

# Year 8 Religion, Catholic Studies

## Early Christian Communities



Name:

Teacher:

Class:

(Compiled by Miss S. Jajo and Mrs T. Geracitano. 2014)

**B8-3 Early Christian Communities**

This unit examines the growth of the Church, which began with a small group of fearful disciples and within a few hundred years of the first Pentecost, had become a worldwide religion. It describes Paul's role as the 'Apostle to the Gentiles', and examines the men and women in Scripture who were the first Christian missionaries. The unit identifies the core beliefs worked out at the Council of Jerusalem. Students examine why the early Christians were persecuted, and the consequences of Constantine's conversion to the Christian faith.

# Early Christian Communities

TERM	DEFINITION
Call	
Challenge	
Community	
Conflict	
Conversion	
Gentile	
Gospel	
Jew	
Kosher	
Law	
Missionary	
Opportunity	
Paul/Saul	
Pentecost	
Response	
Sabbath (1)	
Sabbath (2)	
Values	

## How did the Church begin?

	<b>RESURRECTION</b>	<b>ASCENSION</b>	<b>PENTECOST</b>
<b>What happened?</b>	Jesus rose from the dead	Jesus was taken up to heaven forty days after he rose from the dead	The Holy Spirit came to the Disciples and they received the gifts of the Holy Spirit
<b>Who was involved?</b>	Jesus, the women	Jesus	The disciples, the Holy Spirit
<b>What does it mean?</b>	That death is not the end, there is life after our early life	Jesus returned to be with God	The disciples were sent to spread the Good News about Jesus
<b>Which Scripture reference talks about it?</b>	Luke 24:1-7	Mark 16:19	Acts 2:1-13
<b>What does the Bible say?</b>	The women visited the tomb and found it empty. Two men in bright shining clothes asked them why they were looking in a tomb for someone who is alive.	Jesus was taken up to heaven to sit at God's right hand side	Tongues of fire touched each person and they were able to speak different languages
<b>What does the Church teach?</b>	Jesus Christ was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.	Jesus went before us into God's kingdom so that we live in the hope of joining Him one day	The Church began on this day. All Christians are called to spread the Good News.
<b>When in the Church calendar is it celebrated?</b>	Easter Sunday	During the Easter season	At the end of the Easter season
<b>What colour is this feast day?</b>	White	White	Red



# Birth of the Church

## The Pentecost

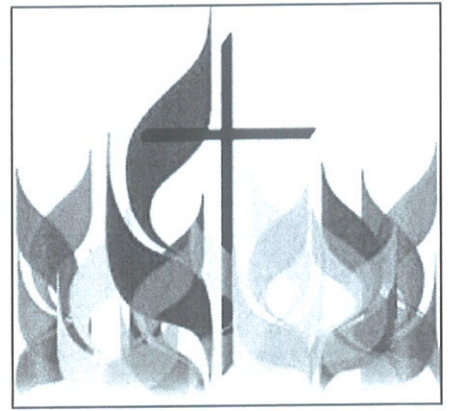
Christianity grew from small groups of Jesus' followers who remained together after His Resurrection.

At first, these groups followed the Jewish religion. However, as their message of Jesus spread throughout the lands, Gentiles (non-Jews) also came to believe in Jesus. This resulted in these groups breaking away from Judaism.

Over time, Jewish synagogues expelled Jews who became followers of Jesus. This meant that they could not trade or eat with other Jewish people, which ended their relationship with the Jewish community.

Jesus Christ laid the foundations for Christianity. The Church first came alive on Pentecost, as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

This experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit ensured that the first followers of Jesus would become confident to spread Jesus' teachings.



## Questions

1. What is Pentecost?

---

---

2. What is the liturgical colour of Pentecost?

---

---

3. Explain why Pentecost is described as the birth of the Church.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# The First Christians

What happened to the first Christians after Jesus Christ had died and risen? This question is partly answered in the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Paul.

