Christianity

A new religion emerged as Rome was transitioning from Republic to Empire. “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman World... So Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth to Bethlehem...” -Luke 2:1,4 There Joseph & Mary became proud parents of a son named Jesus – a son that many believed was the Jewish messiah – the Savior of the World.

Who Was Jesus?

* He was born in Bethlehem around 4BC, but grew up in Nazareth. He learned his father’s profession of carpentry before his career as a teacher and prophet.

* He did not follow the strict teachings of Judaism, instead preaching acceptance and gentility. Non-Jews were referred to as "gentiles".

* He attracted many followers, including 12 confidants known as Apostles. They spread his word after his death.

The Message of Jesus

* Jesus preached a message of love and forgiveness. He was against the rigid, strict rules of Judaism. He welcomed all who believed him.

* "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". The Golden Rule was his most recognizable lesson.

* Jesus preached that humility and gentle spirit were better than wealth and power, and that one should "turn the other cheek".

* He spoke of an eternal kingdom with God in heaven that believers could attain through salvation.

Politics of the Time

* Rome was master of Mediterranean world and Judea was under its control.

* Rome was concerned about rebellions and trouble makers who did not follow their beliefs or laws.

* The Middle East was a volatile area (just like today) where wars were prevalent. The Romans kept close watch on Jesus because of his popularity among the masses and outright disobedience.

Miraculous Events?

* People witnessed miraculous events performed by Jesus. According to testimony, he could walk on water, heal the sick, and turn water into wine.

* These events helped confirm to people that he was the Messiah.
Sacred Symbols and Texts

* The cross is the most widely used symbol.

* The fish is a secret symbol meaning, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

* The Bible is a holy book. It is comprised of two parts - the Old and New Testament.

* Christians speak of the Holy Trinity: the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost to represent God.

The Attraction & Spread of Christianity

* The teachings of Jesus were spread by the Apostles. The man most responsible was Paul of Tarsus - a Jewish convert. He established churches and advised them on spiritual matters.

* Christianity was more sophisticated, attracting the educated and wealthy.

* Christianity offered salvation and forgiveness.

* Christianity offered equality. This appealed to the poor, slaves, and women.

* At first, Christians were persecuted by Romans, but eventually it took over.

* In AD 313, Constantine legalized it in the Edict of Milan. In AD 392, Theodosius made it the official religion of Rome.

Christian Denominations

* Roman Catholicism - the largest sect by far. Believe in a strict hierarchy of faith headed by the Pope. The church is very important.

* Protestantism - Differ mostly in practices and rituals. Not as strict, do not follow the Pope. There are hundreds of Protestant sects, like Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, etc...

Impact of Christianity on Christian's Lives

* There are some dietary restrictions for strict Catholics: no meat on Fridays especially during Lenten.

* The Sabbath is Sunday - the day Jesus rose from the dead. This is a day of worship.

* There are several rites of passage including Baptism, Communion, Confession, and Confirmation. These are performed in churches.

* Christians are committed to missionary work to spread their beliefs, as only those who believe in Jesus can go to heaven.

* Holidays such as Christmas and Easter are celebrated by all denominations.

The End of Jesus?

* Jewish officials pressured Romans to get rid of Jesus. The eventually agreed, and sentenced him to death by crucifixion.

* He died around AD 33 in Jerusalem, thus making it a holy city for Christians.

* There were rumors that he would rise from the dead. Three days later, his body was missing from his tomb.

* Christians believe he was resurrected and went to heaven with God.