# Christianity

# Jesus and the Ideals of Christianity

- Jesus born in Bethlehem in the Roman province of Judea (part of Palestine) during the reign of emperor Augustus;

- Received a thorough Jewish religious education and became a preacher;

- Emphasis on religious morals and ethics

# Teachings

- A single living, personal God is the Father of all humanity; therefore all men are brothers and all women are sisters;
- Love God with all your heart and mind and soul, and your neighbor as yourself.
- The life and person of each individual are sacred;
- Respond to evil with love
- Forgiveness
- The worthy individual practices charity, justice, and the Golden Rule: "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you."
- All persons may repent and be cleansed of sin and achieve eternal salvation; special attention to the meek, the oppressed;
- Baptism entry into a new life in this world filled with God's Spirit.

# Who is Jesus?

- a Jew?
- a teacher – rabbi?
- a religious reformer?
- For Christians – the long awaited Messiah?  the Christ?
- a fraud?

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Words attributed to Jesus:

" I saw Satan fall like lightning."

"Before Abraham was, I AM."  (compare to Moses encounter with God on the mountain.)

"I and the Father are one."

# Incarnation: radically new!

- Different from every other religion, Christians believe God became man; he assumed human nature which was broken, fragmented by sin and he healed it from within.

- Sin had poisoned human nature so to speak and effectively erected a wall between God and man. Only God could break that wall to heal man.

- In Buddhism, Hinduism, Platonism etc., man is trying to free himself, his soul from his body. The body is something of a prison. Christianity sees man as body and soul and both need to be healed. Judaism sees God as absolutely transcendent and cannot conceive of God becoming a man, even a Jew. So, the idea of the incarnation is alien to these other traditions.

# The Spread of Christianity

Early Church Leaders:

**The 12 Apostles**;

the **Gospel** – the written description of Christ's life and teachings by his disciples(students) **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John**.

Larger group of 70

**St. Paul** – devout Jew who arrested Christians, then experienced a revelation and converted to Christianity.

# Favorable Factors

Christianity gained many converts throughout the Roman Empire:

- People were dissatisfied with the old pagan religions, those honoring many gods and goddesses; a widespread cynicism;

- People were attracted by the ideals of Christianity: one loving God, universal love, eternal salvation, equality before God;

- Missionaries could travel and preach with relative ease throughout the Roman Empire, a political and cultural unit;

- Early Church leaders displayed courage, sincerity and ability;

- People were impressed by many early Christians who, rather than renounce their faith, suffered persecution and in some instances died as martyrs;

# Opposition and Persecution

Christianity was opposed within the Roman Empire.

- Pagan priests feared that the success of Christianity would doom their religions;
- Upper classes considered Christianity a slave religion because it appealed to the lowly by preaching equality before God and universal love;
- Roman officials considered the loyalty of Christians suspect;  refused to burn incense to the Roman gods, refused to call the emperor Lord;
- Disapproved of gladiatorial combats and pagan feasts

# Persecution

For 300 years, Christians were persecuted by the Roman government, most severely under the emperors Nero and Diocletian.

The Christians suffered the loss of Roman citizenship, confiscation of property, torture and death.

Nevertheless, Christianity continued to grow stronger and gain converts.

# Christianity Triumphs

- 313 Christians gain freedom from persecution when the emperor **Constantine** ordered religious toleration by the **Edict of Milan**;

- Constantine the first Christian emperor;

- 392 Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Christianity the official state religion;

- Christianity was then **overwhelmingly accepted** by the people of the Roman Empire.