

How do festivals, like Christmas and Easter, shape Christian faith?

Ben: Hello and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast. I'm your host Ben Hurst, I'm a journalist and broadcaster, and in this series we'll be going over the key beliefs and practices in Christianity. And in this episode we're asking how festivals shape Christian faith.

Joining me is Reverend Pippa White. Hi Pippa, can you introduce yourself?

Pippa: Hiya Ben! Yeah, so I've taken the day away from my job as a parish priest in the Church of England, to be here in the studio with you, to talk all about why Christmas and Easter are significant for Christians like me.

Ben: And obviously there's more to these than just Santa and the Easter Bunny, isn't there Pippa?

Pippa: Haha! There definitely is! Yes, festivals like Christmas and Easter aren't just celebrations. They hold real significance for Christians. They both reflect beliefs about Jesus and are celebrated in really diverse ways across different Christian denominations.

Ben: And in this episode we'll be talking about how Christian festivals connect to important themes, like salvation, incarnation, resurrection and community.

So now might be a good moment to grab a pen and paper, or open your notes app, because we'll be exploring key ideas that will help your GCSE study.

Pippa: And there'll be a quick quiz at the end of the episode to help you test what you've learnt. Shall we get started Ben?

Ben: Let's do it.

Ben: So Pippa, before we talk about the individual festivals, let's start with this question - Why are festivals significant for Christians? Why do they matter?

Pippa: Well festivals can allow Christians to remember key religious moments, like certain times in Jesus' Life, but they are also important for us as individuals and communities. For example, at Christmas, I come together with other Christians, to think and talk about the nativity story, which is all about Jesus' birth.

At Easter I'm focused on talking to my congregation about Jesus' death on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter Sunday, when he rose from death. So when we talk about why these festivals matter - well they are about the significance of the key moments in Jesus' life.

Ben: So, they allow Christians to take time out, come together and remember Jesus?

Pippa: Exactly. Festivals are also times when we express big emotions. Christmas is joyful, Lent, which is the 40 days before Easter, allows time to reflect, and we also celebrate at Easter.

Ben: So let's look more in depth at Christmas and how this festival helps Christians understand God and Jesus.

Ben: Hymns and carols, like the one we just heard, are played in many Christian churches worldwide at Christmas, aren't they Pippa?

Pippa: Yeah they are heard and sung by many Christians. But different denominations celebrate Christmas slightly differently.

Ben: Christmas, a festival many people in the UK will have heard of, even if they're not Christian or religious. But for Christians, there's a lot more going on than just presents and decorations isn't there?

Pippa: Yes, that's right. Christmas is a very busy time of year for me as a priest in a Christian church! Christmas celebrates the belief that Jesus, who Christians see as the

Son of God, was born as a human. This is what we call the incarnation, or in other words the process of God becoming 'in flesh' or human in the form of Jesus.

And it's important because it teaches Christians several key things:

- That God is present on earth
- That God has active interest and involvement in human life,
- And that God understands human feelings - like pain and joy.

Ben: Thank you, Pippa. Right shall we get into the details of how Christmas celebrations vary across different Christian denominations?

Pippa: Let's have a listen to some examples...

Anglican denominations often have a Christmas Eve service, that might include candles, music and carols. Some carols retell the story of the birth of Jesus.

Something that's really common in Anglican churches on Christmas Eve is a 'Crib Service'. That's a church service which starts with an empty mini version of the stable Jesus was born in, and then during the service you put little figurines of the angel, the shepherds, Mary and Joseph and Jesus into it.

Many Catholic Christians may attend Midnight Mass, on the night of Christmas Eve, December 24th.

And Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians often attend lively services with music and community meals.

Ben: But not all Christians celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December do they, Pippa?

Pippa: No. Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on the 7th of January, because they follow a different calendar.

Ben: So we've talked about Christmas services for different Christians. What else is important for Christians at this time of year?

Pippa: Many Christians try to give extra to charity because Christmas isn't just about the birth of Jesus. It's about generosity, being compassionate and really living the message of love and kindness.

Ben: To learn more about Christmas and other Christian festivals, just search 'Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies Christmas'.

Ben: So let's move through the seasons, and go from winter to spring, at least in the Northern Hemisphere! This is when another important Christian festival happens. Let's talk about Easter.

Pippa: Yes! I love Easter, because in lots of churches like mine farmers will often bring in some of their animals.

Ben: And why is Easter important?

Pippa: Easter week focusses on Jesus' final days. From Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, through to Easter Sunday when we mark His resurrection.

Ben: Why do many Christians believe the resurrection is significant?

Pippa: Christianity teaches that the resurrection shows that life continues after death.

Ben: And how does it affect the way Christians live their lives?

Pippa: For me, and I think for many Christians, the belief in life after death can encourage Christians to live in a moral way.

Ben: The resurrection is also connected to forgiveness, isn't it?

Pippa: Yes, Christians believe that through Jesus' death and resurrection, sin can be forgiven.

Ben: And Pippa can you share a good source of wisdom about Easter?

Pippa: Yes, let me read you this one, from the Bible, the book of Luke chapter 24, verse 6: “He is not here; he has risen!”

Ben: Easter is celebrated by Christians all over the world, but what happens at Easter time?

Pippa: Eastertide actually lasts for 50 days!

Ben: So this festival moves from sadness to joy and hope?

Pippa: Yes, that’s right.

Ben: A Vigil is when people keep watch or stay awake - usually whilst praying.

Pippa: Yes, and the Easter Vigil starts in darkness before the whole building lights up.

Ben: What’s it like in your church Pippa?

Pippa: Well, we hold a sunrise service, which means I have to wake up at 5am, which is interesting haha! But then we have a huge breakfast together as a church.

Pippa: Are you ready for a quick quiz Ben?

Ben: Yes - come on test me!

Pippa: Why are festivals significant to Christians today?

Ben: They help people remember important beliefs about Jesus, like His birth and death, and they bring communities and families together.

Pippa: What do Christians celebrate at Christmas?

Ben: Christmas celebrates the belief that Jesus, who Christians see as the Son of God, was born as a human.

Pippa: What key belief does Easter focus on?

Ben: The resurrection, the belief that Jesus rose from the dead after the crucifixion.

Pippa: And finally Ben, which quote from Luke chapter 24 verse 6 relates to Easter?

Ben: “He is not here; he has risen!”

Ben: Thanks for listening to this episode of the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast.

Pippa: In the next episode we’ll explore why pilgrimage is significant for some Christians.

Ben: And don’t forget you might want to take a break before getting to grips with the subject matter again. BBC Sounds has some relaxing music; you can find it by searching for ‘relaxing music’. Bye for now!