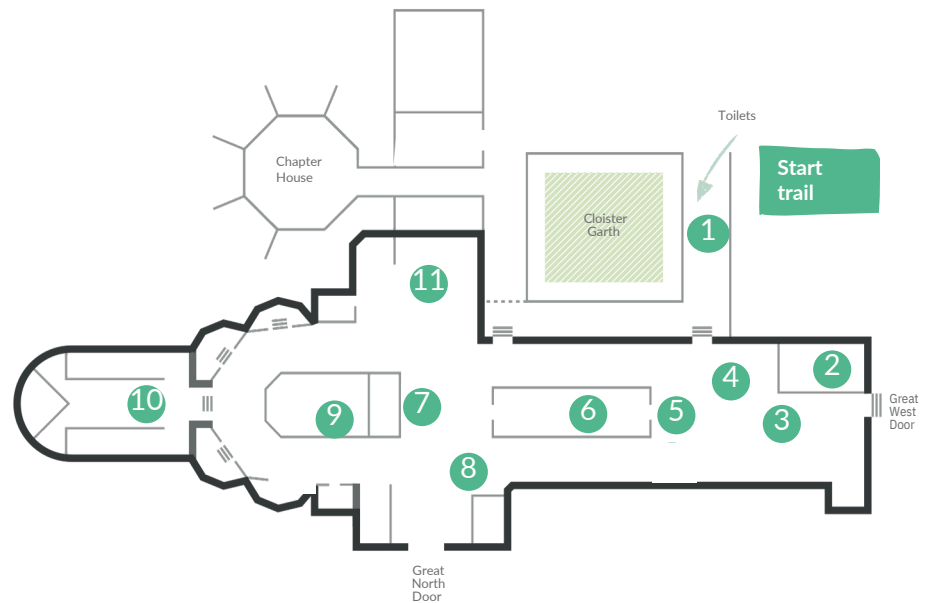


Christian Life and Worship

There has been a place of worship here for over 1,000 years, and today the Abbey is still a living church. The first stone Abbey, built by King Edward the Confessor, was completed in 1065. In the 1240s it was rebuilt in the Gothic style by King Henry III. Westminster Abbey has been the site of coronations since 1066 and over 3,000 people are buried or remembered here.

This map will help guide you around the Abbey. Follow the green dots in numerical order.

Top tip! If you have any questions, feel free to ask an Abbey Marshal or Abbey Guide in a red or blue gown.



1 The cloisters

Westminster Abbey used to be a monastery, a place where monks live and worship together. The monks spent much of their time in the cloisters: meditating; exercising; studying; writing; and teaching. The Abbey was a working monastery for over 500 years, until the reign of King Henry VIII, when all monasteries in England were closed as part of the Reformation.

- While there are no monks living at Westminster Abbey today, there are thousands around the world.
- Christian monks take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Some dedicate their lives to prayer in monasteries, while others engage in charitable work or teaching.

Question: Why do you think monks (or nuns) live together in communities?

Stretch: How would you cope with joining a religious community? Do you think you would enjoy a simple life or would you miss elements of your old life?



2 The Coronation Chair

Since 1308, this chair has been used in coronations as the place where the monarch sits during important parts of the service, including the crowning. It was made on the orders of King Edward I to hold the Stone of Scone, the Scottish coronation stone, which he had captured. The chair was originally decorated with patterns of foliage and animals but has been damaged over time. You might notice the marks on the back, which are graffiti from Victorian schoolboys and visitors.



- Westminster Abbey is built in the shape of a cross. The long part is called the nave, from the Latin *navis*, meaning 'ship'.
- The height of the building (31m) encourages people to look up to God.
- The coronation service is a religious service which includes hymns and prayers. In 2023 at King Charles III's coronation, members of non-Christian religions participated for the first time.

Question: Is there anything else about the building which helps Christian's focus on God?

Stretch: The British monarch is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and the coronation is a Christian service. Why do you think King Charles III had different faiths represented at his coronation?

