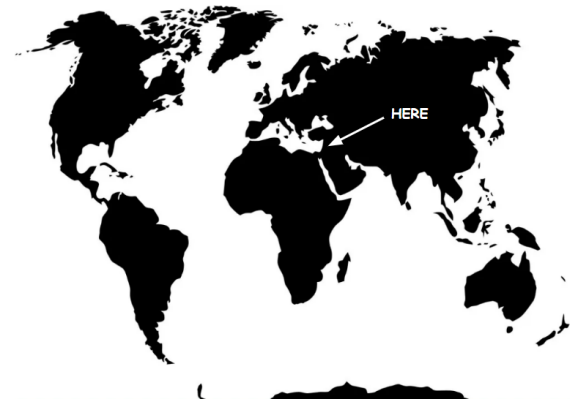


What year is it? That is about how many years it has been since **Jesus** was born. He was so special that people decided that we should count the years from the time that he was born in a little town called Bethlehem.



Jesus was a member of the **Jewish** people. They were what was left of a nation called **Israel**. Long before Jesus was born, **God** chose Israel to be **His** people. And who is the Lord our **God**? The creator of everything and the source of all life! We call **God** "**holy**" which means completely good.

**God** made special promises to Israel called **covenants**: He would always do wonderful things for them, but they were not to forget about **God** and what He had done for Israel. Even though the Israelites had such a special relationship with **God**, they still made lots of mistakes. Other nations took over their land, and when **Jesus** was born, the mighty Roman Empire ruled there.

The Jewish people were waiting for a **Messiah**, or **Christ**: a very special person that **God** would send to save Israel, give them back their kingdom, and bring all the peoples of the world to love **God** too. This person would also save everyone from their **sins** - all the bad things we think, and say, and do that stop us from being holy.



**Jesus** was the **Messiah**. We call Him **Jesus Christ**. Men who knew **Jesus** wrote down that His mother, a young woman called **Mary**, received a visit from an **angel** - not a human, like us, but a special messenger from **God**. The angel told **Mary** that **God** had chosen her to be the mother of **God's** son, and **Mary** agreed. Through the invisible and mysterious **Holy Spirit**, **Mary** became pregnant. **Jesus's** father was **God**, but **God** also picked **Mary's** husband, **Joseph**, to be a father to **Jesus** too.

**Christmas** is **Jesus's** birthday. We give and receive lots of different gifts at Christmas, but the greatest gift is this: that **God** so loved the world that He gave us His only Son.



Even when **Jesus** was a boy, He amazed people by how much He knew about **God**. He even called **God** "father." Then, when He grew up, **Jesus** began His special mission: to tell everyone the "**good news**," or "**gospel**," about the **Kingdom of God**. If we are a part of **God's** Kingdom, it means **God** saving us from evil, sin, and darkness. It means choosing **God** and goodness instead of those things, and siding with **Jesus** instead of the **Evil One**: an angel who wanted to be more important than **God**, and led other angels to turn against **God** too. These "fallen angels" we call "**demons**." We should never fear evil and darkness, because **Jesus** is our "**Good Shepherd**" who loves and protects us.

**Jesus** showed people **God's** **power** and **love**. The most amazing thing He showed us is something really hard to explain and to understand: that there is **one God**, but that **God** is **three persons**, or what we call the **Trinity**. **God** is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We say **Jesus** is the Son of **God**, but also, we say that **Jesus** is our Lord and our **God**.

**Jesus** also performed many **miracles**. With a touch, or a word, or a thought, He healed people who were sick, or blind, or unable to walk. He turned water into wine, controlled a storm, walked on water, fed thousands of people with a little food, and even brought some people back to life. But there was one other miracle still important to us today.

Jesus made lots of friends. People that wanted to learn from Him were called **disciples**, and He also picked twelve men to be His special helpers to spread His good news. These were the **Apostles**. But Jesus also made some enemies. There were some important men among the Jewish people who did not like what Jesus was saying and doing. They enjoyed everyone thinking of them as the holiest people around, and knowing the most about God, and being the most important. When Jesus seemed to say that He was the **Son of God**, they just got angry. They were too greedy and jealous to recognize Jesus as the Messiah; instead, they just wanted Him gone. So, they had the Romans **crucify** Jesus. This meant being nailed to a wooden cross and hanging there until you died. It was horrible, and it is what we think about on **Good Friday** every year. But when we look at images of Jesus on the cross, it reminds us how much **God loves us**. To show this to us, **the Father gave up His only Son, and Jesus sacrificed His own life**.



So what was the greatest miracle? It was Jesus' **resurrection** from the dead, which we celebrate at **Easter**. He was no ghost, for He had a body, but it was different. It was glorified. He would appear from out of nowhere, even in a locked room, and nobody could even recognize Him unless they really **believed** it was Him. Then, Jesus **ascended** into Heaven to be with the Father, promising to come again. Until then, He left us with a special gift: the Holy Spirit.



Jesus wanted us to receive the Holy Spirit by being **baptised**, when a person is washed with water to show that they are making a clean and new beginning with God. He wanted us to be baptised "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Through this, we become **children of God**. Thanks to Jesus, we do not need to fear death, because now we can hope to share what He has: being with God in Heaven, and one day rising again, like Him.

When we receive the Holy Spirit, it is the life of God in our hearts. It is our helper. It helps us to love God and to love other people as God does. It helps us to **pray**: that is when we reach out to God in our hearts, speak to Him in our minds or with our mouths, tell Him everything that bothers us, thank Him, and let ourselves come closer to Him.



Jesus forgave people's sins, meaning God would not hold the wrong we have done against us. After rising from the dead, He gave the Holy Spirit to His Apostles in a special way, so that they could forgive sins too. And the Apostles gave this same power to other men. When we **confess** our sins to someone with this power - a **priest** - and we are truly sorry, we receive God's forgiveness.

Jesus also gave His Apostles another special gift which they would pass on to us. Just before He died, He shared a final meal with them. He took bread, broke it, and said "This is my body." He also took wine, and said "This is my blood." Jesus told the Apostles that this meal should be done ever after to remember Him. When someone goes to a church and receives what looks like bread from a priest, they are really receiving the risen Jesus. By eating the **Eucharist**, we *share in Jesus' greatest miracle* and say "yes" to the **new covenant** God made with us through Jesus' sacrifice.



Jesus wants us to be part of His kingdom, to have the Holy Spirit within us, to repent from our sins and be forgiven, and to receive Him in the Eucharist. He wants us to grow in holiness through prayer, avoiding sin, loving God and loving others, going to the celebration of the Eucharist on Sundays, and learning about God from the **Bible**.

**"Jesus called the children to Him and said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not stop them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" (Luke 18:16)**