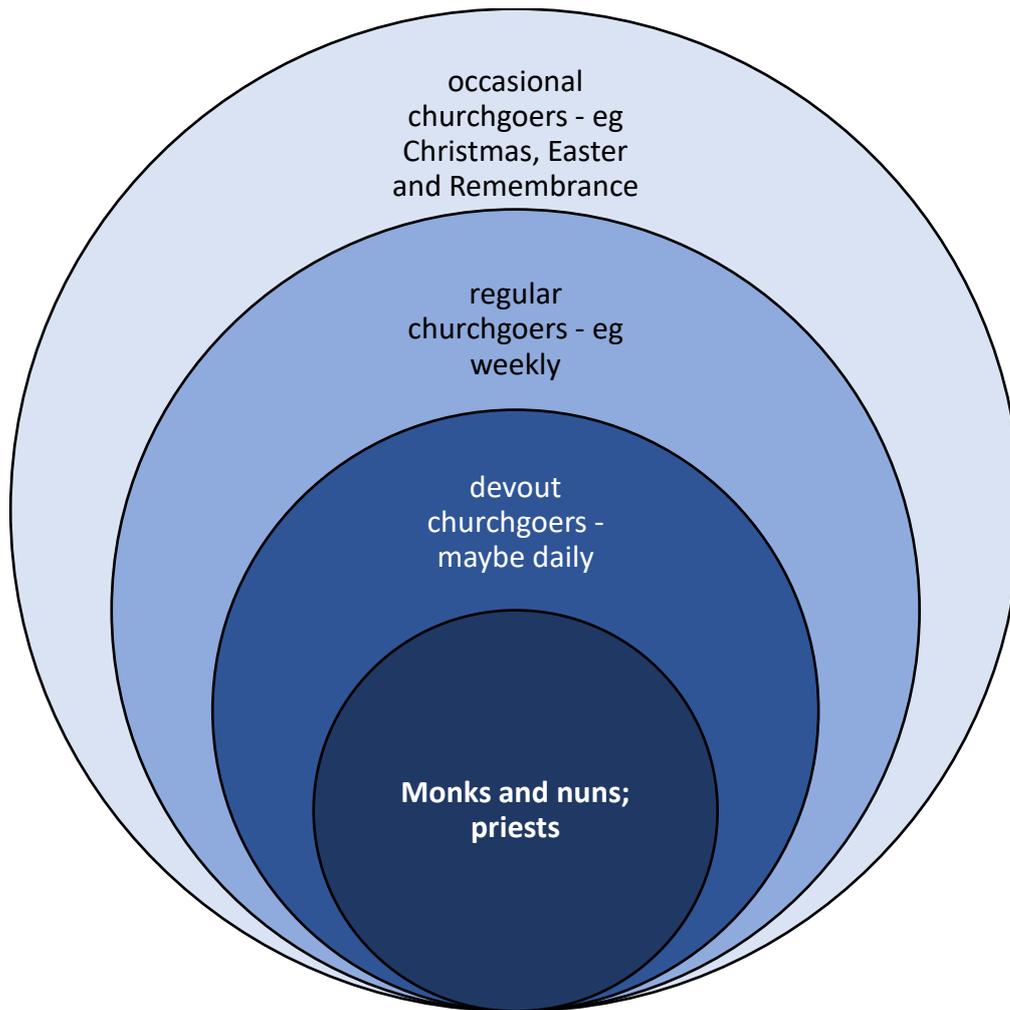
Many Christians would not see themselves as either Literalist or Liberal. You might see them described as **conservative** – they would be traditional in how they interpret the Bible, but not necessarily take every word literally.

Add your own example:



A Christian's attitude to the Bible usually makes most difference in terms of ethics – for example about abortion, remarriage after divorce or capital punishment. It also affects a Christian's view about Heaven and Hell or Creation.

### 3. their attitude to worship and frequency.



Like followers of most religions, Christians vary in how central their faith is to their lives. For some, it is at the heart of everything they do. A monk or nun will commit their whole life to God, living in a religious community, not getting married or having money of their own. For others, their faith is more part of their way of life and family tradition. For example, many people go to Church at festivals but not weekly. All are Christians, but there is huge variation. Always remember to show this difference in your work.

## Check your understanding

### Who's who in the zoo?

Match up the term and the definitions - work in pencil to start with!

<b>Pope</b>	The leader of worship in a Protestant Church
<b>Archbishop of Canterbury</b>	The leader of worship in the Catholic / Orthodox churches
<b>Minister</b>	The name for a priest in a parish in the Church of England
<b>Priest</b>	The Head of the Roman Catholic Church
<b>Monk</b>	Takes vows and lives in a religious community
<b>Bishop</b>	The Head of the Church of England
<b>Vicar</b>	The senior leader of a Church in one area

## Exercise

In these three situations, explore what different Christians might believe about these issues and why they think that?

Only having sex with someone when you are married to them

- a) what would a conservative Baptist believe?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) what would a devout Roman Catholic believe?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c) what would a Liberal Church of England follower believe who worships occasionally?



Having women ministers / priests

- a) what would a devout Roman Catholic believe?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) what would a conservative Baptist believe?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c) what would a regular Church of England worshipper believe?



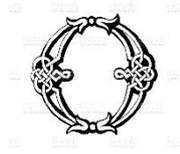
## Worship

- a) what might a regular Russian Orthodox service include on a Sunday?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) what might a Pentecostalist service include?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c) what might a Church of England service include?



