



World History Studies Weekly



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The Origins of Christianity

When you think of Christian symbols or holidays, what comes to mind? Did you know early Christians kept education alive during the Middle Ages? Did you know pretzels have a Christian history?

We've already studied the Jewish people, who were the first to believe in only one true god. Those who were polytheistic (believed in many gods) persecuted Jewish people for their beliefs. In such difficult times, Jewish people hoped that someone would help them—a messiah.

It was around A.D. 30 when a young Jewish man named Jesus of Nazareth began to gain a following. We don't know much about Jesus' childhood, but as a young adult Jesus was a carpenter. He soon began his religious teachings, talking about God, his Heavenly Father. He liked to teach with stories called parables.

Jesus taught that people needed to believe in God and ask forgiveness for their wrongdoings. He stressed the need to love God and to love all people too. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself," which is also part of other religious teachings. Christians believe he performed several miracles, including calming a storm at sea, giving sight to a blind man and even raising a man from the dead. Some people wondered if Jesus was the Messiah for whom the Jews



Tradition says that pretzels were made to look like a person's arms crossed in prayer.

were waiting. Others rejected this thought.

Roman leaders became angry when they heard Jesus talk about the kingdom of heaven. Was this young man trying to conquer them, they wondered. Jesus was popular and cheering crowds often formed around him. The Roman leaders labeled Jesus a troublemaker. They arrested him and ordered him to be killed. In ancient Rome, the method for putting someone to death was crucifixion. People found guilty were nailed to large wooden crosses and left outside to die. Jesus was crucified and just before he died he said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The Bible tells the story of Jesus appearing to some of his followers, alive and well, three days after he was buried. For many, this was proof that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah.

We call 12 of Jesus' closest followers his disciples or apostles. After his death, the disciples continued to spread his teachings. They taught that Jesus was the son of God and he came to Earth to save people from their sins. The name Christ comes from the Greek word *Christos*, meaning savior or messiah. We call followers of Jesus Christians, and the religion based on Jesus' teachings is known as Christianity.

Connections

The 'Irish' Saint Who Wasn't Really Irish

People parade in New York City and turn the rivers green in Chicago every year on St. Patrick's Day. This saint (holy person) lived 1,500 years ago. But did you know St. Patrick wasn't even Irish?

Patrick was born in Britain to wealthy parents. When he was 16, Irish pirates attacked his home and took him prisoner. They took him to Ireland and held him captive. He worked as a shepherd and became a Christian. After six years he escaped and went back to Britain. But he had a dream in which an angel told him to go back to Ireland as a missionary (person who does religious work in other countries). After Patrick became a priest, he did just that. Many Irish at that time practiced a nature-based

religion, so Patrick used some of their symbols to teach them about Christianity. For example, they worshiped the sun. So he put the sun on a cross. This is where the Celtic cross comes from. Historians think he died on March 17 about A.D. 460. Irish villagers mourned his death every year on that day.

The Irish people have always been great storytellers. These stories often became more exaggerated over the years. The story of St. Patrick chasing the snakes out of Ireland is one of these exaggerated stories. St. Patrick's Day started out as a religious holiday, but today he is remembered all over our nation with parties and parades. Does your community celebrate St. Patrick's Day?





Foundations of Christianity

Both Christianity and the Jewish faith believe the Old Testament writings of the Bible, while only Christians follow the New Testament. The main difference between the two faiths has to do with Jesus. The Jews believe that although Jesus was a strong religious leader, he was not the Messiah sent by God. Christians believe Jesus was sent to Earth by God and the people who believe in him will have eternal life in heaven after they die. Christians also believe in the trinity (three beings) of God: the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

As the Roman Empire spread, so did Jesus' teachings and the new religion called Christianity. However, Christians lived a difficult life. Christians refused to acknowledge

Roman emperors as gods and refused to serve in the Roman army. Roman leaders persecuted Christians. Often, Christians were killed in front of cheering spectators at the Colosseum. The Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal in A.D. 312, ending nearly three centuries of persecution.

