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Christianity

The Life of Jesus

The central figure in Christianity is **Jesus of Nazareth**, whose life inspired what was to become the world's most popular religion. In order to understand Christianity, one must be familiar with the life of Jesus. Below is the retelling of his life, focusing only on the main events.

The Virgin Mary & the Birth of Jesus

The birth & childhood of Jesus is told in Luke, the 3rd book in the New Testament. The story begins when God sends the **angel Gabriel** to **Mary**, a young woman who lives in the city of Nazareth in Galilee. She is betrothed (engaged) to **Joseph** the Carpenter.

Gabriel tells Mary that she is blessed & that she will give birth to a son named Jesus. When Mary becomes fearful, Gabriel assures her that Jesus will be great. Since she is not married, Mary wonders how she will conceive a child. Gabriel tells her that Jesus will be the Son of God & so the Holy Spirit will make the birth possible. Christians call this the **immaculate conception**. Mary sees the truth of her calling & says, "I am the handmaiden of the Lord."

At the time of Jesus' birth, Mary & Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. The emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus, had ordered everyone to register for taxes in the town of their birth. Thus, Mary & Joseph go to **Bethlehem** where Jesus is born. Mary places him in a **manger** (an animal food trough) in a stable.

That evening, in the hills of Bethlehem, some shepherds see a new star in the sky. An angel tells them it is a sign that the **savior**, Christ the Lord, has come.

The shepherds follow the **Star of Bethlehem** until they find Mary, Joseph, & the baby Jesus. The shepherds then speak throughout the land of what they have witnessed.



In power paragraph form & complete sentences, explain why Christians consider the birth of Christ to be a miracle? _____

Jesus happened to be born in Bethlehem *because*

- a. that's where the emperor of Rome was.
- b. it had a manger in which he could be born.
- c. Mary & Joseph were there registering for taxes.
- d. 3 wise men would follow the new star there.

The Wise Men Visit

Knowing of the holy birth, three wise men come to Jerusalem to find Jesus, the newborn King of the Jews. **Herod**, the king, is threatened by this news & wants to dispose of the child! He asks the wise men to find Jesus *so that he may worship him*. (Is this *really* his purpose?) Rejoicing, the 3 wise men follow the Star of Bethlehem until they find Mary & Jesus. However, on their way, they were *warned by God not to return to Herod!* (Can you guess why?)

Afterwards, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream, *warning* him that Herod will try to destroy Jesus! The angel then tells Joseph to take his family & *flee* to Egypt!

When the wise men do not return, Herod is furious! He orders the death of all male children in Bethlehem under 2 years of age!!!

After Herod dies, an angel again appears to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take his family into the land of Israel. Since Archelaus, Herod's son, still reigns in Judea, Joseph goes to the city of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. Consequently, Jesus grew up in **Nazareth**.

Jesus & John the Baptist

Luke, Chapter 1, describes the birth of **John the Baptist**, son of a priest named Zacharias & his wife, Elizabeth. Like the birth of Jesus, John's birth was blessed. The angel Gabriel tells Zacharias that John will be full of holiness & turn many others to God.

Now in his 20s, John begins fulfilling his **prophecy**. He lives simply, dresses in camel skins (Whew!) & eats locusts & wild honey. (Yum!) He wanders through Jordan, preaching to the people about *the coming of the Messiah* & urging them to **repent** their sins & live a just life. Before he preaches, he **baptizes** people by immersing them in the water of the **River Jordan**.



With supporting details & full sentences explain *how* the 3 wise men **AND** Joseph helped **protect** Jesus' life. _____

(2 pts)

(Now do you understand the name "Jesus of Nazareth"?)



A synonym for "repent" is _____.

(Be sure to look this up in your thesaurus!)

When Jesus arrives to receive baptism, John knows that *here is the Messiah*. After Jesus is baptized, the **Holy Spirit** comes to him in the form of a dove, and a voice comes from heaven saying,

"This is my beloved, Son,
in whom I am well pleased."