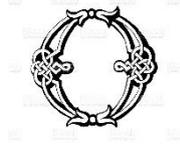
## What do Christians have in common?

At the heart of the Christian faith are beliefs about God, about Jesus and about the Holy Spirit. These include the belief that God is:



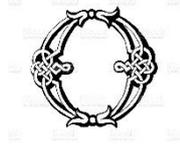
### **One**

There is and can only be one God. Christians like Jews and Muslims are **monotheists**.



### **Omnipotent**

God is all powerful. There is nothing that He cannot do. In the Bible, God creates the world, divides the Red Sea at the Exodus, and is able to control the weather and the natural world,



### **Omnibenevolent**

God is always good. His nature is goodness and He cannot be anything but good. He loves the world and is involved in it. He wants human beings to flourish and cares about each one.

They also believe that God is



### **Eternal**

God is beyond time. He has no beginning and no end. Nothing created him and he cannot die.

These beliefs about God are shared by other religions. There are two beliefs that only Christians hold



### **Incarnation**

Christians believe that God loved humans so much that He became human to show them how to live. *Carne* means flesh, so incarnation means that God took on human flesh to live on earth as Jesus.

Jesus for Christians is not just a special man. He stays God while on earth. He is the Son of God – 100% human and 100% divine (God).



## Trinity

While Jesus was on earth, God did not stop being in Heaven. Christians believe that within God, there are three 'persons' or 'faces' that have always and will always be God.

- **God the Father** – the Creator
- **God the Son** - incarnate in Jesus
- **God the Holy Spirit** – revealing the nature and will of God, especially after Jesus' life on earth was done.

The Trinity is one of the hardest beliefs to get your head round because it says that God is one and God is three at the same time. Some ways to understand it are:

*The Trinity is like a clover leaf or shamrock. It is one plant but has three distinct leaves. It would not be a clover without having those leaves, but a single leaf is not enough to be a clover on its own.*



Ice-water steam

H<sub>2</sub>O can appear in three forms but keep the same basic properties. It can appear as ice, or as water or as steam. God can appear as God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

*Aquafresh toothpaste is made up of three different stripes which do three different things (clean, freshen breath etc). It's only aquafresh when all three stripes are together in the tube.*



None of these examples work perfectly because Christians believe that the 3 persons of God are beings and not things. They exist in a relationship of love with each other. The Celtic knot pattern tries to show how the three interweave with each other without a beginning or end.





This icon – religious art from the Orthodox Church – is a famous way to see the Trinity. An icon is ‘written’ on wood, often with beautiful colours and gold and is used in worship and prayer.

Unlike all the other examples this icon shows the personal relationship of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## Check your understanding

It is important to be able to support your answers with examples from the Bible or the Church. These texts reflect the beliefs looked at above. In pencil to start with, label each text with the belief that you think it shows. Here, as a reminder, are the beliefs:

One    Omnipotent    Omnibenevolent    Eternal    Incarnation    Trinity

- 1) I John chapter 4: *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

Belief?

- 2) A Church blessing: *“the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always”*

Belief?

- 3) The Gospel of John, chapter 3: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life’

Belief?

- 4) Deuteronomy 6 (The Old Testament)

*“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”*

Belief?

5. Exodus 20 (The Old Testament)

*“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;<sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me”*

Belief?

6. Isaiah 40 (The Old Testament)

*“It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;  
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to live in;”*

Belief?

7. John 10 (a Gospel: Jesus is speaking here): *“The Father and I are one.”*

Belief?

8. I Chronicles (Old Testament):

*“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,  
from everlasting to everlasting.”*

Belief?

9. John 1 (The Word here is Jesus)

*“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a  
father’s only son,<sup>[d]</sup> full of grace and truth”*

Belief?

10. Matthew 28 (a Gospel in the New Testament)

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the  
Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And  
remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.*

Belief?

**Practice exam style question**

- a) What do Christians mean by omnipotent? 2 marks
- b) Describe what Christians believe about the Trinity 5 marks

## Creation

Most world religions see God as the Creator of the universe. Christians share that view and believe that although God the Father is often seen as the Creator, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were also present at Creation. Saving (the Son's special role) and inspiring (the Spirit's special role) were part of God's relationship with and desire for humanity since the very beginning.



One very early Christian writer who we will meet elsewhere in the course described God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as being the 'hands' of God who brought God the Father's will into action and formed the universe.

