



BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

What is a Christian?

- ❖ Many people in our society believe themselves to be Christians but have only begun to understand the Christian faith.
- ❖ Being a Christian is not something vague and private but definite and public.
- ❖ No one is born as a Christian (although you may be born into a Christian family).
- ❖ No one becomes a Christian by accident either. You become a Christian by making a decision to say 'yes' to God's gracious invitation to follow Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The sign of a person responding to God's call in this way and becoming part of the Church is Baptism and Confirmation – standing up and being counted as a person of faith.

The Christian Gospel

The Christian Church down the ages has summarized the Christian faith in the words of the Apostles' & Nicene Creeds. These summarize the heart of the Gospel truth that God made us and loves us. We were made to know God but we have turned away from his love. God sent his Son, Jesus, to draw the world back to him. Jesus lived a life without sin. He died on the cross. God raised him from the dead.

Through Jesus, God offers to everyone:

- ❖ forgiveness of sins;
- ❖ a new relationship with God and with God's people;
- ❖ the gift of eternal life;
- ❖ the call to service and discipleship.

It is by the grace and mercy of God that we have come to faith and are able to say and explore these words. It is not through human cleverness or ingenuity. God has revealed himself through the Scriptures. God has revealed himself most clearly through the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. God makes himself known personally to each believer through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles Creed

The word 'creed' comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning 'I believe and trust'.

Two creeds in particular were developed in the early centuries of the Church, which have remained important to the Church and are regularly used in our worship today.

People who were preparing for baptism in the early centuries of the Christian Church learned a short summary of what Christians believe. One version became accepted as the Apostles' Creed, because it was thought to include the essential teaching of the 12 apostles, Jesus' earliest followers. It was into that faith of the apostles that Christians were, and are, baptized. The Apostles Creed says:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, 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, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come 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 Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is a more detailed summary of what the whole Church believes about the great doctrines of the Christian faith. It begins with the statement: 'We believe ...' The Nicene Creed uses the same threefold structure as the Apostles' Creed but goes into more depth and detail. It was first adopted at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 by a gathering of bishops. At St Mary's we say the Nicene Creed together at the main 10am Sunday Eucharist.

Saying 'Yes' to God's call

God invites us to say 'yes' and to respond to this gracious gift of love, just like Mary was invited to do the same when God's Messenger announced that she was to give birth to Jesus. She declared that God's will should be realised in her life:

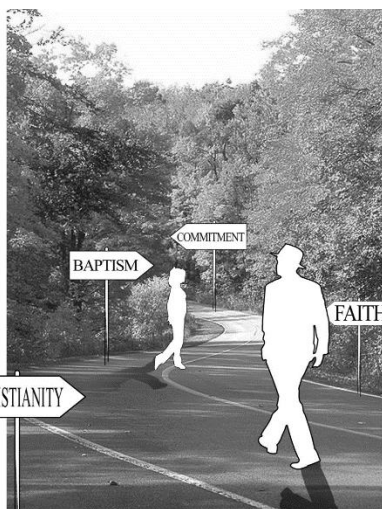
Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1. 38)

Our response to the call of God is fourfold:

- ❖ repentance; We recognise our mistakes and say sorry to God.
- ❖ faith; We open our hearts to God's love for us.
- ❖ receiving the promised gift of the Holy Spirit; We let the Lord dwell with us.
- ❖ becoming a full member of the Church; Baptism and Confirmation.

Baptism

Jesus was baptized in water by John at the River Jordan. Following Jesus' command, from earliest times, baptism has been the outward sign of a Christian's response to the call of God to follow Christ. In the service of baptism the candidates publicly turn away from all they know to be wrong and turn to Christ. The candidates declare their faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism in water is a sign of a new beginning as the water symbolizes being made clean. Going down into the waters of baptism is also a symbol of dying with Christ and rising again. The congregation prays for the candidates to be given the gift of the Holy Spirit and they are welcomed into membership of the Church. In our baptism we are commissioned to live as Christian disciples and to share in God's mission to the world.



How do I become a Christian?

Becoming a Christian is a journey that may take months, sometimes years. Significant points in the journey are often marked by making an appropriate response through personal prayer, prayer with others or public worship. Such moments of response might include:

- ❖ baptism as a child or an adult;
- ❖ confirmation;
- ❖ making a personal commitment through prayer to follow Christ;
- ❖ prayer to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit;
- ❖ a public Affirmation of Baptismal Faith;
- ❖ prayer with others at a new period in your life and Christian service.

The Community of Faith – regular worship

Being a Christian means a commitment to regular worship which can involve services on any day of the week, not just a Sunday morning. As individuals and as families we come before God to praise, pray and share in fellowship. As the Psalmist reminds us:

'Great is the Lord and highly to be praised; his greatness is beyond all searching out. One generation shall praise your works to another and declare your mighty acts.' (Psalm 145.3-4)