3 The Grave of the Unknown Warrior

This is the grave of a person who died fighting for Britain during the First World War. Their identity is unknown; they might have served in the Army, Navy or Air Force, and may have been from any part of the British Isles, Dominions or Colonies. The Unknown Warrior represents all those who died in war and have no known grave. Out of respect, it's the only grave in the Abbey that people do not walk on.

- The Grave of the Unknown Warrior was particularly poignant after WWI and is still an important place of mourning. Wreaths and poppies are often laid by visitors.
- Christian funerals contain phrases about the hope of life after death.
- All those buried at Westminster Abbey are laid with their feet facing east which reflects the belief that Jesus will return from the east and the dead shall rise up to face him.



Question: Which words on the gravestone stood out to you?

Stretch: Do you think we should use modern DNA testing to identify the remains of the Unknown Warrior so his family can mourn?

4 Candles and icons

Light is important in Christianity; in the Bible, Jesus is described as 'the light of the world'. Candles can also be a symbol of prayer. Both candle stations have an icon (a devotional painting of a religious figure) above them. They represent Mary with baby Jesus, and the adult Jesus. The Abbey is a Christian place of worship, but all are welcome to light a candle regardless of personal belief.



- People light candles in church for many reasons including prayer, thankfulness, or remembrance of happy or sad events.
- Icons, most commonly found in Orthodox Christian churches, help Christians focus and pray. They contain many symbols e.g. gold leaf and blue are used to symbolise heaven; red or brown symbolises earth. Jesus is often shown wearing both colours to show that he is God incarnate (made flesh).

Question: Why do you think the idea of light is so important in different faiths?

Stretch: How do you think using an icon might help a Christian to focus on God in their prayers?

5 Nave altar

Altars are used as a focus of worship, and bread and wine is laid upon them during the Eucharist. This is also known as Holy Communion.

- On the altar is a crucifix. Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross but that he rose from the dead three days later so you will also see empty crosses around the Abbey.
- For special festivals such as Easter and Christmas, the altar is covered in white and gold cloths; for saints' days, red. Most of the year it is green representing the idea of growing in faith.
- To the left of the altar are the tombs and memorials of scientists, including Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin and Stephen Hawking.



Question: In front of the altar is a memorial to Nelson Mandela, the first black President of South Africa. What do the words "Forgiveness and Reconciliation" around his name mean?

Stretch: In Stephen Hawking's final book, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions*, he says: "... there is no God. No one created our universe, and no one directs our fate". Why do you think he is buried in Westminster Abbey?

6 The quire

When the Abbey was a monastery, this is where the monks would have worshipped. Today the Abbey choristers sing in these stalls during daily services. As well as a boys' choir who attend boarding school here, the Abbey also has a girls' choir, based at St Margaret's Church. Look out for the seats labelled South Africa, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, which are reserved for representatives of these Commonwealth countries.



- Singing is a form of worship for Christians to show God how much he is worth. The choir sings hymns, psalms (songs from the Bible), and liturgy, set words and prayers.
- Symbols carved into the choir stalls represent various ideas: e.g. 3 petals = the Trinity, 4 petals = the Gospels, (books in the bible which tell about Jesus).
- The gold and other bright colours reveal how colourful the Abbey would have looked in the past.

Question: Can you think of other ways that Christians might worship God?

Stretch: Why do you think the Abbey has so much decoration? Do you think this helps Christians when they worship or is it distracting?

7 The high altar

This is where services such as weddings, funerals and coronation take place, as well as some of the daily services. The mosaic floor, called the Cosmati Pavement, is made from thousands of individually cut pieces of stone and glass. During a coronation, the Coronation Chair is placed in the centre of this floor. The most recent royal wedding (that of William and Catherine, the Prince and Princess of Wales) took place here in 2011.

- Behind the high altar is a mosaic of the Last Supper. This meal is remembered daily in the Eucharist service.
- During Lent, 40 days before Easter, the mosaic is covered with simple brown cloth. Lent is a time of reflection and prayer, leading to the remembrance of Jesus' death on Good Friday.
- To the right is the lectern where the Bible is read. On the left is the pulpit where the priest stands to deliver their sermon.