Herod, hearing of John's influence, shuts him up in a prison. Some time later, John the Baptist is beheaded.

From this time, **baptism** has grown into an important religious rite for Christians. It is said to cleanse followers of their sins.

Many people went to John for baptism & wisdom. He spoke of generosity, honesty, & non-violence. To the people he said, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; & he who has food, let him do likewise." To the tax collectors he said, "Collect *no more than* is appointed you." To the soldiers he advised, "Rob no one by violence or false accusation, & be content with your wages." (Luke 3: 10-14)

Miracles

Christians believe Jesus performed many miracles. Usually these miracles involved healing the sick or even raising the dead. These usual deeds, along with the power of his words, brought Jesus many followers. But he also threatened the religious & political establishment. Here are a few of those miraculous episodes.

Jesus in Galilee

At about the age of 30, Jesus began to preach in Galilee. One day, walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw 2 brothers, Simon & Andrew, casting fishing nets. Jesus took a boat out to them & began to teach. Though they had caught nothing all day, Jesus told the brothers to cast their nets again. This time hundreds of fish rose in the nets. Simon & Andrew were astonished & immediately became **disciples** of Jesus. Soon they were joined by another pair of brothers, James & John.

*Explain in complete sentences, what John the Baptist realizes **after** baptizing Jesus?*

What was his "sign"? (You need 2 answers here!)

*In a complete sentence, what does **baptism** symbolize for modern Christians?*



*Synthesizing information: Complete this paragraph with **2+ sentences** using details from the text.*

Jesus was seen as a genuine menace (danger) to the religious & political institutions of his times.

Jesus' disciples included:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____



The Feeding of the Multitude

As Jesus' fame spread, throngs of people sought his presence. One day he & his **disciples** were followed by multitudes of seekers. Jesus was moved with compassion, seeing them as sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them.

Later in the day, the disciples advised Jesus to send the people away so they might feed themselves. But Jesus told them to bring what food was available. They did this, but collected only 5 loaves of bread & 2 fish.

Jesus took the loaves & the fish & gave thanks. He distributed them to his disciples who, in turn, distributed them to the people. This continued until everyone, about 5000, were fed!

Jesus Walks on Water

Jesus sent his disciples into a boat to cross the sea of Galilee. He went alone up a mountain to pray until evening. Soon the sea became rough & the boat was tossed about violently. Seeing this, Jesus walked on water toward the vessel.

Sighting Jesus, the disciples were afraid, thinking he was a spirit. But Jesus spoke to them & calmed their fears. Peter then answered, "Lord, if it is you, let me come to you on the water."

"Come," answered Jesus. Peter walked on the water towards his Master. But when a strong wind came, Peter began to sink. Jesus took him by the hand, & said to him, "O you of little faith, why do you doubt?"

Raising Lazarus From the Dead

In a village called Bethany lived 2 sisters. Jesus was close to this family. One day, Mary sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick. Two days later, Jesus went to Bethany, knowing already that Lazarus was dead.

"Lord," cried Martha, "if you had been here my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

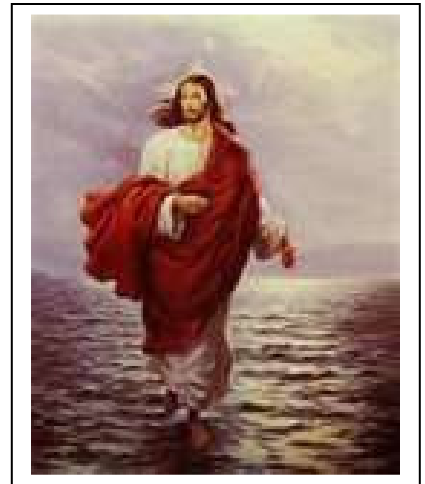


Making Analogies:

_____ : sheep ::

Jesus : followers

(Be careful here; don't be fooled! ☺)



Then Mary came to Jesus, weeping. She took him to the grave of Lazarus, which was a cave with a stone in front of it. Jesus wept for his friend, who had already been dead for 4 days.

