

# Religion and the sacred, icons and the church essay examples

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## **The Changing Image of Christ and the Virgin Mary**

Both presentations depict the changing image of Christ and the Virgin Mary throughout time since the beginning of Christianity. The most significant factor that influenced these changes were the events and the period during which they were created. As stated in the presentation of the Changing Image of Christ, the early depictions of Christ during the beginning of the spread of Christianity was that Christ was a Good Shepherd as opposed to the depiction of the more frivolous gods of the Roman Empire, and so that Christ was to take care of his flock just like any good shepherd. While Christianity began to spread across the Roman and Byzantine Empires, Christ is still a good shepherd, but now he takes on more regal stance. He is both a good shepherd and a King of the Kingdom that one is to join if one follows His teachings. Later on, during the Carolingian eras, Christ is presented as one who died on the cross, but the suffering is eliminated, so as to project a transcendence of death - that He died on the Cross in order that all mankind can be resurrected to the new Kingdom. Towards the Middle Ages, Christ's suffering is presented more graphically, with emphasis on the presentation of the agony during the crucifixion - said to soothe the pained feelings of those undergoing hard times at the moment. Also Christ is presented at this time as a King and as a Judge on Judgment Day in order to remind the flock of their roles as Christians. Towards the more modern times, Christ is seen in his three main roles - as priest, king and a prophet for the future.

The same progression is observed in the depiction of Mary. In the early depictions of Mary during the Byzantine Empire, she is the Mother of Christ,

and the mediatrix between the people and the road to Heaven. Towards the Middle Ages, however, Mary has assumed a tender but regal position as the Mother of God and the Queen of Heaven. Tenderness is related here to her humanity – she is the mother of all people, not only of God. At the same time, she is beautiful and regal, and takes on a royal position as God’s Mother. Thus the images and representations of Christ and the Virgin Mary varied through time depending on the events and situations on hand, and the desired responses of the church leaders in the followers at the time.

## **Pilgrimage**

A pilgrimage is a trip or journey that is normally done in order to strengthen one’s moral self and to increase one’s faith. The pilgrimage is usually performed to go to a venue that is of spiritual significance to the pilgrim, or the one making the journey. The venue may be one where the blessed people, or even Christ himself, was born or died, or in places where many people have said to have been cured of illnesses because of their faith. Others also go to places where the relics of their favorite saints can be found, in order to venerate them and pay homage to them. The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela is a favorite destination for many pilgrims around the world. It is located in the Galicia region of northwestern Spain, and is in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Santiago de Compostela. Many pilgrims come to this church as it is the site where the remains of St. James the Great (one of the apostles of Jesus) are said to have been buried. St. James the Great is said to have brought Christianity to the Iberian Peninsula, and is in fact, the patron saint of Spain and Portugal. The Church is part of the Way of St. James, a pilgrimage that began in the early Middle Ages.

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The Cathedral itself is considered as a prime example of Romanesque architecture, having been constructed in the late 11th century during the reign of King Alfonso II. The basilica itself is shaped as a Latin cross, with a main hall opening up into four transept chapels. As the relics of St. James the Great are found in this basilica or cathedral, this has been a pilgrimage site for Christians for centuries, despite the fact that there are still doubts on whether those remains indeed belong to St. James the Great. Relics have an important role in the Christian world, as they are said to have healing powers, or the ability to bring the faithful together to worship.

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