



## People in Christian art – teachers' notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool in your classroom.

As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this [five-question survey](#).

All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

SLIDE 3: As a class or in pairs, discuss these quotes. One is from the Bible and one is from a South African Christian priest.

1. Do the statements agree about anything?
2. Do the statements disagree on anything?
3. What do the two statements teach us about what Christians believe about human beings?

SLIDE 4: People in art

You may find this article useful as background reading prior to discussion with your pupils.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/jun/05/we-are-born-hungry-for-faces-why-are-they-so-compelling>

Talk to your pupils and ask them to think of reasons why people are so drawn to images of people.

Answers may include:

- People like to connect with other people
- People like what is familiar
- Faces are interesting to look at

SLIDE 5: People in Christian art

Dura-Europos church in Syria is the oldest building used as a Christian church. Frescoes from the walls depict Jesus as the Good Shepherd as well as Jesus and Peter walking on water. There are also depictions of Mary and characters from Bible stories. The church was discovered by a team of archaeologists in the 1930's. The frescoes were removed and taken to Yale University, USA. It is believed that the church was destroyed during the Syrian Civil War.

Why might the early church need images of Jesus and other people from the Bible?

1. To help tell Christian stories
2. To help Christians understand the nature of God
3. To help Christians to focus on God when praying



4. To remind Christians that God is with us

### SLIDE 6: Jesus in Christian art

What does Jesus look like? Ask pupils to describe what Jesus looked like. Collate ideas. If you wish, pupils could even compile a 'photo fit' image of Jesus from class discussion.

You may find that pupils suggest the following:

- A white man
- A man with a beard
- A man with long hair

### SLIDE 7: Jesus in Christian art in Westminster Abbey

These three images of Jesus can all be found in Westminster Abbey.

Image 1 - Wall painting from 13th century

Image 2 - Stained glass window from 1893

Image 3 - Icon from 1994

1. In what ways are the images similar to each other?
2. In what ways are the images different from each other?
3. Is it possible that any of these artists knew what Jesus what looked like?

### SLIDE 8: Jesus in worldwide Christian art

Compare these images of Jesus to the images you have already seen. In what ways are they similar and in what ways are they different. Is it possible that any of these artists knew what Jesus looked like? No physical description of Jesus exists, and no one knows what he looked like. Does this matter?

Why might Christians find it helpful to look at an image of Jesus? Pupils might suggest the following:

- The idea of a personal relationship with God
- A reminder about God's humanity
- To help focus when praying

### SLIDE 9: Saints in Christian art

Click twice to see a close up of Mary and a rose.

Saints are usually painted with their attributes. An attribute is a picture clue that helps us work out who the person is. Here, Mary is painted holding a beautiful rose and the rose is her attribute. Notice that the rose has no thorns. This is because thorns represent sin. Mary holds a thorn-less rose to remind us of the Christian tradition that Mary was born without sin.



In the same way that we might display photographs of our families in our homes, Christians display images of saints in churches. Saints are part of our Christian family.

### SLIDE 10: Saints in Christian art - attributes

You may find the following background information about the painting helpful to read, prior to the lesson.

This is a 15th century altarpiece on wood by Florentine artist Bicci di Lorenzo (1375-1452). It is thought originally to have come from the Capella San Giovanni Gualberto in Sta Trinita, Florence. It shows the Madonna enthroned, holding a rose, with the Christ Child, with angels kneeling at her feet. Either side are depicted figures of saints Anthony Abbot, Giovanni Gualberto, John the Baptist and Catherine of Alexandria. In roundels above are saints Peter and Paul. In small vertical panels at either side are small figures of saints Matthew, Nicholas, Francis, Luke, James the Less and Peter Martyr.

Can you spot the following saints from their attributes?

- St John the Baptist wears an animal skin and has bare feet (to the right of Mary with pink cloak)
- St Catherine has a wheel (to the right of St John the Baptist with green cloak)
- St Peter holds a key (above St John and St Catherine)

Pupils may know some of the stories about these saints and you may choose to share these quick summaries.

St John the Baptist lived in the desert; he wore clothes made of camel skin. He was a prophet who told people that Jesus would save everyone.

St Catherine was a Christian who was tortured and then killed by the Roman emperor because of her Christian faith. The spiked wheel was used to torture her.

St Peter holds the key to Heaven. In the Bible, Jesus said to Peter 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven'. (Matthew 16:19)

### SLIDE 11: Saints in Christian art – patron saints

St Francis is often shown outdoors surrounded by animals. Ask pupils to guess what he is the patron saint of. St Francis is the patron saint of animals and the environment.

### SLIDE 12: People in Christian art

What work is celebrated here?

- Look closely at the uniform (the nurse wears an apron)

How might this work glorify God?

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# Westminster Abbey

## Learning



- Looking after people who are sick, cleaning people, saving lives. The Bible teaches us that Jesus did all these things himself and is happy when we do things like this too.

SLIDE 13:

- What attributes can you find? (blue uniform, wings of air-force on his uniform)
- Think about his body position - how is he portrayed? (kneeling, facing upwards)
- What is his location? (he is outside, we can see trees behind him)

Who is this man? (a RAF pilot from the Battle of Britain)

How might his work glorify God? (risking his life to save others)

This is part of a large stained-glass window in Westminster Abbey. It commemorates the pilots of the RAF who fought in the Battle of Britain in 1940. You can find out more here

<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/about-the-abbey/history/raf-chapel>

SLIDE 14: Modern stained-glass windows

The image shows a modern stained-glass window from the Stained Glass Museum at Ely Cathedral (<https://stainedglassmuseum.com/catshow.php?func=show&seq=0&collno=ELYGM%3A2021.1>).

The artist is Kehinde Wiley- a New-York based artist. For further learning resources about Kehinde Wiley's stained-glass window: <https://stainedglassmuseum.com/learningresource>

You can find out more about Wiley's stained-glass windows here:

<https://mymodernmet.com/contemporary-stained-glass-art/>

SLIDES 15 & 16: Activity: Design a stained-glass window for a person you wish to celebrate

Use these stages to guide your pupils through the creation of their own stained-glass window, building upon what they have learnt about people within Christian art.

- Choose an attribute (Can you think of one meaningful object they could hold/wear?)
- Position of body (standing? Sitting? Involved in activity?)
- Location (background scene? Indoors/outdoors?)
- Use of colour (stained glass windows are designed to be colourful and eye-catching. Are there any symbolic colours you wish to use in your design?)

Once pupils have finished their designs, they could place them in an 'exhibition' so that all can see each other's work. You could suggest that the identity of the window remains secret until pupils have had a chance to examine the windows and look for attributes.