

Study Guide for Christmas: God Becomes Man and is Three-in-One

To be used along with the video of the same name on www.ChristianfromMuslim.com

Summary and Notes:

Today's lesson is based on the reality of former Muslim Huda's first Christmas. You will see her expressions as she learns for the first-time things that churching and even nominal Christians have grown up with. It also shows how Christmas can be used as a bridge to share the gospel with Muslims. Other holidays can be used as bridges too. No surprise, we call these Holiday Bridges.

1. Build Bridges, 2. Share Truth, and 3. Challenge Falsehood. One or more of these should happen any time a Christian and Muslim connect. In fact, Dr. C says we can apply these steps to every relationship we have.

There are two types of Bridges: from you to the Muslim, and from the Muslim to the gospel. Christmas provides both types of bridges – to make friendly connections, and to evangelize.

Besides Huda's wonderful First Christmas experience, the season gives us a chance to address two of Islam's main objections to Christianity – that God would become a man (or have a Son) and be three-in-one (called Trinity).

Christians connected with Muslims need to defend the basics of their faith. Early on in the relationship they will usually hear strong criticisms of the main beliefs of Christianity. If they don't learn how to defend at least the basics, they will lose ground in discussion, and possibly end up doubting their own faith.

We are not saying you need to be expert in theology to befriend Muslims. Rather, as you watch the video and read this study guide, be on the lookout for an idea or two that you can understand and easily explain to Muslims – or to anyone who has questions about Jesus as God, meaning his "Son," and the Trinity. In practice, we stick to simple explanations and examples, not seminary thesis material.

Reality - Former Muslim Huda learns the Christmas symbols

The video lesson begins with Huda and Dr. Cynthia decorating a Christmas tree. This is a new and exciting experience for Huda. She is now a Christian, and so happy to participate! While they decorate the tree, Dr. C uses the opportunity to explain to Huda the symbols of Christmas, and how they fit into the Christmas story.





You see in this reality segment, as elsewhere, Dr. C uses the events of everyday life, and things around her to explain the Bible's teachings. This is not original to her: Jesus is our example in this. Living with his disciples he presented the perfect expression of Deuteronomy 6:7,

*“Talk about them when you sit at home and when walk along the road,
and when you lie down and when you get up.”*

Symbolic Christmas Tree ornaments. Dr. C purposely chooses ornaments for her tree that represent some aspect of Christmas. While they are having fun decorating, Dr. C asks Huda if she understands the meaning of things that we decorate with at Christmas. Huda openly admits she does not know why we celebrate with: angels, stars, and lights. This opens a door for Dr. C to explain parts of the story while hanging the ornaments.

You will notice Huda's excitement at the brass ornament of “Wise Men” on camels. It seems she finds something familiar with it – a caravan? Perhaps she knows that the wise men were from somewhere in the Middle East where she is rooted.

The Meaning of Christmas Lights. Lights are a big part of Christmas. As you might notice in the video lesson, Dr. C loves the symbolism of light. She uses Christmas lights to explain to Huda how Jesus brings light. John 1:12, tells us that at Christmas,

“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”

Think about John 1:12. It tells us that everyone has some kind of light. If you find something true in another religion or world view, don't let it shake you. That does not mean everything they believe is right, only that God is the source of whatever true light they have. Not only is God the source of light, he actually came into the world.

The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:6, that God spoke light out of the darkness, and let us see the true light with Jesus. Yes, Jesus is the light of the world! He healed a blind man, giving him physical light. And more importantly, he brought spiritual light that showed us how to live and the way to heaven.

A secular saying is, “You become what you think about.” Some days that could be a scary thing, if we focus on what drives us crazy – like an enemy or a bad boss. On the other hand, we are told in the Bible to focus on Jesus (*see Hebrews 12:2*). If we do that, it’s a good thing. We will become like him! This is one of our earthly goals.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says,

“We all who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory.”

We can reflect the light of God and be changed into the image of Christ.

One of the beautiful images used to illustrate light in the video lesson, is a painting called, “The Light of the World.” To strict Sunni Muslims this painting would be *haram* – forbidden, because it depicts Prophet *Isa*, the Qur’an’s term for Jesus. So are the other illustrations of Jesus we use in the series, because in Islam no person is to be depicted, especially a prophet.

We draw your attention to this painting because it shows how we can use something physical as a bridge to Jesus. Dr. C has a large copy of this painting in her home. No Muslim who has entered Dr. C’s house has refused to look at it because it is a depiction of Christ. In fact, some Muslims have expressed interest, and have heard the gospel through this painting.



