The background of the slide is white, covered with a pattern of small, semi-transparent question marks in various colors including blue, yellow, red, and grey. A large, faint grey cross is also visible in the background, positioned to the right of the main text.

Christianity: What, Why and Why me now?

Mark Cresswell

If you are interested in Christianity please take a copy.

This booklet can be no more than very brief introduction to Christianity. What Christians believe and perhaps why is a question that's very individual. In these few pages there isn't enough space to do little more than provide a few headlines and pointers about what it means to be a Christian.

The one pointer that I hope does come across is to the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God, who came and lived among us so we might be reconciled to God. If you are interested in Christianity, start with Jesus and you can't go too wrong.

The best place to find out about being Christian is in a church. Church styles vary immensely from traditional to very modern much like the range of music styles we have in our society from classical to pop. My advice is to look for a church where you feel welcomed and comfortable. Being a Christian is a life long and life giving journey and my prayer is that you will find it as life giving as I have. At the end of the booklet there are some pointers for your next step. I hope that this and they are of some help.

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Introduction.

If you were to give human society a score on how well it's doing, many people would probably mark it down as “could do better”—or perhaps worse. On the one hand, our world is full of remarkable achievements. People have created, discovered, and built extraordinary things, and many individuals continue to give of themselves generously to their families, communities, and causes.

But it's also true that there is much to grieve. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who faced far more of these realities than many of us, once reflected: *“As human beings we have the most extraordinary capacity for evil. We can perpetrate some of the most horrendous atrocities.”* Sadly, his words ring true.

At the same time, dissatisfaction is growing with some of the core features of modern Western culture—consumerism especially. The Office for National Statistics reported in August 2024 that more people in the UK rated their life satisfaction as “low” between January and March of 2024 compared with the same period five years earlier.

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”
John 10.10

And yet, there are signs of hope. Reports suggest that more people are turning to Christianity than in previous years. What some are calling a “quiet revival” has led to over two million more people attending church than six years ago. (Bible Society, April 2025)

So while we may be a society that is struggling, restless, and often unhappy, there are also clear signs of potential. Many are once again searching for a deeper solution.

News Headlines July 2025
'I'm So Tired': Mother of Starving Gazan Baby Speaks to BBC
Syria Returns to Bloodshed: 'I'm a Mother Who Saw her Sons Killed' - the Times.
One in Eight Women Victims of Domestic Abuse, Stalking or Sexual Assault, New Figures Show - ITV



What is Christianity?

The church buildings of the Carlford benefice—like many across the county and throughout rural England—stand as a testament to the passionate faith of generations before us. Their belief in God inspired them to create places they considered worthy of God's presence. To pray in these churches, many hundreds of years old, is both humbling and inspiring. That same faith, passed down through centuries, is built on the foundation of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1.1

Jesus is the central figure of Christianity. We worship Him as the Son of God and the Saviour of humanity. His life, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection form the basis of the Christian faith.

Christians believe that Jesus did not simply reveal God's love—He was God, who came in human form to bring redemption and eternal life to all who believe. Through His parables and sermons, He taught compassion, forgiveness, and the importance of trusting in God. Living as His followers means nurturing a life of prayer and embodying the values of God's Kingdom in everyday life.

Most importantly, Jesus' death on the cross is understood as the ultimate act of love—and is God's mechanism to forgive us what the Bible calls sin. Jesus' resurrection three days later shows His victory over death, offering hope and salvation to all who trust in Him. This is the heart of Easter, the great celebration of the Christian faith: the reconciliation of God and humanity through Jesus Christ.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. John 14.6



Jesus of Nazareth, The Christ

“Christ” is not a name but a title. It comes from the Greek word *Christos*, which means “anointed one.” In Hebrew, the equivalent word is *Messiah*.

The Christ is someone chosen and set apart by God for a special purpose.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. John 1.41

Christians call Jesus “the Christ” because we believe He is the promised Saviour - foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures and experienced by His disciples and the first Christian community.

Jesus Christ embodies both full divinity (Godliness) and full humanity, a cornerstone


of Christian belief. As God, He shares the eternal, all-powerful nature of the Holy Trinity. Yet through the Incarnation, He also became truly human - born of the Virgin Mary, living in first-century Israel, experiencing both life's joys and its sufferings. He showed compassion, performed miracles, often healings, and taught about the nature of the Kingdom of God challenging values of the time which still apply today.