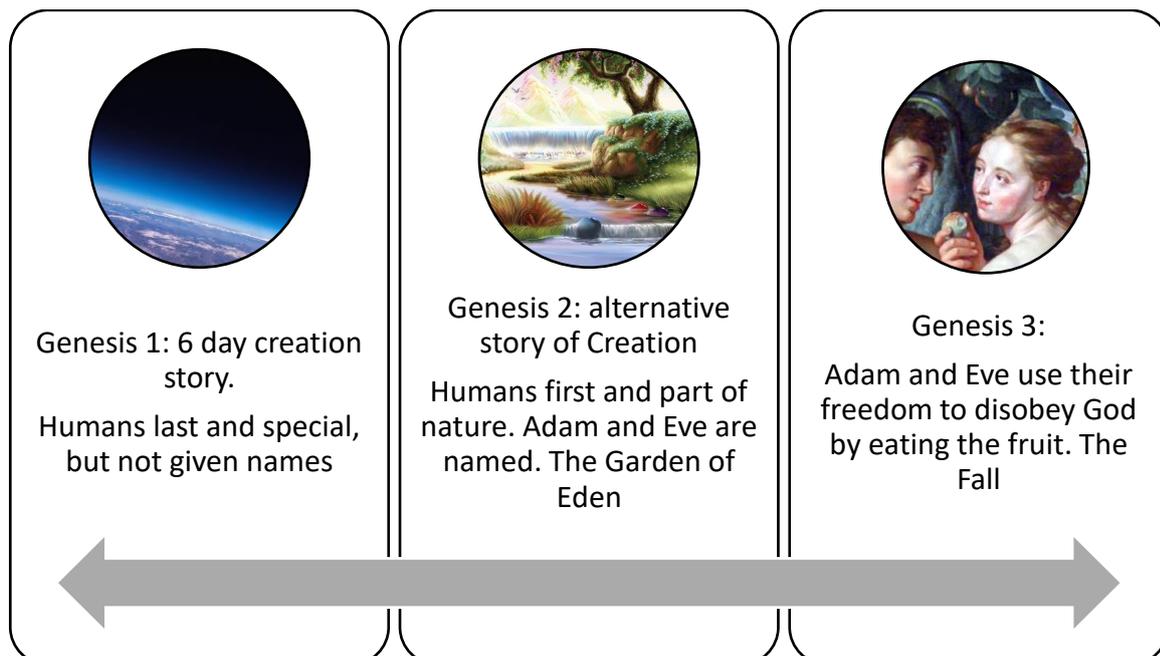
The opening verses of John's Gospel, where Jesus is described as Word, emphasise that Jesus had a role in Creation

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

What is the key phrase here that says Jesus was involved in Creation?

## Genesis 1-3

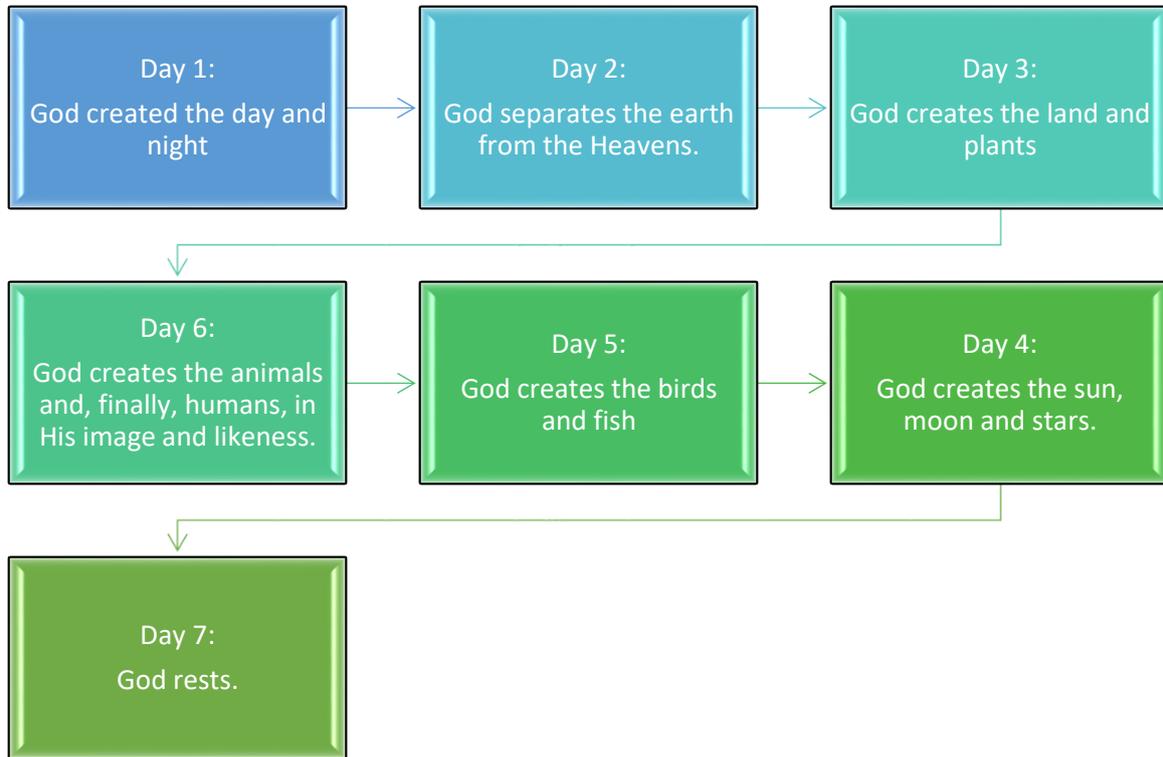
The first 3 chapters of the Bible are crammed full of really important ideas. We will come back to them time and time again when we look at human relationships, sin, the environment, abortion, euthanasia and prejudice. It is worth spending time getting to know them really well and understanding the very different ways Christians interpret them.



**The texts:**

Before we can interpret the texts, we need to know exactly what they say.

