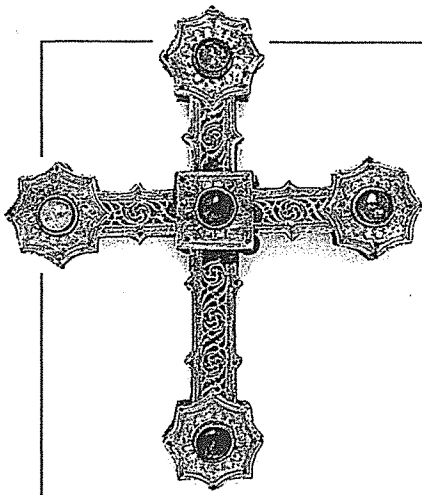


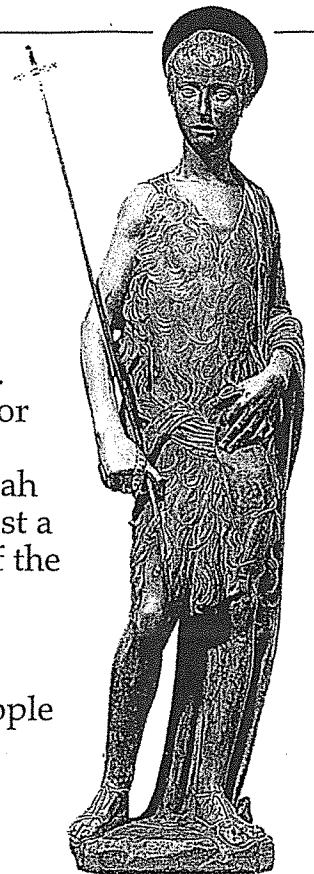
# The Christian faith



## SIGN OF THE CROSS

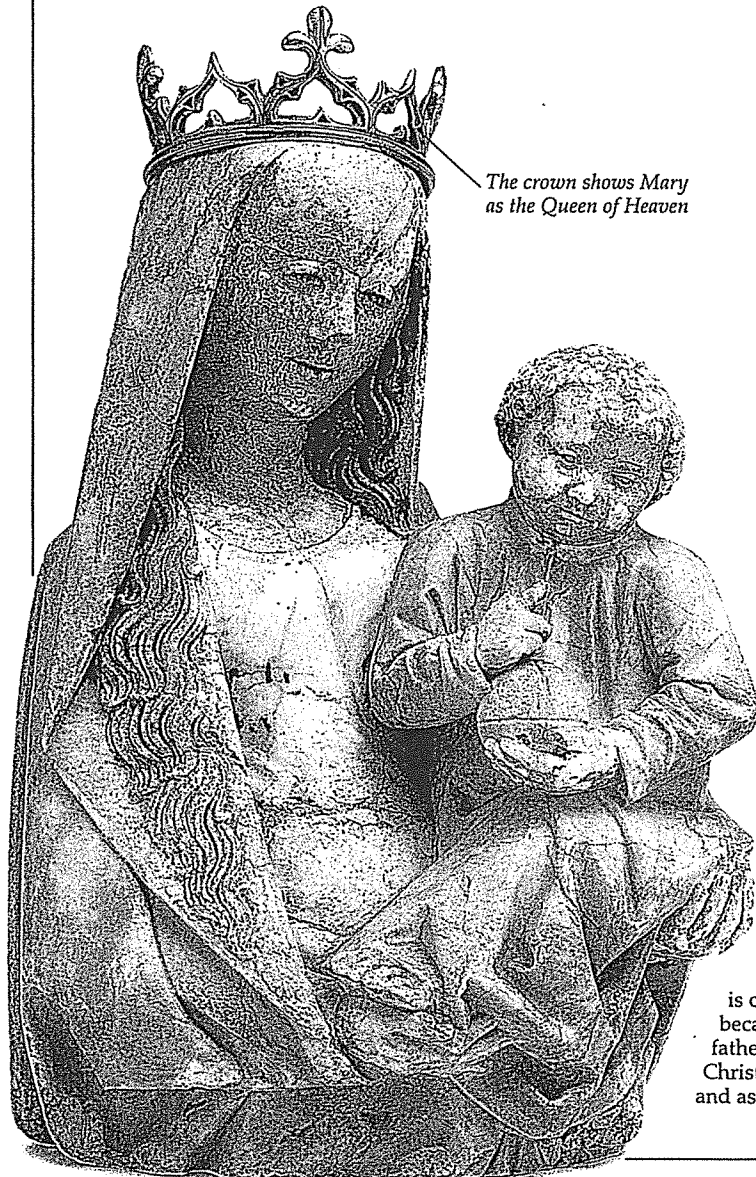
Jesus was executed by being nailed to a cross and left to die (this is called crucifixion). The cross later became the main symbol of Christianity because Christians believe that Christ actually brought salvation by his death and resurrection. When people become Christians and are baptized, they are marked with the sign of the cross.