Question: The bread and wine used at the Eucharist represent the body and blood of Jesus. Can you think of other special foods shared by religious people? Why do you think food is a good symbol?

Stretch: Sermons often address current events to help Christians see how their faith fits into the modern world. What do you think are the most important world issues at the moment?

8 Stained-glass windows

Throughout the Abbey there are stained-glass windows. Some are very ancient, but others are quite modern. They were originally used in churches to help people learn Bible stories as they couldn't read.



- Look up at the round rose windows which show Jesus, saints and the Bible.
- The modern Queen's Window celebrates the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Designed by artist David Hockney, it depicts the countryside to celebrate her love of nature.

Question: Do you like the Queen's Window? How do you feel about something so modern being in the historic Abbey?

Stretch: Why do you think Christians often use expensive and high-quality objects and art to decorate churches?

9 The shrine is not open to the general public as it is very old and fragile. Please look up to your right to see it.

Shrine of St Edward the Confessor

After building the first stone Abbey, King Edward the Confessor was buried here in 1066 and canonised (made a saint) in 1161. When the Abbey was rebuilt by King Henry III, St Edward's body was moved into this new shrine. The tombs around the shrine belong to medieval kings and queens who wanted to be buried as close to the saint as possible. St Edward's shrine has been a place of pilgrimage for hundreds of years, and pilgrims still come to pray here today.

- Prayers are said at the shrine several times a day.
- Around his special day, 13th October, the Abbey celebrates the life of St Edward the Confessor with special services and prayers and welcomes hundreds of pilgrims to pray at the shrine. Christians revere saints like Edward because of their faith and devotion to God.
- Images of St Edward the Confessor show him with a ring to remember the story of how he gave it to a beggar who turned out to be St John.



Question: Is there a place particularly important to you? What makes it special? Will you continue to visit it as you get older? Why?

Stretch: Can you name any other pilgrimage sites around the world? Why do you think pilgrimage is important to followers of many different faiths?

10 The Lady Chapel

Started by King Henry VII in 1503 and completed by his son, King Henry VIII, the Lady Chapel was designed as a burial place for Tudor monarchs. A lady chapel, dedicated to Mary (the mother of Jesus), can be found in most large churches. Look out for the colourful banners, belonging to the Knights of the Order of the Bath. This military order was established in 1725 and use the Lady Chapel for special services. Newly installed knights design their banners to reflect their careers and interests.

- The font is used for baptisms when parents and godparents promise to bring up the child as a Christian. The priest pours water over the child's head in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (The Trinity). Water symbolises the washing away of sin and the beginning of a new Christian life.
- This chapel is also used for weddings for members of the Order of the Bath and their families.



Question: Have you been baptised or been to a baptism or a wedding in a church? You may have seen one on TV or in a film. Can you remember anything about it?

Stretch: Do you think a baby should be baptised or would it be better to wait until the child is old enough to make the decision to become a Christian for themselves?

11 Poets' Corner

Over 100 poets and writers are buried or remembered in Poets' Corner. The first poet buried here, in 1400, was Geoffrey Chaucer, author of *The Canterbury Tales*. This wasn't because of his poetry but rather his job as Clerk of the King's Works, looking after royal properties. Nearly 200 years later, the poet Edmund Spenser asked to be buried near Chaucer. This started a tradition of literary memorials which still continues today, and also includes musicians, actors, singers and directors.



- C.S. Lewis is known for the *Chronicles of Narnia* which explore Christian themes in children's books. He also wrote for adults on miracles, suffering and personal faith.
- There are also two ancient wall paintings. One shows Jesus and the apostle Thomas. Thomas was not present when the resurrected Jesus first appeared (John 20:25) and doubted it was true. A week later, Jesus appeared to him and invited him to touch his wounds and when he did so, Thomas believed.

Question: Many people feel reassured by the story of Thomas who doubted but came to believe. Have you ever had to believe in something without seeing it for yourself? Was it difficult? What persuaded you it was true?

Stretch: In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis, Aslan the lion is killed by the White Witch in order to save Eustace who had betrayed his brother and sisters. How does this reflect Christian beliefs about Jesus?



Use this space to make notes and reflect.