



2.17 The authority of the Bible

Learning objectives

- ▶ To know why the Bible is important to Christians
- ▶ To understand the different ways in which people interpret the Bible
- ▶ To recognise the different ways Christians use the Bible in their worship

? Big question

What is the most important book you have ever read?

The Bible is the holy book of Christianity. Ask several Christians about it and they will give you a variety of reasons why it is the most important book for Christians:

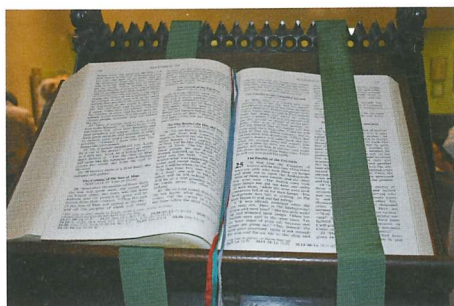
It gives God's message for humans, including how they should live to go to heaven.

It shows what God is like and how God has acted in the world.

It gives eye-witness accounts of some key events in human history, including the story of Jesus.

People have died because they believed in this book.

It is the most printed, most sold and most translated book in the world.



▲ The Bible.

How do Christians understand the Bible?

Different Christians understand the Bible in different ways. There are three main ones, as explained here.

A literal understanding

This is the belief that the Bible is the absolute word of God, written down exactly as God wanted by humans. These people believe that where it seems wrong, or where there are different accounts of the same story, we just don't understand it properly. Even the most recent parts of the Bible are hundreds of years old and languages have changed a lot over time. This makes understanding its full meaning difficult. Such people would also say that humans are not as clever as God – so we should accept what the Bible says even if we don't quite understand it. That is part of the test God has given us.

The Bible was directly inspired by God

This is the belief that the writers of the books of the Bible were human and used their own words, but they had been inspired by God to write them. This interpretation suggests there is truth in the Bible, which people can understand, and which has come from God. There may be mistakes – human errors – but the Bible is still a good source of guidance on how to live, with a strong message of faith and love.

The Bible has a spiritual message

This is the belief that the writers of the Bible were trying to interpret the world around them. They believed in God and believed they were seeing God at work in the world. In their writing they are trying to help others also see that there is a God, that God is good, and that God is responsible for this amazing creation we all live in.



▲ Reading the Bible is important for Christians.

How do Christians use the Bible?

Christians use the Bible in different ways.



Each day, I just pick any part of the Bible and read. It makes me feel calm. I can then think about what I have read. It is amazing how often there is a totally relevant message for me.



I read it as part of weekly Bible study – a class where we discuss what the selected portion means for Christians here and now. I get a deeper insight into how to live my life as God wants me to.



The Bible is read in church on Sundays. There is always an Old Testament reading and a New Testament reading at my church. I read the portion while someone reads it aloud – you get a sense of God from reading it – it is a blessing really.



The Bible is a guide, a story book, a set of poems, history – all kinds of literature. I am reading the Gospels at the moment, to have a better knowledge of Jesus' message – after all, that is what Christianity is based on.



When I write a sermon, I base it on the Bible readings I will use. This means my guidance and advice to the people who attend my church comes from the Bible. At ceremonies such as baptism, marriage or funeral, I use readings which fit the occasion.



I am in the church choir – we sing hymns, most of which come from the Bible or are inspired by it. Since I practise every day, you could say that I am always mindful of the words of the Bible and God.

Activities

- 1 What is the name of the Christian holy book?
- 2 Christians interpret the Bible in three different ways. Explain each way.
- 3 Draw a picture of a Bible. Add labels to explain some of the ways Christians use the Bible in their worship.
- 4 'Books written many years ago cannot help us in the modern world.' Do you agree? Explain your ideas.



2.18 The Gospels

Learning objectives

- ▶ To learn about the four Gospels and their writers
- ▶ To understand some of the motivation behind each Gospel
- ▶ To reflect on the importance of different sources of evidence about Jesus

? Big question

Why is there more than one book about Jesus' life?

