

All Christians have the same basic beliefs. They sum up their beliefs in creeds. The word *creed* comes from a Latin word meaning *I believe*. So a creed is a kind of list of Christian beliefs.

There are various creeds. The one below goes back to the fourth century CE; at that time, it was said by adults who were being baptised. Today, it is often said as part of a church service.

- I believe in God, the Father **almighty**, creator of heaven and earth.
- I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord.
- He was **conceived** by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.
- He descended to the dead.
- On the third day he rose again.
- He **ascended** into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy **catholic** Church, the communion of **saints**, the forgiveness of sins, the **resurrection** of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The most basic belief is in God. Christians see him as their Father. Like a human father, he looks after them and protects them. But he is also powerful: he created the world; without God, there would be no world at all.

There is, for Christians, only one God. But they call him by three different names:

- God the Father
- God the Son (Jesus Christ)
- God the Holy Spirit

This idea is known as the Trinity. It means that three are united in the one God. But how can one God be three at the same time?

This is hard even for many Christians to understand fully. First, you should remember that Christians do not usually think of God as a person with a body. After all, a body has its limits; God has no limits at all.

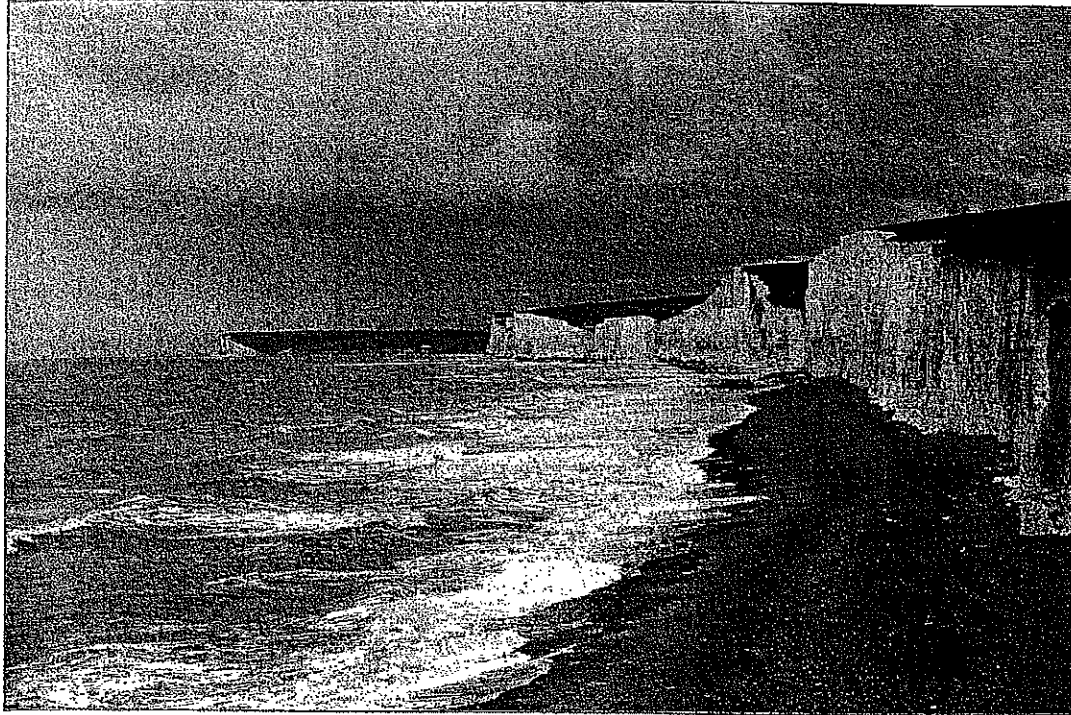
Think of a cup of tea. Most of the tea we drink is blended. This means that it is made from more than one kind of tea. It might include teas from India, China and Sri Lanka. Each one of them adds something to the final taste. Each tea is different. But put them all together and what have you got? You have still got tea.

Or, think of water, steam and ice – all are H₂O. There are many ways in which many things can still be done.



▲ One artist's idea of the Trinity. God the Father is symbolised as an old man, the Holy Spirit as a dove and the Son is Jesus, ascended on high. God is really invisible

Christians do not usually make pictures of God, though they do of Jesus as he was a real man in history. This picture symbolises the Trinity, but God the Father and the Spirit are mysteries. They have no shape and cannot be seen. They are spiritual things, beyond our understanding. God is not really supposed to be an old man in the sky!