**Genesis 1: Creation from nothing (ex nihilo)**



**Important things to remember:**

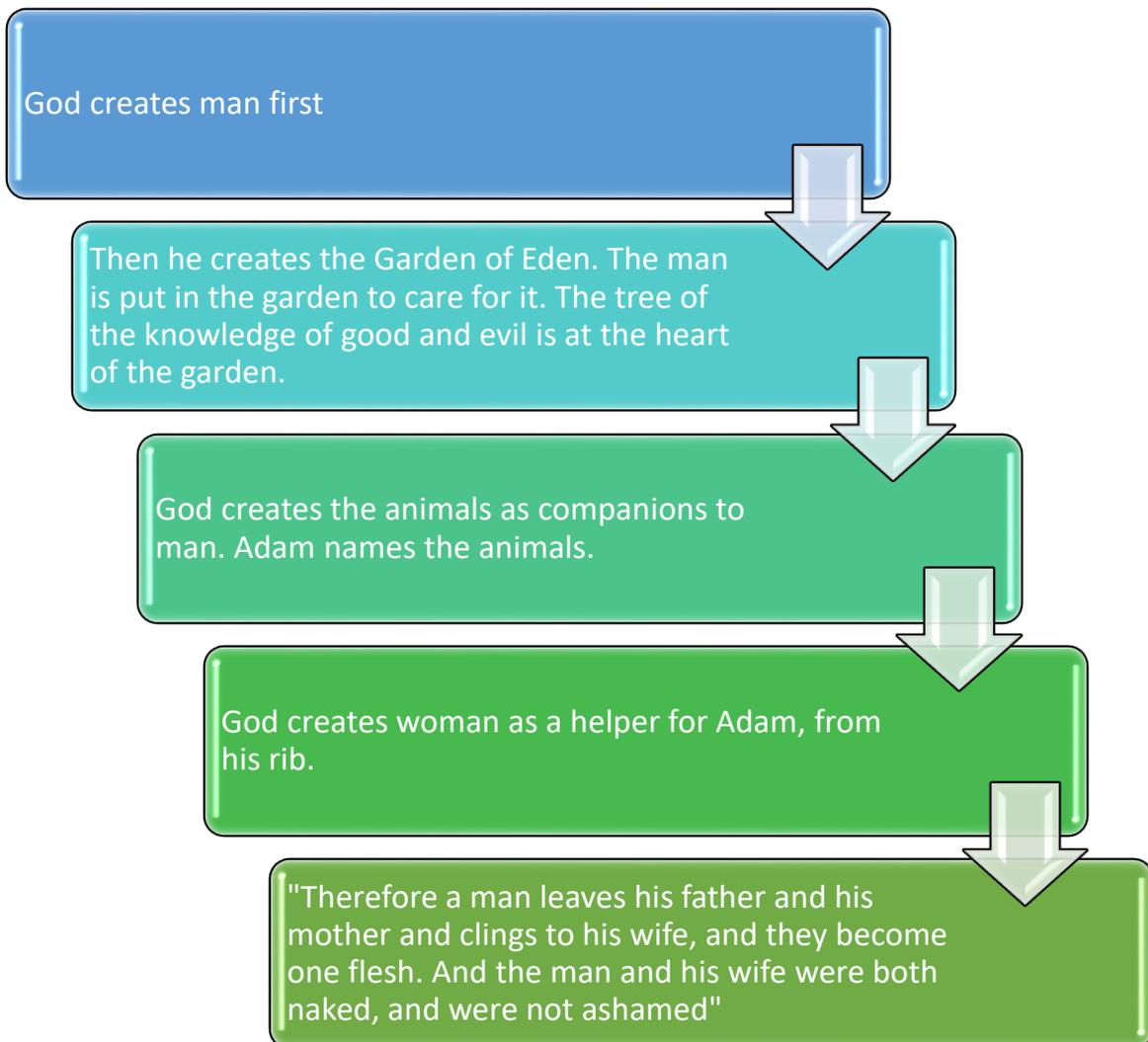
- Creation takes 6 days. God rests on the seventh.
- Humans are described as being in God’s image and likeness in verse 27.
- Humans are given responsibility to rule over the earth and care for it.
- All of the Creation is described as good. Each day ends with ‘and God saw that it was good’.



## Genesis 2: The Garden of Eden

This was probably a completely different account of Creation, from an earlier time than Genesis 1. Genesis 2 is much more earthy and God is more like a human, rather than a Creator of the whole universe.

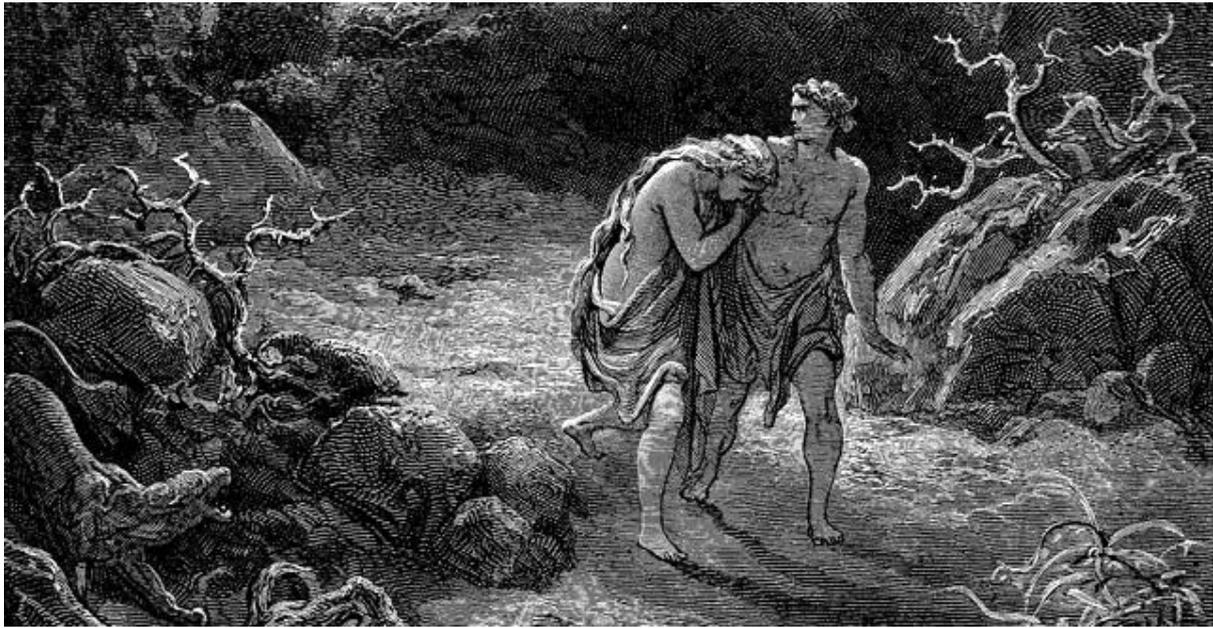
*“the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”.*