The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are all about Jesus' life. Historically, people believed the Gospels were written by four of Jesus' disciples, but we now know that is very unlikely. However, it is probably true that each writer was able to get some of their information from disciples and others who were actually present with Jesus. The first three are known as the **Synoptic Gospels**, because they have similar stories and styles. All the Gospels have their own messages beyond just telling Jesus' story.



▲ Stained glass showing the four Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Which Gospel came first?

Scholars think Mark was written first in about 70CE. We know this because Matthew and Luke each repeated almost all of Mark and they wrote between 70 and 100CE. John was the last one, dating from 90–110CE.

Were there other records of Jesus' life?

Maybe – Matthew and Luke share material which is not in Mark, and each have their own unique material – information not found anywhere else. John has a lot of unique material. This unique material might come from lost manuscripts, or stories which had been memorised. There are also a lot of other historical sources of evidence about Jesus.

Mark's Gospel

Mark's Gospel is short and snappy, with one event after another in very quick succession. It feels like everything happened in just a few weeks. Mark seems to be just telling the story – he doesn't go into great detail and writes in a simple way, using the language we know ordinary people spoke at the time. Mark writes about Jesus' life from his baptism until his Ascension to heaven, after he had told the disciples to go and preach his message to all.

Matthew's Gospel

This was written in a high standard of Greek, showing the author to be educated. He used Mark's Gospel for some of his information, shared another unknown source (called the Q document) with Luke, and had his own unique material (known as M).

Matthew writes about Jesus' birth and childhood, through to his Resurrection. He tries to show how Jesus has fulfilled the Jewish prophecies about the Messiah (the one who God would send to establish his kingdom on earth, page 32). A strong theme of Matthew's Gospel is Jesus being in conflict with the religious authorities (see 2.8). Scholars think Matthew was writing for the early Christians who had been thrown out of Judaism for their beliefs. He is telling them to stay strong to their faith in Jesus.

Luke's Gospel

This is the longest of the Gospels and was written by an educated person. Luke used Mark, Q and his own unique materials (known as L). He starts before Jesus' birth and goes on to describe his birth and life until his Ascension to heaven.

Luke has been called the 'Gospel of the Underdog' because Jesus' words and work are for the victims of society. Jesus is shown healing people who were looked down upon, he welcomes the rejected and he speaks of God's love for even the least important of people. Luke seems to have been writing for an audience who might find it hard to believe Jesus' message was for them. He is telling them to have faith by telling them what happened, but more importantly what it meant.

Why are the Gospels important?

- These are the versions of Jesus' life which have been kept and respected since the first century.
- When the early Church put the Bible together, they had many books about Jesus that could have been selected, but chose just these four.
- There is independent historical evidence for parts of the Gospels – for example, the writings of some Roman historians.
- The Gospels are the basis of the Christian religion, **recited** weekly in church and read regularly by Christians across the world.

Activities

- 1 What are the Four Gospels?
- 2 Three gospels are 'Synoptic'? Which are they and what does it mean?
- 3 Complete these word equations:
 - a) _____ = Mark
 - b) _____ + Q + _____ = Matthew
 - c) Luke's material + _____ + _____ = Luke
 - d) _____ + _____ + _____ + the signs material = John
- 4 Explain why the Gospels are important.
- 5 'One Gospel is enough to know about Jesus.' Give reasons to agree and reasons to disagree. Give a conclusion based on these reasons to show your opinion.

John's Gospel

There is some evidence John knew Mark's Gospel, but he uses a mix of sources – many unique, including a 'signs Gospel' about Jesus' miracles (taken as 'signs' that Jesus was divine) and one about Jesus' speeches.

John starts at the beginning of time, claiming Jesus was with God at the creation, misses out Jesus' birth and ends with Jesus telling Peter, one of the disciples, to lead the group after his resurrection.