▲ *God is everywhere, all around us*

So God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all one. Together, they are God. But each one is also God. The Trinity helps Christians to understand God in different ways – and to see his greatness.

Perhaps it is easier to think of the Trinity as three parts of God. God the Father is God beyond us; God the Son is God with us, and God the Holy Spirit is God in us. God is everywhere, all around us.

God is a puzzle and a mystery to humans. God is transcendent – beyond us. God is symbolised by pure, blinding light, suggesting truth, life and something we cannot see properly. God is symbolised by a vast ocean. We can splash in the shallows, but it gets deeper and deeper. God is beyond our understanding. Yet, God is also symbolised by a caring father. This mysterious force is also love. All life comes from it and we are cherished by it.

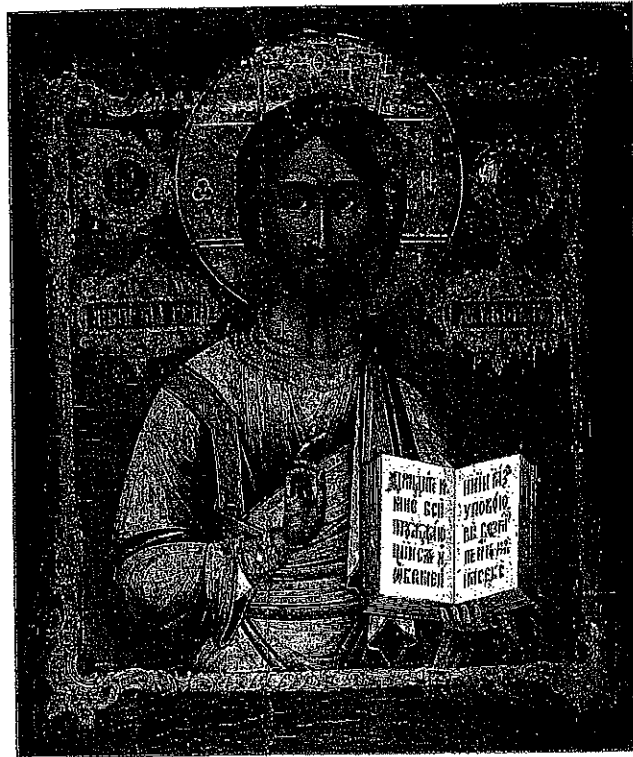
Read these two stories and see what ideas they are suggesting about God:

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Two friends walked by the sea one day and saw a small child running to and from with a bucket, trying to fill a hole in the sand. The child said, 'I'm trying to put the whole sea into my hole!' The friends smiled and walked on. How are we like the little child when we think about God?

A fish went around searching for the ocean. It travelled far and wide, looking here and there. It came to an older fish, and asked, 'Where is the thing called ocean?' 'It is all around you and within you!' answered the older fish.

- 1 a) What different ideas of God do you get from the words (i) almighty; (ii) Father?
- b) What ideas of God do symbols of light and an ocean suggest?
- c) What ideas of God are suggested by the story of the boy by the sea, and the fish looking for the ocean?
- 2 Write a few sentences saying what Christians mean by 'the Trinity'. Use ideas from pages 14 and 15.



▲ Jesus Christ

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord . . .

The middle part of the creed is all about the Son, Jesus. It tells how he was born, how he died, and that he rose again. Eventually, he returned to the Father in heaven (this is known as the Ascension).

Christians also believe 'He will come again to judge the living and the dead'. The Gospels use vivid poetry to try to describe this time:

- When the Son of Man comes as King . . . he will sit on his royal throne, and the people of all the nations will be gathered before him. Then he will divide them into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the [good] people on his right and the others on his left.

Matthew 25: 31-3

Christians have many different ways of making sense of this today, but all agree that Jesus has not yet finished with the world. It will not just fizzle out; evil will not go unpunished. It will end in the glory of God, and we will be judged by one who is Love. People will have to face up honestly to what they have done and who they are.

I believe in the forgiveness of sins . . .