Important things to remember:

- Humans are given responsibility to care for the world – for the garden. This is sometimes called stewardship. Adam cares for the garden on behalf of God – it does not belong to him.
- Adam and Eve are committed to each other for life – this is the basis for Christian beliefs about marriage being ‘until death us do part’.

## Genesis 3: The Fall



What ideas can you see in this picture of the Fall? What is the artist trying to say?

### In Genesis 3:

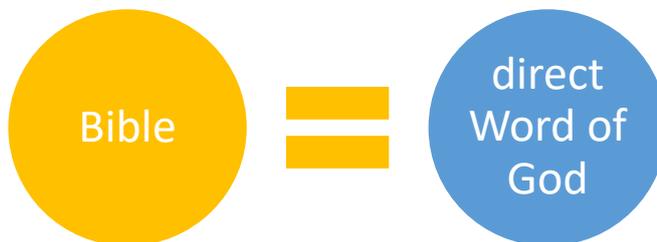
- The serpent (NB not the devil) tempts Eve to eat the fruit that they have been told not to eat. The serpent tricks her, saying they will be like God if they do.
- Eve accepts the fruit, then gives some to Adam.
- They realise they are naked and are ashamed.
- God is angry and punishes them, sending them out of the Garden.
- This is the point where God's perfect relationship with humans breaks down. For some Christians, Original Sin enters the world, so every human being is born with sin because of Adam and Eve's sin.
- For Christians, it explains why Jesus' death was necessary – to mend the broken relationship between God and humans, by being a 'second Adam'.
- Some writers – e.g. Irenaeus, the early Christian writer – didn't see it like this. They saw it as Adam and Eve beginning to grow up and take responsibility for their own actions. They had to experience hardship and suffering in order to fully grow up, but the relationship with God isn't broken in the same way as with Original Sin.

## Why do Christians believe such different things about the Creation stories?

Even though all Christians have the Bible as their holy book, their Scripture, as the Word of God, inspired by God, they might, as we have seen, understand what that means in different ways.

For some Christians, who take a **literal approach**, the Bible is the closest you can get to God's will for humans. It is God *revealing* how he wants humans to live and behave.

Check.... what does reveal mean?



**The Bible cannot be wrong in any detail. It is word-for-word true. Humans write down God's exact words.**

What will a Literalist Christian believe about the way the world began?

For a Liberal Christian, all the people who wrote the Bible were inspired by their faith by God. They wrote down what they believed about God, but it is their words. Sometimes they used stories and symbolism and sometimes the way they understood God was affected by the time and place they lived in. A Liberal Christian might believe the Bible was culturally conditioned

Check.... what does culturally conditioned mean?

For a Liberal Christian, there will be other sources of authority as well as the Bible



What might a Liberal Christian believe about the way the world began?

**Check your understanding: are these statements true or false?**

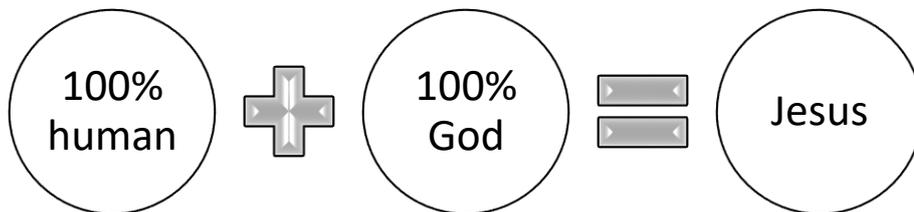
Statement	True or false
A Liberal Christian might accept the Big Bang theory of how the world began	
A Literalist Christian might accept the Big Bang theory of how the world began	
A Liberal Christian might accept the theory of Evolution	
A Liberal Christian believes the world was made in 6 days	
A Literalist Christian might think that each day of Creation was actually a long period of time – e.g. millions of years	
A Liberal Christian believes that God is the ultimate Creator of the universe	
A Literalist Christian believes that God is the ultimate Creator of the universe	

# Jesus Christ

## 1. The Incarnation

This is a crucial part of Christian belief. It is the belief that God became human and lived on earth in Jesus Christ. Through the Virgin birth, he was born without sin and with God as his father.

Christians believe that Jesus was 100% God and 100% human, fully God and fully man.



The term **incarnation** comes from the word for flesh – carne.