John quotes from Jewish scripture and uses Greek philosophy and Roman theories – he tries to encourage everyone to become interested in his story, before telling them clearly that his version is the 'right' one. It is as if he is correcting some false ways of thinking. Scholars believe he was writing for a certain community, making sure they didn't confuse their beliefs.



2.19 Christian places of worship

Learning objectives

- ▶ To explore what churches look like from the outside
- ▶ To learn about the key features inside churches
- ▶ To understand the symbolism and diversity of churches

? Big question

Do all churches look the same?

Key belief

Christians worship in a church. These buildings might also be called **chapels**, **cathedrals** or **meeting houses**. The people who go to church are also known as the church, or **congregation**.

Talk it out

Can you think of any churches in your community?

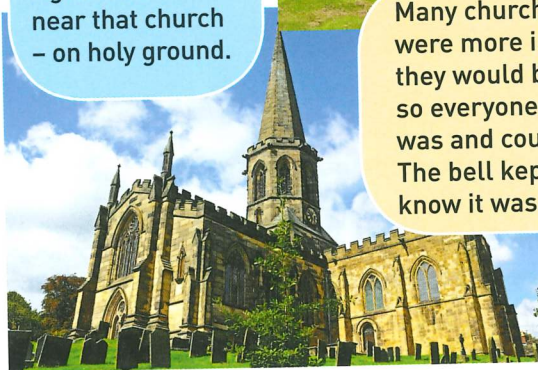
List the features which help you recognise a church.

For Christians, most acts of worship take place in a church. Churches have different styles depending on which denomination they were built by and when they were built. The UK has a long history of Christianity, so many churches are quite old. Despite the differences, many churches have the same specific features so are often easy to recognise.

Churches often have graveyards. Those who attended a church and died had a right to be buried near that church – on holy ground.

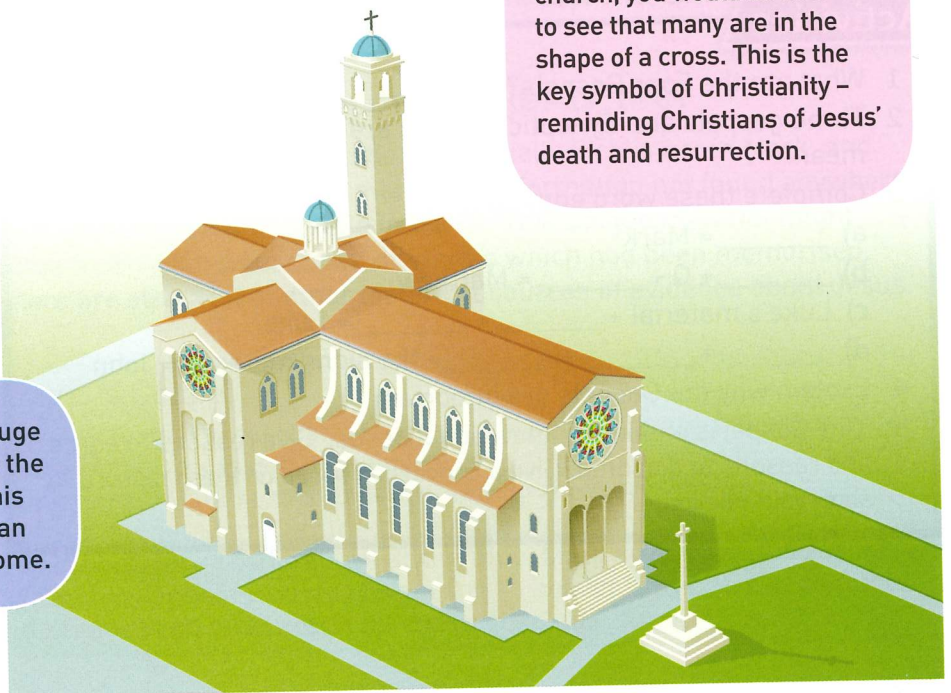


Many churches have bell-towers. Towers were more important centuries ago, when they would be taller than other buildings, so everyone could spot where the church was and could get to church for worship. The bell kept time, but also let people know it was time for worship.