Catholic Church

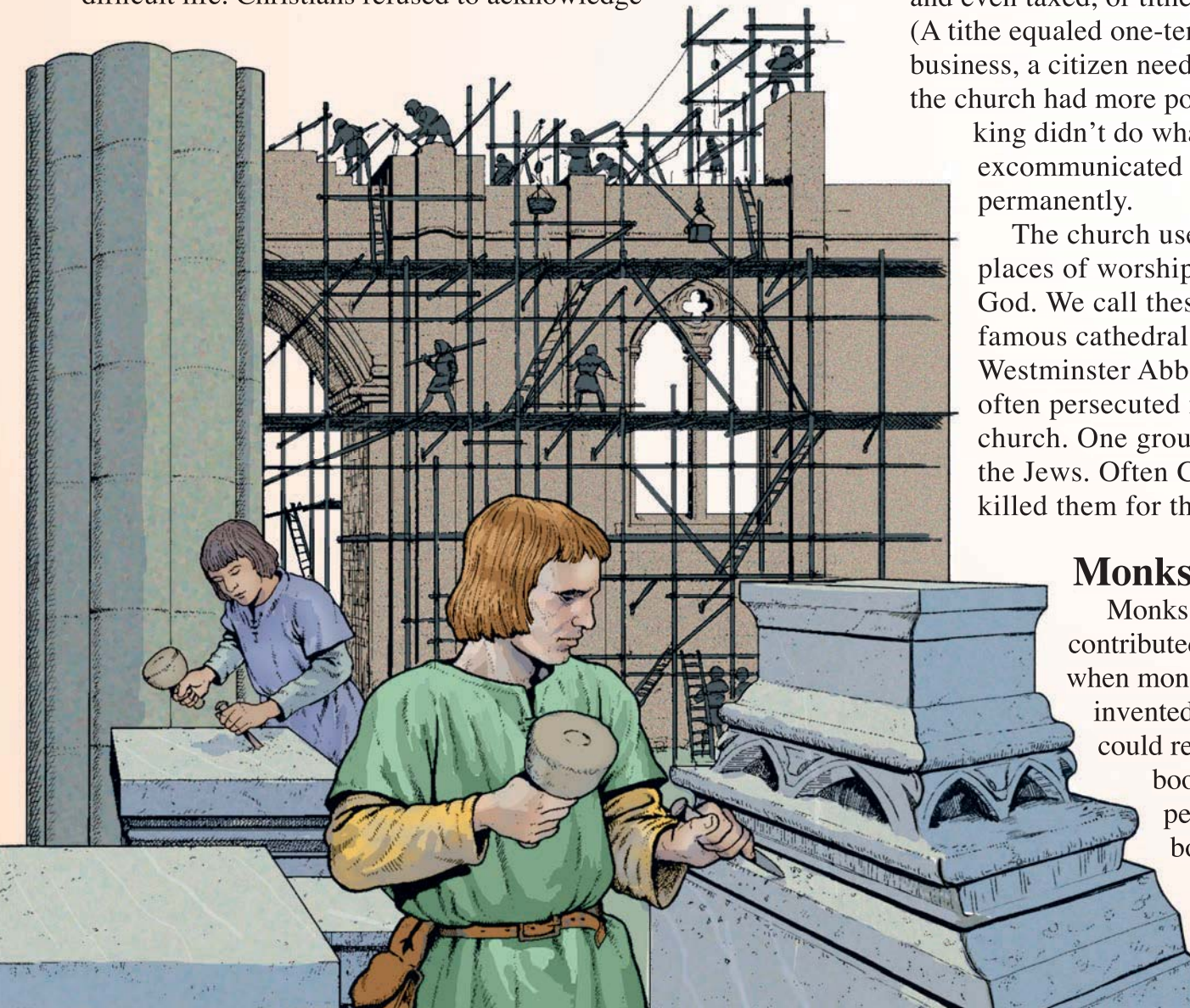
Eventually, the Catholic Church (the first Christian church) became very powerful, especially in western Europe. It had a hierarchy of religious leaders, with the pope as its head. The church made laws for people to follow. It controlled the courts and even taxed, or tithed, the people, just like a government. (A tithe equaled one-tenth of a person's income.) To start a business, a citizen needed permission from the church. In fact, the church had more power than kings did for a long time. If a

king didn't do what the church asked of him, church leaders excommunicated him, or kicked him out of the church permanently.

The church used money it collected to build beautiful places of worship. Christians also built monuments to God. We call these huge buildings cathedrals. Two very famous cathedrals are Notre Dame in Paris, France, and Westminster Abbey in London, England. Church members often persecuted non-Christians who did not join the church. One group that wanted to keep their own faith was the Jews. Often Christians removed Jews from towns and killed them for their different beliefs.