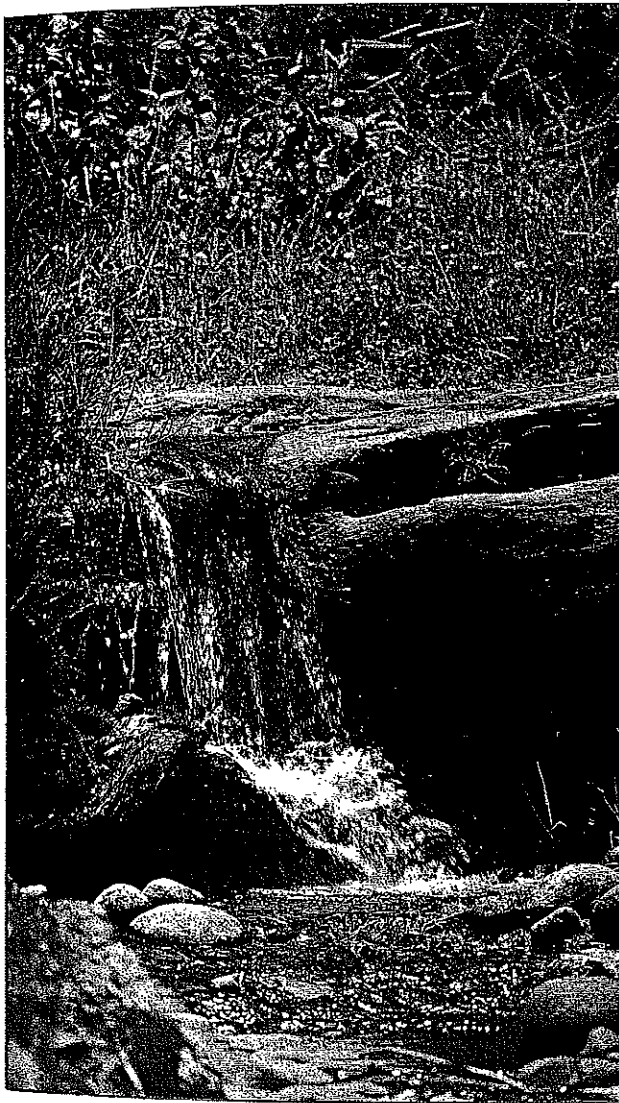
All people make mistakes, and can do wrong, hurtful things to each other. Sin is hurting someone, yourself or God. God wishes to forgive, to make peace and to mend broken relationships. Forgiveness is not always easy and should never be cheap. It takes great courage, and can involve pain and suffering before things are put right. Jesus died on the cross, forgiving his enemies. Christians see the most perfect example of God's love in action, there, forgiving the whole human race for all their sins.

As one hymn states:

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.

I believe in the Holy Spirit...

The Holy Spirit is the part of God that lives on Earth, around us and within us. The Spirit is invisible, like the wind, but Christians say that they can feel the Spirit's effects. In the Bible, the Spirit is also symbolised by a dove for peace, fire for power, and water for life. Jesus once said, "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." He was speaking about the Spirit.



▲ 'Living water' – a spring of fresh, bubbling water

Many people say that they can sometimes feel a peaceful presence when they pray. The Bible calls the Spirit 'the Comforter'. Ian Dunlop, an Anglican priest, explains the comfort of the Holy Spirit like this:

