

What does Catholicism teach about God?

Lauren: Hello and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast. I'm Lauren Layfield. I'm a broadcaster and writer, and host for this series where we'll be going over the key beliefs and practices for your GCSE exam on Catholic Christianity.

In this episode we're tackling what Catholic Christians believe about God, and we'll be covering topics and themes like the Holy Trinity, God's nature and sources of wisdom.

I'm joined by the brilliant Bobby Seagull. Bobby is a teacher, broadcaster and author. Hi Bobby!

Bobby: Hi Lauren! Thank you for inviting me. I'm really excited about this series! I was brought up as a Catholic. Faith wasn't just something we talked about on Sundays - it genuinely shaped our home life, our celebrations and even how we made decisions.

Lauren: Love it. Before we start, it might be a good idea to grab a pen and paper (or open the notes app on your phone) for jotting things down as you listen.

Bobby: And then we'll round off with a quick quiz.

Lauren: Remember you can find a full range of podcasts covering loads of GCSE subjects, like Physics, as well as Religious Studies - just go to BBC Sounds and search for Bitesize GCSE.

Bobby: Let's dive in!

Lauren: Just before we get started, Bobby, could you give us a bit of background on Catholicism.

Bobby: Of course. Catholicism is one of the main denominations of the Christian faith.

Lauren: And denominations are branches of a religion with their own specific beliefs and practices. How would you describe the size of the Catholic community?

Bobby: Worldwide, the Catholic Church is the largest denomination of Christianity.

Lauren: Can you give us two differences in terms of key beliefs between Catholic Christianity and other denominations of Christianity?

Bobby: Sure. Catholic Christianity teaches that the Virgin Mary has a unique and honoured role.

Lauren: And another difference?

Bobby: The other main difference is the belief in transubstantiation, which is that, during the Mass the bread and wine of the Eucharist truly become the body and blood of Jesus. We'll explore sacraments like this in more detail in other episodes.

Lauren: Ok. But there are still many similarities with other Christian denominations, aren't there?

Bobby: Yes, like other branches of Christianity, the Catholic Church uses the New Testament from the Bible for many teachings and believes in eternal life and that Jesus died for our sins.

Lauren: Let's start with an important point about Catholic beliefs.

Bobby: Catholics believe in one God, and one of the key beliefs about God is the Holy Trinity.

Lauren: Ok. The word Trinity comes from 'tri [three] unity'.

Bobby: That's right. Belief in the Trinity is the belief in one God in three Persons. It's really key to remember.

Lauren: This is one God, rather than three gods?

Bobby: Yes. The Catechism of the Catholic Church - an official summary of beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church - confirms this. It says: "The Trinity is one. We do not confess three gods, but one God in three persons". The Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lauren: Can you explain a bit more about that for us?

Bobby: Let me read this to you from the Catechism, paragraph 2-34:

"The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life."

What the Catechism is saying here is that the Holy Trinity is there to help people understand what God is like, even though His nature is something we can't fully explain.

Essentially, Catholic Christians are taught to know and worship one God as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Lauren: And they experience God in three different ways?

Bobby: That's right. A useful way of understanding the Trinity is by thinking of a person who is a parent, a child, and a friend. It's one person, but they have three different roles. He is one God but exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each with a different role, yet all fully God.

Lauren: That makes sense. Let's look at how the Trinity is talked about within the religion.

Bobby: This hymn is perhaps one of the most well-known pieces of music about the Holy Trinity.

Although the Holy Trinity is not directly named in the Bible, it is reflected in different ways throughout.

For example, the Book of Matthew describes all three persons of the Trinity being present at Jesus' baptism.

Lauren: Can you briefly explain baptism?

Bobby: Baptism is a sacrament. A sacrament is a very significant ritual that demonstrates and builds faith. Baptism involves the immersion in, or sprinkling or pouring of, water. It's a ceremony marking the start of Christian life.

Lauren: Meaning the baptism of Jesus is a really significant biblical passage.

Bobby: Yes. It depicts God being revealed in three ways. Catholicism teaches the belief that the voice from heaven you hear in the passage represents the Father, Jesus Christ is the Son, and it also features a dove which embodies the Holy Spirit.

Lauren: Let's look at how God's nature is described using the Trinity.

Bobby: The Nicene Creed, another religious text, sets out key beliefs about the Holy Trinity.

Let me read this quote to you:

"We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen."

Lauren: Ok. This is the belief in "one God", the creator. What's next?

Bobby: The Nicene Creed says:

"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God."

Catholic Christians believe this refers to the Incarnation, the teaching that God the Son became human in Jesus Christ.

Lauren: And the third part of the Trinity?

Bobby: The Holy Spirit, or as the Nicene Creed describes it, the “giver of life”.

Lauren: For more detail on key beliefs in Catholic Christianity search for ‘Bitesize GCSE Catholic beliefs’.

Let’s move on to how God reveals Himself in Catholicism.

Bobby: Catholicism teaches the belief that God reveals Himself in three main ways - through Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium.

Lauren: That sounds like a lot. Can you help break that down for us Bobby?

Bobby: Of course. Scripture is very simply the Bible. Scripture is one way that God is revealed and provides the foundation for communicating with God: public worship and private prayer. The Catechism describes prayer as “the raising of one’s mind and heart to God.”

Lauren: Got it.

Bobby: Tradition is the word of God passed down through Jesus and the Apostles in the form of teachings, prayers, rituals and practices, like Mass, feast days, and acts of worship.

Lauren: And the Magisterium?

Bobby: The Magisterium is like the Catholic Church’s official teaching authority - made up of the Pope and bishops who act as guides.

Lauren: And all three of these are called sources of wisdom?

Bobby: That's right. Catholic Christianity sees them as working together as a whole to help explain Catholic Christian beliefs.

Lauren: Let's pull this all together.

Bobby: Correct.

Lauren: How do these sources of wisdom actually shape daily life for many practising Catholics?

Bobby: They offer moral, spiritual, and practical guidance.

Lauren: That makes sense.

Bobby: For me, scripture, tradition and the Church's teaching show up in real life and my community.

Lauren: I get that. It's really reassuring to have a community behind you.

Bobby: Are you ready for the quiz Lauren?

Lauren: Go on. Let's see what I've remembered!

Bobby: Ok three quick-fire-quiz questions, ready, Lauren?

Lauren: Ready!

Bobby: Name the three persons that make up the Trinity.

Lauren: The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit

Bobby: Correct! What are the three ways God reveals Himself?

Lauren: Through Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium.

Bobby: Correct! And finally, Lauren, which quote from the Catechism 2-34 relates to the Holy Trinity?

Lauren: “The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life.”

Bobby: Full marks!

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

Bobby: In the next episode we'll ask why the Church is important for Catholic Christians.

Lauren: And don't forget, if you want more revision help, there are loads of podcasts to help you with your RS GCSE - just search 'Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies' on BBC Sounds. See you next time!