

What is Christianity?

By Colleen Messina



¹ If you found a time machine, traveled back to the first century A.D., and landed in Judea, you might hear about a man who could reportedly walk on water. According to the locals, this man was either a great teacher or an outright rebel. Jesus Christ was the most controversial person in the Roman Empire! Christianity, the world's largest religion, is based on his teachings.



² The story of Jesus' birth is the story of Christmas. According to the Bible, the angel Gabriel appeared to a Jewish woman named Mary. Although she was a virgin, the angel told her that she was going to have a baby who would be the Messiah. This was startling news! Jews had hoped that a savior, or Messiah, would come to free them from Roman tyranny. The baby Jesus is traditionally shown with his parents, Mary and Joseph, in a stable full of animals. Angels hover brightly above. Shepherds stand close by. This "nativity scene" is often set up during Christmastime.

³ We don't know many details about Jesus' life. We don't even know what he looked like. Christians believe that Jesus was a precocious young man who thought of God as his Father. He became a carpenter, but his wisdom exceeded his years. He even explained the Old Testament scriptures to the wise men of the temple when he was only 12! When Jesus turned 30, he gathered a band of disciples, and he began preaching, teaching, and healing. He left no writings behind except symbols in the sand, but his disciples loved him so much that they left their homes to follow him.

⁴ Jesus had a riveting message. He taught that people needed to repent, or ask for forgiveness for their sins. He taught about love and the Kingdom of God. However, he didn't always teach quietly. Sometimes, he shouted. Sometimes, he did surprising things, even in the holiest place in Jerusalem.

⁵ Tables were set up inside the temple so people could buy animals to sacrifice for Passover. They came from all over Judea for this holiday, and they had different kinds of money. People had to exchange their money for the local currency in order to buy things in Jerusalem, and the moneychangers did that job. Jesus thought that that was terrible! He knocked the tables over and told the people to stop turning his Father's house into a marketplace!

⁶ Jesus' disciples believed that he was the Messiah, or the incarnation of God who came to Earth to bring salvation to mankind. They believed that he set an

example for his students to follow. His best known sermon is called the Sermon on the Mount which contained the Lord's Prayer. Jesus gave this sermon at a mountain near Capernaum which was supposedly the site of an extinct volcano. The Lord's Prayer became the most well known prayer of Christianity.

⁷ Jesus often taught in parables with secret messages, like the story of the lost sheep. According to the Bible, Jesus asked the Pharisees and scribes whether they would go after one lost sheep, even if they had ninety-nine others. If they found their lost sheep, they would certainly bring the animal home. They might say, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." The Bible says that "...there will likewise be more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent." (Luke 15:2-7)

⁸ While many people loved Jesus, the chief priests and the Roman authorities did not. They felt threatened by his message. One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot, made a deal for 30 pieces of silver. He betrayed Jesus. Jesus was tried as a criminal and then crucified on a cross. According to the Bible, Jesus rose from the dead three days later. He appeared to his disciples and taught them for 40 days. He told them to spread the gospel, or the "good news" to all people. Jesus ascended to heaven. Christians believe that Jesus achieved victory over death and that his death made forgiveness of sin possible.

⁹ Because Jesus died on a cross, one of the most popular symbols of the Christian faith is the cross. Many Christians wear crosses around their necks on a chain, and many churches have crosses on their altars or walls. Another symbol of Christianity is a fish. It is believed that Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 people by multiplying two fishes and five loaves of bread! He also asked his disciples to become "fishers of men." Other Bible stories tell of miracles that Jesus performed, like turning water into wine at a wedding and restoring sight to a blind man.

¹⁰ The Bible, the sacred book of Christianity, has two parts. The first part is the Jewish Bible, which is called the Old Testament by Christians. The second part is the New Testament, and it is made up of the writings of the early Christians. The New Testament contains the story of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were four of Jesus' disciples, and they wrote the first four sections, or books, called Gospels. Gospel comes from an old English word meaning "good news." Christians believe that the Bible is the authority for living a good life.

¹¹ Christians have holidays that celebrate events in Jesus' life. Christmas celebrates his birthday, while Easter celebrates his resurrection. Christians attend worship services in churches that are built in many different styles. Most groups of Christians have a minister or priest who gives talks during services. These sermons are based on the Bible. Christians also have special rituals called sacraments, like baptism and Holy Communion.

¹² Today, there are at least 22,000 Christian groups. There are Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Quakers. Even within these big groups, there are small differences. For example, there are Russian and Greek Orthodox Christians. There are also thirteen other Orthodox groups. There are Baptist, Lutheran, and Anglican Protestants. Some Christians have quiet meetings, like the Quakers, while Catholics hold formal masses in beautiful cathedrals, and charismatic groups have noisy celebrations. However, Christians of all kinds believe that Jesus Christ was "the Light of the world."

Name _____



Date _____

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<p>1. Which of the following is the best synonym for "messiah?"</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Teacher</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Savior</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Priest</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Leader</p>	<p>2. Which is the holy book of Christianity?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The Koran</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The Torah</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The Sutras</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D The Bible</p>
<p>3. Which religion was Jesus raised in?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Catholicism</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Christianity</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Islam</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Judaism</p>	<p>4. What is a parable?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A A famous Roman quote</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B A story with a hidden meaning</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C A funny story</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D A true story</p>
<p>5. Which of the following are symbols of Christianity?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Cross and a fish</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Goat and horns</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Whale and a fish</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Wine and a boat</p>	<p>6. True or False: There are not very many branches of Christianity.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>7. Who was in power when Jesus was born?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The Greeks</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The Romans</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The shepherds</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D The mummies</p>	<p>8. What does "gospel" mean?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Tax collection</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Money</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Cook and bottle washer</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Good news</p>