

Christianity

WHO IS GOD?

Christianity is a monotheistic religion, meaning that Christians believe in one omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and omnipresent (always present) God. Although Christians believe in only one God, they believe that God is made up of three persons: God the Father, who created the world; Jesus Christ the son, who lived on earth to invite humankind into a relationship with God; and the Holy Spirit, God's continual presence and power among humankind. The unity of these three "persons" is called the Trinity.

The Trinity expresses the idea of eternal relationship and community. All healthy relationships and community have their source in God. The Trinity is often explained by making a comparison to water. Although water can be liquid, ice, or steam, it is still always the same substance with all the same chemical elements and composition, even though it has different forms.

WHERE DID WE COME FROM?

Many Christians believe the entire universe was created by God out of nothing, creation ex nihilo. According to the Bible, God spoke and the universe began. The entire process of creation took seven days, according to the Bible. Some believe this describes a literal seven day period, and others see it as figurative. Most, do, however, see God as creator and sustainer of all living things. Adam and Eve, the first man and first woman, were made by God in the image of God.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

Christians believe that people were made to be in a close, loving relationship with God. Human rebellion and sin has separated us from this relationship with God, from one another, and fragmented us within. God has been working in people lives throughout history, in order to bring people back into a loving relationship. After giving the law to Moses, and sending prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, God came to earth himself as Jesus in order to reopen the possibility of a relationship with God. Jesus was killed by crucifixion (being nailed to a large wooden cross), but he rose from the dead, overcoming death. Christians believe that Jesus' death and resurrection allows people to overcome sin and enter a life-giving relationship with God. They also believe that Jesus' life, teachings, and sacrifice can bring about reconciliation among people in this world. Christians work for justice and peace here and now with faith and hope in an eternal kingdom with perfect harmony and glory to God.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

The Bible is the Christian sacred text. The Bible recounts the way God has worked through history to bring people back in harmony with God, with others and with one's self. The Bible is a library of different kinds of books containing historical accounts, teaching, songs, poetry, letters, and words from God's prophets. The Bible is divided up into two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament describes everything from the creation of the earth to right before the birth of Jesus. The New Testament recounts the life of Jesus and the development of the early

Christian church.

In addition to the Bible (sometimes referred to as the Scriptures), there are three other sources of Christian belief and understanding: tradition, which is the worship and rituals that developed in the early church, but which are not necessarily recorded in the Bible; reason, which is the scholarship and ideas of men and women who have devoted their lives to understanding God; and experience, which is the changes people sense in their lives as they follow Jesus' teachings.

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO?

Christians believe that Jesus opens up the possibility of a life-giving relationship with God, both here on earth, and in life after death. Christians believe that saying "yes" to this invitation means having a relationship with God—a relationship that deepens and grows and matures as any other relationship would. Different groups of Christians emphasize different ways of deepening this relationship: worship at church, reading the Bible, prayer, singing, serving the poor, being baptised.

There are three major branches of Christianity: Orthodox Christianity seeks to honor the traditions that the earliest Christians practiced. It is the historic Church of the East. Catholic Christianity seeks to follow the teachings of Jesus based on tradition, and on the Catholic Church leaders' interpretation of the Bible. The Roman or Western became distinct from the Eastern in 1054 AD/CE. Protestant Christianity is a very broad term for Christian denominations that grew out of the 16th century Reformation. These churches base their understanding of the Christian life mostly on their reading of the Bible. Because there are different ways to interpret the Bible, there are a great number of different protestant denominations, and they emphasize different aspects and expressions of Jesus' teachings.

WHAT'S GOING ON TODAY?

There are an estimated 1.9 billion Christian people in the world today (source: 2000 World Almanac). Although it was founded in the Middle East, and is still practiced there today, Christianity's presence extends throughout the world.

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE IT?

Christianity is most often represented by a cross, which symbolizes the cross where Jesus was crucified.

Christianity is also represented by a fish, also known as the ichthys symbol (ichthys is Greek for fish). The Greek word ichthys contains five letters. Each letter is the beginning of a word pertaining to Jesus. In English, those words are Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior.

The 411 on the founding of Christianity

Who: Jesus of Nazareth (called "the Christ" or "the Messiah") is the founder of Christianity. Christians believe that Jesus is from God; he is God's son. Christians believe that Jesus is not only God's son, but he is God. Although he was also a human, historical figure, Jesus is God come to earth in human

form.

What: The root of the word Christianity is "Christ", from the Greek word that means "chosen one" or "anointed one of God". Christian literally means "little Christ", and the term applies to those who believe that Jesus is the son of God, and that He died for the forgiveness of sins, and was raised from the dead by God.

When: Jesus of Nazareth was thought to have been born around 6 BCE (formerly BC, or Before Christ, BCE stands for Before the Common Era and applies to all years before year one of the Common Era, CE.) He began his ministry at age 30, and is thought to have been crucified after three years in ministry (age 33). His followers carried on his teachings and ministry, and are still doing so to this day.

Where: Jesus lived most of his life in the Roman province of Judea, which is roughly the region of today's Israel. Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth (in the area of Galilee) and died near the city of Jerusalem. Throughout history, people have heard about Jesus, and have decided to follow his teachings. As a result, Christianity today is practiced all over the world in many different cultures.

WHAT IF I WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information about Christianity, check out these great links:

For information on Protestant Christianity:

- * www.christianity.com
- * www.gospel.com
- * www.beliefnet.com
- * www.britannica.com

For information on Catholicism:

- * www.catholic.org
- * www.catholic.com
- * www.usccb.org
- * catholicism.about.com

For information on Orthodox Christianity:

- * www.goarch.org
- * www.patriarchate.org
- * www.orthodoxinfo.com
- * www.oca.org

Sources:

Baima, T. Christianity: Origins and beliefs. in Beversluis, Joel (Ed.). (1995). A Sourcebook for Earth's Community of Religions. Ada: CoNexus Press.

Britannica Online -- Christianity (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=108294&tocid=0>)

Holy Bible.

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