

## History of Christianity

**Christianity** is based upon the teachings of **Jesus**, a Jew who lived his life in the Roman province of Palestine. Roman communications networks enabled Christianity to spread quickly throughout the Roman empire and eventually to the rest of Europe, and finally the entire globe.

As time progressed, Christianity divided into three major branches. The **Roman Catholic** branch of Christianity is the successor of the church established in Rome soon after Christ's death. It traces its spiritual history to the early disciples of Jesus. The **Pope**, or spiritual leader, traces his office's lineage back to St. Peter, the first Pope, one of Jesus' disciples. Roman Catholicism was originally predominately practiced in Ireland, Poland, France and Spain.

During the fourth century, the Roman Catholic church split and the **Eastern Orthodox** branch was formed.

The split was primarily a political one due to the division of the Roman Empire into western and eastern components. The two churches became officially separate in 1054. Orthodox churches are largely national, each associated with a particular country. Orthodoxy is common in Russia, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, the Ukraine, and Armenia.

The **Protestant** branch split from Roman Catholicism during the **Reformation**, a sixteenth and seventeenth century series of church reforms in doctrine and practice. This movement challenged the authority of the Pope, and became popular in Scandinavia, England, and the Netherlands. Protestantism eventually divided into many denominations which arose in response to disputes over doctrine, theology, or religious practice. Some of the large denominations today are Lutherans, Methodists and Baptists.

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/religion/christianity/history.html>

## Basic Beliefs of Christianity

Christianity believes in one God, while the central figure in Christianity is **Jesus** (or Christ), a Jew who came into this world by immaculate conception to a virgin named **Mary**. His birth is celebrated at **Christmas** with hymns and gift giving. It's believed that Jesus was not only man, but also the son of God and lived his life without sin.

During his lifetime, Jesus performed many miracles and spoke to many people about his father in heaven. He was arrested for claiming to be God's son and was hung on the cross by the Romans at age 33. Christians believe that the suffering and death upon the **cross** which this sinless man endured paid for the sins of all mankind, and because of Jesus' actions, salvation can be achieved by anyone who believes in him. This act of sacrifice is remembered during **Lent**.

Following his death, Christians believe that he rose from the grave (celebrated at **Easter**) and returned to the earth, appearing to his followers and telling them of the kingdom of God to which he was going. He also promised his disciples that he would return one day to bring all believers with him to that kingdom, to enjoy eternal life in the presence of God.

Christians can read of the life of Jesus, as well as his ancestors in the only Christian holy text, the **Bible**. It consists of the Old Testament (which is also considered sacred to **Judaism** and **Islam**) and the New Testament. The Old Testament chronicles the lives of Jews and others who lived before Jesus, who had been promised a savior by God, and were waiting for him. This text contains many stories about people demonstrating faith in God and also provides historical information about the

era. The New Testament is unique to Christianity, for it centers around the figure of Jesus and his effect on the world. Christians believe that Jesus is the one that the Old Testament foretold, so instead of looking for a savior, they await the return of Jesus so that he can take them to his kingdom, or heaven.

The beliefs of Christianity can be seen in the words of the Apostles' Creed, a document which was written to distinguish Christianity from other religions and show basic Christian doctrine in a concise manner.

### **The Apostle's Creed**

I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.  
And in Jesus Christ,  
His only Son, our Lord;  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
Born of the Virgin Mary,  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died and was buried.  
He descended into hell;  
The third day He rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
The holy Christian Church,  
The Communion of Saints,  
the Forgiveness of sins,  
The Resurrection of the body,  
And the Life everlasting.  
Amen.

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/religion/christianity/beliefs.html>

### **Christianity Terms**

**Bible** The sacred text which records the lives of major figures in Christianity, including Jesus. Contains Old and New Testaments.

**Christianity** The belief in Jesus Christ as Savior of the world.

**Christmas** The celebration of the birth of Jesus held on December 25th.

**Cross** Roman method of execution which took the life of Jesus. Now a symbol of Jesus' suffering and resurrection.

**Easter** The celebration of Jesus' triumphant return to life after dying on the cross.

**Eastern Orthodoxy** A branch of Christianity with national ties.

**Jesus** The central figure of Christianity, believed to be true God, who saved mankind from the torture of hell by dying on the cross to grant them salvation.

**Lent** The remembrance of the period of time leading up to and including Christ's death on the cross.

**Mary** Jesus' mother, who conceived him by the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

**Pope** The spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic church.

**Protestantism** The branch of Christianity which broke off from the Roman Catholic church at the time of the Reformation.

**Reformation** A movement which resulted in the formation of the Protestant branch of Christianity. A reforming of Christianity which eliminated certain doctrines and practices of Catholicism which were deemed incorrect.

**Roman Catholicism** The original Christian religion which descended from the original Christians in Rome at the time of Christ.

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/religion/christianity/terms.html>