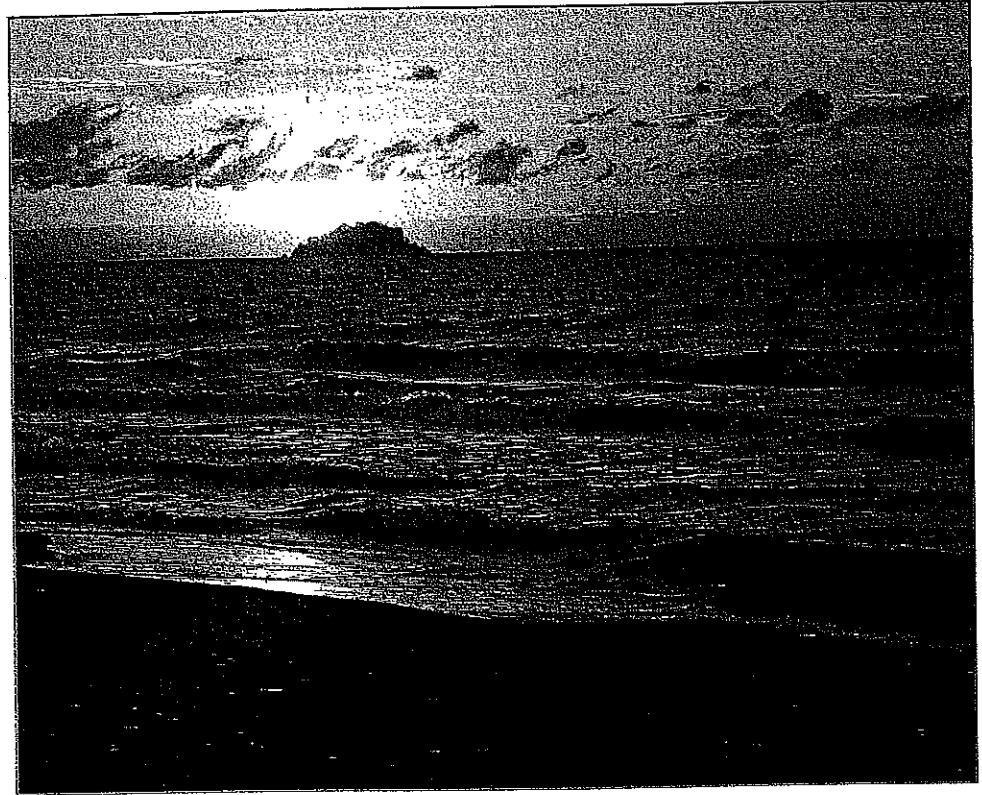
- You can see it in a situation when somebody's very frightened. Somebody who is brave comes to sit beside them. And his bravery communicates itself to the frightened person. He can comfort people. 'The comforter' is another word for the Holy Spirit.

I have experienced that myself. I had a very painful accident when I was a soldier in the war. I broke my leg very badly and it was very painful. A person came and knelt beside me. It was actually a sergeant-major. Fancy a sergeant-major holding hands with you! But he did. He held my hand.

[People] were taking my boot off. That was the really painful moment. I could feel from the pressure of his hand in mine that my pain was becoming his pain. That strengthened me. It made it easier to bear. This is what the word 'comforter' means. It means to strengthen.

That's the nearest parallel I can give of what we mean when we say the 'god-strength' becomes our strength. This is how Jesus taught. He gave stories from real life. We should do the same. I couldn't say I understood the Holy Spirit if I'd not had those experiences to let me see it working at a human level.

- 1 a)** If you had one magic wish to change the world, what would you wish for?
b) Design a CD cover to show what the world might be like when the Last Judgement has happened.
- 2** Which of the following do you think are sins? In each case, explain how you decided.
(i) Murdering someone; (ii) Being unkind to someone; (iii) Being cruel to an animal; (iv) An adult having a pint of beer; (v) Playing football on a Sunday; (vi) Eating unhealthy food and taking no exercise; (vii) Going to a party and enjoying yourself.
- 3** Draw a cross on a sheet of paper. Stick headlines from a newspaper around this, that are cruel and sinful events. At the bottom, write a sentence saying why Christians see the cross as proof of God's forgiveness.
- 4 a)** What do Christians mean by the Holy Spirit?
b) Draw three symbols of the Spirit and say what they suggest.
c) Read what Ian Dunlop says about the Spirit. Describe a time when you needed comforting. Who helped you, and how?



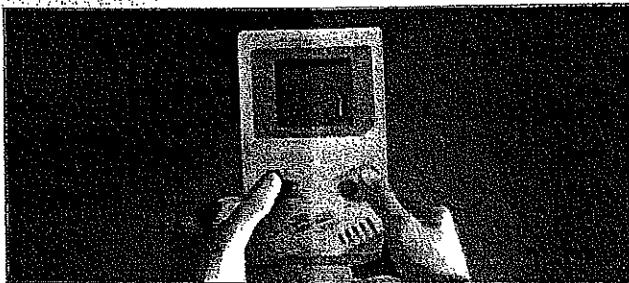
► *The night turns to day. Can God bring light into the darkness of death?*

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... and the life everlasting.

Christians believe that there is a life after death. They believe that you will meet your friends and family again. However, they do not expect life after death to be the same as life on Earth. It is a mystery and a surprise, operating by different rules from this world. It is beyond time and space, spiritual, not physical.