Monks and Manuscripts

Monks, men who dedicate their lives to God, contributed much to society beginning in the 300s when monasteries were formed. Before anyone invented the printing press, the only way someone could reproduce a book was to copy the entire book by hand. Monks were some of the few people able to read and write, so they copied books daily. Imagine if you had to copy this entire newspaper to give to a friend! Monks worked all day in a place called a scriptorium hunched over a desk copying



Vatican City

Did you know that inside the city of Rome is a country? In fact, Vatican City is the smallest country in the entire world. Found on the west bank of the Tiber River, it covers only 108.7 acres or 0.17 square miles. Perhaps you know someone with a farm larger than this country! Another way to think about its size is that Vatican City is even smaller than the

National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Vatican City, also called the Holy See, is the center of the Catholic Church. As with other countries, Vatican City has its own citizens (about 900 people live there), money, postage stamps and flag. It also has a newspaper, radio station and television station to communicate with Christians all over the world. People come to Vatican City

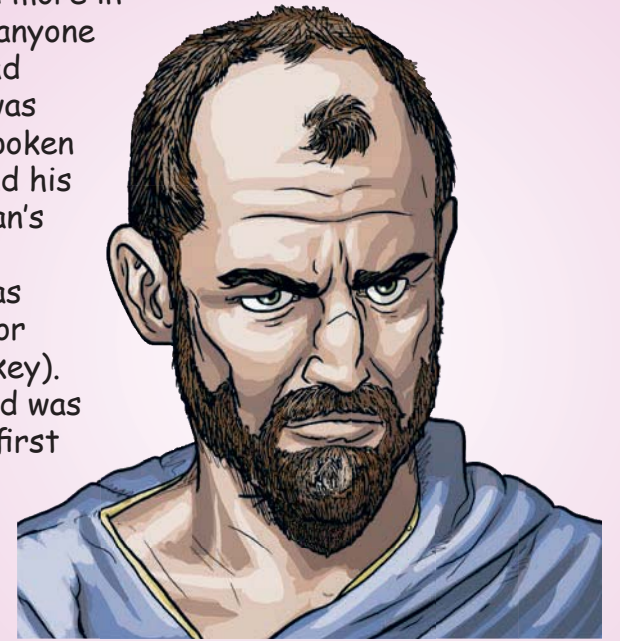
to see the famous St. Peter's Basilica, the largest church in the world. (A basilica is a Catholic church where special ceremonies are held.) The head of Vatican City and the Catholic Church is the pope. Historians have dated Vatican City back to the 5th century, when Christians built St. Peter's Basilica. Vatican City officially became an independent country in 1929.

Geography



St. Paul

One person did more in his lifetime than anyone else to help spread Christianity. He was originally an outspoken critic of Jesus and his teachings. The man's name was Saul of Tarsus. Tarsus was a city in Asia Minor (present day Turkey). He was Jewish and was named after the first king of the Jews, Saul.



Saul was upset by those who followed Jesus' teaching.

He was very angry when Christians built a church in the holy city of Jerusalem. He made it his mission to arrest Christians and punish them harshly for their beliefs. He wanted to stop the spread of this new religion.

Once, while on his way to the city of Damascus (capital of Syria), Saul had a vision. A bright light flashed upon him. He heard a voice ask, "Why are you doing things against me?" When Saul asked who was speaking to him, the voice answered that he was Jesus. "I am the One you are trying to hurt." When the light faded, so did Saul's sight. The brightness had left Saul blind. Those who were with Saul helped bring him to Damascus. Three days later, a follower of Jesus named Ananias came to Saul and placed his hands upon Saul's eyes. Saul's sight returned, and he then converted to Christianity. He also took a new name, Paul. He went on to spread Jesus' teachings. Paul became known as the 13th apostle, and he wrote a number of letters (known as epistles) that became books in the New Testament.

For more than 30 years, Paul traveled to Greece, Crete, Asia Minor, Cyprus and Rome. Wherever he traveled, Paul spread the teaching of Jesus, even though he had never met him. Historians think Paul was killed around A.D. 65 by the Roman Emperor Nero, who arrested Christians and put them to death.

books page by page. They didn't even have paper as we have it today. Instead, they wrote on parchment or vellum (skins of animals). People usually made parchment from sheep or cow skin. They made vellum from the skins of young calves. Monks called their handwritten books "manuscripts," from the Latin words, manus (hand) and scriptum (writing).

