Festivals (Celebrations) in Christianity Summary Sheet

(Pages 48-49 in the Christianity textbook)

This summary sheet is to help you learn about Christian pilgrimage. According to the AQA specification you need to know the following things:

‘• The role and importance of ... celebrations including:

• the celebrations of Christmas and Easter, including their importance for Christians in Great Britain today.’

Some terminology is obvious in meaning but in the exam you will be asked to give definitions of words so that is why such key terms are laid out below. As always, try to be very clear in your mind on the differences between Protestant and Catholic traditions. Making a table of these will help you.

Terminology

**Advent**  - the period of several weeks in the run up to Christmas

**Ascension Day** - the day on which Jesus was taken up into heaven alive (40 days after Easter Sunday – always on a Thursday in May/June)

**Christmas**  - a day celebrating the birth of Jesus (25th December) – the 12 day period from 25th December to 5th January

**Easter**  - a season that remembers the death and resurrection of Jesus

**Easter Sunday** - the anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

**Epiphany**  - the day of the appearance of the wise men to Jesus (6th January)

**festival**  - a day or period of celebration for religious reasons

**Good Friday**  - the Friday before Easter Sunday – this is the day on which Jesus was crucified

**Holy Week** - the week leading up to Easter Sunday

**Lent**  - the period before Easter Sunday – it remembers the 40 days Jesus went without food in the wilderness

**Maundy Thursday** – the day before Good Friday – this was the day when Jesus ate the Last Supper (a Passover Meal) and prayed all night in the Garden of Gethsemane before being arrested

**Old Testament** - the first part of the Christian Bible (also called the Torah/Jewish Bible/Hebrew Bible)

**Palm Sunday -** the Sunday before Easter Sunday – on this day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey and was welcomed by the crowds with palm branches

**Paschal candle** - a special Easter candle

**Passover**  - a Jewish festival celebrated by Jesus which remembered the freeing of the Jews from Egypt in the days of Moses – Jesus was killed at Passover

**Pentecost** - a Sunday festival on the fiftieth day from Easter Sunday in May/June – it is the anniversary of the arrival of the Holy Spirit to the Twelve Apostles (disciples)

**resurrection** - when a person comes back to life after being dead – they come back with the same (but healed) body and same identity

The role and importance of festivals?

Festivals help Christians to:

1. remember **important aspects** of their faith;
2. remember events from **the life of Jesus**;
3. plan their **worship**;
4. remember **key beliefs**, like God’s love for them poured out at the cross.

Christmas

**A. The story:**

1. **Christmas** remembers the birth of Jesus.
2. Christians believe that **God became a human** in order:
   1. to live as **one of us** and share in our sorrows and joys;
   2. to be **a light** in the darkness;

**The light shines in the darkness,**

**but the darkness has not overcome it.**

John 1:5

(The Christmas chapter of John’s Gospel)

* 1. to **rescue** people from hell.

**B. The celebration:**

1. In Britain on **25th December.**
2. **Homes decorated** with lights, trees and tinsel.
3. **Light** symbolises God coming into the world.
4. **Gifts** to remember the visit of the wise men with gold, frankincense and myrrh.
5. **Nativity plays**.
6. **Midnight mass** at the end of Christmas Eve.
7. Christmas **cards**.

Easter

This is the **most important** of all Christian festivals. (For other festivals see the terminology on the first page of this handout. There are also saints’ days such as St Andrew’s Day which is a bank holiday in Scotland.)

**A. The story:**

1. The entry of Christ into Jerusalem on **Palm Sunday**.
2. **Jesus taught** in the streets and Temple of Jerusalem all week, healing the sick and doing miracles.
3. On **Maundy Thursday** Jesus began the tradition of Holy Communion by celebrating the **Last Supper**, a Passover meal with his disciples and saying that the bread was his body ‘broken for you’ and the wine was his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins.
4. On **Good Friday** Jesus was betrayed by Judas who showed his enemies where to arrest Jesus in secret. Jesus was put on trial and **crucified**.
5. On the third day, **Easter Sunday**, Jesus came **back to life** as he predicted.

**B. The celebration:**

1. Giving things up for **Lent**.
2. On Palm Sunday there are church services where people have **crosses made of palm leaves**.
3. Special Holy Communion services on **Maundy Thursday**.
4. In the Church of England and Catholic churches a **paschal candle** is lit to symbolise the risen Christ.
5. **Sun rise services** on Easter Sunday.
6. People eat **Easter eggs** symbolising new life.
7. Painting eggs.

Possible Exam Questions

**For any of these, the word Christmas could be changed for the word Easter or vice versa.**

Explain two ways in which Christians celebrate Easter. (4 marks)

Explain two ways in which celebrating Christmas might help people understand the importance of being in a Christian community. (4 marks)

Explain two advantages of celebrating the same religious festivals every year. Refer to sacred writings in your answer. (5 marks)

Explain two disadvantages of celebrating the same religious festivals every year. Refer to sacred writings in your answer. (5 marks)

‘Christmas is no longer a religious festival.’ (12 marks)

‘The best way to reach an understanding of God is by celebrating a religious festival.’ (12 marks)

‘Christmas is more important that Easter.’ (12 marks)