

# Christmas: Quranic Commonalities

In times of despair, wars, rumours of wars and threats of new terror attacks, the angelic message at the birth of Jesus Christ continues to reassure:

"Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours" (Luke 2:14).

God favours all who believe in His message. Since Christ's birth is described in the Bible and the Quran, about sixty per cent of the world's population has heard about it in one way or another.<sup>1</sup> Both accounts agree in at least six major points.

Commonalities		
	Bible	Quran
1	Many Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.	Many Muslims celebrate the birth of their prophet.
2	Mary is "blessed above all women" (Injeel, Luke 1:42).	Mary is "chosen above the women of all nations" (Al-Imran 3:42).
3	Mary was a virgin who did not have "sexual relations" (Luke 1:34).	Mary was a virgin whom "no man has touched" (Al-Imran 3:47).
4	Mary belonged to Israel, a blessed nation, chosen by God "beyond all others" (Torah, Deuteronomy 7:6, 14).	Mary belonged to Israel, a blessed nation, chosen by God "preferred ... over the worlds" (Al-Baqarah, 2:47).
5	The birth of Jesus is good news announced by angels "that will cause great joy for all people" (Luke 2:10-14).	The birth of Jesus is good news announced by angels and a "sign for the worlds" (Al-Imran 3:45, Al-Anbya, 21:91).
6	The special name, "Jesus", was chosen by God (Injeel, Matthew 1:21).	The special name, "Jesus", was chosen by God (Al-Imran 3:45).

The table above is available as a Christmas card in [English](#) and [Turkish](#).

Consider these commonalities, investigate the contrasts and ask questions. Discuss them with friends, those of other faiths or this author ([Oskar1@live.co.uk](mailto:Oskar1@live.co.uk)).

The Bible and the Quran do not explicitly command or forbid celebrating the birth of Jesus or Muhammad. Here are a few reasons why many Christians celebrate Christmas.

- The angels and shepherds celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 2:13-14, 20).
- Followers of Jesus are instructed to remember Jesus Christ (Injeel, 2 Timothy 2:8).<sup>2</sup>
- Academic research has shown that neither the Christmas dates nor the various Christmas traditions have a pagan background.<sup>3</sup> As long as Jesus Christ is the centre of celebrations (not

<sup>1</sup> All truth is God's truth, wherever it is found. This does not mean that everything else from the quoted source (Quran) is accepted as equally true.

<sup>2</sup> Only here in 2 Timothy Jesus Christ occurs in this order. It seems most likely, "that Paul intended to emphasize Jesus' humanity by placing first the name given at his birth ..." Knight, G. W. (1992). *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 397). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

<sup>3</sup> [answering-islam.org/pagan/christmas.html](http://answering-islam.org/pagan/christmas.html)

food, drink, fellowship, gifts, etc), there is no reason why His birth should not be commemorated at Christmas. Done in such a way, it could be celebrated any day of the week, in spite of the fact that they are named after pagan gods.<sup>4</sup>

**A. In view of the following, do you think Mary is the greatest woman of all time?**

- While the Quran mentions some men as chosen above others, Mary is the only women mentioned in that honourable way.
- Mary is the only woman explicitly named in the Quran.
- Mary is the only woman who has a Surah of the Quran (19) mentioned in her honour.
- Mary is the only woman who experienced pregnancy as a virgin, directly decreed by the Spirit of God. (Al-Anbiyaa 21:91)
- Some hadith<sup>5</sup> and Muslim commentators<sup>6</sup> confirm that Mary was the greatest woman of all time, including in paradise, others do not.

**B. What is your opinion about this statement?**

Since in Mary's Middle Eastern culture a woman's greatness is mainly measured by the importance of her children, Jesus Christ is the most influential person in history according to the Bible and the Quran.<sup>7</sup>

**C. Why did Mary experience pregnancy as a virgin?**

A few points to consider:

- Unlike in Mary's situation, there was no other option with Adam. He had to be created supernaturally, since no humans were yet around.<sup>8</sup>
- Ali Imran 3:59 says that Jesus is like Adam, born miraculously, righteous and holy, in a personal relationship with God.<sup>9</sup>
- Jesus remained sinless, unlike Adam who after his sin was naturally inclined to do wrong. As a result "his life became evil" and so did the lives of all his descendants.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [britannica.com/science/week#ref180116](http://britannica.com/science/week#ref180116)

<sup>5</sup> Bukhari, Vol. 7, Bk. 65, Nr. 329, *Tirmidhi Hadith*, Nr. 1646; ALIM CD-Rom, Tabarani; Hakim; Dhahabi; Ibn 'Asakir; A. Schleifer, 'Mary The Blessed Virgin of Islam', Fons Vitae, January 1, 1997, ch. 4, pp. 62-65, 70-72.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Kathir, Qurtubi, Zajjaj and others.