William Holman Hunt, the artist of this popular and much copied painting, said was not worthy to paint Christ, but felt compelled. He wanted to paint the Bible Story of Revelation 3:20 clearly – so clearly that people would understand it without words. That’s why he placed symbolism throughout the painting. These symbols make it easy to share the gospel. For example:

A faint light glows in the background of the painting, representing the light of creation and the truth people might already know. But it is Jesus who carries the lantern. He is the source of true light, and brings it into the world.

As in Revelation 3:20, Jesus stands at a door. The door, representing a human heart, has no knob on the outside, so he cannot get in. Jesus wears the crown of thorns, showing that he is King and Savior, and the jewels of a Priest on his chest. Important, yes, yet he is polite and gracious. He does not push down the door. Instead, he stands patiently at the door and knocks. For so long the door has remained closed, that it is surrounded by weeds and thorns. Fruit has fallen to the ground, representing wasted opportunities. A bat looks on from its hidden location, embodying the power of evil.

Later in the video lesson, we see Dr. C using an olive wood nativity set from Bethlehem to tell a story. In strict Islam this would also be *haram*, because carved images can be seen as idols. It could be especially bad because one object is a baby representing Jesus. But Dr. C has successfully used this set to tell Muslims the story of Jesus’ birth and gospel. Notice that she tells Huda that we do not worship these objects, but simply use them as reminders of the story.

As you have seen today, various things in our homes can be used in a natural way to help us share the gospel. Something that captures attention and naturally lends itself to telling the gospel story is ideal, even if it does not quite fit with their worldview. Especially at Christmas. Many immigrant Muslims are happy to be let in on the secrets of Christmas, and share its enjoyment.

So, you can consider using depictions of people to bridge Muslims to the gospel. It is unlikely that they will be offended if they are open enough to come into your home. But you might try to determine how they feel about it first. Be sure to let them know you do not worship objects. Thank God, several Muslim who have heard the gospel through Dr. C's painting and/or nativity set eventually became Christians.

Meaning of the Christmas Tree. About 500 years ago, Martin Luther introduced the use of Christmas trees. Fresh trees bring greenery and fragrance into our homes to cheer the bleakness of winter. Trees are also symbolic. They contributed to three important events in Jesus' life: his birth with the manger crib, a boat during his ministry, and the cross of his crucifixion.

Notice the expression of wonder on Huda's face in the video, as she recalls that Jesus was hung on a tree when he was crucified.

Could God become a Man and be Three in one? (*The Incarnation and the Trinity*)
with video of apologists Mike Licona Ph.D. and Rev. Bob Siegel

Although God having a Son (becoming man) and existing as three-in-one (*Trinity*) are two separate objections, they are so closely related that they overlap. So, in this lesson they are considered together. We find that once a Muslim understands that God became man as Jesus, understanding the Trinity follows easily. The best approach is to first address God as man.

How Could God Become a Man? "Incarnation," is the theological word for the idea of God in the flesh. This is an extremely challenging concept for Muslims. It is one of the Big Four Muslim objections that we talk about in this series. In fact, it might be the biggest. (*Note: the two objections not discussed in this lesson, Jesus' death on the cross, and the corruption of the Bible are covered in other lessons.*)

Surah 112 of the Qur'an tells us that Allah is one. It is a very popular chapter. It only has four short verses, so it is easy to memorize and Muslims love to quote it. That's bad news for the gospel, because verse 3 says,

"He begetteth not, nor is he begotten."

Perhaps stronger, the Qur'an tells us that God can forgive anything but believing that he has partners, specifically in the Trinity.

*"Allah forgiveth not that a partner should be ascribed unto him.
He forgiveth all save that."* Surah 4:48

Sadly, as you see, the unforgivable sin in Islam is the essential blessing of Christianity. Confident in these verses, Muslims challenge us, "How could God have a son, become a man?"

"Couldn't or wouldn't become a man?" Dr. C asks them. If they say God could not, they are limiting God's ability. Surah 2:106 in the Qur'an says, "*Allah is able to do all things.*" (Pickthall translation.)

Also, in the Qur'an as in the Bible, God speaks to Moses from the burning bush (*Surah 20:9-14*). This shows that in Islam, God can be within something. If a bush, why not a human body?

If they say that God would not be man, we disagree. God prophesied that he would come to earth in the flesh and save us (*Job 19:25; Isaiah 9:6 & 53*). And he did! All the prophets, even theirs, did blood

sacrifice. We see it in the Bible. They know it from Abraham and the feast of his sacrifice, *Eid al Adha*. And the prophesied final sacrifice, God himself, was Jesus.

