Overview And History Of The Religion: Mormons

Brief introduction/overview of the religion:

- Among the many Christian faiths there is 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' known as LDS or otherwise known as Mormons. It is called the Church of Latter-Day Saints because all members of the church are considered to be saints and we are known to be in the latter days - a time after biblical times – meaning the time period of the bible.

Where and when?

- They are a global Christ-centered faith with over 15 million Mormons in our world today. Roughly 43% of them are from the United States with Utah being its most popular state globally which is known to be the home of Mormonism. It was founded in western New York by Joseph Smith in 1830 and has spread across the entire globe over the many years.

History:

- The story starts when Joseph Smith felt as though there was a lack of religion and faith within humanity. He himself was trying to figure out which area of Christianity he should devote himself to fully, so he prayed. When he asked God which denomination of Christianity he should join, he said that he got a very different response to what he was expecting. God told him to not join any of the churches as they were all wrong. This message came to him through many visions of God, visions telling him that he needs to start a new form of Christianity. He was directed by visions of angels which lead him to many golden plates buried in the ground engraved with religious history in the ancient Egyptian language. He is given a gift from God to be able to read this language. He read them and was inspired by God to make the scriptures into a book, the book of Mormon, which is named after the person who wrote the first transcript on the golden plates. This finding and creation of the book is known as the most sacred story within Mormonism and is a very famous spiritual experience. He published the book of Mormon when he was 24, by the time of his death, 14 years later, there were tens of thousands of followers of Mormonism.

- Only in 2014 did the faith accept the fact that Joseph Smith was not a perfect prophet. Joseph Smith had up to 40 wives, some already married, two only 14 years old and another two who were 16. The practice of marrying girls this young was not a normal thing even in the 19th century.
- He married Patty Sessions and then her daughter Sylvia Sessions and he also married several sets of sisters.
- A famous essay on plural marriage was preached in the early days of Mormonism. It states that polygamy – meaning the practice of having more then one wife at the same time – is commanded by God. This part of Mormonism was hidden for a long amount of time until the accounts of his marriages were leaked.
- His first wife Emma, a woman commonly referred to in scriptures as a symbol of love and care did not know about his 40 wives.

- He would use passages from the book of Mormon to convince them that if they marry him they will have eternal life.
- A month before his death Joseph Smith talked to a large congregation in Illios and strongly and flatly denied the rumors of his practices of polygamy. He said “what a thing for a man to be accused of committing adultery and having seven wives when I can only find one. I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers.”
- Little did everyone know that he was not only lying about being married to 7 women but instead 40.
- Many newspaper articles came out about his lies and exposed him for the things he was doing at the time. He got the city council to shut down this newspaper which was highly illegal. The police found out and he surrendered himself and went to jail. Later that year a mob attacked the jail and killed him along with many other prison inmates.

Beliefs:

- Mormon beliefs consist of the opinion that Jesus Christ is the son of God and the savior of mankind and that in order to be a worthy human we must follow his teachings.
- If you follow the teachings of God, you can make up for sin – this is called salvation.
- That visions and that spiritual revelations can happen at any point in your life.
- There should be religious freedom, that they need to accept that others may believe differently but to still try to educate them on the beliefs of Mormonism.
- That members of the church should be honest, true and virtuous.
- Mormons believe in God, Jesus Christ and in the Holy Ghost. But different to most other Christian religions they don’t believe that in the holy trinity, meaning they don’t believe in three Gods creating one God. Instead, they believe that the three are separate gods. They believe that god, Jesus Christ and the holy ghost are connected and have the same purpose but they do not believe that they make up one god.
- Unfortunately, within the church racism is quite prominent towards black people. It wasn’t until the late 1970s that black people were allowed to be associated with Mormonism. Still, today in some LDS communities black people are judged and discriminated against when going to Mormon churches.

What were their major beliefs about death and the afterlife?

- The biggest thing that makes Mormonism different from other Christian religions is their views on the afterlife.
- While other Christian religions tend to see the afterlife as you either go to heaven or hell depending on how much you embrace the values of Jesus Christ, Mormons believe that every person has a moment either in life or once they die of deciding whether to accept their salvation or deny it. This is what they believe decides what extent of heaven or extent of hell they experience in the afterlife.

How did they understand existence?

- Mormons believe that people were created by God and we were put on this earth by God. They believe we have been given the gift of existence and we need to repay God for this gift by following the laws in the book of Mormon.

Spaces, places, times and artifacts, Rituals and ethics:

- LDS chapels are important places for the religion as it is a place for Sunday worship and many weekday activities.
- Temples are a key aspect of Mormonism. Not just anyone can enter Mormon temples. They are a sacred place for only pure members of the church who have been approved by the LDS council of that area. To have approval you must have shown your devotion to the church. This means following the belief system correctly and abstinence from tea, coffee, tobacco, alcohol and laws of sexual purity. These are also known as their moral ethics – it is seen as immoral to do such things.
- Once approved they can participate in rituals within the temples.
- The most common ritual includes praying to God.
- A major artifact is the original book of Mormon. Mormons from all around the world often go to Salt Lake City in Utah to see the book and many have said that they have had spiritual revelations after seeing it.

Texts:

- They follow the Book of Mormon.
- Mormons follow the bible as well but through it being translated into modern prophets.
- The most famous one is called the doctrine and covenants. It provides a clearer way of describing their beliefs.
- It helps them to understand many errors within the bible that thousands of years may have caused.

Symbols:

- The sego lily is a type of flower that Mormons ate when they settled in Utah and had a lack of food. It is seen on the state flag.
- Another symbol is the all-seeing eye which is on the top of the most famous Mormon temple in Salt Lake City in Utah. It is known as the eye of God and is there to watch over everyone.

Social structures:

- There is quite a distinct structure to the church of latter-day saints.
- The three men that are the heads of the church are called the first presidency which includes the president, the first councilor and the second councilor. The next position is the quorum of twelve apostles, which follows the ancient tradition. The next stage is the quorum of seventy which are seventy Mormons who are taught by leaders above. There are also general officers which consist of men and women and is the only position women are allowed to hold within the religion.
- A way in which they can prove themselves worthy to the higher church is by going around door to door spreading the word of Jesus Christ. You may see these people coming to your door now and again.
- The latest info from 2016 shows that over 240,000 people converted to Mormonism due to door-to-door conversations.

Summary - What have you learned? Found interesting? Challenging?

Throughout my study of Mormonism, I learned an extensive amount about the religion that I never would have known. I found learning about Joseph Smith having 40 wives quite scandalous and interesting and I loved watching different videos of ex-Mormons explaining their views on the religion from an ex insider point of view. I found trying to understand and compress their beliefs a bit difficult as they have so many and all of them have many different meanings. Overall, Mormonism is a fascinating religion and I'm really glad I got the chance to study it.