CHRISTIANS TAKE THEIR NAME from Jesus Christ. Jesus was a Jew who lived in the first century in what is now Israel. At the age of 30 he gathered a band of disciples and traveled about, preaching, teaching, and healing the sick. He declared the need for people to repent (ask for forgiveness for their sins) and to believe in and follow him. His disciples saw Jesus as the Messiah the Jews expected. For Christians, Jesus is not just a man. They believe that God, creator and ruler of the universe, became incarnate (came to Earth as a human being) in Christ to offer forgiveness and salvation to humankind. This was necessary, Christians believe, because God is good and people are not, which creates a gap or barrier between humanity and God. Christians see Jesus as the savior (rescuer) who brings people to God.



## JOHN THE BAPTIST

At the time of Jesus' birth, many Jews were expecting a prophet to come as a "forerunner" heralding the coming of the Messiah. John began teaching before Jesus died, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus was 30, John baptized him in the River Jordan, after which Jesus began to teach and preach. Christians believe that John came to prepare the way for Jesus, and baptism has always been the sign of a person's entry into the Christian community.



The crown shows Mary as the Queen of Heaven



## THE HOLY TRINITY

This picture is used by many Christians to help them think about the Christian belief that God is the Trinity. This means that there are three persons in God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – yet at the same time God is one. In the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, God became human. In the third person, the Holy Spirit, God continues to be present on earth.

## VIRGIN AND CHILD

Statues of Jesus with his mother, Mary, such as this one, are seen in many Christian churches. Respect for Mary as "Mother of God" has developed steadily in some (though not all) branches of Christianity. She is called "the Blessed Virgin Mary" because Christians believe that Jesus' father was not a man but God. Many Christians have great reverence for Mary and ask her to pray for them from heaven.

## CHRISTIANITY

### ONE GOD?

Yes: one God in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the Trinity

### THE AFTERLIFE?

A final judgment, followed by heaven or hell

### FOUNDER?

Jesus Christ, who lived in Palestine c. 6 B.C.E.–30 C.E.