<sup>7</sup> Some prophets are exalted above others according to Al-Baqarah, 2:253. But see also Al-Baqarah, 2:136.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Imran, 3:47, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Melchizedek is mentioned in Injeel, Hebrews 7:3 as a typology, prefiguring or symbolizing Jesus. He was 'without father and mother' in the sense that the Bible does not tell us about them. Jewish scholars identified him with Shem, the ancestor of Abraham [jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10602-melchizedek](http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10602-melchizedek)

#### D. Why was Mary's nation (Israel) chosen by God above all other nations in history?

A few points to consider:

- God does not show favouritism.<sup>11</sup>
- The Bible says that God chose the Israelites because of His love, to keep His promise to their forefathers<sup>12</sup> and to one day bless the whole world<sup>13</sup> through them. Here is how this will be possible in spite of the fact that most Jews currently disobey Him:
- How God dealt with the Israelites in the Torah reveals much about who He is, and how He wants His people to live.<sup>14</sup> The Torah also helps us begin to understand why God placed the tiny nation of Israel at the world's crossroads.
- According to the Quran and the Bible, God generally relates to mankind through a covenant.<sup>15</sup> There is almost no difference in the words *covenant* and *contract* today. Both are broadly defined as agreements between two parties. If either party fails to meet the agreed conditions, they suffer loss and the contract is void. This is also the understanding of covenants and of marriage contracts, according to the Quran. The relationship between a master and a hired worker, as seen in Isaiah 16:13–14 comes closest to this understanding.
- The word *covenant* has an additional meaning when read in the original context of God's dealings with humans. The Hebrew word for *covenant* is בְּרִית, *berith*. It is derived from a root that means *to cut*, referring to the cutting or dividing of animals into two parts, and the contracting parties passing between them, in making a covenant.<sup>16</sup> Those who did not fulfill the terms of the covenant would be punished.<sup>17</sup>
- Amazingly, during the making of the covenant with Abraham, only God passed between the cut up pieces of the animals in the form of "a smoking firepot with a blazing torch!"<sup>18</sup> It implied that ultimately He alone would suffer the punishment when this covenant was violated.
- The Bible and the Quran state that God speaks, hears and sees. Of course, such human terms have to be understood symbolically. However, when describing God with words, such as

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<sup>10</sup>Maryam, 19:19, Injeel, 1 John 3:5, Ta-Ha 20:121, Yusuf, 12:53, Al-Nahl, 16:63, Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 8, Bk. 77, Nr. 611: 'Satan touches every child when it is born, whereupon it starts crying loudly, except Mary and her son.' Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 54, Bk. 60, Nr. 54, trad. 71, Ibn Hisham, ed., The life of Muhammad: (Ibn) Isahq's Sirat Rasul Allah, trans. Al Guillaume, London: Oxford University Press, 1955, p.72. Ayatholla Khomeini: 'You should pay attention and all of us should pay attention (to the fact) that man's calamity is his carnal desire, and this exists in everybody, and it is rooted in the nature of man' (Islamic Government does not spend for its own grandeur, by Kayhan International, September 4, 1985, p.3).

<sup>11</sup>Injeel, Romans 2:11, Acts 10:34

<sup>12</sup>Torah, Deuteronomy 7:6-8

<sup>13</sup>Torah, Genesis 12:1-3

<sup>14</sup>Torah, Ezekiel 39:23, Jeremiah 22:8-9

<sup>15</sup>Arabic *ahdan*, Ta-ha 20:115, Al-Baqara, 2:40, Genesis 9:9

<sup>16</sup>Easton's Bible Dictionary

<sup>17</sup>Torah, Jeremiah 34:18

<sup>18</sup>Torah, Genesis 15:5-22

'suffering' or 'loving', the difference is not found in terms of meaning but perfection only. For example, God's love is perfect, human love is not. If such words were totally different from our understanding of them, any talk about God would become meaningless. If He was not capable of suffering for us and with us, He would not be capable of loving us. While it is true that God is impassible (meaning without passions), in His relationship with us He has genuine emotions, grounded in His own nature and not forced on Him by our actions.<sup>19</sup>

