**The Aztecs**

The Aztecs worshiped many gods. When they took over a new tribe or culture they often adopted the new tribe's gods into the Aztec religion.   
  
**The Sun**   
  
One of the most important aspects of Aztec religion was the sun. The Aztecs called themselves the "People of the Sun". They felt that in order for the sun to rise each day the Aztecs needed to perform rituals and sacrifices to give the sun strength.   
  
**Main Gods**   
  
Despite worshiping many gods, there were certain gods that the Aztecs considered more important and powerful than the others. The most important god to the Aztecs was Huitzilopochtli. Here are some of the most important gods to the Aztecs. 

   
*The god Huitzilopochtli* by Unknown

* **Huitzilopochtli** - The most fearsome and powerful of the Aztec gods, Huitzilopochtli was the god of war, the sun, and sacrifice. He was also the patron god of the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan. The Great Temple in the center of the city was built in honor of Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. His name is thought to mean "left-handed hummingbird". He was often drawn with feathers and holding a scepter made from a snake.

* **Tlaloc** - Tlaloc was the god of rain and water. While Tlaloc helped the Aztecs much of the time by sending rain and causing plants to grow, he also could get angry and send thunder storms and hail. Tlaloc was worshiped at the Great Temple in the city of Tenochtitlan and also at the top of a tall mountain named Mount Tlaloc. He was often drawn with fangs and big goggle-like eyes.

* **Quetzalcoatl** - Quetzalcoatl was the god of life and wind. His name means "feathered serpent" and he was usually drawn as a serpent which could fly, very much like a dragon. When Cortez first arrived at the Aztecs, many thought that he was the god Quetzalcoatl in human flesh.

* **Tezcatlipoca**- Tezcatlipoca was a powerful god associated with many things including magic, the night, and the earth. He was a rival god to Quetzalcoatl. According to Aztec mythology, he was the first god to create the sun and the earth, but was struck down by Quetzalcoatl and turned into a jaguar. There was a large temple built to him in the city of Tenochtitlan just south of the Great Temple. His name meant "smoking mirror".

* **Chicomecoatl**- Chicomecoatl was the Aztec goddess of agriculture, nourishment, and corn. She was often drawn as a young girl carrying flowers or a woman using the sun as a shield. Her name meant "seven snakes".

   
*Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca*by Unknown

**Priests**   
  
The Priests were responsible for making sure that the gods were offered the correct offerings and sacrifices. They had to perform all sorts of ceremonies in the temples to make sure that the gods were not angry with the Aztecs. Priests had to undergo extensive training. They were well-respected and powerful in the Aztec society.   
  
**Human Sacrifice**   
  
The Aztecs believed that the sun needed the blood of human sacrifice in order to rise each day. They performed thousands of human sacrifices. Some historians think that more than 20,000 people were killed when the Great Temple was first dedicated in 1487.   
  
**The Afterlife**   
  
The Aztecs believed in a number of levels of heaven and the underworld. Depending on how you died would determine where you went. Those who died in battle would go to the top level of heaven. Those who drowned would go to the underworld.   
  
**Interesting Facts about the Aztec Religion, Gods, and Mythology**

* Sometimes people were selected to impersonate the gods. They would dress like the gods and then act out stories from the Aztec mythology.
* The Aztec calendar played an important role in their religion. They held a number of religious ceremonies and festivals throughout the year.
* The largest of the Aztec festivals was the Xiuhmolpilli, which meant "new fire". It was held once every 52 years in order to prevent the world coming to an end.
* The Aztecs often went to war in order to take captives that they could use in their sacrifices.
* The Aztecs believed they were living under the fifth, or final, sun. They feared the day when the fifth sun would die and the world would come to an end.