### SCRIPTURES?

The Bible, made up of the Old Testament (the Jewish Bible) and the New Testament

### MAJOR FESTIVALS?

Christmas – Jesus' birthday  
Easter – His death and resurrection

### PRIESTS?

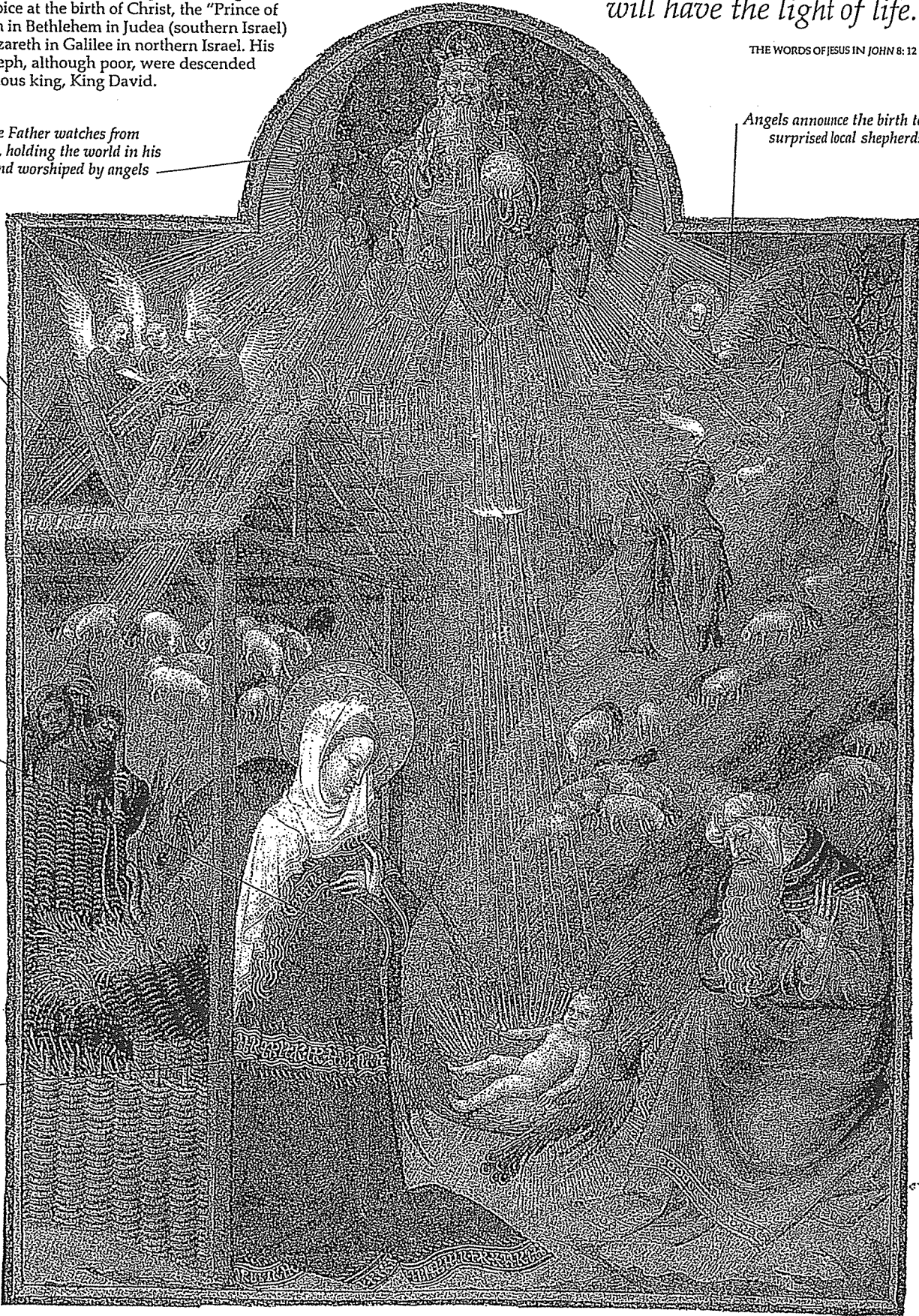
Most denominations have priests

**THE CHRISTMAS STORY**

The most familiar image of the Christian story is of Christ's Nativity (birth), which Christians celebrate at Christmas. In this picture, Jesus, Mary, and her husband Joseph are surrounded by the animals who lived in the stable, by local shepherds and their sheep, and by angels. The angels are singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors" as they rejoice at the birth of Christ, the "Prince of Peace." Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea (southern Israel) and brought up in Nazareth in Galilee in northern Israel. His mother, Mary, and Joseph, although poor, were descended from Israel's most famous king, King David.

*I am the light of the world.  
Whoever follows me will  
never walk in darkness but  
will have the light of life.*

THE WORDS OF JESUS IN JOHN 8: 12



God the Father watches from heaven, holding the world in his hand and worshiped by angels

Angels announce the birth to surprised local shepherds

The baby Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room at the inn in Bethlehem

Mary and Joseph are dressed in blue, the color of divinity and heaven

The painting shows the dress and styles of the artist's day

Picture showing the story of Christ's birth, from a 15th-century book

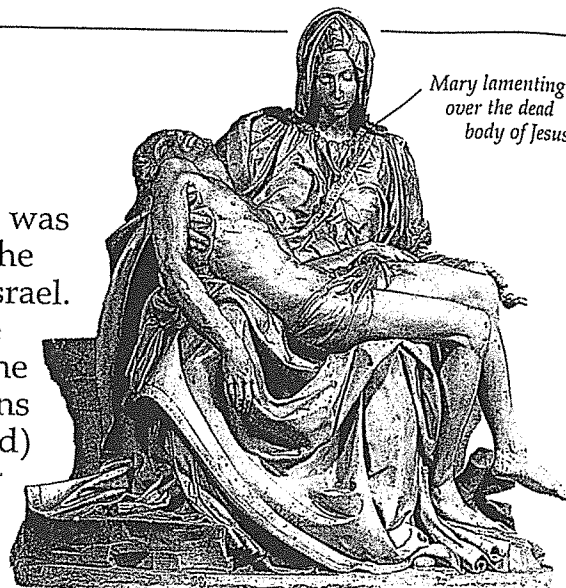


**CUP OF SUFFERING**

Shortly before he died, Jesus held a farewell meal, the "Last Supper," with his disciples. He offered them wine to drink and bread to eat and told them to drink from the cup and eat the bread ever afterward, to represent his blood shed and his life laid down for them. Ever since, Christians have followed this command in services called Holy Communion, the Mass, the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper.