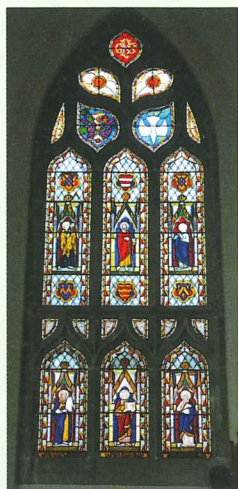


If you could fly above the church, you would be able to see that many are in the shape of a cross. This is the key symbol of Christianity – reminding Christians of Jesus' death and resurrection.

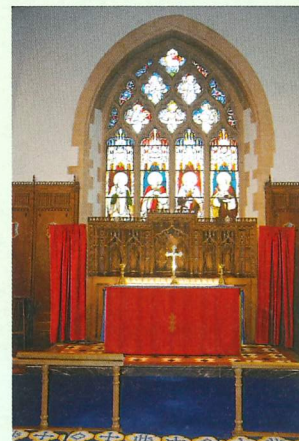
Churches often have huge doors at one end or on the side of the building. This shows that everyone can come and all are welcome.



Stained glass windows let light in – symbolic of the light of Jesus' teachings. They help remind/teach the Christian message. They might show famous saints, people and events. Sometimes stained glass windows are just meant to 'wow' us.



The **altar** is the focal point of most churches and is located at the front. It represents the holiest part of the church, so often has a barrier, such as a communion rail around it, separating it from the rest of the church. There is usually a cross or crucifix on the altar. For communion, the bread and wine will be kept on the altar. It represents the table from the Last Supper.



The **pulpit** is a special raised stand for the vicar/minister to speak from when he or she gives a sermon. It is high so that people look up to the speaker. It may have Christian symbols on it and can be simple or decorated. The **lectern** is simply a stand which holds

the Bible for people to read from. Sometimes the lectern is decorated with Christian symbols.



The **organ** is found in traditional churches. Music is very important in Christianity, with hymns praising God being a feature of worship. The Bible tells Christians to 'raise a joyful sound' to God, so they do.



Pews are seats or benches. They are all the same – showing the equality of all people before God.

The **font** is found at the entrance to most churches and is a standing bowl for baptisms. Being at the entrance it symbolises a welcome into the Christian faith for the child.



Activities

- 1 What different names are given to a Christian place of worship?
- 2 List the ways it is possible to recognise a building as a church from the outside.
- 3 Write about each of the following – altar, font, stained glass window, pulpit.
- 4 What is the most important feature of a church? Explain your answer.
- 5 'It doesn't matter what a church looks like.' Do you agree with that statement? Explain three reasons to agree and three reasons to disagree.



2.20 Leaders of the church

Learning objectives

- ▶ To know what is meant by 'vestments'
- ▶ To understand the role of a church leader
- ▶ To reflect on whether anyone could be a member of the clergy

? Big question

Can anyone be a member of the clergy?

There are lots of names for the leader of a congregation (group of worshippers) of Christians: vicar, priest, minister, pastor – that is just four. Different types of Christians give different names to their church leaders or clergy, and most have a **hierarchy** of leadership – leaders at different levels with different titles.

For Catholics, the Pope is higher than cardinals, who are higher than bishops, who are higher than priests.

In the Anglican tradition, the Archbishop of Canterbury is the highest, then other archbishops, then bishops, then vicars.

For the Orthodox Church, it is the Patriarch, then the bishops, then the priests.

It is easy to spot a priest or vicar in daily life – they tend to wear a clerical collar attached to their shirt. You might know that as a 'dog-collar' – it is a collar which shows just a small square of white at their throat. Many Catholic priests wear a cassock – a long, black dress-like garment, which is tight-fitting in their upper body, with buttons all down the front. For Protestants, there is often no special clothing worn outside an act of worship.

Vestments

Vestments is the word for the religious clothing that many church leaders wear during worship. Some common ones are described below – see if you can spot any of them in the pictures.