"Lord," Martha cried, "by this time he is decaying."

"Did I not say to you," answered Jesus, "that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?"

So, Jesus had them roll away the stone. He thanked God & said, "Lazarus, come forth."

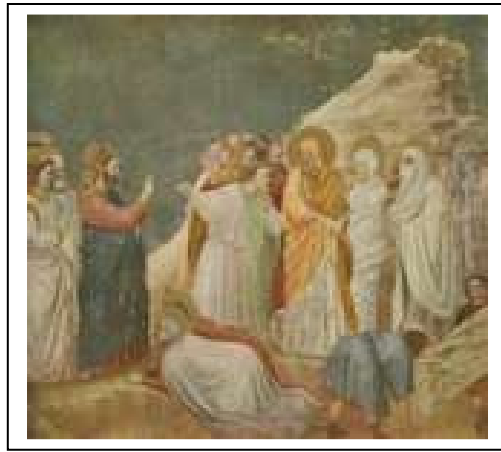
And Lazarus rose from the dead.

The Last Supper & the Crucifixion

In the spring of his 3rd year of ministry, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate **Passover**. According to Matthew's Gospel, crowds of people welcomed him into the city, proclaiming him to be the Messiah. Immediately upon seeing this, the Pharisees began plotting against Jesus. These religious leaders demanded that people conform only to the laws of Moses. Because Jesus disregarded their traditions in order to meet human needs, & because his following was growing, he threatened them!

Once inside the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus made even more enemies. He went to the Temple built by Herod the Great. Instead of finding a quiet place of worship, Jesus found the Temple was crowded with the noise of merchants & money-changers. *Outraged*, Jesus overturned their tables & drove merchants from the Temple, shouting, "Make not God's house a marketplace." The Sadducees, who controlled the Temple worship, then joined the Pharisees in their opposition of Jesus.

That evening, Jesus & his disciples gathered to have supper together. In an act of humility, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Then he took some bread, broke a piece, & said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And when he blessed the wine, he said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood.



In conclusion...what was the miracle of Lazarus?

Traveling to Jerusalem for the *purpose of* _____ (doing what?),
Jesus came upon a crowd of **people declaring** that
he was their _____.

Applying past vocabulary in an analogy:
Jerusalem : **marketplace** :: Athens : _____
(Don't know? Check your Athens reading...)



BONUS: What great **Renaissance** artist is credited with creating this painting of the "Last Supper" ↑?

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (I Corinthians 11: 24-25)

These instructions are followed in the Christian sacrament of Holy Communion in which bread & wine are consumed. Though most Christians repeat these actions, the practice has different meanings to different denominations.

When the meal was over, Jesus told his disciples that he would soon be gone. He gave his final commandment, the bedrock of his teachings: *love one another*. (John 13: 34-35)

Later that night, in the **Garden of Gethsemane** on the Mount of Olives, Jesus was arrested. He was taken before **Pontius Pilate**, the Roman ruler, & charged with **blasphemy** & with organizing a revolt against Rome. Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion, the common form of punishment for revolutionaries. It meant that the sentenced person would be *tied or nailed to a cross & left to die...slowly*.

Jesus was whipped & a crown of thorns was placed on his head to mock him as a king. Then, he was led to Golgotha, a hill outside of Jerusalem. On his back he, alone, carried the wooden cross on which he was to be executed. A crowd of people followed, weeping for Jesus. This route toward death is called *Via Dolorosa*, the Way of Sorrow. (You will read about this later.)

Jesus' hands & feet were nailed to the cross. When he was mocked & taunted by soldiers & the mob, the dying Jesus said these now famous words: "Father, forgive them for they know *not* what they do." Hours later, & in utter pain, Jesus cried out, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" And then he died.

