

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

(1 Peter 3:18–20)

The word 'prison' in this passage is believed to refer to Hell.

The Resurrection has always been central to the Christian message. For Christians, the resurrection proves that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that there is life after death. Easter is the festival when Christians celebrate the Resurrection but it is celebrated every Sunday and at every Eucharist. 'The third day' was actually a Sunday. It was the first day of the week. The believers in the resurrected Jesus began holding meetings on the first day as well as attending the Jewish synagogue on Saturdays. Soon it became one of the ways of identifying Christians. When Christianity was outlawed, the fact that people met on Sunday was evidence against them.

The resurrected Jesus was not a ghost. He was so real that the disciples ate and drank with him. The New Testament recounts various resurrection appearances which occurred during the next 40 days. Then Jesus appeared for one last time before he returned to his Father in the mystery of the Ascension. The Acts of the Apostles gives a description of the Ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:1–11). Christians still visit the place where this is said to have happened on the Mount of Olives outside the walls of Jerusalem. The Apostles' Creed is expressing the conviction that Jesus returned to be with God and is in the place of highest honour, 'seated at the right hand'.

The belief that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead is part of eschatology, the study of the last things. The word 'apocalyptic' comes from a Greek word meaning to uncover or reveal. It implies a dramatic event when God breaks into history. The belief that God created and controls the

universe leads to the inevitable conclusion that God will be in control of the end of the world. The return of Christ is called the Parousia, the Appearing. This dramatic event will automatically bring Judgement because no longer will there be the opportunity to choose to believe.

HOLY SPIRIT

According to Acts 1, before the Ascension of Jesus, he promised that his disciples would receive the power of the Holy Spirit. The word for power in Greek is 'dunamis'. We get the word 'dynamite' from it. Acts goes on to tell, in chapter 2, how on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell on the followers of Jesus. The experience had such an amazing impact that their lives were totally changed. Christians celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit at Whitsuntide. It is regarded as the birthday of the Christian Church.

Christians believe that the Holy Spirit continues to work in the world. In John's gospel Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the paraclete which is a Greek word for 'the Comforter'. Christians believe that the Holy Spirit gives them guidance, faith, hope, understanding and the spiritual strength to live up to the teachings of Jesus. The power of the Holy Spirit, they believe, is what inspires people and gives special charismatic gifts, such as the ability to preach, teach, heal, prophesy and speak in tongues like the disciples did after Pentecost. Most important of all, the Holy Spirit helps them to spread love in the world.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

(Galatians 5:22–32a)

Christians believe that the Holy Spirit has always been at work in the world. The Holy Spirit referred to in the Apostles' Creed is the same Spirit of God which hovered over the waters at creation and the same Spirit which spoke the word of God through the Old Testament Prophets. The word for spirit in Hebrew is 'ruach'. It can also be translated as breath or wind.

The Nicene Creed says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son ('Filioque' is the word for 'and the Son' in Latin). Some Christians wanted to leave out 'filioque' because they felt that it implied that the Holy Spirit was less important than the first two persons of the Trinity. In fact, this was one of the points which led to the split between the Christians in the West and those in the East in 1054 (see page 63).



THINKING POINT

A dove is a symbol of peace. It is also used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

How appropriate do you think it is as a symbol of the Holy Spirit?

The next statements in the Apostles' Creed are all part of the Holy Spirit working through the church. The Holy Catholic Church refers to the universal church. The word 'Catholic' comes from the Greek word 'Katholikos' meaning universal.

The communion of saints means the fellowship which unites all Christians.

The forgiveness of sins is a process which Christians experience by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It starts with recognising that something is a sin, seeing the need to repent and being truly sorry. Then, believing the promise that God will forgive sins, the Christian can confess the sin, stop feeling guilty and make a new start in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the phrase 'resurrection of the body' the creed reflects the Jewish background from which Christianity grew.

The Jews did not believe in an immortal soul in the way that many Greeks did. In Genesis 2:7 when God creates Adam, he breathes into him and Adam

becomes a living being. The word in Hebrew for this living being is 'nephesh' which means both body and soul; the physical and the spiritual together. The Jews believed that each living being has one life and then dies. The Jewish Scriptures do not contain much teaching about what happens after death. But a belief developed that at the Last Day the dead would rise for Judgement. To the present day, many Jews, Christians and Muslims bury their dead rather than cremating them because of the belief in the resurrection of the body.



The Resurrection by Sir Stanley Spencer.

The creed is expressing the Christian belief that death is not the end. Most Christians are content to accept the teaching in I Corinthians 15 where the resurrection of the body is described as a transformation and a mystery.

The word 'Amen' simply means 'So be it'. It is a Hebrew word expressing the certainty that something is true.

FOR DISCUSSION

What do you think are the essential things which a person must believe before he or she can be described as a Christian?

Christians continue to have theological arguments about the mysteries and paradoxes in their religion and the exact meaning of statements in the creed. Which do you think are the greatest mysteries in the Christian faith?

'Basic Christianity is simple enough even for a child to understand.' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer and consider other points of view.