- A **pectoral cross** is a large cross worn on a chain round the neck. The cross is the main symbol for Christianity.
- A **cassock-alb** is a long, baggy, white gown which some Anglicans wear.
- A **stole** is like a long scarf which goes around the neck and drops to the floor at either side. Its colour will be decided by the time of year. Many Anglican vicars have specially designed stoles. They always have a cross on them, symbolising Jesus' death and resurrection.
- A **chasuble** is a big baggy garment like a poncho, which is worn over other clothes. It is worn for **Eucharist** services. These can also be specially designed. They have often been passed down from one vicar or priest to another. Some of the chasubles in cathedral museums are hundreds of years old and breath-taking in their intricate design.



▲ A Catholic priest.



▲ Anglican vicars wearing different robes.

Different types of Christians also wear particular vestments. Catholics often wear a hat called a **biretta** – a small square skull cap. Bishops wear a **mitre** (a dome-like hat) in processions into church and for some ceremonies. Orthodox priests wear an **orarion** – a very long stole which wraps around their body. Many Protestant ministers who wear dog-collars add **preaching bands** for services – two long strips of white cloth which hang from the collar.

The reason for wearing special clothing is to separate the clergy from everyone else. In denominations where vestments are worn, they raise the clergy to a different level, as if putting on the special clothes represents a spiritual level because they represent God. The clothes also have Christian symbols on them, reminding the congregation of important beliefs.

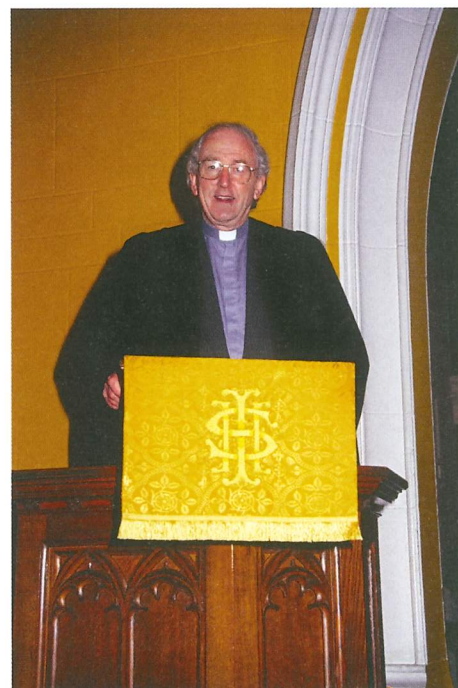
For many Protestant groups, though, there are no special clothes – they just dress smartly for their services. For these groups, what is important is the message being spread.

The role of Christian clergy

The Christian clergy have a spiritual role in the church, which is to lead services. They have had special training and been **ordained** for this. They also have a spiritual and **pastoral** role to give guidance and support to the congregation in their everyday lives. They visit the sick, lead study sessions and prepare people for marriage and confirmation. Clergy often participate in local community groups – for example, as school governors, giving school assemblies and advising local councils. They are role models in their communities, setting an example as Christians. The role is very wide ranging, but its most important element is to spread the word of God, so any member of the clergy must have strong faith.



▲ Orthodox priests.



▲ A Methodist minister.

Activities

- 1 What do we mean by the term 'vestments'?
- 2 Explain some reasons why many Christian leaders wear vestments.
- 3 Explain what each of these is: chasuble, stole, cassock, 'dog collar'.
- 4 Imagine you are a church leader. Write a series of diary entries to show your work for the week, including writing a sermon, delivering services and pastoral work, as well as the wider role the clergy have.
- 5 Design a stole to be used at a specific Christian festival, such as Christmas (see pages 46–47) or Easter (pages 48–49). Explain your design with annotations – how it fits with that festival, the colours you've used and the images or symbols you have chosen.
- 6 'Anyone could be a member of the clergy.' Do you agree with that statement? Give reasons for your opinion.



