# Christianity

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| **General** | **Core Belief**  Christians believe in living according to the loving nature of God as revealed by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection helped in this task by Holy Spirit and by communicating with God through prayer. They believe Jesus is both fully human and fully divine and believe there is only one God, but exists in the mystery of the Trinity. The core Christian beliefs are summarised in the Nicene Creed said by Christians around the world.  **‘Rules’ of Life**  All Christians try to follow the example that Jesus taught and lived, one of the foremost tenets of which is to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and to love one’s neighbour as oneself’. Many Christians would believe also in trying to keep Judaic Ten Commandments. In practice, this might mean trying to meet everyday situations with a ‘Christlike’ response, arrived at through prayer, quiet reflection and consultation of the Scriptures. Many Christians will acceptance of these "Rules for life" - through a service, often but not exclusively, during teenage years. This may be First Communion (especially in Catholic churches) and Confirmation (of baptismal promises made as a baby), or Believer's Baptism (eg Baptist and Pentecostal churches).  **Scripture**  The Christian scriptures are called ‘The Bible’, which comprises both ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Testaments. New does not imply better than, or replacing the old, but refers to the fact it was written later.  The ‘Old Testament’ contains the books of the Hebrew Scriptures, to which Jesus testified, and which Christians therefore consider to be part also of the Christian body of scriptures. The ‘New Testament’ includes:   * The Four Gospels - four accounts of the life of Jesus * The Acts – accounts of the establishment of the early churches and communities established in different locations * The Epistles – letters to those churches and to early Christians * and other writings such as the ‘Book of Revelation’.   In addition to this, the writings of the early church ‘Fathers’ and various Christian saints play an important part in Christian teachings.  **Daily Acts of Faith**  Gathering together for services, many Christians pray and read the Bible daily, and often use the ‘The Lord’s Prayer’, which Jesus taught his disciples. Worship on a Sunday is usual. Many Christians regard Sunday as a weekly day of rejoicing of Christ’s resurrection, a victory over sin and death.  The regular sharing of bread and wine (called according to denomination: the Eucharist, Communion, Mass or Lord’s Supper) is important for Christians but the frequency of this act of remembrance varies according to the Christian tradition followed. Indeed, Quakers and the Salvation Army do not hold Communion services. In addition, many Christians follow an individual programme of devotion that may include studying the Scriptures, private prayer and meditation.  **Major Annual Events**  The most widely observed Christian seasons and events are:  Advent – a time of prayerful preparation in anticipation of Christ’s birth at Christmas and his second coming at the end of history.  Christmas - to celebrate Christ’s birth: a joyous festival marked by the exchange of cards and presents.  Lent – 40 days to commemorate Christ’s sojourn in the wilderness: a time of fasting, prayer and charitable giving as acts of penitence.  Holy Week – to commemorate all the events leading up to Christ’s death e.g. Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday    Easter - in commemoration of Christ’s death and resurrection  Ascension Day - to commemorate the day on which Christ ascended into the heavens: a solemn remembrance, taking place 40 days Easter Sunday, which is always a Thursday.  Pentecost/Whitsun - to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to Christ’s Disciples 50 days after Easter Sunday. A day represented by symbols of the Holy Spirit such as a dive or the tongues of fire. These are often represented in the colours white and red.  **Births**  Jesus taught that children are to be made welcome, and the birth of a baby in a Christian household is a cause for celebration.  For many Christians denominations it is important for a baby to be ‘baptised’ or ‘christened’ (the ritual washing away of original sin by water) when an infant. This ceremony is a joyful opportunity for friends and family to welcome the new baby into the church, and to make promises about bringing up the child to know Christ. ‘God Parents’ are chosen and the baby is given its ‘Christian’ names. Some churches (e.g. Baptist and Pentecostal) practice believer’s baptism when an age of understanding has been reached. In these churches, a Service of Infant Dedication is held which give thanks for the birth of the child and promises are made about bringing up the child to know Christ.  **Names**  Most Christians have at least two names: one or more ‘Christian’ names, followed by a family name which for men traditionally remains constant, but may change for women if they follow custom of adopting their husband’s family name once they are married.  **Diet**  General: Although some Christian denominations ban the use of stimulating substances (such as alcohol, tobacco, tea and coffee), following the teaching of Peter the Apostle, early Christians taught that Jesus was not teaching it was religiously forbidden to eat any particular kinds of foods.  Specific: Some Christians would traditionally undertake some kind of fast or abstinence as a spiritual discipline during the period of Lent. Fasting at other times of the year can be a preparation for communion, an act of penitence, or an individual act of devotion.  **Language**  As Christianity is ethnically diverse, members of Christian families in the United Kingdom may speak several languages other than English, depending on their cultural background.  Church services would generally take place in the language of the host country. ‘The Bible’, although written originally in Hebrew and ancient Greek, is generally read in translation.  **Dress**  Although some Christian denominations may issue their own guidelines, in general Christians are not enjoined in matters of everyday wear to dress in a particular way.  Religious orders of Christian monks and nuns may have forms of dress, which would generally entail the wearing of darker colours, full-length robes and head coverings for women.  **Places of Worship**  A Christian place of worship sometimes called a Church or Chapel, may vary greatly in its presentation, from a plain room to ornate and richly decorated building. It would be usual, however, to find a focal point, which depends on denomination, may include flowers and the Bible on a table, to a draped altar, crucifix and statues of saints.  Offerings of money are customarily taken to a Christian place of worship, to be made either during or after the service.  Dress etiquette varies, but most visitors would generally find it acceptable to be dressed modestly. Historically, there has been a custom for men to remove hats and women to wear them and this has been adopted in some churches in Birmingham.  Inside the building, seating is on chairs or rows of benches (‘pews’). During the service, worshippers may stand, sit and kneel at various points.  **The Home**  Some Christians may have a small shrine at home, with sacred pictures, flowers and a candle. A copy of the Bible would normally be kept in a Christian household, and the wearing of the cross or crucifix as a pendant is common. | |
| **Classroom Practice** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| Do attempt to represent the Christian belief that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. Jesus was not half man and half God. Nor was Jesus God disguised as a man.  Do attempt to help pupils understand that Christianity has diversity and takes a wide variety of different forms e.g. Catholic, Orthodox, Church of England, Pentecostal, Baptist, etc.  Do try and avoid using Bible stories as the basis of a topic when its relevance is tenuous e.g. Noah’s Ark isn’t really relevant to a theme on water.  Do help the pupils to understand that the Eucharist is also a memorial service as expressed in Jesus’ words “do this in remembrance of me”.  Do be aware that different denominations hold different beliefs about the Eucharist. For some it represents communion with God whilst others believe that the Holy Spirit transforms the bread and the wine into Jesus’ body and blood. | Don’t represent Jesus in Christian belief as being merely a good man or wise teacher or as being a prophet. For Christians Jesus is God incarnate represented by title like ‘The Son of God’, ‘The Christ’, and ‘The Messiah’.  Don’t liken Christian belief in the Crucifixion to belief in a human sacrifice, which placates a blood-thirsty God. The Crucifixion has to be understood in the light of the Christian claim that Jesus is both fully God and fully human hence God is on the Cross.  Don’t use the term ‘The Holy Ghost’ as it suggests a trivial and spooky concept of the third person in the Trinity. Do use the term ‘The Holy Spirit’.  Don’t neglect the resurrection as part of the Easter Story. However difficult it may seem the resurrection and the Crucifixion are inextricably linked and one should not be mentioned without the other.  Don’t suggest that in Christianity Mary or the Saints are worshipped. Prayers are made to Mary or the Saints as mediators.  Don’t assume Christian belief by using phrases like “our God” or “we believe” as this will not be appropriate for all pupils. As with all religions distancing devised should be used e.g. “Christians believe…” or “Part of the Christian tradition is that…”. |
| **Visits** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| Do attempt to organise visits to a church when they are busy. Visiting an empty building can reinforce the impression that some children have that churches are a monument to a faith, which is no longer relevant. |  |