Bob Siegel, is a Christian from a Jewish background. Like Muslims, Jews strongly believe that God would not take human form. But Siegel tells us in the video lesson that this concept is not new with Christians. It was present in the Old Testament of the Bible, which the Jews had before Jesus was born, as well as the New Testament, which was written after.

“Christians do not worship a man and call him God,” Siegel says. He explains that we worship a God that at a certain time in history came into earth as a Man. God the Word became human. He lay aside all his power and special characteristics. We read about this in the New Testament, in Philippians 2:6-11,

*“Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal’s death on a cross.
Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in the heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”*

(New Living Translation)

God is characterized by being everywhere and all powerful (omnipresence and omnipotence). But “Jesus is a limited human being. How can he be God?” Muslims ask. Mike Licona responds that God can become a man, because he can do what he pleases (Surah 2:106).

As we read above in Philippians, God gave up the divine lifestyle to enter human form. Licona points out that if a soldier loses body parts in war, he is still 100% human, even with his reduced functioning. That is how it was with Jesus on earth. Jesus as God in human form does not express all the attributes of God, but is still God.

Muslims usually ask where was God when Jesus was man? At this point Dr. C uses an empty or partly full glass as an illustration. She says, “Look at this glass. It has air inside it. But air also surrounds it, and everything else in this room. In a similar way,” she says, “when Jesus was on earth, God was specially localized within a human body, but was also everywhere else around him. The Spirit of God was still everywhere.” (Note: some Muslims do not believe God is present everywhere. This could make it more difficult to accept the limitations of the incarnation. You might need to clarify that we believe he is everywhere unseen.)

Siegel gives us a powerful reason, besides dying in our place, of why God became a man: to identify with us. God does not ask us to do anything he did not do himself. He does not say, “Look at me in distant in heaven. Find a way to please me.” No! God says, “Look at me showing you how to live on earth.” (Note: for how to explain the main reason Jesus came to earth, to die as the prophesied final sacrifice for sins, see the lesson and study guide on “The Path of the Prophets.”)

“Emmanuel” means God with us. Jesus is called Emmanuel. This is hard for Muslims to accept. They tell Dr. C that God would not walk dusty streets and go to the bathroom, a view supported by Surah 4:171,
“Be it far from his glory that he should have a son.”

We can counter this view with a Powerful Question. Muslims agree with Christians that God is the greatest and most complete being. Is there someone that your Muslim friend or relative loves a lot? Perhaps a child? Maybe a spouse? Imagine if they were dressed in their finest, for *Eid al Fitr*, a Muslim day of celebration. On their way to the party, that loved one fell into quicksand, or a muddy pit. Would the Muslim reach down to pull them out? It would mean ruining their finery. But of course, they would!

If we as humans would degrade ourselves to save someone we love, but God would not, then who has the greater love? Us! Humans would actually be greater than God in some way. Can that be? Dr. C and others have found that this analogy can very powerful tool to explain the incarnation, especially to those with children.

The Muslim objection to God becoming a man, that it is simply too humiliating for him to consider, has one good use: it reminds us Christians of how wonderful God is. What a great sacrifice Jesus made for us – just to walk this earth, let alone to suffer and save us! The thing Muslims cannot accept – God emptying and degrading himself – is what saves Christians and makes us love him.

The Trinity. The Trinity is another of the Big Four stumbling blocks for Islam. The teaching, or “doctrine” of the Christian Trinity is that God has three facets, or “persons”: The Father, the Holy Spirit, and God the Son in the flesh, Jesus Christ. The Trinity is not three gods, but one God that we meet in three forms. It is one of those things that can be difficult to write down or explain, but it makes sense when you see it. Like a rainbow.

After we explain to Muslims how Jesus is God, we can mention concept of three-in-one, for the Trinity. Use an analogy you are comfortable with. All analogies break down at some point, but in a general way, you could use the three phases of water, three parts of an egg, or the three lobes of a shamrock, like St. Patrick did with the pagans.

This last example has the benefit of allowing you to tell the story of St. Patrick. Reinforcing a point with a story is usually a good idea with Muslims. You can share how Patrick brought the polytheistic Celts to worship one God. Fighting polytheism is something that bridges to Muslims (*although unlike Mohammed, Patrick fought spiritually, not physically – but don’t mention that if you are trying to bridge*).