One way to remember it is to think of Chilli con carne - chilli beans with meat. So, at the Incarnation, God takes on flesh.

The belief that Jesus was not just close to God but was God is what split Christians from the Jews. Jews believe that God cannot have a Son who is also God, because there would then be two Gods.

It is really important to remember that Christians don't just think Jesus was like God, or Goddish, but fully God, even when he was on earth. He was able to show humans what God was like in a way no-one else could and to draw people to God. Because he was the Son of God, he could perform miracles, both over nature and illness.

Where do you see beliefs about the Incarnation in the Bible?	
Text	What does it mean in my own words?
'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's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 14)	
'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'. (Luke's Gospel, chapter 1)	

## Looking closer – belief in the Virgin birth



Why might some Christians find believing that Mary conceived Jesus as a Virgin difficult?

How might a Literalist understand the story of the angel visiting Mary?

How might a Liberal understand it?

Roman Catholics give the Virgin Mary special importance in their worship and Churches. What examples of this can you think of?



## Jesus' death – the crucifixion

When he was about 33, probably around 29AD, Jesus was executed on a Cross by the Romans, just outside Jerusalem. All four Gospels tell of how he died.

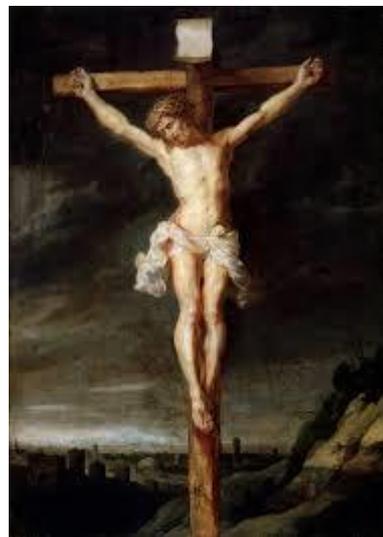
Why did the Romans crucify him?

- At the Passover festival, the key time for Jews, Jesus had gone into the Temple and thrown over the tables of those selling animals for sacrifice.
- The Jewish leaders were shocked by his claim to be the Son of God and thought he was blaspheming – saying things about God which could not be true. Jesus had claimed to be able to forgive sin and they believed only God could do that.
- On the Sunday before he died, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey and been greeted by a crowd who called him King. The Romans, who ruled Jerusalem, would not let someone who might stir up the people against them, live.



Crucifixion was an agonising death. Jesus was flogged first and had to carry his cross to the place of execution, known as Golgotha. The Romans used crucifixion to scare the people and ensured that the criminal died in agony. Usually they would suffocate because they could not lift themselves up to breathe, but it could take days to die, often in hot sunshine.

A sign was placed above Jesus' head, saying that he was the King of the Jews. He died. after about three hours and the Gospels say that the sky turned black.



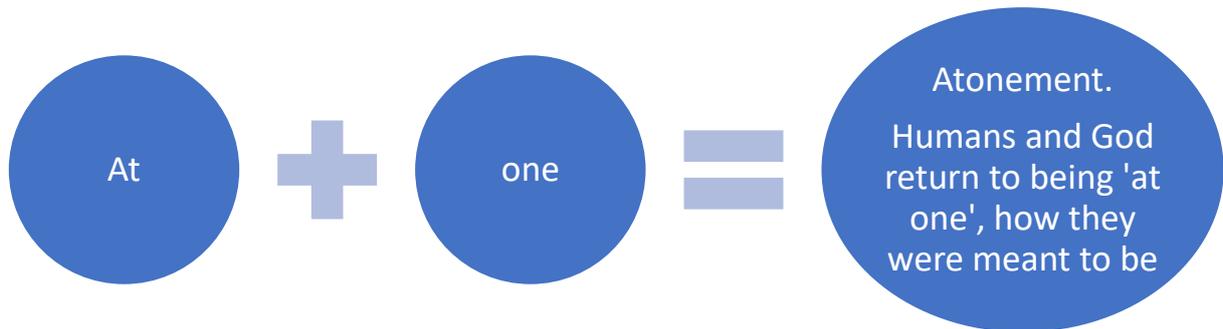
Look closely at these paintings. What do you notice?

## How do Christians explain why Jesus died?

It was shocking for Jesus' followers that he was crucified. They could not understand why if he was the Son of God, he had been allowed by God to die the death of a criminal.

Christians believe that Jesus' death wasn't an accident, but part of a reconciliation – a mending- of the relationship between God and humanity. They call this belief **Atonement**.

Again, break the word down.....



There are many ways of understanding Atonement, but we can look at two: -

### 1. Jesus died to save people from sin

- Since Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, every human being was born with sin, with original sin. Adam didn't just sin himself but infected the whole of humanity with that sin.
- Every human being ever born does things wrong. They have their own personal sin as well as Original Sin. They fall further and further away from sin.
- Before Jesus, in Judaism, there was a tradition of using an animal sacrifice to make up for sin. Humans gave up something precious to them as a way of showing that they were sorry.
- This time, humans didn't have anything valuable enough to give that would make up for all the sins of everyone that ever lived.
- The only thing good enough, was a person who had never sinned, who would take on all the sin and offer himself like a sacrifice.
- Jesus died on the Cross and that was the sacrifice that allowed God and humanity to be reconciled. Humans were saved.

