

'Isa (AS) in the Qur'an

By

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Jesus or 'Isa in Arabic (alayhis salam, meaning: peace be upon him) is of great significance in both Islam and Christianity. However, there are differences in terms of beliefs about his nature and life occurrences. Every year millions of Christians celebrate December 25 as the Christmas, the day Jesus, the son of Mary (Ar. Maryam), was born. Christian children are also lied that Santa Claus would bring gifts for them when they go to sleep at night on the eve of Christmas.

Jesus is believed by Christians to have been born in 1 C.E. (Common Era). However, the Christian gospel accounts don't support this common myth.

The year of Jesus's birth was determined by Dionysius Exiguus, a Scythian monk, abbot of a Roman monastery. The Gospels of Matthew 2:1 and Luke 1:5 place Jesus's birth **in the days of Herod**. However, Herod died in 750 AUC (4 B.C.E.) - four years before the year in which Dionysius places Jesus birth. Matthew 2:16 opines that Jesus was supposed to be no more than two years old when Herod ordered the slaughter of all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under. This means that Jesus was probably born sometime between 6 to 4 B.C.E. Luke 2:2, on the other hand, says that Jesus was born **during the census of** (Syrian Governor) [Quirinius](#), which took place at 6 C.E., i.e., ten years after Herod's death.ⁱ

So, one way to accommodate competing Gospel versions of Jesus's birth will be to place the year somewhere between 6 BCE and 6 CE or shortly thereafter.

In Luke 2:8 we are told that when Jesus was born "there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night". December is too cold for such shepherd activities in either Bethlehem or Nazareth of Palestine (places associated with birthplace of Jesus). So, December 25 could not be Jesus's birthdate.

There are so many contradictory and false accounts in matters relating to Jesus within the New Testament that it is problematic to take such accounts seriously, let alone as being divinely inspired.

Islam rejects the Christian concept of trinity. Instead, it preaches pure monotheism in one God (Allah), as clearly laid out in the Qur'an: "Say, He is Allah, the One. Allah, the eternally Besought of all. He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him." (Surah al-Ikhlās, 112:1-4)

For an authentic account on 'Isa (AS), the Qur'an, the last Revelation from Allah, remains our best source. There are about 71 verses in the Qur'an that refer to Prophet 'Isa (AS), the son of Maryam.

His birth:

And make mention of Maryam in the Scripture, when she had withdrawn from her people to a chamber looking east, and had chosen seclusion from them. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man. She said: Lo! I seek refuge in the Beneficent One from you, if you are God fearing. He said: I am only a messenger of your Lord, that I may bestow on you a faultless son. She said: How can I have a son when no mortal has touched me, neither have I been unchaste? He said, So (it will be). Your Lord says, It is easy for Me. And (it will be) that We may make of him a revelation for mankind and a mercy from Us, and it is a thing ordained. And she conceived him, and withdrew with him to a far place. And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of a palm tree. She said: Oh, would that I had died before this and had become a thing of nothing, forgotten! Then (one) cried unto her from below her, saying: Grieve not! Your Lord has placed a rivulet beneath you. And shake the trunk of the palm tree toward you; you will cause ripe dates to fall upon you. So, eat and drink and be consoled. And if you meet any mortal, say: Lo! I have vowed a fast unto the Beneficent, and may not speak this day to

any mortal. Then she brought him to her own folk, carrying him. They said: O Maryam! You have come with an amazing thing. Oh sister of Harun! Your father was not a wicked man nor was your mother a harlot. Then she pointed to him. They said: How can we talk to one who is in the cradle, a young boy? He spoke: Lo! **I am the slave of Allah.** He has given me the Scripture and has **appointed me a Prophet.** And has made me blessed wheresoever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I remain alive. And (has made me) dutiful toward her who bore me, and has not made me arrogant, unblest. Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive. Such was 'Isa, son of Maryam, (this is) a statement of truth concerning which they doubt. (Surah Maryam, 19:16-34)

(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Allah gives you glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, 'Isa, son of Maryam, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah). He will speak unto mankind in his cradle and in his manhood, and he is of the righteous. She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal has touched me? He said: So (it will be). Allah creates what He wills. If he decrees a thing, He says unto it only: Be! And it is. (Surah Al-e-Imran, 3:45-47)

[Note: The speaking of Jesus from his cradle is not to be found in the New Testament. In a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah (RA) and compiled in Sahih Bukhari, it is said that 'Isa (AS) was one of the three children who spoke in the cradle.]

