

## **Empathizing (The Ancestors of the West)**

### **One God or Many?**

The religions that existed in the geographical area in which Zoroastrianism began, as well as those of the ancient Greeks and Romans, were polytheistic. Many different gods and goddesses were worshipped to obtain a desired result. These gods and goddesses were specialized, and a deity's power was limited to his or her particular area of concern. This contrasts sharply with the one God as portrayed in Christianity (as well as in Judaism and Islam) but may evoke some similarities to the Catholic practice of asking saints for their intercession. Ask the students to compare and contrast the polytheistic understanding of multiple gods and goddesses with the Catholic understanding of the saints.

### **Mystery Religions and Christianity**

Page 200 in the student book lists three features shared by most or all of the mystery religions. It also notes that Christianity must have resembled a mystery religion to people of the ancient Roman world. Have the students identify elements within Christianity that echo these three aspects of mystery religions. For example, people (or their parents) choose that they will be baptized (i.e., initiated into the Christian faith community); Christians emphasize having a personal relationship with God through Christ; and Christians share the mystery religions' hope for a blessed afterlife.

### **Isis and the Virgin**

Have the students look up additional information about Isis and about the cult of the Virgin Mary, especially in folk manifestations of Catholicism, to see what similarities and differences exist.

