

The Jesus of Christmas for Muslims

Have you ever wondered how a Middle Eastern man became so popular in the West, that two millennia later its major holiday centers on his birth? What was unique in his message? If he were a prophet, why did he come? What does he have to do with us?

Let's examine the **Reasons for His Popularity**. Jesus gathered a large crowd of followers largely for three reasons: his teachings, his deeds, and the hopes of the Jewish people.

His Teachings: When we read about Jesus in the Bible (*Injil*), we find that the people "*listened to him with delight*" and "*were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law*". The religious leaders of that day were primarily rich men. They were the only ones who had the time to perform all the rituals and requirements that they themselves added to the law of Moses. The common man felt left out and impossibly unspiritual. But Jesus showed them a fresh face of their faith. He told them that what was in the heart was more important than ritual. He told them that the "*poor in spirit*" were blessed, and that God cared for them as their Heavenly "*Father*". Never before had the Creator-God been seen in this approachable light! Jesus spoke openly against the hypocrisy of the legalistic leaders. He told enigmatic stories called "parables", which had deep hidden meanings. All this he did while protecting, and even fulfilling, the law. No wonder the people were "*overwhelmed with wonder*" and "*everyone praised him*". (*Injil* surat Mark 12:37 & 9:15; Luke 4:15,32; Matthew 5:3 & 6:9 & 7:28)

His Deeds - Illness and death are common in every generation. Jesus performed miracles like none ever done. This sensational gift was bound to draw large crowds, as the ill, their family and friends came for physical, if not spiritual reasons. The lame walked, the blind received their sight, the deaf could hear, and the dead were even brought back to life! Beyond this, there was the integrity of his personal life: he deceived none, was kind - but honest in confronting sin, set the example of being a "servant-leader", did not use women for lust, or even allow himself the consolation of marriage, but taught and befriended women; he did no violent deed and promoted none. His was the most exemplary life ever lived. At his trial only contradictory false testimony could be found. It was his own words which condemned him: when the high priest asked him, "*Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?*" he purposely answered, "*I am*". Because of their jealousy, even although they were expecting the Christ (which means "Messiah"), the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death. (Mark 14:61,62)

The Hopes of the Jewish People - The Romans brought many benefits: they built good roads and they unified culture throughout the ancient Mediterranean. However, they were also cruel and demanded high taxes. This yoke was a heavy one which the Jewish people, long downtrodden by foreign rule, were anxious to throw off. They hoped and prayed for a deliverer - a Messiah! There were many ancient prophecies about a prophet who would restore Israel's glory and rule on the throne of David. Jesus was not the first of the contenders for "Messiah". Others came before and after him, but their style was remarkably different, and they did not fulfill the prophecies. They preached rebellion, but were powerless to supplant Rome. When Jesus came with his miraculous powers, over not only diseases but over nature - calming storms, turning water into wine and multiplying bread to feed 5,000 - he was the best candidate for Messiah that they could imagine. We are told in the Bible that the people even tried to make him king by force, but he prevented it. (John 6:14,15:& 12:13) Imagine their disappointment when Jesus refused to use his great power for political reasons! But there was another set of prophecies which the people had ignored: the Messiah must suffer. The people preferred not to think about

this, so Jesus brought it to their attention. (Mark 9:12, Luke 24:26,27) He also warned his disciples that his life would come to a violent end, followed by his resurrection, but this idea was so far out of their expectation that they could not even comprehend his words until after they occurred.

(Mark 10:33; Luke 18:31-33) Would this surprise you too?

Why Should We Follow Jesus? Many men have come claiming to be prophets and asking us to follow them, for example: Moses, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and Rev. Moon. Their messages differ, so we can not rightly follow them all. How do we choose? Jesus disciple John records how Jesus answered this challenge (John 5). *"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid."* Jesus said. Then Jesus gave three sound reasons to follow him, which are still valid today: a major prophet's testimony, his work, and the prophecies.

1) John the Baptist (*Yahia* in the Quran) was a major prophet, highly regarded by the people. He testified that his main purpose in coming was to prepare the way for the Messiah and bear witness to him. He identified Jesus as the Messiah, and also called him, *"The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"*. (John 1:29, Mark 11:32)

2) His work. As was shown above, Jesus' ministry was of enormous impact, and he pointed this out as validating him.

3) The prophecies regarding the Messiah which he clearly fulfilled, including the 61 major ones. Even fulfilling only 8 of these is essentially impossible with a probability of 1x10 to 17th power.

No other prophet has ever had this weight of evidence supporting him. Even after his resurrection he still brings good to earth: individual lives are healed and changed; and collectively, the more a nation follows and honors him, the more it steps out of darkness into liberty, health, education, and economic progress.

How Does this Affect You Personally?

Just as Prophet Adam was cast out of Allah's presence for disobedience, so our **sins separate** us from with Allah. If Allah punished Prophet Adam, he will surely punish us.

"For the wages of sin is death."

(Injil, Surat Romans 6:23)

But Allah loves each of us! He wants to be in fellowship with us on earth, and forever in paradise. Because **Allah's justice is equal to his mercy**, a penalty must be paid. So, he provided a substitute for our punishment, just as he provided a ram for Prophet Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son, at *Eid el Adha*. In this way, Allah shows us he will accept a blood sacrifice in substitution.

Because only Allah is perfect, one time he came to earth in human form as the perfect "Lamb of God" in Jesus. **Jesus' sacrificial death satisfies Allah's justice**, and his resurrection from the dead proves he has power over sin and death!

"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished."

(Romans 3:25)

We must humbly **submit to Allah's way of salvation**, and receive mercy in the way he chooses to give it. We must admit that we have sinned can never be perfect. We can, in prayer, **accept Jesus as our Savior** - accept his death in our place, and ask him to come into our hearts! He then assures us of our salvation, and sends us the Holy Spirit as a guide. *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord...If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

(Romans 6:23&10)

Once we have accepted Jesus as our Savior, we should **follow "The Way"** Allah prefers us to live - not to earn our salvation, but to please him and to grow. We should read the Bible daily, meditate upon it and pray; love Allah above all, and love others as ourselves; meet with other believers to be encouraged; and share this good news, or "gospel" with everyone we meet!