### 2. Jesus died to show the love of God

- This way of thinking starts in the same place. There was a wall of sin that stood between humanity and God so that humans could no longer see God properly.
- God sent Jesus to show people what He was like in person. He revealed that God was love.
- When he died on the cross, Jesus showed that love more than ever. He loved people so much that he was prepared to die for them.
- When people looked up and saw Jesus high on the cross, they realised the love of God and turned round their lives to live as He wanted them to, showing love.
- When they did that, God and humans were reconciled, and humans were saved from sin.

## Look closely....

What do these passages from the Bible and Church services say that fits in with the idea of Atonement? Use them to support answers on this topic. They are sources of authority.

Bible passage/ Church service	What does it say?
<p><b><i>An Old Testament passage from the book of Leviticus about the Jewish Day of Atonement, when an animal took on the sins of the people:</i></b></p> <p><b>‘When he has finished atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness’</b></p>	
<p><b><i>Isaiah 53: a poem from the Old Testament about a person who would suffer for other people</i></b></p> <p><b>He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces; he was despised, and we held him of no account.</b></p> <p><b>Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.</b></p> <p><b>But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.</b></p> <p><b>All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity [sin] of us all.</b></p>	
<p><b><i>Matthew 26 – the Last Supper</i></b></p> <p><b>While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’</b></p>	
<p><b><i>John’s Gospel, chapter 3:</i></b></p> <p><b>God so loved the world that he gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.</b></p>	
<p><b><i>Part of the Communion service in a Church.</i></b></p> <p><b>Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.</b></p>	



### **Check your understanding....**

Both the ideas of Atonement have a wall separating God and humans. In your own words, write 2 paragraphs, explaining:

- i) what the wall between them was
- ii) how Jesus' death could break it down.

Use sources of wisdom and authority in your answers.

## The Resurrection

Christians believe that 3 days after he died, Jesus rose again from the dead. When some of his women followers went to his tomb, to finish all the rituals of death, they found the stone rolled away and the body gone. Jesus appeared to the women, then to other followers, his disciples in the weeks afterwards, before he returned to Heaven at the Ascension.

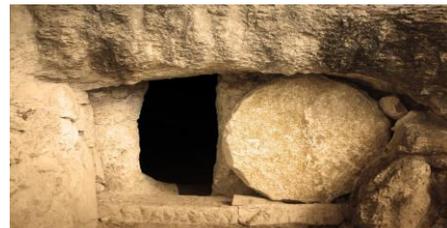
Just as the Incarnation is celebrated at Christmas, the Resurrection is celebrated at Easter.

Luke's Gospel, chapter 24:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

The Resurrection matters for Christians because

- It confirmed that Jesus was divine, that he was the Son of God. Humans could not come back from the dead.
- It showed God's power over life and death.
- It showed the victory of good over evil.
- It gave hope to Christians that Jesus had defeated death for humans too. Even when they died, they would have another life and live for eternity.
- It made Jesus the Saviour of the world
- It fulfilled promises in the Bible.



The Resurrection is vital to Christian belief and is a major difference to Judaism and Islam.

St. Paul writes about the Resurrection in a letter to the Corinthians, in the New Testament part of the Bible:

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.

## The Ascension

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke's Gospel, chapter 24

40 days after Jesus' resurrection, Christians believe that he returned to Heaven. He didn't die again and never has. Being God, he returned to being God, in Heaven.

The Ascension showed that

- Jesus' work on earth was done.
- Jesus' work on earth had been a success and God was accepting him back

Christians believe that Jesus will one day come again. Some believe He will return from Heaven in the same way that he left earth, from the clouds of Heaven.

### Bring it all together....

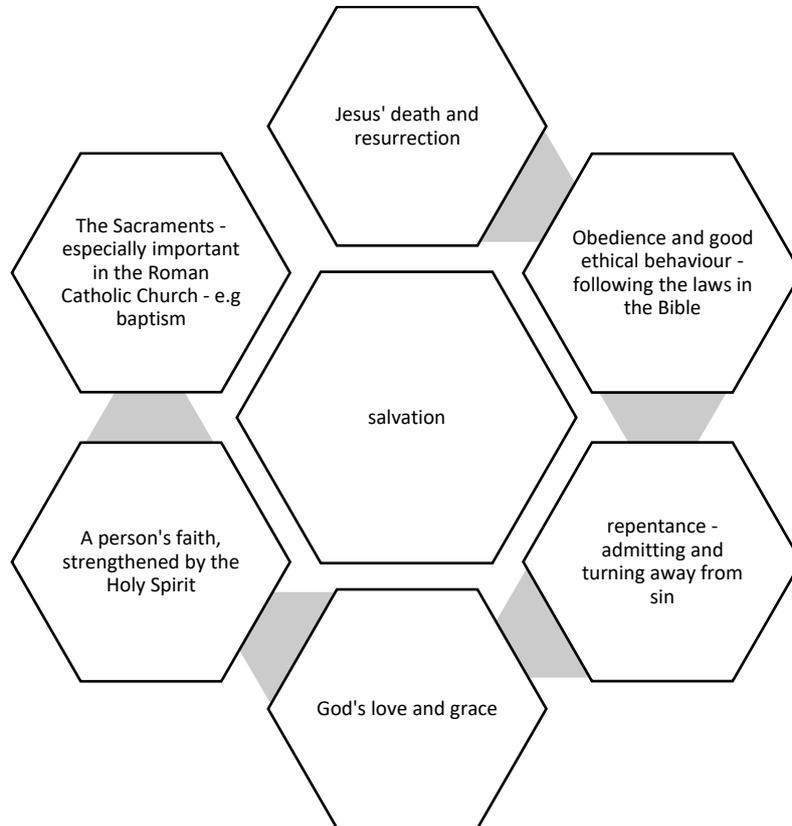
In 100 words, explain to someone who has never heard of Christianity, why Christians believe Jesus is so special

### Practice exam question

- What is meant by Resurrection? 2 marks
- Describe what Christians believe about the Incarnation 5 marks
- Explain two ways in which the Resurrection influences Christians today 8 marks
- 'The crucifixion is the most important part of the Christian story'. Do you agree? Explain your answer, using sources of authority and show you have understood different points of view.

