

Name: _____
Date: _____

CHRISTENDOM

As the power of the Roman Empire faded in the first centuries of the Common Era, the practice of worshiping the Emperor and Roman gods slowly became less prevalent. A new faith, Christianity, developed from Judaism, a religion practiced in a remote outpost of the Empire called Judea.

After the death of a holy man named Jesus about 30CE, his followers spread the message of Christianity to cities throughout the Empire. In Christianity's early history, it was a Roman citizen's civic obligation to honor the Emperor and the Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses. The Roman government often persecuted Christians because Christians believed honoring anything but their one God was a grave offense. Emperor Nero blamed Christians for starting the Great Fire of Rome in 64CE. Emperor Decius declared Christians to be "enemies of Rome." There are stories of Roman officials ordering Christians thrown to wild beasts for refusing to renounce their faith. Despite the efforts by Roman authorities at suppressing it, Christianity continued to grow.

Over time, many traditional Roman practices merged with Christian celebrations. Christians began to celebrate the birth of Jesus in December when Romans traditionally celebrated the birth of the sun after the longest night of the year.

In 311, Emperor Constantine decreed that Christians could practice their beliefs without oppression. By 325, he called Church leaders to a meeting in Nicaea, in present day Turkey, to standardize Christian teaching throughout the empire.

Forty-three years after Constantine's death, Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Empire. The standards set by Constantine at Nicaea were to be considered official, and all other Christian teachings were heresy. Heresy is a belief that contradicts or defies established religious teachings. Because Christianity had developed independently in cities throughout the Empire, there was a diversity of beliefs among the faithful. After Nicean Christianity became the official religion of the

empire, people who practiced heretical beliefs often faced punishment or death.

Christianity spread past the borders of the Roman Empire to barbarian lands. The faith spread to present-day France after Frankish king Clovis I became a Christian in 496. By the seventh century, missionaries spread their beliefs to Great Britain, the last outpost of Western Europe to accept Christianity.

Religious life was often the only way to get an education in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. It also allowed poor people to escape a dreary life and possibly rise to power. Some Christians renounced their possessions and lived apart from the rest of society. Men lived as monks in monasteries and women as nuns in convents. A fifth-century monk now called St. Benedict established strict rules for monasteries, including when monks should eat, pray, and work. Often the younger sons of nobles or widowed women would leave the stress of the everyday life for the care and comfort they found in monasteries and convents.



Monasteries produced many well-educated men prepared to serve as administrators for uneducated kings and lords. Some Monks copied books by hand in an era before the printing press. The Christian Bible was the only book in many smaller villages in Western Europe. Often the only person in a village capable of reading the Bible was a Christian priest.

People did not think of Europe as a distinct place until after the Middle Ages. Instead, they spoke of "Christendom," or the community of Christians. Christianity was the most important influence of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. Europe was home to communities of Jews, Muslims, and pagans, but by 800, Christianity had become the faith of almost most people in Western Europe.

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Fill in the Blanks

Christianity grew out of J__d__i__m; a religion practiced in the remote Roman province of J__d__a. The followers of Jesus spread his m__s__a__e to c__t__es throughout the Empire, but Christians often faced p__r__e__u__i__n because they refused to honor Roman *t__a__i__i__ns.

In 311, C__n__t__n__i__e made the practice of Christianity *l__g__l. Fourteen years later, the Emperor summoned church leaders to a meeting in N_____, where they s__a__d__r__i__ed Christian teaching throughout the E__p__re. A later Emperor named T__e__d__s__us declared Christianity to be the Empire's o__f__ci__l religion, and that all practices that did not adhere to the standards set in Nicea were h__re__y.

Many people who lived in Western Europe during the Middle Ages were attracted to religious life because it offered an opportunity get an e__u__a__i__n and possibly escape a *ch__erl__ss life. Some Christians lived apart from society as n_____ or m_____. Monks lived in m__n__s__e__i__s, where the routine of everyday life could be exacting. St. B__n__d__ct established strict rules for when some monks could e____, work, and p_____. Monks were often served as a__m__n__s__r__t__rs for un__d__c__t__d kings and lords. In an era before the invention of the p__i__ti__g p__e__s, monks carefully c__p__ed the w__r__s and i__l__s__r__t__o__s of b__o__s by h_____.

Christianity spread beyond the b__r__e__s of the Empire to present day Germany, F__a__ce and G__e__t Br__t__in. Europe was home to communities of J_____, M__s__i__s, and p__g__ns, but by 800, C__r__s__i__n__ty had become the f__i__h of most people of W__s__e__n Europe.

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. Why did Decius declare Christians to be "enemies of Rome?"

*2. Why do you think early Christian leaders merged with celebrations with traditional Roman practices?

3. What is heresy?

4. Why did many Christians of the Middle Ages enter monasteries and convents?

5. What is Christendom?

*This is a higher order learning question. You will earn credit for any reasonable answer.