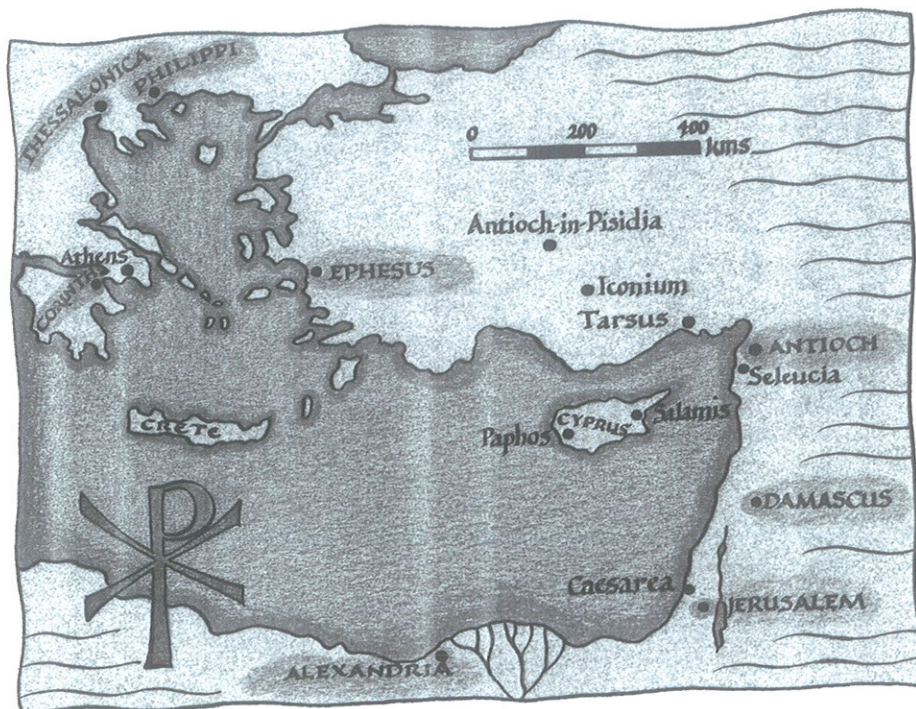
## 3.1 Pentecost: the Birth of the Church

Despite all their concerns and fears, the first Christians had the promise that Jesus would not abandon them but would send a special counsellor or protector to help and guide them. The transformation of the first Christians into people filled with faith and courage is told in the story of Pentecost. The Apostles, led by Peter, began to proclaim the message of Jesus to people from every nation who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover. The number of disciples began to increase.

The message of Pentecost was the message of the Resurrection. The Apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit and led by Peter, were determined to share the story of the Risen Christ. Pentecost, seven weeks after the first Easter, may be described as the birthday of the Church.

### *Pentecost and the Holy Trinity*

Pentecost is also a feast that celebrates the Trinity, the term that describes the nature of God. The special Counsellor that Jesus promised was the Holy Spirit. With the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit reveals to us the nature of God – three Persons, yet one God. Pentecost is important because it celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.





# The Story of Pentecost: The Beginning of the Church

## Acts of the Apostles 2:1-15

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travellers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God."

They were all astounded and bewildered, and said to one another, "What does this mean?" But others said, scoffing, "They have had too much new wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, "You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning!"

## Activities

1. How is the Holy Spirit identified in the story?
2. Name some of the places that visitors to Jerusalem came from?
3. How did the people react to the preaching of the Apostles?
4. Create a symbol to illustrate how you would have felt as an early Christian after the death of Christ.

