

THE MUSLIM JESUS



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Living in Canada, we are surrounded by various celebrations which our multicultural society brings. Some of them are aligned with Islam, so we can acknowledge and celebrate them, while others are either in direct opposition to Islamic teachings, or do not align with our morals and values. In this article, we wanted to not only unpack Christmas (no pun intended) from our religious perspective and what level of interaction we should have with others who mark this holiday - either out of religious significance or cultural prominence - but to also highlight the life of Prophet ʿĪsā (Jesus) ﷺ from the Quranic lens.

Islam holds a nuanced (complex, yet interesting) perspective on Christmas, especially within the Canadian context where diverse cultures and religions coexist. The general stance of our senior scholars (*marājiʿ taqlīd*) based on the teachings from Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and his Ahlul Bayt ﷺ reflect a balance between respecting religious diversity, yet maintaining the integrity of our own faith. We will speak about this later in more detail.

Islam emphasizes the importance of respecting the religious practices of other people - even if we do not accept them. In the Canadian context, where multiculturalism is a fundamental value, we must

recognize the diversity of religious beliefs and cultural practices as we are encouraged to have harmonious coexistence with our fellow beings. The Quran emphasizes the need for dialogue and understanding among people of various religions, especially the People of the Book - the Jews and the Christians - by fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance, as Allah ﷻ says:

﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾¹

“Say: ‘O People of the Book, come to a word that is equitable between us and you – that we will not worship any except Allah, and that we will not associate anything with Him, and not take one another as lords instead of Allah (by obeying another in disobedience to Allah).’ However, if they turn away, then say: ‘Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him].’”¹

While we do not celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, we can make use of this time of the season to educate others on the “Muslim-Jesus.” Thus, December becomes a great opportunity to study the Quran and learn about the Islamic perspective on Prophet ‘Īsā ﷺ so that we can educate ourselves, our friends, co-workers, and neighbours.

Thus, we take you through a journey of the Quran to develop a chronological summary about the life of Prophet ‘Īsā ﷺ based on the verses of the Quran.

1. Lady Maryam (Mary) ﷺ and her Miraculous Pregnancy

Although technically, the birth of Prophet ‘Īsā ﷺ started with the birth and early years of his mother, Lady Maryam ﷺ, we will begin the narration with Angel Jibrā’īl ﷺ (Gabriel) announcing to Lady Maryam ﷺ how she will miraculously conceive a child, as seen in Sūrah Āle ‘Imrān (3), verses 45-47:

﴿إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَكَةُ يَمْرَيْمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾ قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ وَكُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤٧﴾﴾

“And (remember) when the angels said: ‘O Maryam, indeed Allah gives you the glad tidings of a Word from Him, to be called the Messiah, ‘Īsā, son of Maryam; highly honoured in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (to Allah). He will speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity, and (he will be) of the righteous ones.’ She (Maryam) said: ‘My Lord, how shall I have a son seeing no mortal has ever touched me?’ (The angel who appeared before her) said:

¹ Quran, Sūrah Āle ‘Imrān (3), verse 64.

‘Such is Allah, He creates whatever He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it ‘Be!’ and it is.’”²

Moving onto the next phase, the Quran speaks about the pregnancy phase and birth of Prophet ‘Isā ﷺ:

2. Lady Maryam’s ﷺ Pregnancy and the Birth of Prophet ‘Isā ﷺ

Some time later, as the pregnancy of Lady Maryam ﷺ progressed, she withdrew herself to a remote place “in the east” to deliver her baby, and at that instance, Allah ﷻ provided her some sustenance through the Unseen Realm. Allah ﷻ says in the Quran:

