

Access World Religions Christianity Glossary

anoint – A religious act in Christianity (and many other religions) that usually occurs with oil, or chrism. Church leaders anoint congregants during traditional rituals and to heal the sick.

apocalypse – A term used in Jewish and Christian texts to describe the end of the world.

apostles – The twelve disciples or followers of Jesus during his lifetime.

Ash Wednesday – Christians celebrate this holy day on the first day of Lent by receiving ashes in the sign of a cross on their foreheads as a symbol of repentance.

bishop – A male, religious leader in Roman Catholicism who administers to a specific diocese or region of people.

chrism oil – The sacred oil used to anoint Christians.

chrismation – The confirmation ritual for Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches, as well as the Assyrian Church of the East, Anglican and Lutheran churches.

Church of the Holy Sepulcher – A church within Old Jerusalem, originally built in the fourth century. As one of the most revered sites for Christians, it is believed to be Jesus' burial site and continues to be a popular pilgrimage destination for Christians today.

crusades – A series of European military expeditions that began in 1095 and lasted more than 200 years. Thousands joined forces and made the journey East to expel non-Christians from holy cities in the Middle East in an effort to gain religious and political control of the region.

denomination – A school or sect of Christianity. Protestants, Lutherans and Baptists are examples of different Christian denominations.

disciples – The followers of Jesus Christ during his lifetime.

Easter – A Christian holiday that celebrates the divine nature of Jesus Christ and commemorates the Christian belief in his death and resurrection.

ecumenical – Associated with all Christian churches.

ecumenical council – A meeting of Christian bishops organized to analyze, debate and resolve Church doctrine and policy.

Emperor Diocletian – A Roman Emperor from 284-305 B.C.E. who is remembered primarily for his violent persecution of Christians. He also divided the Roman Empire into East and West.

excommunicated – Derived from the Latin ex (out) and communio (communion) which literally means to be “out of communion.” It is an extreme condemnation practiced by Christian religious leaders used to banish a person from a religious community.

filioque – A Latin word meaning “and from the son.” When this phrase was added to the Nicene Creed, it asserted that the Holy Spirit emerged from the Father **and** the Son, a radical notion for church followers in the East who believed that the Holy Spirit rose from the Father only.

gospel – Written by later authors, this collection of four books, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are believed to chronicle the birth, life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Old English translation is “good news.”

Gregorian calendar – A contemporary and international dating system developed in the late sixteenth century and named after Pope Gregory VIII. It replaced the Julian calendar.

Holy Spirit – Often depicted as a white dove, Christians believe the Holy Spirit is a sacred and perfect force that guides the faithful with the power of God. The Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, is one of three equal beings that make up the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ – Christians believe Jesus was the son of God and born from the Virgin Mary to live as a divine representative on earth. Jesus acquired a large following of people during his lifetime, the closest of whom were called disciples. Born in the Roman Province of Judea, he traveled this region performing miracles and spreading his gospel. Roman leaders in Judea became increasingly uncomfortable with the large numbers of people who followed Jesus. He was ultimately arrested and sentenced to crucifixion under the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilot. Jesus died on the cross and was buried in a tomb in Jerusalem. Three days later, Christians believe he rose from the dead.

Jordan River – A river in the Middle East that empties into the Dead Sea and holds spiritual significance for multiple faiths including Judaism and Christianity.

Julian calendar – A dating system developed by Julius Caesar in 45 B.C.E., which was replaced by the Gregorian calendar in the late 16th century.

minister – A religious leader in Christianity who has completed religious study, taken specific vows for the faith and has the authority to lead a church or congregation. A minister’s duties vary from one congregation to another, but can include performing spiritual guidance, weekly services, baptisms, marriages and funerals.

New Testament – Part of the Holy Bible, this is a collection of books written by Christian leaders in the first century C.E. The New Testament follows the Old Testament (for Christians) and includes the gospels, Acts, epistles, Revelation, Order and Apocrypha as part of its contents.

Nicene Creed – The most widely recognized declaration of Christian faith. It dates back to the first ecumenical council in Nicaea, Turkey, in 325, where church leaders gathered because they believed it was necessary to implement a religious creed and address the divine nature of Jesus to solidify a unified Christian faith.

orthodoxy – Derived from the Greek words “orthos” (right) and “doxa” (belief). This term generally refers to those who follow the traditional interpretation of their religion.

Pentecost Sunday – One of the most important holidays in the Christian faith, celebrated seven weeks after Easter. A feast day for Christians that commemorates the contact between the Holy Spirit and the apostles as described in the New Testament.

Pontius Pilot – A Roman prefect in the province of Judaea during Jesus’ lifetime who sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion.

priest – A male religious leader in Roman Catholicism given the authority to lead a church or congregation of people. Duties include weekly services, baptisms, marriages, funerals, administering confession and acting as spiritual guides.

Protestant Reformation – A Christian reform movement, led by Martin Luther, a German priest, in the sixteenth century, in reaction to the excesses of the Catholic Church, specifically the practice of indulgences, which promised an afterlife in heaven to those who contributed large sums of money to the church.

resurrection – The Christian belief that after Jesus’ death and crucifixion, he physically rose from the dead on what would become the first Easter Sunday.

rite of passage – A ritual marking an important time in the life cycle, such as childbirth, adulthood and marriage. Some religious ceremonies require participants to remain in complete solitude, while others involve elaborate public events.

Temple of Artemis – A Greek temple dedicated to Artemis and built around 550 B.C.E. in the ancient city of Ephesus (Turkey). Artemis was a Greek goddess, the daughter of Zeus and Leto and the twin of Apollo. In Greece, Artemis was worshipped mainly as the goddess of the forest, wild animals, the hunt and fertility. In art, she is often presented in a wilderness scene carrying a bow and arrow.

Vatican II – The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican included Catholic bishops from all over the world who gathered in Rome from 1962 to 1965, under the leadership of Pope John XXIII and Paul VI, to discuss Roman Catholic doctrine. This council instituted radical changes in a number of areas, including updating the Catholic liturgy, or religious worship, for the modern era to make it more accessible for an international and multicultural Catholic community.

vernal equinox – Occurring in late March, it marks a time when day and night are exactly equal and ushers in the season of spring. In Latin ver means “spring” and equinox means “equal night.”

Visigoths – An ancient Germanic sub-group of the Goth tribe that ultimately settled in Western Europe. The Visigoths rose to power in the early fifth century under Alaric I when he led his warriors in a historic attack on Rome in 410 that led to the fall of the Western Empire.