**Today’s Targets:**

* Explain how Constantine influenced the Church
* Explain the importance of the Council of Nicaea
* Describe the role of the Church during the Middle Ages, as well as the role of the priests and nuns.
* Explain how religion affected the world view of the people during the Middle Ages
* List three important events in the early history of the church.

Constantine and the Rise of Christianity

Constantine came into power in 312 AD, and was the emperor of the Western Empire. In 324 he also became the emperor of the Eastern Empire, and the Roman Empire was united once again. He moved the capital from Rome to Istanbul, and renamed the city Constantinople. While Constantine was not a Christian at this time, he did legalize Christianity, and eventually converted on his deathbed. He also called the Council of Nicaea, which made some important decisions regarding Christianity.

The Council of Nicaea

This meeting took place in 325 AD. Prior to this, the followers of Christianity were all using different scriptures, and teaching different things based on their interpretation of the speeches of the followers of Jesus. Constantine decided that the teachings and message needed to be consistent, so he called a meeting of 318 Christian bishops to make important decisions. They decided the following things:

1. Whether or not Jesus was the Son of God or an incarnation of God.
2. Which books should be included in the Bible.
3. Whether or not Mary was divine or human.
4. The role of women in the Church.
5. The dates of Christmas and Easter.
6. The role of Jesus in salvation.
7. The order and importance of different rituals (such as communion) and what sacraments were required in order to participate.
8. How to become a priest, and what behaviour was acceptable for priests.
9. How confession should be performed.
10. What was required to get into heaven.
11. Who could interpret the word of God.
12. Rules surrounding baptism.

At this time the Church was gaining power, and more and more people were beginning to follow their teachings. People liked the idea of heaven, and the thought that while their life might be awful, the afterlife would be great.

How was Christianity different from other religions?

When Jesus was born, he was born into a Jewish society, and his parents were Jewish. The majority of people living in that area were Roman, and had a ***polytheistic*** belief system – which means they believed in many gods. They also believed that the gods interacted with people, and could mate with people, and that it wasn’t unusual to be a son of god. The Jews, on the other hand, had a ***monotheistic*** view – which means they believed there was only one god; they called this god Yaweh or Jehovah. They believed that God made a covenant (agreement or deal) with the Jews to send prophets to help them live a good life, and as a go-between between the Jews and God. They believe that Jesus was one of these prophets.

Toward the end of his life, Jesus was arrested by the Romans because his disciples declared him “King of the Jews”, and Rome already had a King. It was against the law for a Jew to be declared (or to declare himself) King, so he was arrested and tried. Jesus was found guilty, and his sentence was crucifixion. Crucifixion itself was quite a common punishment during these times. After Jesus’ death, his disciples continued to preach his teachings, and traveled all over the Middle East spreading his words. This religion became more and more popular because it appealed to the average person. It said that the poor and the weak would inherit everything in the Kingdom of God, and that the rich people wouldn’t get anything. It also said that the people who were their oppressors would go to Hell, and a lot of people liked that idea.

The Church During Medieval Times

During the Dark Ages and Medieval Times the Church (which would later be known as the Catholic Church) was all powerful. They were so powerful that they had their own laws and taxes, and even controlled the kings! The most important law was that you couldn’t go against the church. If you did, you were charged with ***heresy***, and the punishment was death (often you were burned at the stake) and an eternity in Hell. Attending church and saying prayers was a daily occurrence for everyone, and the church played a central role in the community. Often fairs and celebrations were held in the churchyards, and the priests and nuns were an important part of the community. The priests and nuns were the only health care that most people had, and took care of the elderly and orphans. The priests were the only ones who could read and write, so they kept track of records for the whole community. They cared for their congregation’s spiritual health as well as their physical health. When someone died, the priests performed the funeral rites and prepared the bodies.

Assignment:

1. Explain two ways Constantine influenced the Church.
2. Summarize why the Council of Nicaea was so important, and how it has influenced our world today (particularly if you’re Christian, and especially Catholic). (4 marks)
3. Describe the role of the Church during the Middle Ages. (3 marks)
4. Describe the role of the priests and nuns during the Middle Ages. (3 marks)
5. Explain how religion affected the world view of the people during the Middle Ages. (4 marks)
6. List three important events in the early history (0 AD – 500 AD) of the Church, and explain why you think they were important. (3 marks)