



# CHRISTIANITY AN INTRODUCTION

What's it all about?

Sometimes we miss the most obvious questions. We may know that Christianity has influenced our culture to a huge extent over the years, we may have heard stories about Jesus of Nazareth when we were little, we may enjoy attending candle-lit carol services..... But have we ever considered the basic questions: 'What is Christianity all about?' and 'What has it got to do with me?' This simple guide will help you to begin to answer these questions, and suggests ways to explore further.



“ I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. ”

*C.S.Lewis,  
author of the Narnia series*

“ God is always the life-bringer. Therefore the heart of the Christian faith is not about threat but invitation. ”

*Alan Bartlett, theologian*



# FINDING GOD HAS FOUND YOU

Have you ever felt that you have caught a glimpse of God in the wonders of creation or in the joy of loving relationships? This is no surprise as Christians understand God to be the source of all that exists, and the source of all love. But a far deeper glimpse of God can be found in the person of Jesus. In Jesus we find God, come to us, in human terms.

20 centuries ago Jesus offered an invitation to live life differently. He invited people to change their thinking because there was a new world order about to break in. He said that heaven was going to come to earth – in fact had already come. It was going to begin with him and would grow, just like a tiny seed could grow into a tree in which birds could build their nests.

It is estimated that there are 2 billion people who have some loyalty towards Jesus today – more than any other world religion and still increasing. He continues to call people, not to 'become religious' but to become part of this movement for change.

Jesus had a manifesto:

“ God’s Spirit is on me; he’s chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, ‘This is God’s year to act!’ ”  
*From Luke’s gospel, chapter 4, The Message*

This was what he wanted to do for people. Heaven was poised to affect human lives – positively. Jesus’ invitation to ‘change our lives because God’s kingdom is here’ remains as contemporary and relevant as ever.

Jesus said: **‘I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness.’**  
(From John’s gospel, chapter 10)



## CROSS-PURPOSES

Jesus may be known for his wise teaching, his challenging miracles, his befriending unlikely people, and for irritating the religious leaders of his day – but it is his death on a cross (and what happened afterwards) which sets him apart. Unexpectedly, at the heart of the Christian faith is a God who suffers, who suffers for the sake of others.

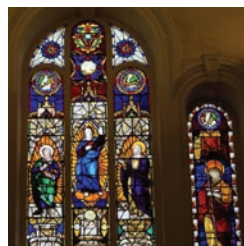
But why do Christians see Jesus' death as more significant than that of so many other people? They believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that his death had a very particular purpose. On many occasions Jesus said he would lay down his life, and then take it up again. He said he would do this because of his never-ending love for people, in order to open up the radical way of living he proclaimed in his manifesto.

Through Jesus' sacrificial action, and his subsequent resurrection, the opportunity to make a new start is made possible for us all. We so often live self-centred lives, and we live with the consequences of this. On the cross God took upon himself the mess we make of the world and of our lives, and transformed it. What we find we cannot do for ourselves, because of our human limitations, God did for us. Then God's inexhaustible and life-changing love wins through. Historians from the time tell us that although Jesus died and was buried, afterwards his followers witnessed his physical presence. They ate with him, and talked to him. They knew they had met with Jesus – and the Christian church spread throughout the world as a result.

The cross is a mystery that even clever theologians struggle to explain. It is a reality "too rich to comprehend". What is important is not tying it up in a neat parcel, but seeking to enter into the possibilities it opens for us.

“ The only way to make sense of the cross eventually is to spend time at its foot. ”

*John Pritchard – former Bishop of Oxford*



## SPARK

The ignition spark on the oven just wasn't doing anything. It was supposed to deliver the spark to the gas and then we could get cooking. But nothing. All the hardware was there. The oven, the gas rings, the gas connected. But no spark. It had become clogged with years of dirt and grease. It needed a clean.

Life. It's all there, but the spark is missing.

Christians believe that we are not fully alive until we have the 'spark' of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. We were never meant to live life without him. It's as senseless as trying to cook without power. But how do we get this spark?

By becoming 'religious'? No.

By obeying a lot of rules? No.

By going to church at every opportunity? No.

None of these in themselves deal with the issue. We need to get rid of the dirt and press the 'ignition' button.

We do this not by covering up the dirt, but by getting rid of it. There's stuff that spoils all our lives – weaknesses like self-preservation, cowardice, cruelty, jealousy - the grime and dirt builds up inside us. We can get rid of this by asking God to forgive us for the wrong we have done. We simply need to admit it and say sorry. Then we can ask for God's Spirit to make us the people God has always intended us to be, to make us truly alive.

### Trinity

We see in these pages one of the unique things about the Christian faith – the model of God as Trinity. We know God in creation (often referred to as Father); God in history (Jesus Christ, the Son), and God in us and in the world (the Holy Spirit). This is God above, God beside, God within. Relationships are at the heart of what makes us human and at the core of what makes God himself. Here is a divine community of love which calls us into love too.



## NEVER THE SAME AGAIN

When God breaks into our lives, people are naturally awestruck. Life is never the same again. We are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, to become his people, to become part of his movement for change. We are called to be changed on a daily basis by God's Spirit at work within us, so that we slowly begin to be more like Jesus.

Many people think that boredom or misery are the consequences of following Jesus. So they are stunned by his words when he said he had come to give life – more and better life than we have ever dreamed of. Life as a Christian is an adventure, a challenge, a journey which will continue for the rest of our lives.



Christianity is not a theory or a speculation but a life;  
not a philosophy of life but a life and a living process.... Try it!



*Samuel Taylor Coleridge, poet*

Christians seek to live differently as a result of their meeting with God. Part of their living differently is about seeking to continue encountering God each day; through prayer, through worshipping with others, through reading the Bible, through belonging to a group of Christians in a local church, through discovering God's activity in the world. Another part of living differently is about seeking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in being just, loving, merciful and generous in relationship with all people. Christians do not always live up to God's standards, but they know what it is to begin again in God's forgiveness and love.

It is impossible for the Christian faith to be encapsulated in such a small leaflet – this is simply a very short introduction. For more information about the Christian faith, you can explore the options on the next page.

## EXPLORING FURTHER

Speak with the person who gave you this leaflet. Tell them what you have read and thought. What might you want to ask them about their faith and how they live it out?

Go to your local church and ask if there are any introductory courses which you can join (see [www.achurchnearyou.com/](http://www.achurchnearyou.com/) for details of CofE churches in your area).

**www.trypraying.co.uk** 'Trypraying' encourages people to try relating to God simply by praying for a week. A free booklet and/or app is available from the website. If you have found this leaflet helpful, you will recognise some of the words in 'trypraying'.

**www.rejesus.co.uk** Packed full of information about Jesus' life and his significance, and what it means to follow in his footsteps.

**www.christianity.org.uk** The website of the Christian Enquiry Agency, which seeks to inform people about Jesus Christ and Christianity. You can ask questions, order a free booklet or request prayers here.

**www.biblegateway.com** Allows easy access to the Bible on-line or via an App.

Books to read:

**Conversations with Jesus of Nazareth** by Simon Parke

**Unapologetic: Why, despite everything, Christianity can still make surprising emotional sense** by Francis Spufford

Or read an account of Jesus' life in one of the gospels in the bible. Mark's gospel is the shortest, and can be read in just a few hours. A modern, readable version like 'The Message' will be helpful.

This leaflet was inspired by the Oxford 'Living Faith' series, and the 'Trypraying' material, with thanks.



**DIOCESE OF TRURO**  
DISCOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM  
GROWING THE CHURCH