



Salvation: primary teachers' guide

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Introduction

This guide, produced by Westminster Abbey, contains key information on Christian beliefs about salvation, to support the delivery of Religious Education within your classroom.

Westminster Abbey has a distinctive role within the Church of England, which is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It is neither a cathedral nor a parish church, and it stands outside the normal jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. It is instead a 'Royal Peculiar', which was a status granted to it in 1560 by Elizabeth I, under which the Dean and Chapter are directly answerable to the Sovereign. Building upon its origins as a monastery and the Benedictine importance placed on education, Westminster Abbey today strives to be a school of the Lord's service.

This resource discusses salvation in broad terms based on Christian teachings. All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Salvation and sin

The notion of salvation is fundamental to Christianity. Christians believe that through the Fall, sin entered the world. The story of Adam and Eve – seen by many Christians today as representative, symbolic figures – gives us an account of how humans disobeyed God, and abused their own free will. In order to restore the relationship between God and mankind, Jesus became human, lived and died among us, and rose from the dead, sending his Holy Spirit on the Church to live as his new community.

Christians learn about original sin in Genesis 3:1-7. Christians interpret the Genesis story in different ways. For many Christians, this is a symbolic account and there is a poetic style to the telling of the creation story, particularly seen in Genesis 1 with the repeated literary device of the phrase "And God saw that it was good". You may find it helpful to read the full passage out loud.

When the symbolic figures of Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, they 'fell' from perfection and through choosing disobedience led to all humans being born in what Christians call 'original sin'. The story in Genesis 3 demonstrates the human disposition to not always choose the good, as humans have free will.

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her and he ate." (Genesis 3:6)



As all humans are descendants of Adam and Eve – symbolically the first humans - Christians believe that every person has the ability to disobey God, as described by St Paul,

“since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)

Christians believe that it is important to seek reconciliation with God, as living a sinless life is essentially impossible in the world.

The role of Christ in salvation

Christians believe that salvation from sin was the purpose of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

“She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21)

In the Acts of the Apostles 4:8-12, Peter reminds his listeners that Jesus was crucified and resurrected by God,

“This Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.”
(Acts 4:11)

Christians believe that Jesus is the “new Adam” as the first-born of a new kind of humanity in which a relationship with God becomes possible. Jesus’ teaching and ministry calls people to salvation. In his speech, Peter continues to explain that it is Jesus alone who can save human beings, implying that it is the teachings of Jesus that must be followed if people are to receive salvation.

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Atonement

Atonement, the belief that Jesus’ death on the cross “achieved” the healing of the relationship between God and humankind is a fundamental component of Christians teaching. In John 3:10-21, Jesus makes clear that the Incarnation of God’s only Son offers salvation to human beings. Christians believe that they respond to this gift through faith.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

Sacrifice of animals, and offerings of grain and wine, to make up for sins is a familiar concept in the Old Testament, often with lambs or goats being killed to ‘atone’ for the sins of human beings. This is why Jesus is often referred to as the Lamb of God.

This sending of God’s only Son, and not holding him back from death on the cross, shows Christians that God is omnibenevolent, all-loving and infinitely good. Christians remember the importance of Jesus’ sacrifice and that God makes eternal life possible in both the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed.

“I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,



the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.” (The Apostles’ Creed)

“For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.” (The Nicene Creed)

Creeds express the most important Christian beliefs and teachings and were written to be recited during public worship, cementing the centrality of the doctrine of atonement in Christian teaching.

Salvation and the Church

Christians become members of the church through baptism. If someone is baptized as a child, they will usually declare the promises initially made on their behalf by godparents for themselves at Confirmation. Whilst in the minds of many salvation focuses on the afterlife, salvation is also about building a relationship with God while on earth. This means that the doctrine of salvation is intimately associated with the Church, as a space that brings together a community of people who believe in God’s grace and the role of Jesus Christ in salvation.

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundations of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.” (Ephesians 2:19-20)

The Church is entrusted with the teachings of the Gospel. These are expressed in public worship, including sermons and sacramental life. Christians believe that they are fed and sustained through receiving Holy Communion. In the church, Christians learn about the forgiveness of sins, and experience that forgiveness in their own lives. For many Christians, this is highlighted in the public confession of sins during services, and in private confession with a priest, who is entrusted with the power to declare Christ’s forgiveness.

Finding out more

You may also wish to look at our other [Christian beliefs teaching resources](#).