The Word and the Spirit. The Qur’an says more wonderful things about Jesus than about anyone else, including Mohammed. It calls Jesus the “Word” of God.

“...His word which he conveyed unto Mary and a spirit from him...” Qur’an Surah 4:117

Arabic speaking Christians say that the way this verse expresses God giving his Word to Mary is powerful in Arabic. It indicates the special gift of a special being. Unfortunately, this same verse says Jesus was only a messenger. Still, it calls him these excellent things, as well as Messiah. So, Muslims know Jesus is unique among prophets. This is a good starting point for discussions.

You can ask your Muslim friend how God can be separated from his Word? It is part of him. They have trouble answering that. We find that pointing out to Muslims that their book already speaks of Allah, and the Word of God (*Kalimat Allah*), and the Spirit of God (*Ruh Allah*), can help them to accept the Trinity – or at least understand our view of it.

Muslims take pride in the Qur’an’s depiction of Jesus and sometimes tell us, “I love Jesus more than you do!” If you hear this this preposterous claim, quickly recover from the shock. Tell them that Jesus said whoever loves him has and obeys his commands (*John 14:21*). Then offer them a Gospel of John.

Muslims experienced in countering Christians will likely tell you that the word “Trinity” is not in the Bible. That’s OK. Admit it boldly. We have nothing to hide. It is actually a good thing. Explain that Trinity is a man-made word that roughly explains the three aspects of One God.

Although the Trinity is a big Muslim objection to Christianity, there are some inconsistent and strange Islamic teachings in this area. When we clarify what we believe, in contrast to what they propose in its place, we see that Christian view is much more reasonable.

A twisted Trinity. It is curious that according to the Qur’an, the Christian Trinity includes the Father, the Son, and the Mary (*Surah 5:116*). No branch of Christianity has considered Mary to be God. So where did this idea come from?

The Bible was not available in Arabic at the time of Mohammed. It is thought that Mohammed misunderstood the concept of the Trinity from the many images of Mary he saw with Christians of the time. This misinterpretation reflects not only on Muslim theology, but also on the Qur’an’s origin. Think: if the Qur’an were truly from God, how could God be confused about the Christian Trinity?

A disgusting conception. The Qur’an’s version of the Trinity fits with the tradition of what Muslims think Christians believe about Jesus’ birth. Brace yourself. They think Christians believe that God the Father had sex with the Virgin Mary and created Jesus. To us, that is a preposterous notion! We don’t even want to pass through our minds what they have decided we believe. This is not at all like the God of the Bible. It resembles a Greek myth: Zeus ravishing yet another maiden to produce a demigod such as Hercules.

In the West, Dr. C finds that Muslims do not like to admit believing this. It might be that they are influenced by Christian thinking, or perhaps they are too embarrassed to tell Christians in the face that they think we believe something so evil and absurd. But it does fit with the teaching of the Qur’an.

If you too find this thought disgusting, perhaps you can sympathize with the Muslim view that Christians are a man-made cult. They think we are creepy and blasphemous to believe such a thing. Actually, we agree with them. But we don’t believe that. To believe it would be obscene. We need to explain to them what we really believe.

Luke 1:35 to the rescue! Read the wording of this verse,

“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’”

This description is actually very similar to the way the Qur’an describes the conception of Jesus (*Surah 3:45,47*). Dr. C likes to read Luke 1:35 to Muslims so that they see what the Bible really says.

She also points out to them that the verse means a spiritual son. Arabic has two words for son: *walid*, a physical son, and *ibn*, which can be a figurative son – like “Son of Iraq,” or the English slang, “Son of a Gun.” Jesus is the *ibn* of God. Spiritually conceived, not physically.

The Christmas Story told for former Muslims

Using a nativity scene, Dr. C tells the story of the first Christmas:

An angel announces to Mary that she will have a special baby. The Holy Spirit, the *Ruh Allah*, would cause a miracle. That's why the baby would be called the "Son of God."

Joseph was engaged to Mary. He was upset that she was pregnant, but he was not going to cause trouble for her. An angel told him not to be afraid to marry Mary, because God was responsible for her pregnancy. Rome was the government at that time. It called a census while Mary was pregnant, so Joseph and Mary traveled to his family town of Bethlehem. Because the town was crowded, they had to stay in a stable. Jesus was born in the stable! After the baby Jesus was born, they put him into a manger, a feeding trough, for a crib.



A Virgin? Huda asks how it happened that Mary was a virgin, but living and traveling with Joseph like a wife? A good question. Dr. C explains about the kind of engagement that Mary and Joseph had in ancient Israel.