﴿فَحَمَلَتْهُ فَانْتَبَدَتْ بِهِ ۖ مَكَانًا قَصِيًّا ﴿٢٢﴾ فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَىٰ جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَلَيْتَنِي مِثُّ قَبْلِ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مِّنْ نَّسِيًّا ﴿٢٣﴾ فَنَادَتْهَا مِنْ تَحْتِهَا أَلَّا تَحْزَنِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ تَحْتَكِ سَرِيًّا ﴿٢٤﴾ وَهَرَىٰ إِلَيْكَ بِجِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ تُسْقِطُ عَلَيْكَ رَطْبًا جَنِيًّا ﴿٢٥﴾ فَكُلِي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا ۖ فَمَا تَرَيْنَ مِنَ الْبَشَرِ أَحَدًا فَقُولِي ۖ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أُكَلِّمَ الْيَوْمَ إِنْسِيًّا ﴿٢٦﴾﴾

“So she conceived him, then she withdrew with him to a distant place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. She said: ‘Oh, I wish that I had died before this, and had become a thing in oblivion, completely forgotten!’ (A voice) called out to her from beneath her: ‘Do not grieve! Your Lord has provided beneath you a stream. And shake the trunk of the date-palm towards you - it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon you. So eat and drink, and be comforted. And if you should see from among humanity anyone, say (through gesture): ‘Indeed, I have vowed a fast of silence to the All-Merciful, so I cannot speak to (any) human being today.’”³

According to reports in the books of *Hadith*, Maryam ﷺ delivered her son, not in Bethlehem in what is today’s occupied-Palestine as some report, but rather, in the city of Karbala in present-day Iraq.

The next phase of the life of Prophet ‘Isā ﷺ transpired when his mother and him returned to their hometown, and he exonerated his mother from the vile and vicious attacks against her. In that event, he spoke from the cradle, and confirmed his role as a Prophet of Allah ﷻ:

﴿قَالَ إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ ءَاتَنِي الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا ﴿٣٠﴾ وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُ وَأَوْصَانِي بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ مَا دُمْتُ حَيًّا ﴿٣١﴾ وَبَرًّا بِوَالِدَتِي وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْنِي جَبَّارًا شَقِيًّا ﴿٣٢﴾ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا ﴿٣٣﴾﴾

“He (the infant - Prophet ‘Isā ﷺ) said: ‘Surely, I am a servant of Allah. He (has already decreed that He) will give me the Book (the Gospel) and make me a Prophet. And He has made me blessed (and a means of His blessings for people) wherever I may be, and He has enjoined upon me the prayer (*ṣalāt*) and alms (*zakāt*) [and to enjoin the same upon others] for as long as I remain alive.

² Quran, Sūrah Āle ‘Imrān (3), verses 45-47.

³ Quran, Sūrah Mariam (19), verses 22-26.

And (He made me) dutiful towards my mother, and He has not made me unruly, wicked. So, peace be upon me on the day I was born, and the day I will die, and the day when I will be raised alive (up again for life).”⁴

Growing up, Prophet ‘Īsā ﷺ was given the ability by Allah ﷻ to perform miracles so that he could prove to the people that he had been sent by the Almighty ﷻ to guide the Children of Isrā’īl to salvation and success in this world and the next.

3. The Prophethood of ‘Īsā ﷺ and His Miracles

The mission of Prophet ‘Īsā ﷺ began then, and in order to further strengthen the fact that he was deputed by Allah ﷻ, he was given the ability to perform various miracles, including healing the blind and lepers, and raising the dead to life:

﴿وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَهَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٩﴾ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَلَأَجَلٍ لَّكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا ﷻ﴾

“And (We will make him) a Messenger to the Children of Isrā’īl (saying to them, by way of explaining his mission): ‘Indeed, I have come to you with a clear proof from your Lord: I fashion for you out of clay something in the shape of a bird, then I breathe into it, and it becomes a bird, by the permission of Allah. And I heal the blind (from birth) and the leper, and I give life to the dead, by the permission of Allah. And I inform you of what things you eat, and what you store up in your houses. Surely in this is a clear proof for you (demonstrating that I am a Messenger of Allah), if you are sincere believers (as you claim.) And (I have come) confirming (the truth which is contained in) the Torah (that was revealed before me), and to make lawful for you certain things that had been forbidden to you. And I have come to you with a sign (demonstrating that I am a Messenger of Allah) from your Lord. So, keep away from the disobedience to Allah (in due reverence for Him, and observe piety), and obey me.’”⁵

As with all Prophets that Allah ﷻ sent, they faced opposition and constant attacks against their character, mission, and message.

