

## The role and importance of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Hail Mary is one of the most common prayers used by Roman Catholics.

*Hail Mary, full of grace,  
The Lord is with thee.  
Blessed are thou among women,  
And blessed is the fruit of the womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.  
Amen.*

The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church teaches that there were many holy women in the Bible such as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Judith and Esther but Mary was the purest of them all. She obeyed God's wishes without question.

This is seen when she is told that she will be the mother of Jesus and says:

*'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her.*

**(Luke 1:38)**

Mary's faith never changed even when Jesus was being crucified. Mary is the supreme model of Christian faith because she believed that 'nothing will be impossible with God':



A statue of Mary in a cave in Lourdes.



Dead Christ in the Arms of the Virgin Mary by Luis de Morales.

*For the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name.*

**(Luke 1:49)**

Sometimes Mary is described as the 'new Eve'. She was preserved from all stain of original sin.

In 431 CE the Council of Ephesus said that Mary truly became the Mother of God by the human conception of the Son of God in her womb.

### The Immaculate Conception

To be the mother of Jesus, Mary was saved from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception teaches.

*The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.*

Mary was blessed more than any other living person and remained free of every personal sin for her whole life.

**EXAM TIP**

Remember that not all Christians regard the Virgin Mary in the same way.

**Mary's virginity**

The Church teaches that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

The Virgin Birth was an act of God which humans cannot be expected to understand:

*Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'.*

**Matthew 1:23**

The Church teaches that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life and that James and Joseph, 'brothers of Jesus', are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom Matthew calls 'the other Mary'.

**The Assumption**

When the time came for her life on earth to end, Mary, who had remained free from all sin, fell asleep (Dormition) and was taken up body and soul into heaven.



*Annunciation* by Robert Campin c.1410–40.

**ICT FOR RESEARCH**

Search for Mary (Virgin Mary) in Wikipedia to help you consider the importance of the role of Mary for Roman Catholics.



A statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, Little Walsingham in Norfolk.



Young women wearing traditional Bavarian clothing carry a statue of Mary to honour the Feast of the Assumption in Germany.

**EXAM TIP**

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary was assumed into heaven and did not die, but many other Christians do not believe this as it is not in the Bible.

# 5

## Places and Forms of Worship

### THINKING POINT

Find out some of the main differences between the buildings Christians worship in and write a short explanation for the use of each name.

### EXAM TIP

Remember not all Christians worship in a church and there are many different types of buildings as well as forms of worship.

### Places of worship

If most people were asked where Christians worshipped they would probably answer that it was in a church. However, there are many different buildings in which Christians worship together. Some of the names given to these are church, chapel, meeting house, citadel, cathedral, minster, abbey, monastery and priory.

However, whatever name is given to this place of worship, they all serve the same purpose, which is to provide a place where Christians come together to worship:

*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*

**(Matthew 18:20)**

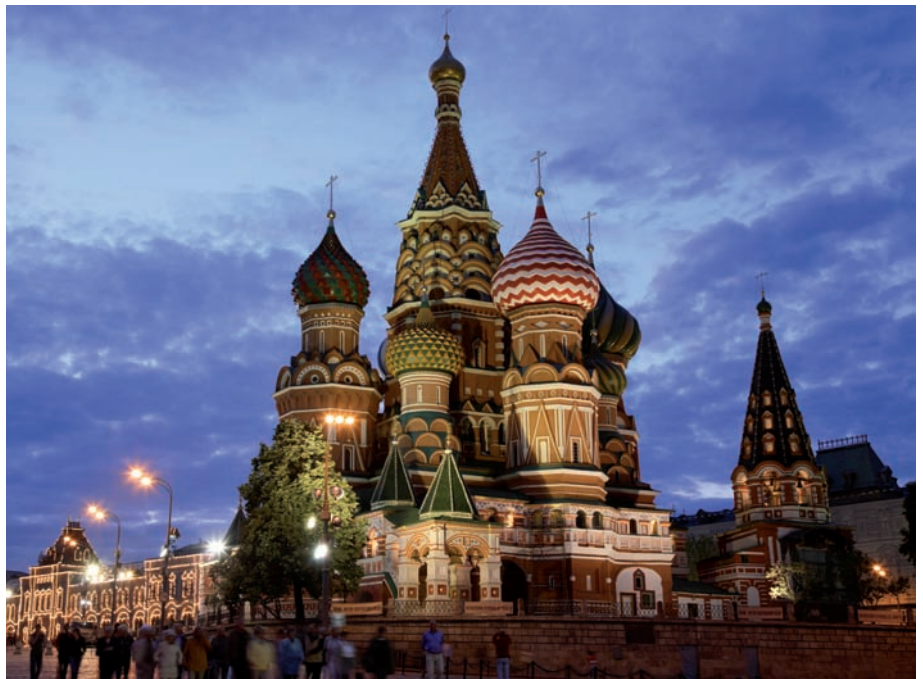
Most traditional churches are designed in the shape of a cross.