# Way of the cross

AT THE AGE OF THIRTY-THREE, Jesus was arrested, tortured, and crucified by the Roman authorities who then ruled Israel. Christians believe that as he died, he "took on himself" the sins of everyone (all the wrong and evil that, Christians say, is in us and cuts us off from God) so that anyone could be forgiven by God and live with God forever. Three days later, according to the Bible, he rose from the dead. He appeared to his disciples, then he "ascended" to heaven, returning to his Father. So, for Christians, Christ is a living savior who has defeated death, not a dead hero. They believe that he helps and guides those who follow him and that he makes it possible for all to share in his victory over death and sin.



Mary lamenting over the dead body of Jesus

**MOURNING MOTHER**

At the beginning of the gospel story, Mary is asked if she is willing to be the mother of the Son of God. Her "yes" to God is seen as a great example of faith. Many Christians also see her as uniquely blessed by God. She is not often mentioned in the Gospels, but when the time came for Jesus to die, she was one of the few who did not abandon him. She is often pictured in Christian art. A sculpture or picture showing her mourning over the dead body of her son (as above) is called a pieta.

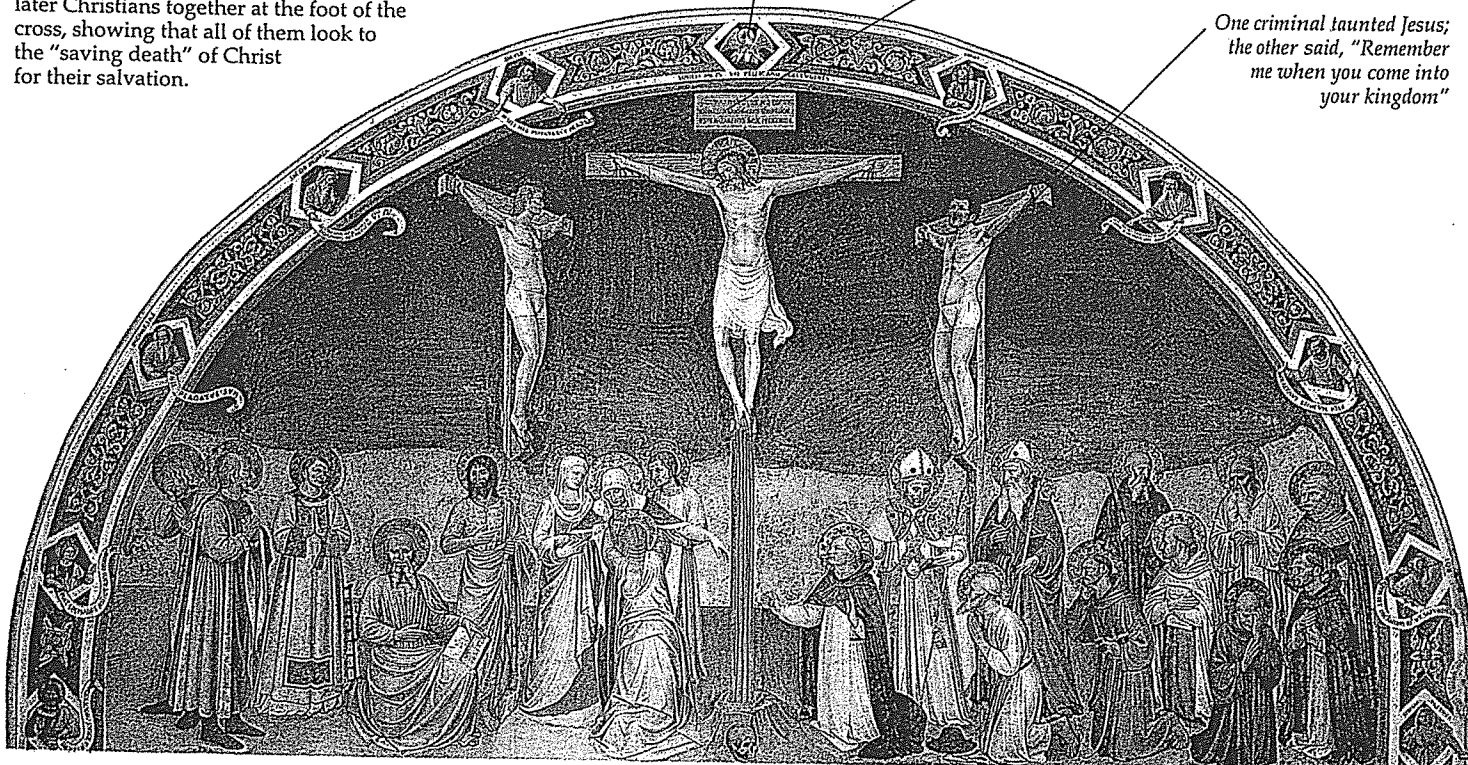
**THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST**