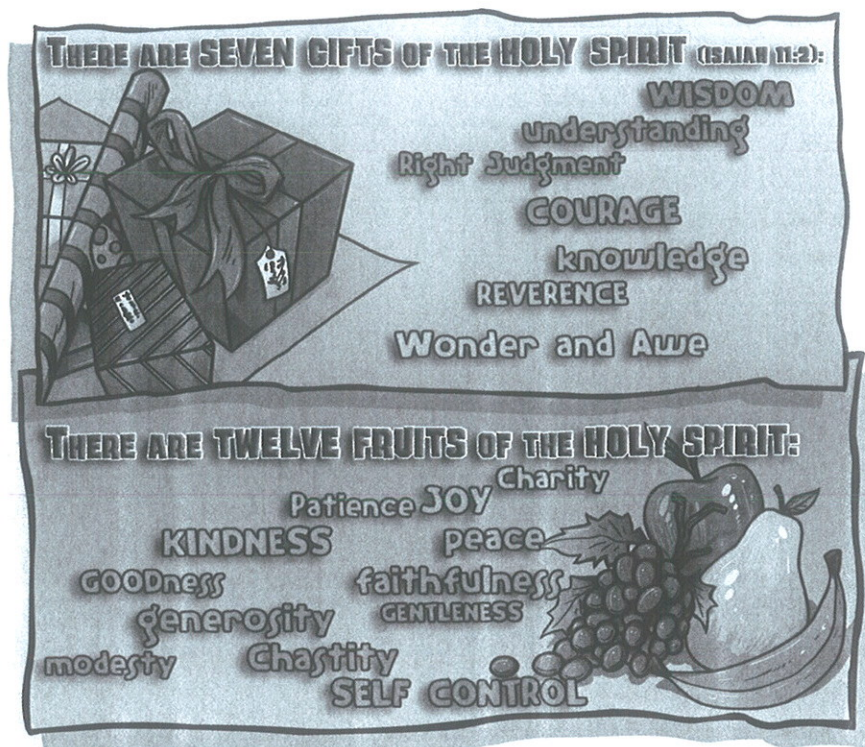


In the story of Pentecost we hear of the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit.  
This spirit will live in them, giving them strength and courage to continue Jesus' work on earth.

*In the boxes provided, draw a cartoon, telling the story of Pentecost.*

The Story of Pentecost:  
The Beginning of the Church

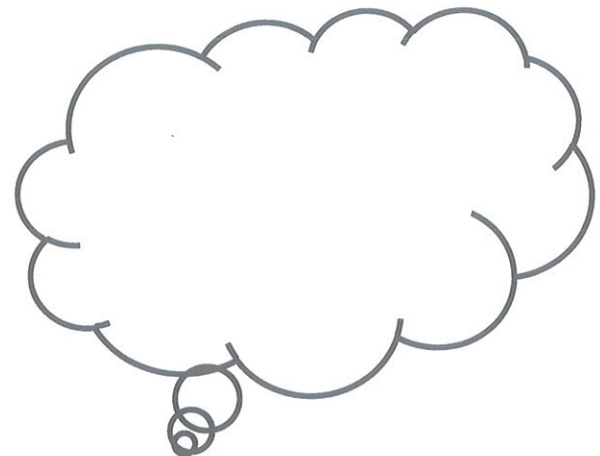
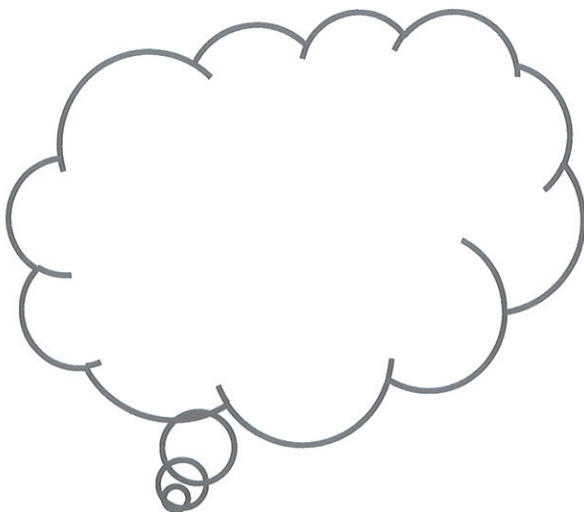
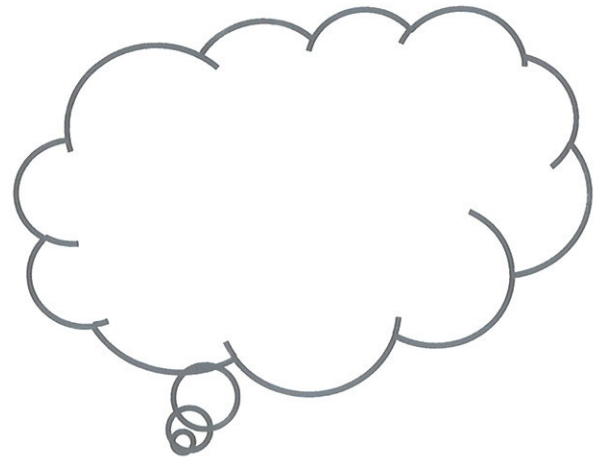

# Fruits and Gifts of the Holy Spirit



1. In a table, define the meanings of the SEVEN gifts of the Holy Spirit and the TWELVE fruits of the Holy Spirit.
2. Select THREE from each group (6 in total) that are the most challenging for you (to live by).
3. Class Poll: After conducting a class poll, identify which gift and fruit were considered to be the most important. Explain why.