Originally, they were probably a simple rectangle, based on a normal building. The earliest were converted houses called *titulae*.

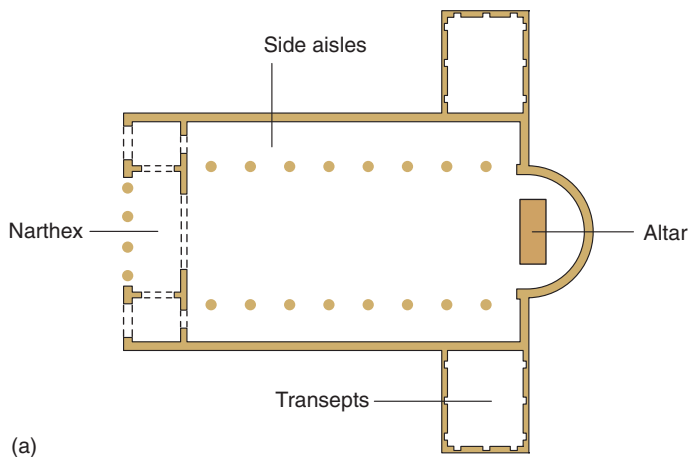
The two main types of building found today are the basilica style, which is a long building with a door at one end and an altar at the other, and a shape with a dome at the centre of a circular or polygon-shaped building.



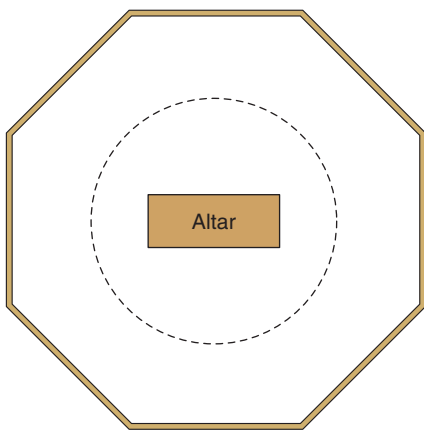
Truro Cathedral in Cornwall.



Cathedral of St Basil in Moscow.



(a)



(b)

The two main types of church buildings: (a) the basilica style and (b) the circular style.

Many churches also have transepts – extra space at right angles to the main part of the building. These can be shorter than the main building to form a traditional Latin cross shape or can make all the parts of equal length as in a Greek cross.

Traditionally churches face east, towards Jerusalem. This means that the altar, where the Eucharist is celebrated, is placed at the east end of the church. The altar itself stands in a part of the church called the sanctuary and is usually separated from the rest of the church by a rail called the communion rail.

The part of the church which leads back from the sanctuary to the transepts, where a choir may sit, is the chancel. In some medieval churches the chancel is slightly angled towards the left. These are often called ‘weeping chancels’ and are said to represent the position of Jesus’ head when he was on the cross.



The rood screen from St Cyprian's Church in London.

At the entrance to the chancel there is sometimes a screen. This is known as a rood screen from an Old English word which meant ‘cross’, because many of these screens originally had a statue of Jesus on the cross fixed to the top of the screen.

The largest part of the church, where the congregation sit, is called the nave. This name is thought to come from the Latin word ‘navis’ meaning ship.

Often the main door will be at the far west end of the church and in this area is the baptistery. This is used for baptisms and contains the font. The font contains water for baptism and is placed at the west end of the church so that when children, or adults, come to be baptised, the ceremony takes place right at the entrance and they are then welcomed into the church.

These are the basic details of a church building but there is a very large variation in shapes and design across the world.

The outside of a church may be very simple or very elaborate depending on the style of the time in which it was built. Some churches have towers or steeples. These contain the church bells which have always been rung to warn people that a service was