

What is the status of Jesus in Islam? How are Muslims' beliefs different to that of Christians?

All praises belong to Allāh, the Creator Most Sublime Who is Uncreated, the One without equal, the One Who begets not and nor is He begotten, the Independent above all that is falsely ascribed to Him, Who has blessed us with the bounty of Islām and made us from amongst the Muslims. Infinite salutations, peace and blessings be upon all Messengers of Allāh, specifically the final Prophet, Our Master, Muhammad Mustafa ﷺ, upon his purified family, his esteemed companions, and whomsoever follows in his blessed footsteps until the last day.

Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) known as Eesa in Arabic, has been mentioned by name no less than twenty-five times within the Qūr'ān and also many times with honorific epithets across fifteen chapters. Nearly two billion Muslims religiously believe the Prophethood of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) independent of any Christian missionary or church coercing them to do so. The belief in the Prophets of Allāh is an integral article of faith in Islām. The denial of any established Prophet mentioned in the Qūr'ān results in disbelief and renders one outside the fold of Islam.

This is clear in the famous tradition (hadith) of the angel Gabriel (upon him peace) when he asked the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, "Tell me about Islam." The Prophet ﷺ replied, "It is that you testify that there is no god but Allāh and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh," and he ﷺ went on to mention the pillars of Islam. Then the angel Gabriel (peace be upon him) asked him about belief and he ﷺ said, "It is that you believe in Allāh, His Angels, His Books and **His Messengers.**" [Muslim]

Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) is of great significance in both Islām and Christianity. However, there are differences in terms of beliefs about the nature and life occurrences of this noble Messenger. Primarily, know that both the Qūr'ān and the Bible are viewed as the word of God by their respective religious adherents. The Qūr'ān was revealed by Allāh to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and memorised and recorded in his lifetime. The Bible or the New Testament contains four biblical narratives covering the life and alleged death of Jesus (peace be upon him), however, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica none of the sources of his life or work can be traced to Jesus (peace be upon him) himself.

The Muslims accept Jesus Christ (peace be upon himself) as one of the esteemed messengers of Allāh. The overwhelming majority of Christians, who are Trinitarian, do not accept him as only a messenger per se but attribute divinity to him.

The Qūr'ān says in reference to the status of Jesus (pbuh) as a Messenger:

ما المسيح ابن مريم إلا رسول قد خلت من قبله الرسل وأمه صديقة كانا يأكلان الطعام انظر كيف نبين لهم الآيات ثم انظر أنى يؤفكون

The Messiah, son of Mary, was not but a messenger; [other] messengers have passed on before him. And his mother was a supporter of truth. They both used to eat food (as other mortals do). Look how We make clear to them the signs; then look how they are deluded. [Qūr'ān 5:75].

Muslims reject he was divine. Divinity necessitates being independent and not being contingent. Humans are dependent on food in order to live. Allāh Most High explains in the Qūr'ān that Jesus (peace be upon him) is a messenger just like those who came prior to him, both he and his mother ate food – God is not dependent upon food.

يا أيها الناس أنتم الفقراء إلى الله والله هو الغني الحميد

O mankind, you are those in need of Allāh, while Allāh is the Free of all need, the Praiseworthy. [Qūr'ān 35:15].

Both the Muslims and the Christians believe that the mother of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) was a chaste and pious woman. The Muslims believe she was raised in the temple of the prayer under the care of the prophet Zechariah (upon him peace), her uncle. She was not married before, during or after the period of her pregnancy. The Christians believe however, although she was a virgin, she was married to a man named Joseph during her pregnancy.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.” [Matthew KJV 1:18].

The Qūr'ān explains the same event differently, Allāh Most Sublime says:

قالت رب أنى يكون لى ولد ولم يمسنى بشر قال كذلك الله يخلق ما يشاء إذا قضى أمرا فإنما يقول له كن فيكون

She said, "My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me?" [The angel] said, "Such is Allāh; He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is. [Qūr'ān 3:47]

So the Christians believe Mary was married to Joseph and became pregnant. Joseph believing she had committed infidelity intended to divorce her but was convinced otherwise in a dream

“that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost”. The Muslims’ belief is similar yet significantly different to the Christians in this respect. In the Qūr’ān we learn, the physical presence of an angel in human-form frightened Mary. Mary was informed not to worry as the angel had only come to give her glad tidings of the birth of a son, Jesus (peace be upon him). Mary remarked “how will I have a child when no man has touched me?” It was impossible for her to be pregnant considering she was pure in every sense of the word, in contrast to the Christian belief that she was married with a husband.