Outside the city of Jerusalem, Jesus was put to death with two criminals. He carried the cross on which he was executed to the place of his death. Crucifixion was then a common, very painful method of execution. Christians seek to live, to love, and to accept suffering patiently, as Jesus did, following him in "the Way of the Cross." Pictures of the Crucifixion feature greatly in Christian art. This picture shows people who were said to be there and later Christians together at the foot of the cross, showing that all of them look to the "saving death" of Christ for their salvation.

The pelican was used as a symbol of Christ because it was believed to pierce its own breast to give blood to feed its young

The writing on the cross quotes Jesus as claiming to be "King of the Jews"

One criminal taunted Jesus; the other said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom"



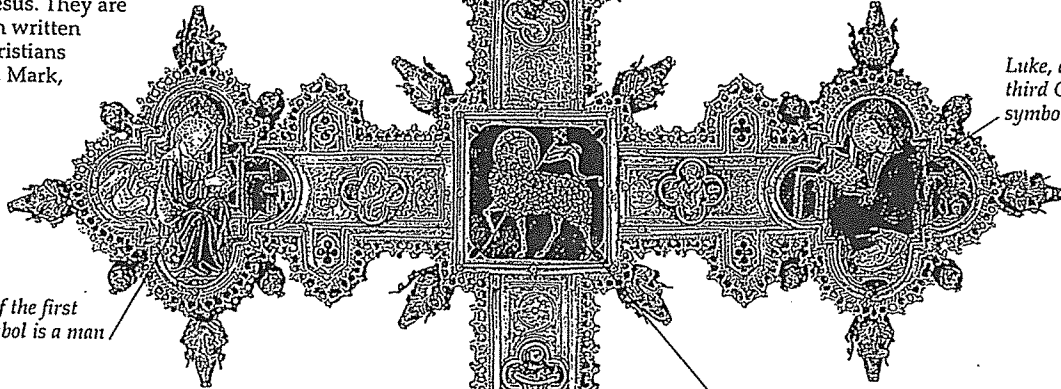
John, author of the fourth Gospel, whose symbol is an eagle

**THE CRUCIFIX AND THE CROSS**

Crucifixes show Christ hanging on the cross; they are symbols of his death and the salvation that, Christians say, it brought. Crosses are empty, and so remind Christians of Christ's resurrection. The four Gospels, whose authors are represented on this cross, are the four books in the New Testament that tell of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They are said to have been written by four early Christians named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

**ASCETICISM**

The ascetic renounces (gives up) many ordinary human activities and bodily comforts in order to live a very simple, ordered, and disciplined life. Such a life also involves dedication to regular prayer and contemplation of the divine. Ascetics may even give up home and job to follow their chosen path.



Luke, author of the third Gospel, whose symbol is an ox

Matthew, author of the first Gospel, whose symbol is a man

Lambs were traditionally used for sacrifice; Christ is pictured as the "lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" because he sacrificed himself