His likeness:

Lo! The likeness of 'Isa with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, and He said unto him: Be! And he is. This is the truth from your Lord (O Muhammad), so be not you of those who waver. And whoso disputes with you concerning him, after the knowledge which has come unto you, say (unto him): Come! We will summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then will pray humbly (to our Lord) and (solemnly) invoke the curse of Allah upon who lie! (Surah al-e-Imran, 3:59-61)

[**Note:** After the conquest of Makkah, Prophet Muhammad (S) sent emissaries to various parts of the world. The Christians of Najran were invited to Madinah in 10 A.H. During religious discussion with the Christian delegates, the topic of 'Isa (AS) arose. When the Christians refused to accept Islamic teachings about Jesus Christ, Prophet Muhammad (S) challenged them with a **Mubahala** (prayer curse). They returned to the place where they were staying. Their leader advised them saying: *"If he (S) challenges us with his people, we accept the challenge for he is not a Prophet; but if he challenges us with his family in particular we don't challenge him, for he is not going to put forward his family unless he is truthful."*

The next day, when Prophet Muhammad (S) brought only selected members of his family - Hasan, Husayn, Fatimah and Ali (RA) - the Christians were surprised and felt that they would perish if they take upon the Mubahala challenge. They instead asked for peace by offering Muhammad (S) tribute in return for protection.]

His mission and miracles:

And He (God) will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Taurat and the Injil. And will make him a **messenger unto the children of Israel**, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I **fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah's permission.** I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah's permission. And I announce unto you what you eat and what you store up in your houses. Lo! Herein verily is a portent for you, if you are to be believers. And (I come) confirming that which was before me of the Taurat, and to make lawful some of that which was forbidden unto you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to Allah and obey me. Lo! **Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him.** That is a straight path. (Surah Al-e-Imran, 3:48-51)

[Remember] When Allah will say (on the Day of Resurrection): O 'Isa, son of Maryam! Remember My favor unto you and unto your mother; how I strengthened you with the holy Spirit (Ruhil Qudus), so that you spoke unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught you the Scripture and Wisdom and the Taurat and the Injil; and **how you did shape of clay as it were the likeness of a bird by My permission, and did blow upon it and it was a bird by My permission**, and you did heal him who was born blind and the leper by My permission; and how did you raise the dead, by My permission; and how I restrained the Children of Israel from (harming) you when you came unto them with clear proofs, and those of them who disbelieved exclaimed: This is nothing else than mere magic. And when I inspired the disciples, (saying): Believe in Me and in My messenger, they said: We believe. Bear witness that we have surrendered (as Muslims). When the disciples said: O 'Isa, son of Maryam! Is your Lord able to send down for us a table spread with food from heaven? He said: Observe your duty to Allah, if you are true believers. (They said): We wish to eat thereof, that we may satisfy our hearts and know that you have spoken truth to us, and thereof we may be witnesses. 'Isa, son of Maryam, said: O Allah, Lord of us! Send down for us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us, for the first of us and for the last of us, and a sign from You. Give us sustenance, for You are the Best of Sustainers. Allah said: Lo! I send it down for you. And whoso disbelieves of you afterward, him surely will I punish with a punishment wherewith I have not punished any of (My) creatures. (Surah al-Ma'idah 5:110-115)

[Note: The NT gospels don't cite the miracle about the bird. However, such a narrative can be found in the Second [Infancy Gospel of Thomas](#),ⁱⁱ which is a non-canonical sayings gospel, discovered near [Nag Hammadi](#), Egypt, only in December 1945.]