⁴ Quran, Sūrah Mariam (19), verses 30-33.

⁵ Quran, Sūrah Āle ‘Imrān (3), verses 49-50.

4. Opposition to the Message of Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ

The Quran articulates that Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ faced a lot of rejection by some of the Bani Isrā'il - those same people he was sent to guide:

﴿فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾﴾

“But when 'Īsā felt (persistence in) disbelief from them, he said: ‘Who are my supporters for (the cause of) Allah?’ The disciples said: ‘We are supporters for Allah. We have believed in Allah and testify that we are Muslims (those who submit to Him).’”⁶

Just like some past of the Prophets that Allah ﷻ had sent were killed, so too the plot was hatched to kill Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ, and the Quran paints the picture of this plan and how it concluded.

5. The Plot to Crucify Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ

The Quran rejects the idea that Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ was crucified; instead, Allah ﷻ asserts that it was made to appear so:

﴿وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا ﴿١٥٧﴾﴾

“And [for] their saying: ‘Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, 'Īsā, son of Maryam, the Messenger of Allah.’ And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain.”⁷

One of the unique aspects of Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ is the fact that he is still alive until today - some 2,000 years later. Contrary to the popular narrative: he was **not** killed, he did **not** die, he was **not** buried, and he was **not** resurrected three days later. The Quran tells us where he is now.

6. The Ascension of Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ

Allah ﷻ mentions in the Quran in one verse about the ascension of Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ - without providing explicit details:

﴿بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٥٨﴾﴾

⁶ Quran, Sūrah Āle 'Imrān (3), verse 52.

⁷ Quran, Sūrah Nisā' (4), verse 157.

“But Allah raised him to Himself. And Allah is Exalted in Might and is All-Wise.”⁸

This chronological summary provides a broad overview on key events in the life of Prophet ‘Īsā ﷺ based on Quranic references, realizing that the Quran does not provide exhaustive details on every aspect of his life; and if we want further information, then we need to delve into the detailed texts authored by our respected scholars.

Muslims in Current Times

Coming to contemporary times, what should our level of interaction be with Christians, or really anyone who identifies with and celebrates Christmas? Should we respond to greetings of “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Holidays?” Or is it forbidden/idolatry to do so? Can we give gifts to other people who are festive during this event? Will it make us non-believers if we acknowledge others who mark this day - either as a religious festival, or as a simple cultural expression? Are **we** permitted to “celebrate” Christmas?

Taking guidance from Āyatullāh Sīstānī, he is quoted as saying:

“A Muslim is allowed to take non-Muslims for acquaintances and friends, to be sincere towards them and they be sincere towards him, to help one another in fulfilling the needs of this life.”

Āyatullāh Sīstānī then quotes Allah ﷻ as He has written in His noble Book, the Quran, that: “Allah does not forbid you in regard to those who have not made war against you on account of (your) religion, and have not driven you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; surely Allah loves those who act justly.” (Sūrah al-Mumtaḥinah (60), verse 8)

He goes on to say: *“When these kinds of friendships produce good results, then it guarantees that the non-Muslim friend, neighbour, colleague, or business partner will know about the values of Islam, and it will bring them closer to this upright religion.”*

The Āyatullāh then quotes a *ḥadīth* from the Prophet ﷺ where he said to Imām ‘Alī ﷺ: “If Allah guides - through you - a single person from His servants, that is better for you than anything upon which the sun shines from the East to the West.”

Āyatullāh Sīstānī also specifically states: *“It is permissible to greet the Ahlul Kitab (the Jews and the Christians, etc.), and the non-Ahlul Kitab on the occasions they celebrate, like: New Year, Christmas, Easter, Passover, etc.”*

In short, rather than completely boycotting any social interactions in such situations, Muslims can use these opportunities to acquaint co-workers, neighbours, and others with the concept of the “Muslim-Jesus” by sharing literature on Prophet ‘Īsā ﷺ through Shia narrations.

⁸ Quran, Sūrah al-Nisā’ (4), verse 158.