- The Quran alludes to the story of Abraham. He said, "I will emigrate for the sake of my Lord."<sup>20</sup> According to the Bible God never ultimately breaks the covenant with the Israelites, although He punishes those who violate it.<sup>21</sup> The Quran hints at this profound truth by recording that God kept sending 13 of the 25 prophets mentioned in it to the Israelites. This happened in spite of their repeated disobedience as a nation. In contrast, people who disobeyed the message of non Jewish prophets like Nuh (Noah), Hud (Heber), Salih (Methusaleh), Lut (Lot), Shu'aib (Jethro) and others, were destroyed.<sup>22</sup>
- God illustrates His faithfulness to the children of Israel in the Bible by comparing Himself to a husband who marries a prostitute. The Bible also says that God gives his people an eternal inheritance.<sup>23</sup> The reason for this extraordinary commitment is found exclusively in God's holiness and love, not in the feeble attempts of His people to win favour by living an upright life and doing good deeds.
- Having demonstrated His unconditional love, God asks those who believe in Him to do likewise when they enter marriage covenants.<sup>24</sup> They are to continue doing their share, regardless of whether the other party keeps the agreement. Since God knew the risks involved in marriage covenants, he made certain provisions to protect against human abuse.<sup>25</sup> While God's definition of covenant is loving and merciful, one wonders, "Is it consistent with God's attribute of justice?" We find the answer in commonality number 5.

## E. Why is the birth of Jesus good news for the whole world?

A few points to consider:

- As demonstrated below, the complete story of Jesus confirms previous scriptures the way it ought to.<sup>26</sup> It is about restoring eternal honour before God and people.
- The Torah, Zabur and Injeel are scriptures from God, mentioned in the Quran. They describe the word *sin* as more than simply doing wrong things by mistake. It is thinking wrongly, caused by a rebellious attitude of disbelief which is in the heart of everyone. From God's perspective, sin is

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<sup>19</sup> Torah, Exodus 3:7, Psalms 78:40, Isaiah 63:9, Hosea 11:8, Injeel, 1 Peter 2:21-22, Hebrews 4:15. Source: [matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2010/09/does-god-feel-our-pain/#fnref-6014-1](http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2010/09/does-god-feel-our-pain/#fnref-6014-1)

<sup>20</sup> Al-'Ankabut, 29:26

<sup>21</sup> Zabur, Psalm 89:34, Torah, 2 Kings 17:5-23

<sup>22</sup> [qul.org.au/library/our-messengers/1-25-prophets-of-islam](http://qul.org.au/library/our-messengers/1-25-prophets-of-islam)

<sup>23</sup> Torah, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hosea 1-3, Injeel, Romans 3:3-4, Hebrews 9:15-17

<sup>24</sup> Torah, Malachi 2:14

<sup>25</sup> Such as divorce in case of adultery, etc (Injeel, Mathew 19:7-12, 1 Corinthians 7:7-24).

<sup>26</sup> Al-Maida, 5:46, Ali Imran, 3:3

serious, because He is absolutely holy. Every human is guilty and deserves judgement (An-Nahl, 16:1).

- God showed that there is only one way for mankind to deal with sin, through sacrifice. The principles of God's way are hinted at in the earliest stories recorded in Scripture. These principles became clearer and more detailed as time passed.
- **Adam and Eve (Adama and Hawa)**  
When Adam and Eve sinned, they covered their nakedness with leaves because a horrible shame and fear entered their lives. Their reaction to sin's shame and fear was not enough from God's perspective, so He gave them garments of animal skin. This points to the first sacrifice that deals with the devastating result of sin (Torah, Genesis 3:7, 21). In the Quran, God gave them clothing to cover their nakedness (Al Araf, 7:26). Shame only comes as a result of sin.
- **Cain and Abel (Habil and Kabil)**  
God accepted Abel's animal sacrifice but rejected Cain's crop sacrifice (Al Maida, 5:27, Genesis 4:3-7). Abel brought his sacrifice in faith, according to the Injeel, Hebrews 11:4. Did Adam and Eve remind Cain and Abel how God dealt with their shame in paradise by clothing them in animal skins? It makes sense that Adam and Eve would have told their boys the best way to remember God's solution was to bring Him an animal sacrifice.
- **Abraham (Ibrahim)**  
God provided an animal to sacrifice instead of the son (As Saffat, 37:107, Genesis 22). It cannot have been a simple act of worship on Abraham's part because the Quran says "we ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice." Have you considered that there may be another reason why the sacrifice is called mighty? (or "momentous" as in Yusuf Ali's translation) Could it be momentous because it points to a perfect sacrifice in the future? (See article titled, *The Mystery of Abraham's Sacrifice: [answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/sacrifice.html](http://answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/sacrifice.html)*)
- **Moses (Musa)**  
Moses was commanded by God to sacrifice animals for forgiveness of the Israelites' sins (Torah, Numbers 19:1-10). Muslim commentators, such as Yousuf Ali and Maudidi, think Al Baqara, 2:67-74 also alludes to this.
- **Jewish temple and its priests**  
The words *temple* and *priests* are mentioned in Al-Isra, 17:1 and Al-Ma ida, 5:44. Daily temple animal sacrifices offered by priests for the forgiveness of sins are clearly taught in the Torah. There is no removing of shame without shedding blood. This is why Leviticus 17:11 says, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."
- **Jesus (Isa)**  
The sacrificing of countless animals by the people of Israel through many centuries was a necessary but ineffective remedy for sin. These sacrifices merely foreshadowed or pointed to a