Despite being God, Jesus endured a show trial and a cruel death on the cross. Christians believe this was the decisive act that bridged the gap of sin separating humanity from God, reconciling us to Him. His resurrection confirmed His identity as both God and Saviour, and it remains the foundation of Christian hope.

At Pentecost, the apostle Peter explained this to the people of Jerusalem, leading to the first of many conversions. From there, the message of Jesus Christ spread rapidly, becoming the movement we now know as Christianity.

The implications are discussed in more depth in ‘Mere Christianity’ (Chpt 4) by CS Lewis, and it's worth a read.

So those who welcomed his message were baptised, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2.4



Evidence

The Evidence for Jesus.

Christianity is centred on the person of Jesus, and its authenticity depends on whether Jesus was a real historical figure or simply a legend. So, was Jesus of Nazareth an actual person?

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.
John 1 12-13

The historical evidence suggests yes. His existence is supported by both biblical and non-biblical sources. The New Testament, especially the Gospels, gives detailed accounts of Jesus' life, teachings, and crucifixion. While these writings are theological in nature, they also function as historical documents, preserving what the earliest Christians believed and experienced.

Beyond Christian scriptures, several non-Christian writers from the first and second centuries also mention Jesus. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, refers to Jesus as a wise man and even as the Christ. Although parts of Josephus' text may have been influenced by later Christian editors, most scholars agree that his references to Jesus are authentic. The Roman historian Tacitus also records that Jesus was executed under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Emperor Tiberius, confirming the Gospel accounts.

Taken together, the consistency between biblical writings and external historical sources provides strong evidence that Jesus was indeed a real historical figure. For Christians, it is not only safe but reasonable to assume that Jesus truly lived, died and rose again.

For a deeper look into these areas please have a read of Lee Strobel's book *The Case for Christ* and in particular the concluding chapter.

The Kingdom of God

Many of Jesus' teachings focus on the Kingdom of God and how it differs from the values of the world. Some versions of Christianity have taught that faith is mainly about receiving a reward after death. But the Kingdom of God is both beyond death and available to us here and now.

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus contrasts the temporary nature of earthly kingdoms with the eternal nature of God's Kingdom. Earthly kingdoms are built on power, wealth, and status. They rise and fall, depending on material or political strength.

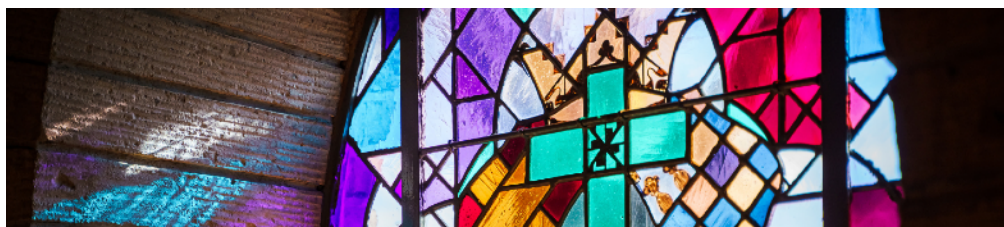
Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." John 18 36

The Kingdom of God, by contrast, is eternal and unshaken by time or human influence. It is grounded in values that endure—peace, justice, love, and compassion. Where earthly kingdoms often depend on domination, whether military or economic, God's Kingdom is marked by humility and service. Its greatness is not measured by control or riches but by the transforming power of love and genuine care for others.

While earthly kingdoms work from the outside in, enforcing authority, the Kingdom of God works from the inside out. It changes hearts, forms communities, and builds a way of life rooted in love.

Yet as central as these teachings are, they are not the whole of the good news of Christ. The Kingdom matters deeply—but the heart of the gospel is even greater.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Matthew 6 20





1st Priority

Experiencing God, changing priorities.

Prayer and worship stand at the heart of the Christian faith. They are how we respond to the reality that Jesus, as God, came to restore our relationship with Him. Through them, Christians experience God in a living and personal way.

The Bible teaches that true worship is led by the Holy Spirit. Prayer is more than simply reciting words; it is an honest, heartfelt conversation with God that deepens relationship and trust. This was central to Jesus' own life - repeatedly the Gospels show Jesus withdrawing to quiet places to pray. In thanksgiving, confession, and intercession, Christians open their hearts to God, grow in faith, and encounter His presence.