It is crucial to convey to practicing Christians our acknowledgment, love, and acceptance of Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ, and express our shared anticipation of his second coming. Muslims believe in the return of Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ, accompanied by Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ, to initiate transformative societal reforms and establish the kingdom of Allah ﷻ on Earth. By fostering understanding and emphasizing shared beliefs, we contribute to interfaith dialogue, promoting unity and mutual respect among diverse communities.

As believers, we share a common anticipation for a future guided by the principles of justice, compassion, and Divine harmony - underscoring the universal values that bind us all together.

However, an important question is: Can we “celebrate” Christmas? This is **NOT** a holiday that Muslims should take part in as such. Although we share the love of Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ, we do not acknowledge him as being God or a part of the Trinity; we do not recognize him as the Christians do; and we do not want to get caught up in the capitalist, consumer-based, materialistic activities that take front and centre during the Christmas season.

Therefore, for the following reasons, we should **not** be actively taking part in, or celebrating Christmas at home:

1. Avoidance of Religious Syncretism:

Islam emphasizes the importance of maintaining distinct religious practices: thus, we need to ensure that we do not incorporate religious beliefs and practices of others with Islam - must keep our religion pure.

2. Concerns about Associating Partners with Allah ﷻ:

The concept of the Trinity in Christianity, which includes the belief in God as the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit, is perceived as associating partners with God. Celebrating Christmas, which involves commemorating the birth of Jesus as the Son of God, is seen as conflicting with the concept of Islamic Monotheism which says that Allah ﷻ has no partners, no parents, no children, etc., and is completely needless of anything and anyone.

3. Cultural and Historical Context:

Christmas has some religious significance in Christianity, but unfortunately it has evolved into a cultural celebration with various secular aspects. In certain instances, it has even ‘lost’ any religious basis behind it. As such, most Muslims choose not to participate due to a desire to maintain a distinct cultural identity, and adhere to their own religious traditions.

4. Avoiding Imitation of Other Faiths:

Islam encourages believers to be distinct in their practices, and not imitate the rituals and traditions of other faiths. Therefore, Muslims must avoid celebrating Christmas and uphold their own unique religious identity, and refrain from adopting customs that are not intrinsic to Islamic teachings.

We have 14 immaculate role-models, the 14 Maʿṣūmīn - that means we have at least 14 happy events which we should include in our lives by partaking in various activities such as: good food, celebrations,

decorations, giving gifts to our children and loved ones, and a time to connect with our family and community - **and we must never give that up for the festivities of other religions.**

We know that our children may be tempted or excited about the Christmas season, and to see the lights all around and the decorations in the malls, and streets, so it is **up to you**, the parents, to ensure that you are upholding our Islamic holidays and celebrations at home and in the centres, and not looking to other religions or cultures to take cues from for our own lives! It is also a call to the religious organizations and centres to ensure that they magnify and amplify our festive occasions to ensure that our children understand the importance of Islamic festivities, and do not feel left out in any way, or feel that we have a 'boring' religion that is always gloomy and sad.

In conclusion, embarking on a journey to explore the life of Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ through the Quran and authentic textual sources is not merely an academic pursuit for Muslims: it is a heartfelt quest for spiritual enrichment.

Understanding the life of Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ will deepen our connection with the shared Abrahamic heritage, fostering unity among diverse faiths. It is a call to transcend religious boundaries and appreciate the interconnectedness of our beliefs. As we delve into the teachings of this great Prophet ﷺ, we will find a reservoir of love, humility, and resilience - inspiring us to emulate these noble virtues within our daily lives.

Let this study be a catalyst for profound personal growth - for us and our families, enriching our faith and strengthening our commitment to the principles that unite us as believers. May the exploration of the life and teachings of Prophet ʿĪsā ﷺ illuminate our hearts, foster a genuine love for this esteemed Prophet ﷺ, and create a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of Divine guidance encapsulated in the Quran.

Further Reading Material:

<https://www.al-islam.org/jesus-ethics-forty-ahadith/jesus-ethics-forty-pieces-advice-word-god>

<https://www.al-islam.org/jesus-through-shiite-narrations-mahdi-muntazir-qaim>