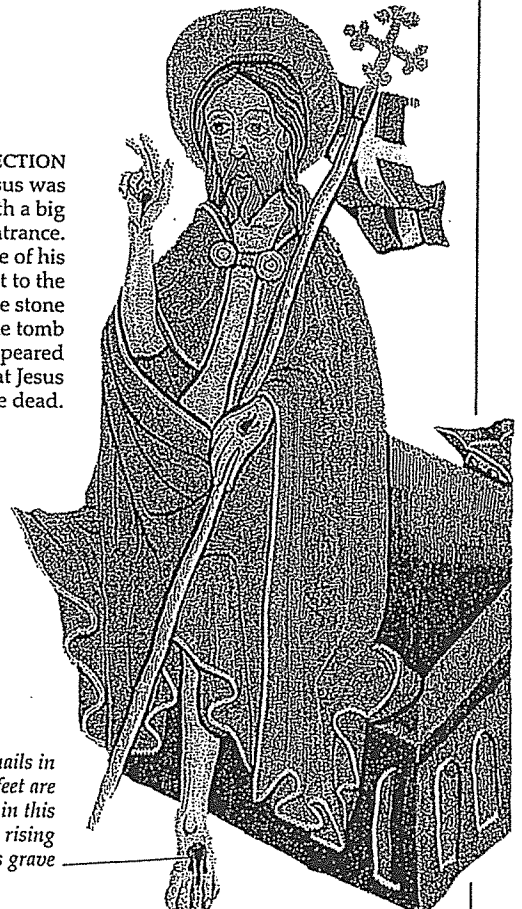
*If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.*

ST PAUL, IN ROMANS 6:8

Mark, author of the second Gospel, whose symbol is a lion



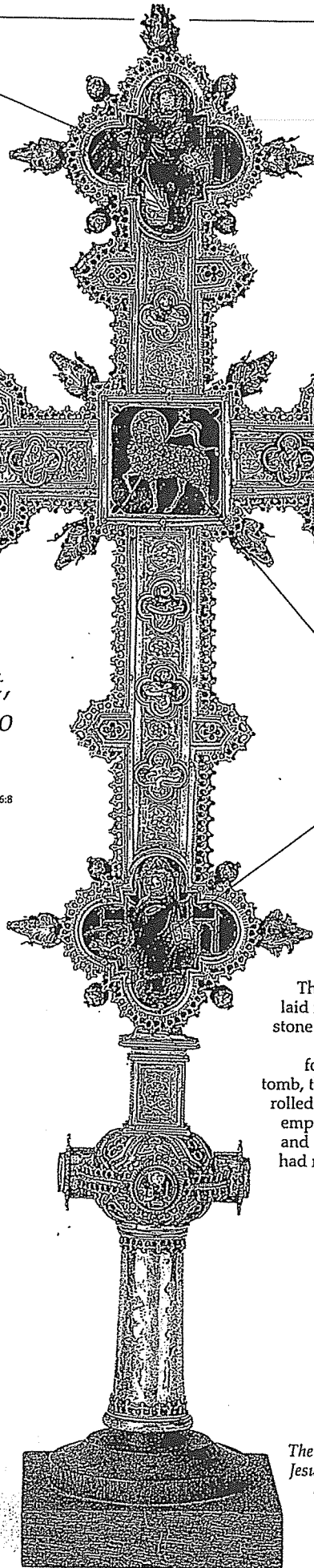
**RESURRECTION**  
The body of Jesus was laid in a tomb with a big stone across the entrance. When some of his followers went to the tomb, they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Angels appeared and told them that Jesus had risen from the dead.



The marks of the nails in Jesus' hands and feet are clearly shown in this picture of him rising from his grave

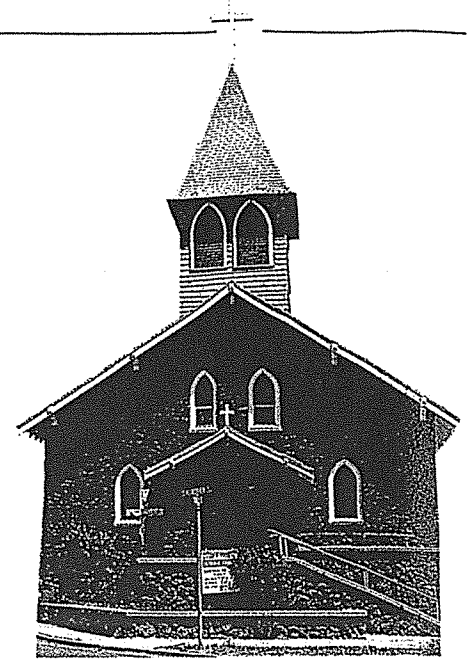
**ASCENSION TO HEAVEN**

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his followers in Jerusalem and Galilee over a period of 40 days. He taught them and commanded them to tell all people the gospel ("good news") - that his death had made forgiveness and new life possible for all - and to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Then he ascended to heaven and returned to God.



