

Although Christians believe in one God, they also believe that God has three parts.

Christians Believe in God as the *Trinity*

The Trinity is the idea that God exists in three 'persons' — the Father, the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. The importance of all three is shown in the Bible:

Matthew 3:16-17 describes how at Jesus's baptism, Jesus "...saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" (NIV)

In Philippians 2:6, St Paul described Jesus as having "equality with God" (NIV).

The *Trinity* is Explained in the *Nicene Creed*

- 1) In 325 AD, Church leaders from around the world gathered at the Council of Nicaea. They produced a creed — a statement of beliefs. This was further developed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD, and is known as the Nicene Creed. It describes how Christians see God:

"We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth... We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God... of one Being with the Father... was made man... he suffered death and... he rose again... We believe in the Holy Spirit... the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son... who has spoken through the prophets."

- 2) Before this, not everyone had agreed that the Son of God (Jesus) was one with God, rather than having been made by God. Now they agreed that he was equally important.
- 3) The importance the early Church placed on the Trinity in the Nicene Creed means it is a key belief for most Christians — it is usually recited during the Eucharist service (see p.8). But some groups, such as Christadelphians, don't believe in the Trinity.
- 4) Christians see the three parts of the Trinity as having different characteristics and roles:

The Father

- For many Christians, God the Father is the God of the Old Testament. He created Heaven and Earth and sustains them. God the Father might be described as the transcendent part of God.
- The title 'Father' is a mark of respect for God, e.g. the Lord's Prayer starts with 'Our Father' (see p.11).

The Son

- Christians believe Jesus (see p.4-5) is the incarnation of God in human form. He is seen as both divine and human — the immanent and personal part of God, who understands human suffering.
- Christians believe that Jesus provides a model for Christian behaviour in obedience to God the Father. The Gospels contain a record of his life and teachings, and are an important source of guidance for Christians on how they should live their lives.

The Holy Spirit

- Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world. Before his death, Jesus promised his disciples: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever — the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17 NIV).
- The Holy Spirit is seen as the immanent yet impersonal part of God — it continues to guide the Church.
- Some Christians feel that the Holy Spirit also guides them personally in being good Christians. The Catechism of the Catholic Church 736 says "By this power of the Spirit, God's children can bear much fruit."

Three into one doesn't go in maths — but this is RS...

For some exam questions you'll have to refer to sacred texts or religious teachings to get full marks. You can write quotes or describe what is said — you'll need to say where the information comes from.