# Early Church VS Today's Church

1. In pairs, compile a list of activities that take place in Christian communities today.





## Difficulties faced by Christian Communities

1. Write out a list of the difficulties faced when starting an organisation.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

2. Compare these difficulties to those faced by early Christian communities.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



## Classification Task

1. Think about contemporary examples of Parish activities. In the table below, categorise these activities into those which DO and DO NOT reflect the Early Church.

<b>DO REFLECT</b>	<b>DO NOT REFLECT</b>

# Persecution and Martyrdom

## Define

✓ Persecution:

✓ Martyrdom:

## St Stephen: The First Martyr

Stephen was one of the great men of faith in the early church. Though he was not an apostle, he holds a special place in scripture because he was chosen to minister to the widows who were being cared for in Jerusalem. It seems that some of the widows were being overlooked and neglected, so Stephen and six other men who were "full of faith and the Holy Spirit", were chosen to take care of them.

He also was the first Christian martyr (MAR ter). A martyr is a person who holds to a belief so strongly that he/she is willing to die for it. Such was the faith that Stephen had in Jesus Christ.

Stephen was able to work miracles among the people. He began to preach and some of the Jews would argue with him about his beliefs. These evil men persuaded some men to say that Stephen was speaking against Moses and even against

God. This wasn't true, but many people got upset about it because they believed it was true.

They took hold of Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish rulers. In the picture you can see him appearing before the group. Directly in front of him is the high priest with the beautiful breastplate on the front of his garment. It contained gold and twelve different precious gems. On each stone was written the name of one of the tribes of Israel.

These were powerful men who were able to make life and death decisions about people. But Stephen was not afraid to speak the truth. As he stood before them, they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

He began to speak to them. He told about the whole history of the Jewish people beginning with Abraham. Then he accused the men, and their fathers before them, of hurting and killing the prophets, and even of killing the Righteous One, Jesus.

The rulers became very angry with him, but Stephen looking up to heaven, saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He told the men what he was seeing.

They put their hands over their ears because they didn't want to listen to him. They yelled at the top of their voices. They rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him to death.



While they were throwing stones at him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit," and "Lord do not hold this sin against them." Then he "fell asleep" (died).

He had the same forgiving spirit that Jesus had when he had said the same words when he was on the cross.

The young man who was consenting to Stephen's death was Saul of Tarsus.

**Extension Activity:**

- Identify a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Martyr (Examples; Andrew, Bartholomew, Philip). Describe their persecution and experiences as an Early Christian Martyr.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# St Stephen - First Martyr

St Stephen was one of \_\_\_\_\_ men chosen to be \_\_\_\_\_ to serve the \_\_\_\_\_ members of the community. He was a man filled with the \_\_\_\_\_ and with the \_\_\_\_\_.

His jobs included:

- \* \_\_\_\_\_
- \* \_\_\_\_\_
- \* \_\_\_\_\_

Some of the Jews \_\_\_\_\_ his preaching about \_\_\_\_\_ and so he was arrested and \_\_\_\_\_.

They found witnesses to falsely testify that Stephen had committed \_\_\_\_\_.

St Stephen knew the \_\_\_\_\_ would help him and so he wasn't \_\_\_\_\_.



## The Martyrdom of St Stephen (Acts 7:54-60)

**54** When they heard these things, they became \_\_\_\_\_ and ground their teeth at Stephen. **[j]** **55** But filled with the \_\_\_\_\_, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56** "Look," he said, "I see the \_\_\_\_\_ opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" **57** But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. **58** Then they dragged him out of the city and began to \_\_\_\_\_ him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named \_\_\_\_\_. **59** While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." **60** Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this \_\_\_\_\_ against them." When he had said this, he \_\_\_\_\_. **[k]**

For this reason, St Stephen's feast day is \_\_\_\_\_, and he is considered the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Christian Church to have \_\_\_\_\_ for his \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_. After his death a bitter \_\_\_\_\_ started and many Christians fled from \_\_\_\_\_.

## The Role of Saul

Saul was a \_\_\_\_\_ who had \_\_\_\_\_ of St Stephen's death. He was very \_\_\_\_\_ in the persecution of Christians at the time.

Perhaps it was the courageous witness of St Stephen that eventually enabled Saul to find the strength to turn to Christ and follow Him.





## St Paul: A Christian Hero



1. Read pages 62-65 and 69-71. In groups, you will be allocated one section of the story. You will be required to make a short summary on the information presented. This will be presented to the class.