After his death, Jesus' body was wrapped in a linen shroud & placed in a tomb that was sealed with a rock. The tomb was offered by a rich man, for Jesus' family would not have been able to afford such a burial.

But the story does not end there; for then, came the resurrection...



Upon meeting Pontius Pilate, **Jesus was charged with what 2 specific crimes?** 1) _____

2) _____

A **synonym** for the word "**mock**" might be _____.

(Use that thesaurus of yours!)



The Resurrection

The most compelling episode in the life of Jesus is considered by many to be the resurrection. The word **resurrection** actually means "rebirth." For Christians, however, the words has special significance.

According to Matthew's Gospel, 3 days after the crucifixion, some friends of Jesus went to visit his tomb. An angel spoke to them, saying that Jesus had risen from death. As they departed to share the news, they met Jesus, who instructed them to find his disciples. But when Jesus met with 2 of them, they did not recognize him. Though he knew all the scriptures & the story of his own life, it was not until they ate bread together that they felt his presence. *Finally*, the disciples believed that Jesus was resurrected.

Jesus revealed himself again at the Sea of Tiberias where his disciples were fishing. Though they caught nothing all night, he filled their nets with fish just as he had done years before.

Jesus continued to appear to his disciples for 40 days, teaching of the kingdom of God. Finally, atop a mountain in Galilee, Jesus said these final words to his disciples:

"All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. Go therefore & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father** & of the **Son** & of the **Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded of you; & lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28: 18-20)

With this final instruction, the spread of Christianity began. It started with a handful of Apostles, but steadily spread throughout the world, shaping history & mankind.

And, as you may know, the **Easter** holiday commemorates this resurrection of Jesus.

BONUS: What French word also means "rebirth"?

(Think Florence...art...revival of "the classics..." ©)

Describe what occurred three days after the crucifixion of Jesus. _____

What is the **difference between an apostle & a disciple?** _____

Christians honor & celebrate the holiday of _____ in honor of Jesus' resurrection.

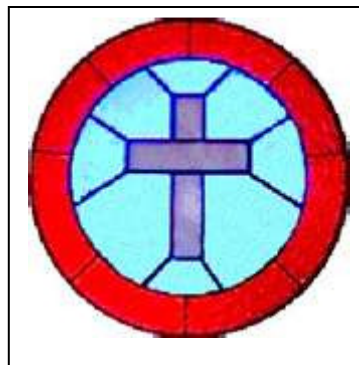
Branches of Christianity

Christianity has undergone many changes over the course of history. Though it began in ancient times as one church, it has divided into many separate churches, each with its own set of beliefs & practices. For non-Christians, understanding the differences among Christian churches can be difficult.

The most significant division within Christianity occurred in 1054 CE when the Eastern & Western churches separated. The Eastern church was composed of the churches of Greece, Eastern & Western Europe, & Russia. The capital of the Western church was **Rome**, & the Roman Pope or Bishop of Rome, claimed authority over both churches. The Western church believed that the Pope was the person closest to God &, therefore, most capable of leading Christians. But the Eastern church did not believe the Pope should have power over them. This conflict caused the churches to split. From then on, the Roman Catholic Church has been led by the Bishop of Rome, or the Pope.

In the 16th century, a movement called the **Reformation** caused a split which divided the Roman Catholic Church. At that time, there were many independent Christian groups. Although they did not all share the same beliefs they each rejected the central authority of the Pope & came to be known as **Protestants**. It is *difficult* to speak about Protestantism as one religion since it has *divided itself into 100s of separate sects*. They include such groups as Quakers, Baptists, Methodists & Presbyterians.

Each of these branches of Christianity maintains different beliefs & practices in different ways. You can use an encyclopedia to find out more about the denominations.



Recalling past history: **Who** was responsible for **dividing** the Roman empire into east & west?

(Go ahead, check your Rome readings....)

Using context clues: **What** is the "root word" of Protestant? _____