

Pilgrimage - Background Information

- A pilgrimage is a special religious journey made alone or with others to a holy place.
- Pilgrimage is an important feature of many faiths and goes back thousands of years e.g. the Gospel account of Jesus and his family travelling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, a Jewish custom.
- Muslims who can afford it are expected to make one pilgrimage during their lifetime to the holy city of Makkah (Mecca). This pilgrimage is known as ‘hajj’ in Arabic.
- In Medieval times, Christians in Britain walked many miles to cathedrals, to holy sites in Palestine and Rome and to visit the tombs (shrines) of saints. Sites, which pilgrims still visit today, include the shrines of Santiago de Compostela in Spain (St James) and St Thomas a Becket in Canterbury, Kent. Modern day pilgrims also visit Lindisfarne (Holy Island), Iona, Walsingham and Taize.
- Pilgrims take these journeys:
 - to enlist the saint’s help, e.g. for curing an illness
 - as an act of thanksgiving
 - as an act of penance on account of sin
 - as a means of expressing religious devotion
- Many early pilgrims went to see the relics of saints or visit the “Mother Church” of the Diocese, the Cathedral. (just as your children will when they come to the cathedral)
- A pilgrim would be blessed by the priest as they set out on their journey. They would be asked to answer questions in order to ensure they were genuine pilgrims. (in the same way the children from your school will be asked questions when they visit – see page 9)
- Pilgrims would stay at hospices or other places where they could take a night’s rest. On their return journeys they wore an emblem of the place they had visited, often a shell (see page 9). Pilgrims returning from Jerusalem wore a palm leaf and were known as ‘palmers’.
- As the children prepare to take part in Explore@Wells they are connected through history to all the pilgrims who have visited Wells Cathedral over the last 800 years and will be among the 300,000 who visit it this year.

Jerusalem

Jewish people were expected to visit the Temple in Jerusalem three times a year:

The Feast of the Passover in Spring

The Feast of Pentecost in early Summer

The Feast of Tabernacles in Autumn

The Temple in Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish religious life. The first Temple was built under Solomon and destroyed about 400 years later by the Babylonians in 587 BC. About 50 years later a second temple was started but the magnificent Herod's Temple was built in Roman times. It was destroyed in AD 70. Jewish people still visit the site whenever they can.

- Psalms 121 and 122 were sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem.
What messages do they give to pilgrims?
- Jesus went to Jerusalem with his parents when he was 12 years old. Find the story in your Bible (Luke 2, verses 41 – 52).
If you were Jesus how would you explain your actions to your parents?
- Jesus also went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover? You can find this in Mark 11 Verses 1 – 11.
Why was Jerusalem important then and why is it still important today?



Pilgrims at The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Some write prayers and leave them in the cracks in the walls.

Assisi

Many pilgrims like to visit the hill town of Assisi in Central Italy. It is the birthplace of St Francis.

Born in 1182, the son of a cloth merchant, he was rich and enjoyed a high-spirited lifestyle as a young man. However when at war in 1204 he had a vision of Christ on the cross and as a result he returned to Assissi and joined a pilgrimage to Rome and whilst there he joined the poor begging at St. Peter's Basilica.

He decided to give all his money to the poor and spent the rest of his life helping those in need.

He loved all living creatures and preached to the birds, calling them 'My little sisters, the birds.' He wrote a poem called 'Song of Brother Sun and the other Creatures of the Lord' and a famous prayer which begins 'Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace'.

St Francis lived a life of prayer, labour and poverty and travelled a great deal preaching about the love of God and founding monastic orders. He finally returned to Assisi where he died in 1226.

1. Find the prayer of St Francis. Make a reflective station, based on this prayer, in your classroom.
2. St Francis founded an Order of Friars called Franciscans.
Find out about them and what they do today.



Basilica of St Francis, Assisi

The Holy Land

Probably the place that Christian people most long to visit today is the Holy Land. There they can go to many traditional places and remember how Jesus was born, lived on this earth and died on the cross. Places that are specially visited in the Holy Land are Manger Square in Bethlehem, the Sea of Galilee, the Dome of the Rock (the site of the old Temple) and the Garden of Gethsemane.

Inviting someone who has visited the Holy Land, to come in and talk to the children about their wonderful experiences is one of the best ways to share what this very special place is all about.

1. Why do you think these places in The Holy Land are especially important to Christians, Muslims and Jews?

2. If you could visit the Holy Land, which other places would you like to visit there and why?



Other places of pilgrimage for Christians

Rome

At the end of the Roman Empire the centre of the Christian church moved from Jerusalem to Rome. St. Peter and St. Paul both died in Rome and so it has always been an important place of pilgrimage for all Christians. After the reformation Rome continued to be the centre of the Roman Catholic church. Catholics in particular like to visit the Vatican city and the great cathedral of St. Peter. They like to stand in St. Peter's Square and receive a blessing from the Pope.

Iona

Iona is a small barren island off the west coast of Scotland. People still make pilgrimages to the great abbey there, remembering how St Columba first brought Christianity to the people of Scotland. Columba was born in Ireland about AD 521 and was of royal blood. He is said to have quarrelled with the king and was exiled from Ireland. He spent much of his time in missionary journeys on the west coast of Scotland preaching, building churches and founding monasteries.



Isle of Iona

Canterbury

This is an important place of pilgrimage in England. In 1170 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas a Becket, was murdered in the Cathedral in Canterbury. A special road across England, known as the Pilgrim's Way, went from Winchester in Hampshire to Canterbury. Crowds of pilgrims travelled that way to visit the tomb of Thomas a Becket, especially on 29th December, the anniversary of his death. After the reformation the Head of the Church of England became the monarch and the most senior cleric, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Glastonbury

The oldest place of Christian pilgrimage in England is Glastonbury. It is sometimes called the 'cradle of English Christianity'. A large monastery was established there with a huge abbey. There are many legends about the abbey. One of these says that Joseph of Arimethea came to Glastonbury with the cup which Jesus used at the Last Supper to give the wine to his disciples. This cup is known as the Holy Grail.



Glastonbury Abbey

The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan

In 1678 a book was published, written by a man called John Bunyan who was imprisoned in Bedford Jail for holding unlawful religious meetings. In the book John Bunyan thinks of the

whole of life as a pilgrimage towards the Celestial City, which we would call ‘heaven’. He writes about a man called Christian who meets with many difficulties and dangers on his journey through life. He gives interesting names to these difficulties – Christian falls into a marsh called the ‘Slough of Despond’, and has to climb a hill called the ‘Hill of Difficulty’. He is captured by ‘Giant Despair’ and shut up in ‘Doubting Castle’. He meets good friends on his journey, ‘Faithful’ and ‘Hopeful’, and he finds pleasant places as well as difficult ones: he stays at the ‘Palace Beautiful’, journeys through the ‘Delectable Mountains’ and finally reaches the Celestial City. (children’s versions of the book are available). John also wrote the hymn about pilgrims ‘He who would valiant be’

The Pilgrim Shell

A Brief History

In the Middle Ages pilgrims travelled to the holy shrine at Santiago de Compostella in Galicia (Northern Spain), either as a penance or simply because they believed that St James, the brother of Jesus, was buried there. Once there, the pilgrims found scallop shells on the beach which they would wear as evidence of their pilgrimage. Now the scallop shell is the universal sign of the pilgrim, used in many churches at baptism to symbolise the start of a Christian pilgrimage through life.