# Church of Christ

CHRISTIANS BELIEVE that before Jesus ascended to heaven he promised he would send the Spirit of God to be with his followers after he left them. Shortly afterward, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, who were gathered in Jerusalem, filling them with new boldness and power. They went out and preached that Jesus was the promised Messiah, calling on people to turn away from their sins and be baptized in his name. They formed a community of faith that continues today – an assembly of baptized believers known as “the church,” guided by the Holy Spirit. The early church spread rapidly from Jerusalem across the Roman empire. Today it numbers nearly two billion members worldwide. Christians see the church as “the body of Christ,” united by faith in him and



**CHURCH AND CHURCHES**

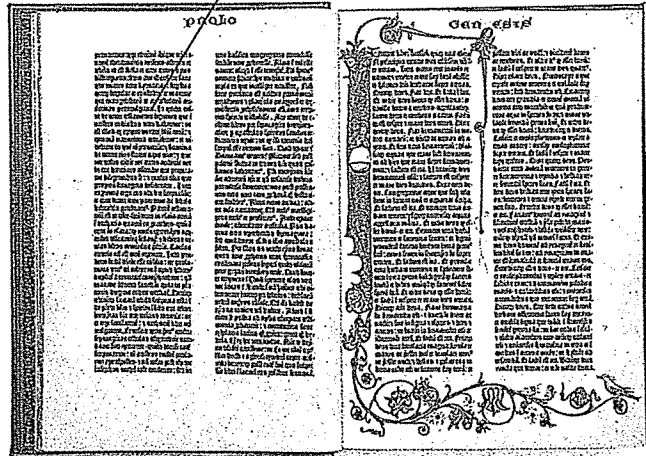
Baptized Christians make up “the church.” In today’s world there are different branches of the church, and many of the branches are split into different denominations. The buildings in which Christians meet to worship God are also called churches. Church buildings across the world are built in many different ways.



## THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Christians celebrate the two ceremonies of baptism and communion. These ceremonies are called sacraments. (Some Christians believe there are also five other sacraments.) Some branches of Christianity see sacraments as signs symbolizing God’s inward, spiritual work; others say they are also instruments used by God to do that work. Baptism is the rite of entry into the church; water is used, symbolizing the spiritual cleansing of the believer’s soul.

Christians believe the Bible to be “the Word of God”



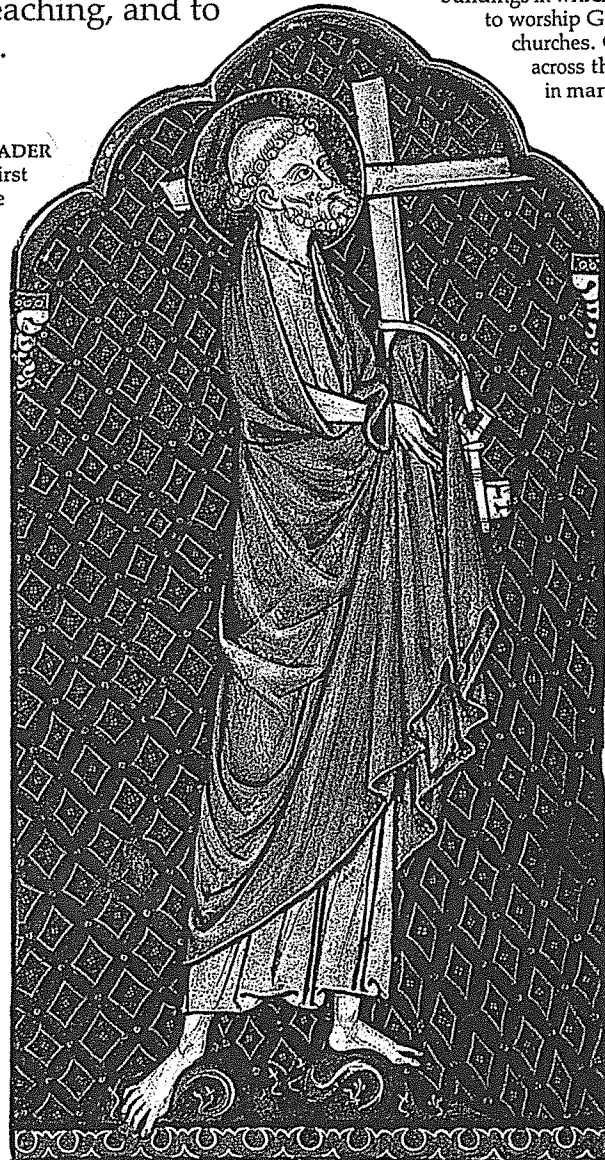
## THE BIBLE

The Bible is the Christian holy book. The first part is the Jewish Bible, called the Old Testament by Christians. The second part, called the New Testament, is made up of the writings of early Christians. The Bible is seen as having unique authority.

called to do his work in the world. They seek to love God and other people as Jesus did, to spread his teaching, and to live as he lived.