2.21 Public worship

Learning objectives

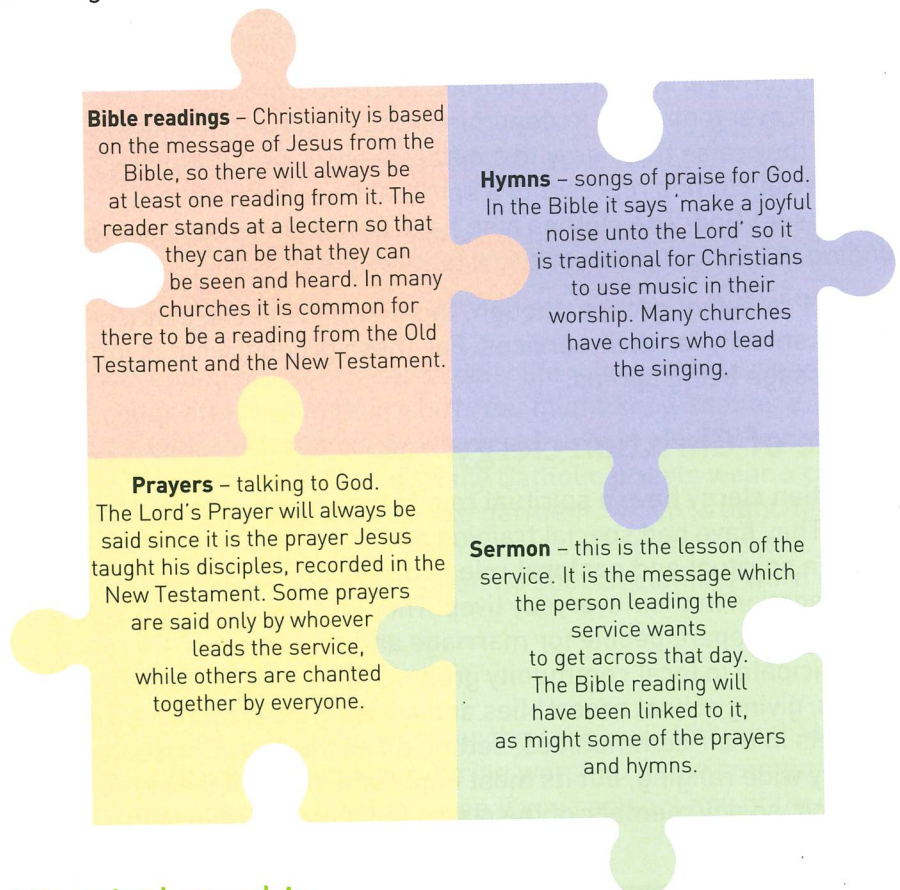
- ▶ To know the key parts of an act of Christian worship
- ▶ To learn about the specific act of Eucharist
- ▶ To reflect on why people might see public worship as important

? Big question

What makes up an act of worship for Christians?

All Christians attend public acts of worship, that is, join in with others in worshipping God. Group worship takes place in a church on Sunday each week. Many churches have more than one act of worship (service) on Sunday, and many have additional ones in the week.

Christian acts of worship have some common features, as explained in the diagram below.



Liturgical worship

Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Anglican Churches use a set format and wording for their services – this is **liturgical worship**. In the Anglican Church, it is a version of the Book of Common Prayer (originally published in 1549), called 'Common Worship'. Versions of this are used in over 50 countries. This means that a person going to any church using these books can join in and feel part of the service.

Eucharist

On the evening Jesus was arrested, he gave bread and wine to his disciples as symbols of his body and blood. Almost all Christians copy this event through a service which has several names, including Eucharist, Mass, Holy Communion and Divine Liturgy. This liturgical service is what is known as a 'sacrament' – by following it, a person receives grace from God. It remembers Jesus' sacrifice and acts as a chance to say sorry to God for sins committed. Lots of Christians talk about a sense of peace and well-being they get from taking part in the Eucharist.



▲ Eucharist.