When 'Isa came with clear proofs (of Allah's sovereignty), he said: I have come unto you with wisdom, and to make plain some of that concerning which you differ. So keep your duty to Allah, and obey me. Lo! **Allah is my Lord and your Lord. So, worship Him.** This is the right path. (Surah al-Zukhruf, 43:63-4)

And when 'Isa son of Maryam said: O Children of Israel Lo! I am the messenger of Allah unto you, confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Taurat, and **bringing good tidings of a messenger who comes after me, whose name is Ahmad**. Yet when he (Muhammad) has come unto them with clear proofs, they say: This is mere magic. (Surah as-Saff, 61:6)

[Note: The word 'gospel' (Ar. Injil, Gr. Evangel) literally means 'good news or tidings'. 'Isa (AS), as the last Messenger of Allah to the Israelites, delivered the good news that after him will come Muhammad Ahmad al-Mustafa (S), the last mighty Messenger, for whom all the tribes of the world had been waiting for. It should be pointed out here that Muhammad's (S) grandfather, Abdul Muttalib named him Muhammad and his mother named him Ahmad. In this regard, also consider the Prophetic hadith, as recorded by the Imams Bukhari and Muslim: "*I have five names: I am Muhammad and I am Ahmad and I am Al-Mahi (the obliterator) by whom God will obliterate unbelief, and I am Al-Hashir (the gatherer) at whose feet the people shall be gathered and I am Al-'Aqib (the last one to come) after whom there is no other prophet.*" In another hadith, compiled by Imams Ahmad and Bayhaqi, Prophet Muhammad (S) reportedly said, "*I am the prayer of my father Abraham (Ibrahim),ⁱⁱⁱ and the good news given by Jesus ('Isa), and the vision of my mother.*"]

His humanity and not divinity:

O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter anything concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah (Christ) 'Isa, son of Maryam, was **only a messenger of Allah**, and His word which He conveyed unto Maryam, and a spirit from Him. So, believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not 'Three (Trinity)' - Cease! (it is) better for you! - Allah is only one God. Far it is removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to be **a slave unto Allah**, nor will the favored angels. (Surah an-Nisa, 4:171-2)

The Messiah, son of Maryam, was no other than a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat (earthly) food. See how we make the revelation clear for them, and see how they turned away. (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:75)

He is saved from the plot to kill him:

And they (the disbelievers) schemed, and Allah schemed (against them): and Allah is the best of schemers. (And remember) when Allah said: O 'Isa! Lo! I am gathering you and causing you to ascend unto Me, and am cleansing you of those who disbelieve and am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me you will (all) return, and I shall judge between you as to wherein you used to differ. (Surah al-e-Imran, 3:54-55)

And because of their (Israelites) saying: We slew the Messiah 'Isa, son of Maryam, Allah's messenger - **They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them**; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof except pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise. (Surah an-Nisa, 4:157-8)

When Allah said, O 'Isa, son of Maryam! Remember My favor unto you and unto your mother; how I strengthened you with the holy Spirit (Ruhil Qudus), and how **I restrained the Children of Israel from (harming) you** when you came unto them with clear proofs, and those of them who disbelieved exclaimed: This is nothing else than a mere magic. (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5: 110)

[Note: The Qur'anic verses cited above make it clear that despite the attempts of those who wanted to kill or crucify 'Isa (AS), Allah foiled their evil plan and saved him by raising him alive to the heaven.]

His second coming:

There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his ('Isa's) death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them. (Surah an-Nisa, 4:159)

He ('Isa) is nothing but a slave on whom We bestowed favor, and We made him a pattern for the Children of Israel... And lo! he ('Isa) shall verily be a **Sign for the coming of the Hour**. So doubt you not concerning it, but follow Me. This is the right path. (Surah al-Zukhruf, 43:59,61)

[Note: As to the descent of 'Isa (AS) as one of the major signs of the 'end of time' (i.e., before the Doom's Day), in a Prophetic hadith, narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah (RA), Muhammad (S) said: *'How will you be when the son of Maryam descends amongst you, and he will judge people by the Law of the Qur'an and not by the law of Injil (Gospel).'*" In another Prophetic Tradition, recorded in Sahih Bukhari, Muhammad (S) reportedly said, *"The Hour will not be established until the son of Mary (i.e. Jesus) descends amongst you as a just ruler, he will break the cross, kill the pigs, and abolish the Jizya tax. Money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it (as charitable gifts)."*