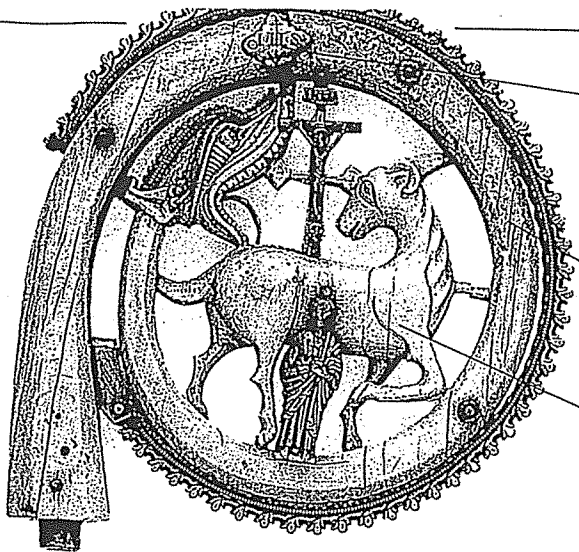
## PETER THE LEADER

Peter was the first disciple to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. He became the chief of the apostles (“sent ones”) – the group of 12 leading disciples – and the leader of the early Christians. He is said to have gone to Rome and led the church there.



Peter holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven

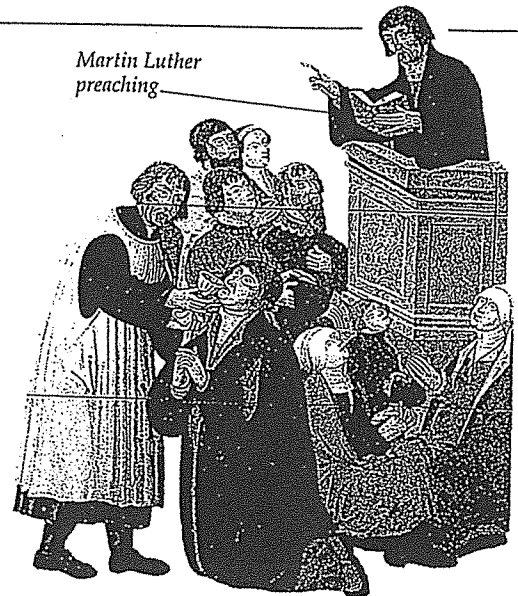
Peter is often called the first bishop of Rome



IHS, the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus

As a sign of their authority, bishops may carry a staff called a crozier, shaped like a shepherd's crook; this is the head of one such staff

A lamb near a cross, used to represent the sacrifice of Christ



Martin Luther preaching

### BISHOPS AND SHEPHERDS

In the Bible Jesus is described as "the good shepherd." Early Christian leaders were therefore also seen as shepherds ("pastors" in Latin), called to look after the people in their churches (the flock) as a good shepherd looks after his sheep. Christians who led and cared for others became known as "pastors" and their leaders as "bishops" (watchers).

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart... and your neighbor as yourself.*

THE WORDS OF JESUS, IN MARK 12:30-31

### DIFFERENT CHURCHES

By the 11th century, Christianity was split into two main groups: the Roman Catholic Church in western Europe, headed by the Pope in Rome, and the Eastern Orthodox in eastern Europe, centered in Constantinople (now Istanbul). Reformers such as Luther and Calvin broke away from the authority of the Pope in the 16th century. Their followers came to be known as Protestants.

### PREACHING AND TEACHING

Jesus spent a great deal of time preaching and teaching. He taught both by sermons and by parables - little stories, taken from ordinary life, with a spiritual meaning. The best known of Jesus' sermons is "The Sermon on the Mount," pictured here. Jesus' parables and sermons are recorded in the Bible and are still used today to teach and to spread the Christian faith.

The twelve apostles listen to the sermon

Jesus Christ preaching