- ✓ Paul's Background
- ✓ Paul's Conversion
- ✓ Paul's Journeys: 1<sup>st</sup> Journey
- ✓ Paul's Journeys: 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey
- ✓ Paul's Journeys: 3<sup>rd</sup> Journey
- ✓ Characteristics of Paul
- ✓ A Key Teaching of Paul

<i>Section of Story</i>	<i>Summary</i>
Paul's Background	
Paul's Conversion	
Paul's Journeys: 1 <sup>st</sup> Journey	
Paul's Journeys: 2nd Journey	

Paul's Journeys: 3rd Journey	
Characteristics of Paul	
A Key Teaching of Paul	

# The Letters of St Paul

LETTER	LOCATION	YEAR	CONTEXT	THEMES
Romans	Corinth	57-58AD	He is about to go visit the Christian community at Rome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Jesus Christ</li> <li>* The Gospel</li> <li>* Christianity as a faith for all</li> </ul>
1 Corinthians	Corinth	57 AD	Corinth was a political and commercial centre full of vice and sin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Addressing the sins of the centre</li> <li>* How to prevail against a pagan environment</li> <li>* Christian love</li> <li>* The Resurrection</li> </ul>
2 Corinthians	Corinth	57 AD	After he was released initially from Rome it explains his reasons for not coming back to visit the Christians in Corinth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Against false apostles</li> </ul>
Galatians		55-57 AD	The Jewish Christians of some of the Churches Paul had founded on his first missionary journey were being persuaded that the Gentile converts had to also obey Jewish laws of circumcision etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and His Cross alone</li> </ul>
Ephesians	Rome	62 AD	While he was in prison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Universal unity of the Church</li> <li>* The mystical body of Christ</li> <li>* Jesus' spousal love</li> </ul>
Philippians	Philippi	62 AD	To encourage the people to continue to practise their faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Christ's self-emptying act of salvation</li> </ul>
Colossians	Rome	62 AD	While captive in Rome To instruct the Church in Colossae on specific errors about Christ's nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Christ as the head of the Church and whole of creation</li> </ul>
1 Thessalonians	Thessalonica	52 AD	Relates the troubles that St Paul encountered on his visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The Second Coming of the Messiah</li> </ul>
2 Thessalonians	Thessalonica	52 AD	Instructing the people on the second coming and working hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The Second coming of the Messiah</li> <li>* Living an idle life</li> </ul>
Philemon		63 AD	To plead for Philemon's run-away slave, Onesimus, to be accepted back by Philemon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Forgiveness</li> <li>* The body of Christ</li> </ul>







## St Paul's advice to the early Christian Communities

St Paul wrote letters to many of the early Christian communities or Churches. In these letters he often talked to the people about current problems. He would offer advice on how they should think and act as followers of Christ.

Read the following Scripture references and complete the table

Scripture References	Name of the city or community to which St Paul is writing	Key line from this passage of scripture	Explanation of the key issue St Paul is writing about
Romans 12:14-21	Rome	Bless your persecutors: never curse them, bless them	
1 Corinthians 1: 10-15	Corinth	Brothers (and sisters), I urge you not to have factions among yourselves	
Ephesians 4:25-32	Ephesus	Your mind was to be renewed in spirit	
Colossians 3: 5-11	Colossae	„„you have put on a new self	
1 Thessalonians 5: 19-20	Thessalonica	Be at peace among yourselves	

# Early Christian Converts

## Define

✓ Convert:

1. Read each of the following references about the lives of some Early Christian converts.
  - Lydia (Acts 16:23-39)
  - Tabitha (Acts 9: 35-42)
  - Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:1-3, 24-26)
  
2. In your books, answer the following questions:
  - a) What qualities did these people have?
  - b) Why were they admired by their fellow Christians?



# The Council of Jerusalem

1. Distinguish between Jews and Gentiles.

---

---

3. Read Acts 4:32-34 (in the box below).

## **The Believers Share Their Possessions**

<sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all <sup>34</sup> that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales.

a) What benefits would result if all people lived like this?

---

---

b) What are the difficulties in achieving the lifestyle it describes?