The Shepherds. "How did the shepherds get to the manger?" Dr. C asks Huda. Huda admits she does not know. Our narrator reads aloud the Christmas story from Luke 2, as Huda follows along in her Bible. He reads that an angel appeared to them, and announced good news of the Savior's birth! He told them they could actually visit the baby in a local stable. Then the angels sang for joy! This is one reason we have so much singing at Christmas. (*Note that Islam discourages music, and allows none in the mosque.*)

"Glory to God in the highest, and Peace on Earth!" sang the angels. What a beautiful thing to sing. That is the message of Christmas.

The Christmas Star. "What about the Star?" Huda's asks. We don't know exactly what caused the star's appearance. Astronomers have proposed various possibilities, like a supernova, or a star within a certain constellation. The important point however, is that educated people from the East, possibly Persia or Iraq, understood it as a sign that a special king was born in Israel. How did they know? Again, we are not sure. It is possible that the Prophet Daniel had left them a prophecy when he lived in Persia. But it could have been something else entirely.

The true Christmas story brings together all kinds of people. Dr. C likes that! First, Jesus as *Emanuel* – God with us, then the poor shepherds, the rich Gentile wise men, and Jews faithful to God.

Former Muslim Huda's first Christmas

Huda tells us how much she enjoys her first Christmas as a Christian. We present it to you in her heart language of Arabic, with subtitles, because we think it is special to see her sincere reaction to the experience.

Huda tells us that as a child she learned about Christmas from television. It looked fun. But since she grew up in a Muslim country, she really had no first-hand experience with it until as an adult she began to travel. Then she enjoyed the physical expression of the holiday: things like decorations and gifts. Now that she is a Christian, she tells us, the holiday has taken on a fuller and deeper meaning. She is so happy to celebrate the birth of her Savior this year, as part of God's family!

Our Gift at Christmas is the ability to become part of God's family. Dr. C is glad Huda is in it. She and Huda invite everyone watching to become part of it too!

References for this Lesson:

Bible

II Corinthians 5:17

Deuteronomy 6:7

Luke 1:26-55 & 2:1-20, Luke 1:35 in particular

Matthew 1:18-23 & 2:1-23 & 5:14

Job 19:25

Isaiah 9:6 & 53

Philippians 2:5-11

Micah 5:2

Isaiah 7:14

John 1:9-12 & 8:12

Hebrews 12:2

II Corinthians 4:6 & 3:18

Matthew 5:14-16

John 14:21

Qur'an:

Does not beget – Surah 112:3

No partners - Surah 4:48

No Trinity, far from God's glory – Surah 4:171

Jesus the Word of God and a Spirit from him – 4:171

Trinity includes Mary – Surah 5:116

God in the burning bush – Surah 20:9-14

Angel announcing to Mary - Surah 3:45,47

Study Questions:

1. Think about Huda's reactions as she learned various aspects of the Christmas story for the first time.
 - If you were raised as a Christian – true or nominal – what good memories does this bring back of your childhood?
 - If you were raised Muslim, how does it make you feel to see a former Muslim so obviously enjoying learning about Christmas?
2. This lesson talks a lot about light. What aspects of light especially appeal to you?
 - The True light coming into the world
 - Jesus the Light of the World
 - Jesus bringing sight and light to the physically blind
 - Jesus bringing light to the spiritually blind
 - Christians reflecting the light of Jesus, like Christmas bulbs reflect the light on the Christmas tree?
3. Dr. C gave us three examples of using things around her home to “bridge,” or get people's attention, so she can share the gospel with them.
 - Do you remember what they are? (*Clue: Christmas Tree, a Nativity Scene, and a painting.*)
 - How could you use Christmas or other holidays as a “Holiday Bridge?”
 - What might be around your home, school, or place of work that you could use to capture Muslims, and others' attention to share some of God's truth?

4. Creator God loved us enough to put up with our degraded position on earth as Jesus.
 - Does hearing the Muslim objection to God becoming a man make you appreciate Jesus more?
5. You read above that Muslims will no doubt challenge you about God becoming man, having a Son, and be told that the Trinity make no sense – that you believe in three Gods.
 - Give an example of how you would explain about God becoming man, or be the Son of God?
 - Give an example of how you would explain the Trinity.
6. Dr. C likes that the Christmas story includes people of different races and social levels. That actually makes it very up-to-date with modern multi-cultural thinking in the West.
 - If you are Christian, have you considered that part of the story before?
 - If you are from Muslim background, what do you think about that part of the story?

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