## Salvation and the afterlife

We have seen that the death and resurrection are key to Christian belief that they have salvation, that they are forgiven by God and will have life after death – that they are ‘saved’. There are a number of elements that Christians believe bring salvation



Grace is the love and forgiveness of God that Christians believe He shows even when they don't deserve it.

Humans can't earn salvation – it's a gift from God, given through the Holy Spirit which is the ongoing presence of God in the world.

*This is what the book of Acts in the New Testament says about the coming of the Holy Spirit. It*

- *unites people of different languages*
- *inspires people to live as God wants them to live*
- *changes people and strengthens them to live like that.*

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

Today, in Evangelical worship, the Holy Spirit is really important. as it inspires them to worship, to pray and to sing in a very free way. We will come back to this when we look at Christian practices next term.

## The afterlife

No-one knows for sure what happens when we die. Christians however are confident that there is an afterlife, with God, which need not be feared.

Recap: what makes Christians think there is an afterlife?

Christians believe that the world as it is now is not how God wants it to be. When they pray the Lord's Prayer, they pray that God's will might be done 'on earth as it is in Heaven'. Suffering, hatred, and violence are not part of God's plan, and eventually, because he is all-powerful (omnipotent), good will triumph and all these things will disappear.

This end of time, when Jesus will appear is part of a set of beliefs called **eschatological** beliefs. The eschaton is the Greek word for the end, for the last things.

At the end of time, Christians believe that

- Jesus will come again (the idea of the Second Coming).
- Humans will be judged for their behaviour
- there will be no more suffering.
- God and humans will be united

A passage from the last book in the Bible, Revelation talks about this:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

**What ideas do you see in this passage?**

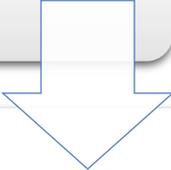


## What happens to individuals?

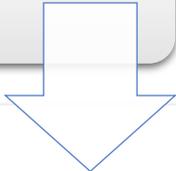
During history, there have been some very different answers to this in Christian thought. It depends which passages from the Bible and which ideas about God you give most importance to.

Exercise: Read through these different ideas about what might happen after death. Which one do you think is most consistent with what we have learnt about what Christians believe about God, Jesus and human life?

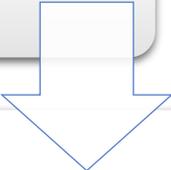
Belief 1: If God's nature is good, then he could not wish for any of the humans he made to suffer. He will save all people because he loves them and because he is all powerful. All people go to Heaven. This is known as Universalism.



Belief 2: God's nature is love and good, but he also gave humans free will. It has to be possible for a human being to reject God and be eternally separate from Him. While God wants everyone to be with Him, humans can choose to separate themselves from Him. We can call that separation Hell but Hell isn't a place where God punishes people. It is self-exclusion.



Belief 3: It would not be fair for all people, however they have behaved, to go straight to Heaven. There needs to be a place called Purgatory, where people are cleaned up from their sin, before they can go to be with God. For some, this will be a long and hard time, because they have slipped so far from God in their life on earth



Belief 4: Humans are, ever since the Fall, sinful. They cannot be with God. Most people - who do not accept Jesus or live good lives, - deserve to suffer forever in Hell. That is their choice.

## Analysing the beliefs

**What is my answer? Which belief seems to fit in with the ideas about humans, God and Jesus we have studied? Explain carefully why you have chosen it.**

**Now work through the other answers. Why have you rejected those? What is wrong with them. Look at each one in turn**

**What did others in the group say? What reasons and arguments did they give?**

**Have I changed my mind? If so, why? If not, what didn't convince you about what they said?**

## Finally....

Look at this artwork.

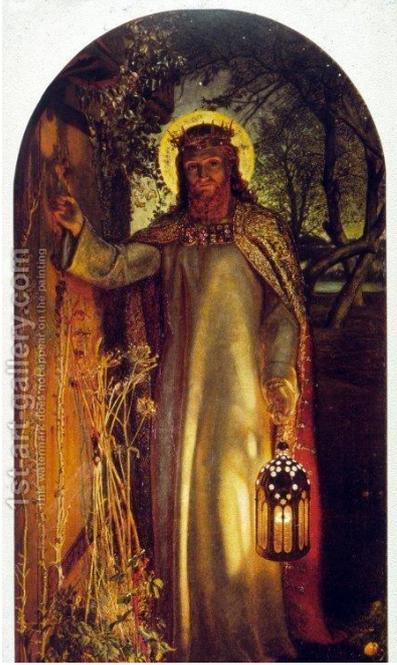
How has Hell been portrayed? Which, if any of the paintings seems to fit in with the ideas of Heaven and Hell you felt were most consistent with Christian belief?



What is the artwork suggesting?  
Which belief does it reflect?

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What is the artwork suggesting?  
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