In another hadith, recorded in Sunan Abu Dawud, Muhammad (S) reportedly said, *"There is no prophet between me and him (i.e., 'Isa). He will descent (to the earth). When you see him, you will recognize him: a man of medium height, reddish fair, wearing two light yellow garments, looking as if drops were falling down from his head though it will not be wet. He will fight the people for the cause of Islam. He will break the cross, kill swine, and abolish jizyah. Allah will perish all religions except Islam. He will destroy the ad-Dajjal (the Anti-Christ) and will live on the earth for forty years and then he will die. The Muslims will pray over him."* Some hadith commentators suggest that the phrase about 'Isa (AS) living for 40 years on earth may refer to his total life span (and not necessarily for living 40 more years in his second advent). They say that he (AS) had stayed on earth for 33 years before he was ascended to the sky; i.e., he will stay on earth for 7 years after he descends from the sky; so, the total is 40 years.]

Christian doctrine refuted:

They surely have **disbelieved** who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Maryam. (Surah al-Ma'idah,

5:17)

They surely **disbelieve** who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Maryam. The Messiah (himself) said: O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Lo! Whoso ascribes partners unto Allah, for him Allah has forbidden Paradise. His abode is the Fire. For evil-doers there will be no helpers. They surely **disbelieve** who say: Lo! Allah is the third of Trinity; when there is no God save the One God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve. Will they not rather turn unto Allah and seek forgiveness of Him? For Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. The Messiah, son of Maryam, was no other than a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat (earthly) food. See how we make the revelations clear for them, and see how they are turned away! (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:72-5)

And when Allah will say: O 'Isa, son of Maryam! Did you say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? He will say: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that which I had no right. I spoke unto them only that which You commanded me, (saying): **Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.** I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when You took me You were the Watcher over them. You are Witness over all things. (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:116-7)

It befits not (the Majesty of) Allah that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him! When He decrees a thing, He says unto it only: Be! And it is. (Surah Maryam, 19:35)

Last Words:

As can be seen from the brief analysis above, the Qur'an portrays 'Isa (AS) as a major prophet and messenger who performed miracles by Allah's leave. He is a human being and not a divine entity. He was a precursor to Muhammad (AS) - the Prophet of Islam. His mother Maryam was a saintly lady who gave birth to 'Isa (AS) miraculously. He taught pure monotheism and not trinity. Thus, despite some similarities between the two narratives, there are some major differences between what Christianity makes of Jesus and how the Qur'an presents him. Such theological differences should not, however, be major obstacles to finding common grounds between these two communities towards a peaceful coexistence in our world.

ⁱ Luke 2:1-2 states: "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while **Quirinius was governing Syria.**" The Census of Quirinius was a census of **Judaea** taken by Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, Roman governor of Syria, upon the imposition of direct Roman rule in 6 CE.

ⁱⁱ "1. I, Thomas, an Israelite, write you this account, that all the brethren from among the heathen may know the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ in His infancy, which He did after His birth in our country. The beginning of it is as follows: - 2. This child Jesus, when five years old, was playing in the ford of a mountain stream; and He collected the flowing waters into pools, and made them clear immediately, and by a word alone He made them obey Him. And having made some soft clay, He fashioned out of it twelve sparrows. And it was the Sabbath when He did these things. And there were also many other children playing with Him. And a certain Jew, seeing what Jesus was doing, playing on the Sabbath, went off immediately, and said to his father Joseph: Behold, your son is at the stream, and has taken clay, and made of it twelve birds, and has profaned the Sabbath. And Joseph, coming to the place and seeing, cried out to Him, saying: Why do you do on the Sabbath what it is not lawful to do? And Jesus clapped His hands, and cried out to the sparrows, and said to them: Off you go! And the sparrows flew, and went off crying. And the Jews seeing this were amazed, and went away and reported to their chief men what they had seen Jesus doing."

ⁱⁱⁱ The prayer (du'a) of Ibrahim (AS) regarding Muhammad (S) is mentioned in Surah al-Baqarah 2:129.