

History of Christianity

Christianity is based upon the teachings of **Jesus**, a Jew who lived his life in the Roman province of Palestine.

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

During the fourth century, the Roman Catholic Church split and the **Eastern Orthodox** branch was formed. Churches became officially separate in 1054. Orthodox churches are largely 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 changes in doctrine and practice to rebel against the Catholic Church and power of the Pope. 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. Of all of the major religions, Christianity has the most denominations of any religion.

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 supposedly by **immaculate conception**, born of God and not of man to a virgin named Mary who merely carried him to birth but did not conceive him. His birth is celebrated at Christmas time with hymns and gift giving and his death is celebrated at Easter, though these Christian traditions and many others can be traced to older traditions from earlier religions. 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 is said to have performed many miracles and spoke to many people about his "Father in Heaven" (God). He was arrested for claiming to be God's son and was hung on the cross by the Romans at about 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 and live according to his teachings.

The life of Jesus, as well as his ancestors is found 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. The **New Testament** is unique to Christianity.

Christians believe that Jesus was fully human and fully God and as the Son of God is part of the **Holy Trinity**: God the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. All Christians believe in heaven and that only those who sincerely repent their sins before God will be saved and join Him in heaven. Belief in hell and Satan varies among groups and individuals.