Now Jesus (peace be upon him) being born without the intervention of a father /male is one of the fundamental premise for the Christians to argue that his father is God. The Qūr’ān negates this with the simplest of arguments:-

إن مثل عيسى عند الله كمثل آدم خلقه من تراب ثم قال له كن فيكون

Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allāh is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, "Be," and he was. [3:59]

The Christians universally accept Adam (peace be upon him) as the first man, existing without any parents, as mentioned in Genesis. The question arises what is a greater miracle, Jesus to have no father or Adam to have no father and no mother? The Christians however, by the same measure do not consider Adam as the son of God or Divine, although by their logic he would have the greater right.

The first miracle of Jesus according to the Bible is when he turned water into wine at the wedding reception in Galilee. The Muslims in comparison believe he spoke whilst in the cradle as Allāh has mentioned in the Qūr’ān:-

قال إني عبد الله أتاني الكتاب وجعلني نبياً

[Jesus] said, "Indeed, I am the servant of Allāh. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet.

Both Muslims and Christians agree that Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) performed many miracles which ranged from healing the blind, curing the lepers and even reviving the dead. The significant difference between both faiths is that the Christians use these miracles to further prove that Jesus was the son of God as well as the incarnation of God, but the Muslims believe these miracles were performed by the will and permission of God and not independently by Jesus. They are signs which are gifted by God to His Prophets and Messengers whereby strengthening them in delivering the message of God.

The Trinitarian Christians use the miraculous birth of Jesus and his many miracles to argue he is divine, separate from God yet part of God, although God is “one” He is also “more than one” and Jesus who is God is also the son of the Heavenly God — Along with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost), together, they are referred to as “the Trinity” or “the Godhead.”

Islam is a pure monotheistic religion and the Qūr’ān emphatically warns:

يا أهل الكتاب لا تغلوا في دينكم ولا تقولوا على الله إلا الحق إنما المسيح عيسى ابن مريم رسول الله وكلمته ألقاها إلى مريم وروح منه فآمنوا بالله ورسوله ولا تقولوا ثلاثة انتهوا خيرا لكم إنما الله إله واحد سبحانه أن يكون له ولد له ما في السماوات وما في الأرض وكفى بالله وكيلا

O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allāh except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allāh and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allāh and His messengers. And do not say, "Three"; desist - it is better for you. Indeed, Allāh is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allāh as Disposer of affairs. [Qūr’ān 4:171]

Muslims believe in the Absolute Oneness of God, Who is free of human limitations, needs and wants as aforementioned. He has no partners in His Divinity. He is the Creator of everything and is completely separate from His creation. To say Jesus is the son of God or God is blasphemous and Islam rejects this. Allāh has further said in the Qūr’ān:

لم يلد ولم يولد

He (Allāh) neither begets nor is born [112:3]

And He further said in the Qūr’ān:

ما كان لله أن يتخذ من ولد سبحانه إذا قضى أمرا فإنما يقول له كن فيكون

It is not [befitting] for Allāh to take a son; exalted is He! When He decrees an affair, He only says to it, "Be," and it is. [19:35]

With regards to Jesus (peace be upon him) dying and subsequently resurrecting, this is a core Christian belief it relates to the entire notion of atonement of the initial sin. According to the Christians, Jesus died for the sins of mankind upon the crucifix, this belief is fundamental to the Christian faith. Without accepting this, the Christians do not believe one can attain salvation. Although this belief is not stated explicitly in the primary source texts of the bible, it has become the very core of Christendom.

Muslims categorically reject this as Allāh has said in the Qūr’ān:

وقولهم إنا قتلنا المسيح عيسى ابن مريم رسول الله وما قتلوه وما صلبوه ولكن شبه لهم وإن الذين اختلفوا فيه لفي شك منه ما لهم به من علم إلا اتباع الظن وما قتلوه يقينا

And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allāh ." 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. [Qūr'ān 4:157]

To conclude, there are three miracles, Muslims believe, that the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) was uniquely given; his miraculous birth, his ascension to heaven and his second coming. All of these miracles were gifted by Allāh. The Christians also attest to the above mentioned miracles using the bible, however, in addition to this, they believe he died upon the cross and subsequently resurrected. They perceive these miracles as proof of his divinity. With the exception of his crucifixion and death, both religions are in harmony with regards to all the other miracles.

And Allāh knows best.