Christians do not really believe that heaven is up above us. The stars and planets are above us. Heaven is thought to be in another dimension, another level of reality, rather like the different levels in a computer game – when you are inside one, you have no way of knowing what it is like to be inside another.

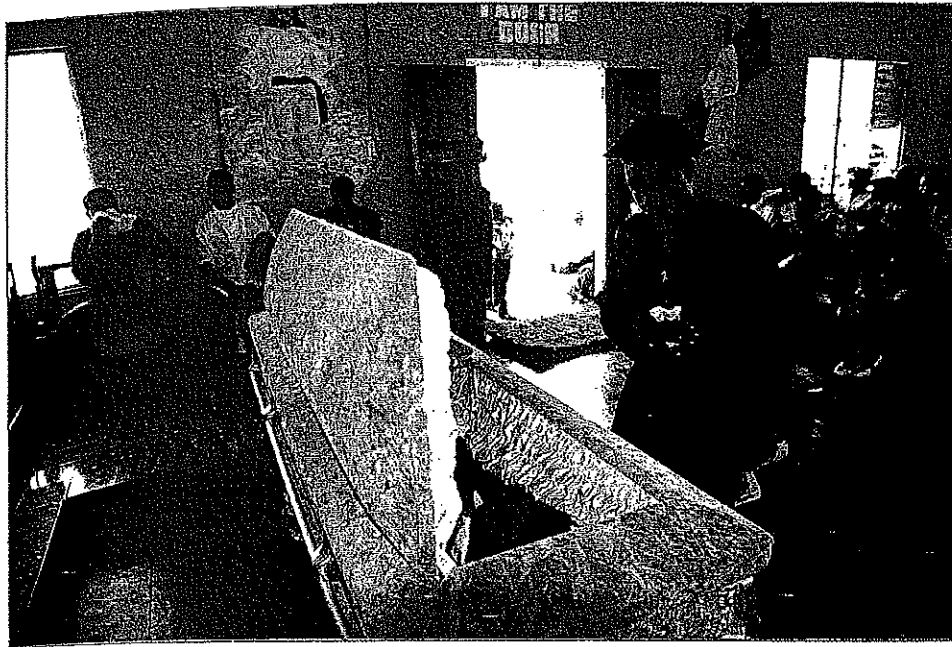


▲ *Time to move on to a different level*

God himself will be with them:
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.

Revelation 21: 3-4

Christians hold funeral services to give thanks for the life of the dead person, and to commit their souls to God's care. It is a chance to gather family and friends and to grieve. It is right to be sad, and to shed tears, but Christian funerals also have a note of joy – death is not the end.



◀ A Christian funeral ritual in Jamaica. Mourners pray over the open coffin from the day of death to the burial day of the loved person

In Britain, people tend to be reserved about showing emotion. This can be very different in other parts of the world. Afro-Caribbean funerals, for example, usually have an open coffin, and the mourners file past this to pay their last respects during the service – weeping, blowing a kiss, touching, sprinkling holy water. In ancient times, even great warriors wept openly and acted out their emotions – in the ancient Greek poems of Homer, for example, King Priam rolled in the dung and smeared this over him when he heard that his son was dead. Achilles knelt in the dust and wept when his good friend died. In the Bible, the custom is mentioned of mourners falling onto the ground and weeping (for example, Psalm 44: 23–36).

In modern Judaism, mourners rip their clothes to express grief. Letting out such feelings is important, and helps people to heal.

The Anglican prayer of Committal in the Funeral Service is as follows:

● Heavenly Father, by your mighty power you gave us new life, and in your love you have given us new life in Christ Jesus. We entrust N to your merciful keeping, in the faith of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who died and rose again to save us, and is now alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit in glory for ever.

- 1 a) Go around the class and each finish the sentence, 'Heaven is ...'
- b) Where do Christians think heaven is?
- 2 Collect some **obituary** notices from a local paper. What phrases do people tend to use in obituaries and why?
- 3 When did you first become aware of death? Why do people feel uneasy talking about death?
- 4 How would you like to be remembered?
 - a) What music would you like to be played at your funeral? Any special readings?
 - b) What epitaph (inscription) would you like on a gravestone?
 - c) Write your own obituary.
- 5 Read *Water Bugs & Dragonflies* by Doris Stickney (Mowbray). This tells a story to help young children understand about death and eternal life. In groups, write your own stories to read to young children on this subject.