In a Roman Catholic Mass, only those who have been confirmed may take part. There are Bible readings, prayers and a sermon, and the Nicene Creed is recited (reminding everyone what a Catholic must believe). The bread (unleavened wafers) and a chalice of wine are brought to the altar, where the Eucharist prayer is said to bless them. Catholics believe the bread and wine then becomes the body and blood of Christ. Each person will go to stand in front of the priest, open mouthed. The priest places a wafer onto their tongue and blesses them. The priest drinks the wine. The Mass ends with the reciting of the post-Eucharist prayer.

Some Protestants have a simpler service which still includes prayer, hymns and readings. Whoever wants to participate goes to the front of church after the ordinary service. They often have individual cups which are filled with a non-alcoholic drink, and pieces of ordinary bread, symbolising the body and blood. They remember Jesus' sacrifice but also that he gave new life.

For Anglicans, the format is similar to that for Catholics. They all drink wine from a single chalice, held by the vicar. They believe the bread and wine are symbolic of Jesus' body and blood.

Orthodox Christians follow the Divine Liturgy. The bread and wine are prepared on the altar, which is hidden from view behind the iconostasis (a wall of images behind which only priests may go). The bread (made with yeast to represent life) is divided into four parts, three of which are blessed by the saying of the Eucharistic prayer. Orthodox Christians believe that Jesus is then present in some way in the bread and wine, but it does not become Jesus' actual body and blood. After Bible readings, prayers and a sermon, first the Bible and then the bread and wine – in one chalice – are brought out. Everyone is invited to share this, and they receive a spoonful of the mixture. The fourth portion of bread is given out to be taken to people who were not able to attend.

Activities

- 1 Name the four main parts of a Christian act of worship.
- 2 Write a sentence to describe each one of the four main parts of a Christian act of worship (four sentences in total).
- 3 How do the different elements link together in a service?
- 4 What event does the Eucharist remember? Explain how it does this.
- 5 Compare and contrast the different ways Christians celebrate the Eucharist.
- 6 'It would be better for Christians if they were told how often to worship, as happens with other religions.' What do you think? Give reasons to agree and disagree.



2.22 Private worship

Learning objectives

- ▶ To learn how Christians worship outside of church services
- ▶ To understand why Christians want to worship on their own
- ▶ To reflect on the relative importance of public and private worship

? Big question

For some Christians, why is it not enough to just go to church once a week for worship?

Key belief

Christians believe God is always with them in the form of the Holy Spirit. God guides, protects and comforts them. This means they can talk to God or worship God at any time. For some Christians, everything they do can be done as an act of worship – they just need to dedicate it to God.

Christians believe they should worship God and that God wants them to. In the Old Testament, God made an agreement with Abraham which said that if Abraham and his people worshipped only God, then God would look after them. Most Christians do more than just attend church as a way of worshipping God.

Christians feel closer to God when they pray. This doesn't have to be 'kneeling down, hands together and head bowed' sort of praying – many Christians just talk to God in their heads as a form of prayer. They could be doing something and thinking of God. This makes them feel connected to, and at peace with God.

Many Christians set aside time specifically for God in their daily life. They might sit and pray to God, using **rosary** beads or an image to help them focus. They might read a portion of the Bible or another text which helps them understand its words. Others might paint. Some might do something to help others or help at church. The point is that they are giving this time to God in their thoughts or actions – so it is seen as an act of worship. By worshipping, they gain a deeper understanding of their faith and they feel **blessed** by it – it is a very personal thing.

The rosary

The rosary is a set of beads which helps someone to count the number of prayers they say in a session. There will be groups of ten smaller beads split by large marker beads. Often the circle of beads has a crucifix and a picture of the **Virgin Mary** on a short string coming from the circle. Each bead is held between thumb and finger while the prayer is said, before moving onto the next bead. Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians use different forms of these – for example, a 59-bead rosary, a 15-bead rosary or a ring rosary.



▲ A Christian using rosary beads during prayer.