perfect and sinless sacrifice to come (cf. Hebrews chapter 10). Let me explain what I mean with an illustration.

Suppose I give you a cheque guaranteeing you a certain amount of money. Once you receive the money, you have something better than that piece of paper. You no longer need the cheque. Likewise, an animal sacrifice points to something better, a *greater* sacrifice. Once the greater sacrifice has taken place, the animal sacrifice, like the cheque, is no longer needed.

John the Baptist (Yahya) described Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John said Jesus came to be the perfect sacrifice for sin (Injeel, John 1:29). He was sacrificed on behalf of all who repent and believe in Him to take away their sin, shame, fear and guilt (Injeel, Mark 10:45).

In the Injeel, Luke 24:44-47 Jesus says, "Everything written about me in the law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the psalms had to come true." He opened the disciples' minds to understand the scriptures and said, "This is what is written: the Messiah must suffer and must rise from death three days later."

God confirmed His work by raising Jesus back to life on the third day and taking Him to heaven forty days later (Injeel, Acts 1:3, 1 Cor. 15).

The path to certain forgiveness is promised in the Torah, Zabur and Injel. The Quran says Muslims have to believe in those books (Al-Maida, 5:46-48). All that is needed now is to be really sorry and to stop living sinfully and selfishly. Instead, believe that Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to remove your sin and shame. In His strength and out of thankfulness, follow His example and obey all his teachings.

From God's perspective, we are naked and in shame because of our sins, but we can be clothed in rightness through the shedding of blood. This good news has been revealed since the time of Adam and Eve. Through Jesus the Messiah, this good news is for all people until the end of time.

What could possibly be better than to instantly receive:

- absolute forgiveness of sins
- transformation from shame to honour
- release from fear and guilt
- life to the full
- God's power in our lives to live His way of justice and mercy

The prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah (Jesus). He alone can offer all these blessings (Injeel, Mark 2:6; Luke 24:44-47; John 11:25-26). Will you humbly pray to God and tell Him you are truly sorry, that you wish to turn from your selfish life and believe in Jesus? He is the true and

perfect sacrifice who removes your shame. Then God will live in you through His Holy Spirit empowering you to keep His commands and live a new life.

**F. Why was Mary not permitted to choose the name for her baby boy and instead was given a special name by God himself through the angel?**

A few points to consider:

- In Middle Eastern culture a name represents the identity and activities of the person to whom it is given.
- The name 'Jesus' means 'God is salvation.'
- She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).
- For more details of how a number of prophecies were fulfilled through Jesus please visit: [iinjil.org/clarke/signposts.pdf](http://iinjil.org/clarke/signposts.pdf)

**G. Why do a number of other points about the life of Mary and Jesus in the Quran differ from the Bible but agree with apocryphal sources not accepted by early Christianity?**

A few points to consider:

- Apocryphal sources could be compared with hadith found to be weak and therefore rejected by Islam.
- For details see: [answering-islam.org/Authors/Arlandson/apocryphal.htm](http://answering-islam.org/Authors/Arlandson/apocryphal.htm)

**H. Why does the account found in the Quran on how to get forgiveness not confirm the way described in the previous scriptures?**

A few points to consider:

- Al-Maida, 5:46 and Ali Imran, 3:3 state that messages from God should confirm previous ones.
- The Quran states that the written form of the Torah and Injeel have not changed: Al Ma'idah, 5:43,47,68-69 and others.<sup>27</sup>
- Please contact the author ([Oskar1@live.co.uk](mailto:Oskar1@live.co.uk)) if you have questions, comments or wish to study the Bible further through a six lesson Bible correspondence course.

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<sup>27</sup> Some bad individuals quoted or wrote Scripture portions wrongly, claiming them to be God's word. Others forgot part of it. Nobody changed the actual books: [christianityexplained.net/explainedto/muslims/26.html](http://christianityexplained.net/explainedto/muslims/26.html)