

WEEK 12

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DIGGING DEEPER

Light in the Dark: Zachariah's Sunrise

Muslims love Jesus, too: 6 Things You Didn't Know about Jesus in Islam

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Christmas, as everyone knows, commemorates the birth of Jesus and is a major religious celebration for Christians around the world.

But what many people don't know is that Jesus is an important figure in Islam, too, even though most Muslims don't celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday. (But some, especially some American Muslims, do celebrate it for cultural reasons!)

In honor of the holiday, here are six things you may not know about the role of Jesus — and his mother, Mary — in Islam:

Jesus, Mary, and the angel Gabriel are all prominent characters in the Qur'an (as are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and a bunch of other Bible characters).

Muslims believe that Jesus (called "Isa" in Arabic) was a prophet of God and was born to a virgin (Mary). They also believe he will return to Earth before the Day of Judgment to restore justice and defeat al-Masih ad-Dajjal, or "the false messiah" — also known as the Antichrist. All of this may sound pretty familiar to many Christians. (The fact that Muslims know that "al-Masih ad-Dajjal" is the Arabic name for the Antichrist created some...uh...unexpected problems for Netflix recently — warning: spoilers.)

Mary (called "Maryam" in Arabic) has an entire chapter in the Qur'an named for her — the only chapter in the Qur'an named for a female figure. In fact, Mary is the only woman to be mentioned by name in the entire Qur'an. As noted in the Study Quran, "other female figures are identified only by their relation to others, such as the wife of Adam and the mother of Moses, or by their title, such as the Queen of Sheba." Mary is mentioned more times in the Qur'an than in the entire New Testament of the Bible.



Muslim women take a selfie in front of a Christian manger displayed in front of the Church of the Nativity in the West Bank town of Bethlehem on December 18, 2014. Thomas Coex/AFP via Getty Images

Just as they do with all the other prophets, including Mohammed, devout Muslims recite “peace be upon him” after every time they refer to Jesus by name.

Muslims believe that Jesus performed miracles: The Qur’an discusses several of Jesus’s miracles, including giving sight to the blind, healing lepers, raising the dead, and breathing life into clay birds.

The story of Jesus’s birth as told in the Qur’an is also the story of his first miracle, when he spoke as an infant in the cradle and declared himself to be a prophet of God. Here’s the story:

And remember Mary in the Book, when she withdrew from her family to an eastern place. And she veiled herself from them. Then We [God] sent unto her Our Spirit [the angel Gabriel], and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man. She said, "I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate [i.e., God], if you are reverent!" He said, "I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow upon thee a pure boy."



Muslims in the city of Manado in Indonesia join the Christmas Santa Parade wearing Santa hats and mingle with Christians. Ronny Adolof Buol/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images

She said, "How shall I have a boy when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?" He said, "Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, 'It is easy for Me.'" And [it is thus] that We might make him a sign unto mankind, and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter decreed.

So she conceived him and withdrew with him to a place

far off. And the pangs of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, "Would that I had died before this and was a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!" So he called out to her from below her, "Grieve not! Thy Lord has placed a rivulet beneath thee. And shake toward thyself the trunk of the date palm; fresh, ripe dates shall fall upon thee. So eat and drink and cool thine eye. And if thou seest any human being, say, 'Verily I have vowed a fast unto the Compassionate, so I shall not speak this day to any man.'"

Then she came with him [the infant Jesus] unto her people, carrying him. They said, "O Mary! Thou hast brought an amazing thing! O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not an evil man, nor was thy mother unchaste." Then she pointed to him [Jesus]. They said, "How shall we speak to one who is yet a child in the cradle?"

He [Jesus] said, "Truly I am a servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. He has made me blessed wheresoever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I live, and [has made me] dutiful toward my mother. And He has not made me domineering, wretched. Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised alive!"

That is Jesus son of Mary— a statement of the truth, which they doubt.

So although Muslims do not believe that Jesus is the son of God — a critically important distinction between Muslim and Christian views of him — Muslims do revere Jesus as an important prophet.

Merry Christmas!