---

---



# The Council of Jerusalem – The First Major Problem

There was a lot of pressure within the early Christian Church. The question the early Christians were asking was “where does Judaism fit in the new Christian religion?” Does this new religion replace Judaism or does it continue Judaism? If a Jewish person becomes a Christian should their life be any different? Should they continue to follow the laws that Moses gave them, not just the 10 Commandments but the 613 *Mitzvot* (smaller Jewish laws)? Should they change what they eat? Should they be circumcised? Should they read the Old Scriptures (the Torah)? Should they worship in the Temple?

The people within Judaism disagreed with each other about the answers to these questions.

There were two sides to this debate:

1. The first group was headed by James the apostle, the head of the local church-community in Jerusalem. They believed that the old Jewish customs, rituals and laws should be kept. (Acts 2:26; 21:10). This group believed that they were the chosen people and that Moses had given them a law to follow and they should not give up that law. These people said that Jesus was a Jew so the new church-community should follow the laws that Jesus followed. They believed that if Christians did not follow the Jewish law then they were not being true to Jesus’ message because he was a faithful Jew.
2. The other group was lead by Paul. His side believed that Jesus had a new message and this message challenged Judaism and its laws. Paul said that Christians should not be bound by the old laws, that Jesus’ message was one of love and therefore anyone should be able to join Christianity.

The decision made at the Council of Jerusalem brought about the first split in Christianity.



# The Council of Jerusalem

## **The Church's first big problem:**

Would the church be only for Jewish people, or would the church be for all people, Jewish or not?

## **Issue talked about at the Council:**

Do Gentiles (non Jewish people) need to be circumcised to be Christian?

Do Gentiles need to follow the Jewish dietary laws (rules that tell them what they can and can't eat and drink)?

For Paul, the problem over the issue of circumcision had a great deal to do with Jesus' message. If Gentiles are made to practise Jewish Law, it would be like saying that having faith in Jesus is not enough and therefore they can't be saved.

## **What happened at the Council?**

- Paul's attitude was accepted by the Church
- The Christian Church was no longer only for Jewish people
- It was a turning point / an important point in the history of the Church

## **What happened after the Council?**

Gentiles no longer had to be circumcised when they became Christians. They did, however, have to follow some Jewish laws:

- Food offered up to idols (false gods) was forbidden
- Illegal sexual intercourse was not allowed (adultery)
- Some food laws had to be followed.

## Constantine and the Christians

Emperor Constantine was a ruler of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century. His mother, Helena, was Christian. This influenced his style of ruling and after a series of battles won, he too, converted to \_\_\_\_\_. Constantine became the first Roman Emperor to be Christian.

In his most famous victory at the Battle of Milvian, he had a \_\_\_\_\_ where he saw his victorious army marching under the sign of Jesus Christ - a cross in the sky with the words '*In hoc signo vinces*' - By this sign you shall conquer. He then won the battle and had those words and the symbol of Christ - the \_\_\_\_\_ - inscribed on the banners and shields of his soldiers.

In 313 Constantine issued the Edict of Milan which granted \_\_\_\_\_ freedom to everyone in the Empire. For the first time, Christians were able to publicly profess their faith without being \_\_\_\_\_.

Other positive effects from this included:

- \* Roman methods of organisation were adapted by the Church to help her governance
- \* Crucifixion was \_\_\_\_\_ as a form of execution in 316
- \* Laws were established to help protect children
- \* The centralised government of the Empire helped maintain the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church
- \* Cohabitation without lawful marriage was made \_\_\_\_\_

Some \_\_\_\_\_ effects include:

- \* The Church losing her independence from the State

vision	persecuted	Chi Rho
abolished	Christianity	illegal
religious	unity	negative

## Persecution by Nero

Paul's Journeys tell us by the middle of the first century there were groups of Christians scattered throughout the Roman world. A large community of Christians had gathered in the imperial capital, Rome. It was here, around the year AD 64, that the emperor Nero launched a fierce persecution of Christians. Nero blamed them for a fire that engulfed the city. It was during this time that both St Peter and St Paul were martyred in Rome.

✓ Below is an excerpt that describes how Nero persecuted the Christians.

*First of all, those who admitted they were members of the sect were arrested. Then, based on what they confessed, large numbers were convicted, not so much on the charge of arson as for hatred of the human race. They went to their deaths accompanied by derision, they were covered with skins of wild animals and ripped to pieces by dogs, or they were nailed to crosses and, when darkness fell, set on fire to become lamps in the night... Therefore, pity was aroused for them, caused by the impression that they were being sacrificed not so much for the welfare of the state as to the ferocity of one man.*