Since parchment and paper were rare, monks usually didn't leave spaces between their words or use capitals. Imagine reading this newspaper without any spaces or capital letters. It would be difficult, don't you think? To find some enjoyment in an otherwise boring task, monks often decorated the very first page with a fancy letter that they colored in with red, green or blue ink. They called them illuminated letters. Sometimes the monks also decorated book margins with leaves, animals, angels and vines. Monks also occasionally left notes to those who read the book they copied. One such example was, "He who does not know how to write imagines that it is no labor; but though only three fingers hold the pen, the whole body grows weary."

Helping Others

Nuns, women who dedicate their lives to God, also contributed to the larger society. In those days, if you got very sick, sometimes your own family could not care for you. The nuns cared for the sick at the convents, the nuns' home. Religious orders built some early hospitals. Both nuns and monks also taught school during a time when few could read or write. Religious people aided the poor and spread Christianity as missionaries. A priest named Patrick was a famous missionary. He lived from about A.D. 390 to 461 and brought Christianity to Ireland. People still honor him every year in March on St. Patrick's Day.

Catacombs

The ancient Romans who believed in gods and goddesses cremated (burned) their dead. Christians, on the other hand, believed a person needed the body for the soul to be resurrected in heaven. They also feared that non-Christians would destroy the dead bodies of Christians out of disrespect. For these reasons, early Christians buried their dead in dark underground burial chambers outside the city of Rome. They called these places catacombs. Archaeologists have found at least six such burial chambers along one of the oldest roads in Rome—the Appian Way. The catacombs date back to about A.D. 100. Christians cut spaces into the underground rock along both sides of winding passages. They laid dead bodies to rest in the spaces. When the Romans adopted Christianity and stopped persecuting Christians, they moved the remains of the dead in the catacombs to above-ground cemeteries.

'The Pieta'

Italian artist Michelangelo was only 25 years old when he created one of his most famous works of art for a banker named Jacopo Gallo. Michelangelo took two years to create "The Pieta," a sculpture that shows Mary holding a dying Jesus in her lap. It was placed in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome when Michelangelo completed it in 1499. "The Pieta" stands 69 inches high, and its name is Italian for pity or compassion.

When people came to see the unveiling of "The Pieta," Michelangelo enjoyed standing among the crowd listening to their comments. That is, until he heard someone else claim to be the sculptor of the beautiful statue! Michelangelo was not yet a famous artist, and when he told people he was the sculptor, no one believed him. Why? Well, Michelangelo had