Worship is our response of love and reverence for God. But it is not confined to church services - it is also lived out daily, as we show gratitude for God's grace in the way we live. When we gather together, worship through hymns and songs, scripture readings, sacraments, and sermons unites believers, strengthening our community while lifting our hearts to God. In worship, we not only speak to God but also listen for His voice.

Among the most profound acts of worship are the sacraments, especially Holy Communion. Here we remember Christ's sacrifice and draw close to God. More than a symbol, Communion is a mystical encounter where we Christians believe they receive Christ in a unique and real way.

Prayer and worship shape the priorities of a Christian's life. They turn our focus away from worldly concerns and toward spiritual growth, compassion, and service. As we immerse ourselves in these practices, we become more aware of God's love, peace, and purpose. And as that awareness grows, it overflows into everyday actions that reflect the values of God's Kingdom.

To experience God in prayer and worship—to truly perceive His presence in the world—is one of the greatest privileges of being a Christian.



Follow me

When Jesus says, “Follow me,” He’s inviting us into something far deeper than simply knowing about Him. He’s calling us to know Him personally and to live the way He lived. To follow Jesus is to trust Him, to walk in His ways, and to show love and kindness to others as He did. It’s an invitation into a relationship with God that is rich, meaningful, and life-giving - yet one that stands in sharp contrast to the self-focus and self-gain so common in the world.

To explain this kind of love, Jesus often told stories, or parables. One of the best known is the story of the Good Shepherd. In it, a shepherd has 100 sheep, and one goes missing. Most people would be content to keep the 99 safe, but this shepherd leaves the flock behind and searches for the lost one. When he finally finds it, he doesn’t scold or abandon it - he lifts it onto his shoulders with joy and carries it home.

That act isn’t logical - it’s love.

And it reveals the heart of God’s love for us. This is what Jesus is like with us. In a world that often feels cold or loveless, He knows each of us by name and loves us deeply. Even if we wander off or feel far from Him, He never gives up on us. That truth can be hard to believe at times, but it is the promise at the center of the gospel.

Following Jesus means trusting that love. It means caring for others as He cares for us. And it means living with the assurance that, no matter what, we are never truly alone.

*“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever”
John 6.51*

Further Reading

The following books provide useful introductions to Christianity. All are available on Amazon as paperbacks and ebooks.

"Being Disciples: Essentials Of The Christian Life" by Rowan Williams, SPCK Publishing, 2016

Written for the general reader by one of our greatest living theologians, this book will help you to see more clearly, love more dearly and follow more nearly the way of Jesus Christ.

"Mere Christianity" by C.S. Lewis, William Collins, 1980

This classic work began as a series of radio talks during World War II and remains one of the most accessible introductions to Christian belief. Lewis explains core Christian concepts with clarity and wit, in a conversational style.

"The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel, Zondervan, 1998

Written by a former investigative journalist and atheist, this book follows Strobel's journey as he examines the historical and factual basis of Christianity. He presents the evidence in an engaging, story-driven format, making it a compelling read for skeptics and believers alike.

"Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense" by N.T. Wright

In this thought-provoking book, N.T. Wright explores the fundamental questions of human existence - justice, spirituality, relationships - and how Christianity provides satisfying answers.

Becoming a Christian

If you are interested in exploring Christianity further we would be delighted to talk with you and support you. Please do make contact either after a service or via email: contact@carlfordchurches.org

The Church of England provides a number of videos to introduce you to faith. This is a good starting point:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/when-and-how-did-you-become-christian>



Everyday Faith

There are many resources available from different organisations to support and nurture a faith journey. One of which, available as a app is Everyday Faith - Reflections, prayers and guidance to encourage your everyday faith.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/everyday-faith-portal>

Services in the Carlford Churches.

In our benefice we have a cycle of worship services. Each week on Sunday mornings we offer services of Holy Communion and Morning Prayer across our nine parishes. Services last about an hour and contain readings, hymns and usually a talk or sermon. Some use traditional language. You would be most welcome at any of them, details are in our weekly newsletter available on our website where there are also service listings.

www.carlfordchurches.org



The Start course

The Start introduces Christianity through 6 video-based small group sessions, each lasting 90 minutes couple with discussion.

We are planning to run it as we have demand so please ask about the next start date.

Contact us: Please contact Rev Mark Cresswell
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From the earliest days of the Church, Christians developed short, simple summaries of the faith. This is one of them.

The Apostles' Creed

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.

Acknowledgments:

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Parts of this booklet were drafted and proofread using Apple intelligence writing tools to enhance clarity.