Christianity

Christianity is the largest religion in the world, with about 2 billion followers. It is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Most Christians are members of one of three major groups: Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Eastern Orthodox. Christianity teaches the existence of only one God. Christians regard Jesus as the son of God. They believe that Jesus entered the world and died to save humanity from sin. The cross shown above, a symbol of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, represents Jesus’ love for humanity by dying for its sins. Christians believe that they reach salvation by following the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Ritual

Each year, hundreds of thousands of Christians from all over the world visit the Basilica of Guadalupe in northern Mexico City. The church is considered the holiest in Mexico. It is near the site where the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, is said to have appeared twice in 1531. Out of deep respect for Mary, some pilgrims approach the holy cathedral on their knees.

Worship Practices

Holy Communion is perhaps the most important rite of worship in Christianity. This rite recalls Jesus’ actions and words during his Last Supper with his disciples, when he identified bread and wine with his body and blood.

Christian denominations differ in their ideas about the meaning of Communion. In Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and some Protestant denominations, the rite of Communion is viewed as an actual reenactment of Christ’s sacrifice of his life for the human race. The bread and wine are sanctified to become Christ’s actual body and blood.

Many Protestants, however, look upon Communion as symbols of Christ’s body and blood. Protestants differ in their beliefs about the nature of the bread and wine.

World Religions and Ethical Systems

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DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION: GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci

Class Time 45 minutes
Task Analyzing a work of art
Purpose To deepen understanding of the relationship between art and religion
Instructions Tell students that the painting on this page, *Last Supper*, shows Jesus with his 12 disciples. In the painting, Jesus has just made an announcement and the disciples are reacting to it. Challenge students to use the Internet and other research tools to learn more about the painting and its meaning. Have students answer the following questions:

- How does the artist make Jesus the focus of his painting? (He places Jesus in the center.)
- What does Jesus tell his disciples? (One of them is about to betray him.)
- Which one of the disciples will betray Jesus? Which figure represents him in the painting? (Judas Iscariot; He is placed just to Christ’s right clutching a money bag.)
- What action does this representation foreshadow? (It foreshadows the actual betrayal, when Judas points out Christ to the men who have come to arrest him.)

World Art and Cultures Transparencies
- AT36 Last Supper

Ritual

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Modern Christian Missionaries

Class Time 45 minutes  
Task Researching the work of modern Christian missionaries  
Purpose To understand modern connections to traditional religious practices  
Instructions Tell students that over the centuries, Christians have converted people throughout the world. Motivation for Christians’ missionary work came from Jesus himself, who asked his followers to carry the faith to the whole world.

Besides religion, missionaries also impacted various cultures through education and Western ways of living. Some of these impacts were positive; some were not.

Have small groups of students research to learn about the work of modern Christian missionaries. What are some of the modern missionaries’ goals? What methods do they use to obtain their goals? Do you agree or disagree with the missionaries’ approaches? Ask students to name some Christian missionaries of the 20th and 21st centuries. (Albert Schweitzer; Mother Teresa; priests and nuns working in foreign countries)