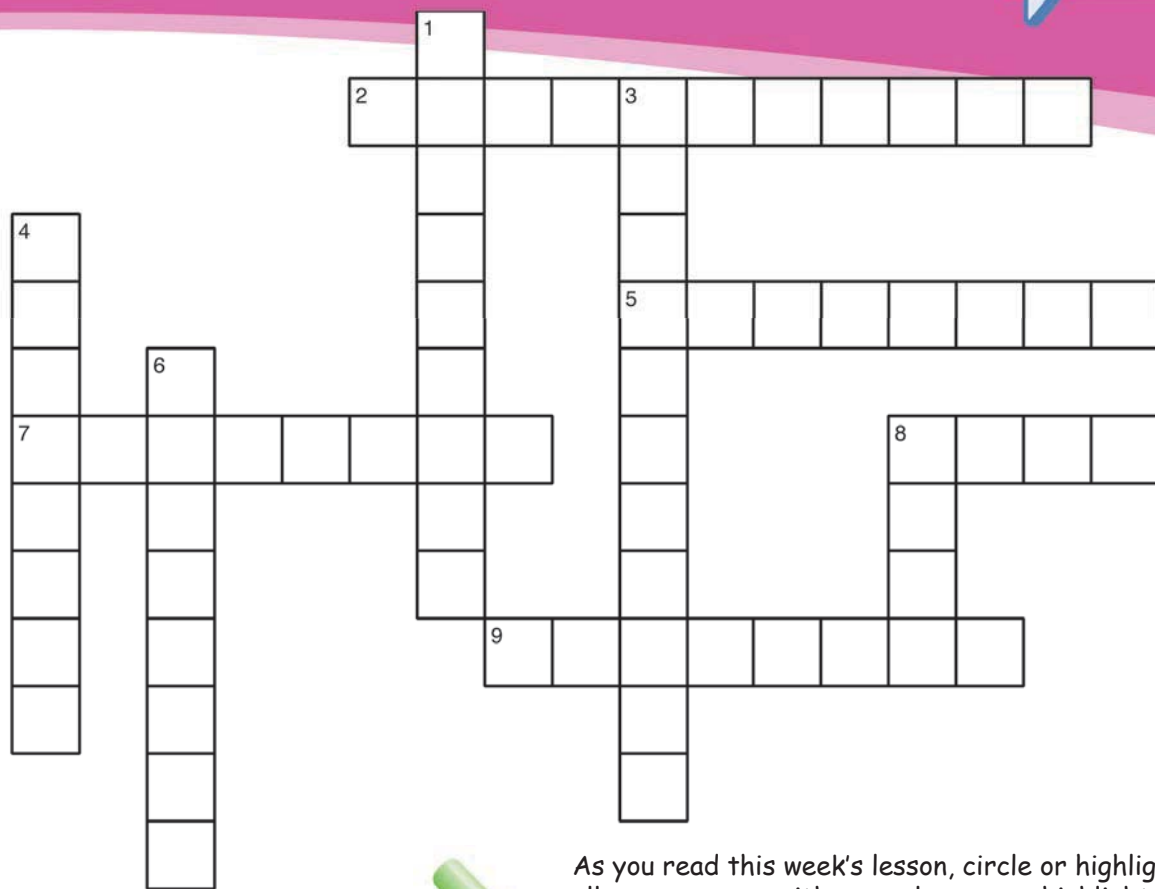


not signed his name on the sculpture. People thought that someone so young could not possibly have created a masterpiece like "The Pieta." That night, Michelangelo went into the church with a chisel and, across the sash of the Virgin Mary, wrote "MICHAEL ANGELUS BONAROTUS FLORENT FACIEBAT" (Michelangelo Buonarroti of Florence Created This). Later, embarrassed by his actions, Michelangelo said he would never again sign his works of art.

In 1972, a vandal with a hammer damaged the statue. He broke off an arm, knocked out part of Mary's nose and chipped her eyelids. Artists restored "The Pieta," which is now behind bulletproof acrylic glass in St. Peter's Basilica. If you can't get to Rome, you can see pictures of "The Pieta" on the Internet.



Name _____



ACROSS

- 2. smallest country in the world
- 5. Greek word for savior or messiah
- 7. stories used by Jesus to teach lessons
- 8. name taken by Saul after his conversion to Christianity
- 9. letters written by Paul

DOWN

- 1. paper made from animal skins like cows and sheep
- 3. ancient Roman form of execution on a cross
- 4. famous sculpture of a dying Jesus in the lap of his mother, Mary
- 6. snack food with a history in the Christian faith
- 8. the head of the Catholic Church



As you read this week's lesson, circle or highlight all proper nouns with any color pen or highlighter. This will help you find some of the crossword answers and get ready for this week's test.

Design a Pysanky

Activity

On Easter, Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. The holiday is in the spring, when Earth renews itself. Eggs have represented new life for centuries. People of some cultures around the world once believed the world began as a very large egg.

Coloring eggs at Easter time dates back to ancient times too. Some of the most beautiful colored eggs are those of the Ukrainian people. They call their eggs Pysanky (also spelled Pysanka or Pysanki). This word means "to write." The different colors represent different things:

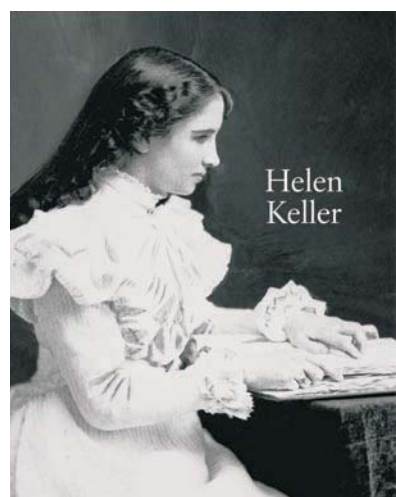
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| White: purity | Blue: good health | Pink: success |
| Yellow: light and youth | Green: new hope and growth | Brown: happiness |
| Orange: strength and endurance | Red: happiness and love | |
| Black: eternity | Violet: power | |

Use the list above and the Pysanky symbols you can find at this Web site—<http://www.learnpysanky.com/symbols.html>—to draw your own Pysanky in the box below.

Let's Write

Imagine you are a monk working in a scriptorium. What is it like sitting all day at your desk and copying a book

by hand? What do you think about? What do you hear going on outside the scriptorium? What message will you leave behind for the person who will read your copied manuscript? Remember to check your writing for proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.



Helen Keller

Could only see possibilities.

