

# What Lutherans Believe

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## Islam

*From <http://www.islam.org>*

### **What do Muslims believe?**

Muslims believe in One, Unique, Incomparable God; in the Angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom His revelations were brought to mankind; in the Day of Judgement and individual accountability for actions; in God's complete authority over human destiny and in life after death. Muslims believe in a chain of prophets starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elias, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, peace be upon them. But God's final message to man, a reconfirmation of the eternal message and a summing-up of all that has gone before was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through Gabriel.

### **How does someone become a Muslim?**

Simply by saying 'there is no god apart from God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' By this declaration the believer announces his or her faith in all God's messengers, and the scriptures they brought.

### **What does Islam mean?**

The Arabic word 'Islam' simply means 'submission', and derives from a word meaning 'peace'. In a religious context it means complete submission to the will of God. 'Mohammedanism' is thus a misnomer because it suggests that Muslims worship Muhammad rather than God. 'Allah' is the Arabic name for God, which is used by Arab Muslims and Christians alike.

### **Why does Islam often seem strange?**

Islam may seem exotic or even extreme in the modern world. Perhaps this is because religion does not dominate everyday life in the West today, whereas Muslims have religion always uppermost in their minds, and make no division between secular and sacred. They believe that the Divine Law, the Shari'a, should be taken very seriously, which is why issues related to religion are still so important.

### **Do Islam and Christianity have different origins?**

No. Together with Judaism, they go back to the prophet and patriarch Abraham, and their three prophets are directly descended from his sons, Muhammad from the elder son Ishmael, and Moses and Jesus from the younger son Isaac. Abraham established the settlement which today is the city of Makkah, and built the Ka'ba towards which all Muslims turn when they pray.

## **Who is Muhammad?**

Muhammad, was born in Makkah in the year 570, at a time when Christianity was not yet fully established in Europe. Since his father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards, he was raised by his uncle from the respected tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative.

Muhammad was of a deeply religious nature, and had long detested the decadence of his society. It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near the summit of Jabal al-Nur, the 'Mountain of Light' near Makkah.

## **How did Muhammad become a prophet and a messenger of God?**

At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for twenty-three years, is known as the Quran.

As soon as he began to recite the words he heard from Gabriel, and to preach the truth which God had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered bitter persecution, which grew so fierce that in the year 622 God gave them the command to emigrate. This event, the Hijra, 'migration', in which they left Makkah for the city of Madinah some 260 miles to the north, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

After several years, the Prophet and his followers were able to return to Makkah, where they forgave their enemies and established Islam definitively. Before the Prophet died at the age of 63, the greater part of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China.

## **How did the spread of Islam affect the world?**

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the simplicity of its doctrine - Islam calls for faith in only One God worthy of worship. It also repeatedly instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observation.

Within a few years, great civilizations and universities were flourishing, for according to the Prophet, 'seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman'. The synthesis of Eastern and Western ideas and of new thought with old, brought about great advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature, and history. Many crucial systems such as algebra, the Arabic numerals, and also the concept of the zero (vital to the advancement of mathematics), were transmitted to medieval Europe from Islam. Sophisticated instruments which were to make possible the European voyages of discovery were developed, including the astrolabe, the quadrant and good navigational maps.

## **What is the Qur`an?**

The Quran is a record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. It was memorized by Muhammad and then dictated to his Companions, and written down by scribes, who cross-checked it during his lifetime. Not one word of its 114

chapters, Suras, has been changed over the centuries, so that the Quran is in every detail the unique and miraculous text which was revealed to Muhammad fourteen centuries ago.

### **What is the Qur`an about?**

The Quran, the last revealed Word of God, is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects which concern us as human beings: wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law, but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and an equitable economic system.

### **Are there any other sacred sources?**

Yes, the sunna, the practice and example of the Prophet, is the second authority for Muslims. A hadith is a reliably transmitted report of what the Prophet said, did, or approved. Belief in the sunna is part of the Islamic faith.

### **What are the Five Pillars of Islam?**

They are the framework of the Muslim life: Faith, Prayer, concern for the needy (the Zakat), self-purification (the fast), and the Pilgrimage to Makkah (Hajj) for those who are able.

#### **FAITH**

There is no god worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is His messenger. This declaration of faith is called the Shahada, a simple formula which all the faithful pronounce. In Arabic, the first part is la ilaha illa Llah - 'there is no god except God'; ilaha (god) can refer to anything which we may be tempted to put in place of God - wealth, power, and the like. Then comes illa Llah: 'except God', the source of all Creation. The second part of the Shahada is Muhammadun rasulu'Llah: 'Muhammad is the messenger of God.' A message of guidance has come through a man like ourselves.

#### **PRAYER**

Salat is the name for the obligatory prayers which are performed five times a day, and are a direct link between the worshipper and God. There is no hierarchical authority in Islam, and no priests, so the prayers are led by a learned person who knows the Quran, chosen by the congregation. These five prayers contain verses from the Quran, and are said in Arabic, the language of the Revelation, but personal supplication can be offered in one's own language.

Prayers are said at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall, and thus determine the rhythm of the entire day. Although it is preferable to worship together in a mosque, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories and universities. Visitors to the Muslim world are struck by the centrality of prayers in daily life.

## **THE ZAKAT**

One of the most important principles of Islam is that all things belong to God, and that wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The word zakat means both 'purification' and 'growth'. Our possessions are purified by setting aside a proportion for those in need, and, like the pruning of plants, this cutting back balances and encourages new growth.

Each Muslim calculates his or her own zakat individually. For most purposes this involves the payment each year of two and a half percent of one's capital.

A pious person may also give as much as he or she pleases as sadaqa, and does so preferably in secret. Although this word can be translated as 'voluntary charity' it has a wider meaning. The Prophet said 'even meeting your brother with a cheerful face is charity.'

The Prophet said: 'Charity is a necessity for every Muslim.' He was asked: 'What if a person has nothing?' The Prophet replied: 'He should work with his own hands for his benefit and then give something out of such earnings in charity.' The Companions asked: 'What if he is not able to work?' The Prophet said: 'He should help poor and needy persons.' The Companions further asked 'What if he cannot do even that?' The Prophet said 'He should urge others to do good.' The Companions said 'What if he lacks that also?' The Prophet said 'He should check himself from doing evil. That is also charity.'

## **THE FAST**

Every year in the month of Ramadan, all Muslims fast from first light until sundown, abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations. Those who are sick, elderly, or on a journey, and women who are pregnant or nursing are permitted to break the fast and make up an equal number of days later in the year. If they are physically unable to do this, they must feed a needy person for every day missed. Children begin to fast (and to observe the prayer) from puberty, although many start earlier.

Although the fast is most beneficial to the health, it is regarded principally as a method of self purification. By cutting oneself off from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person gains true sympathy with those who go hungry as well as growth in one's spiritual life.

## **PILGRIMAGE (Hajj)**

The annual pilgrimage to Makkah - the Hajj - is an obligation only for those who are physically and financially able to perform it. Nevertheless, about two million people go to Makkah each year from every corner of the globe providing a unique opportunity for those of different nations to meet one another. Although Makkah is always filled with visitors, the annual Hajj begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic year (which is lunar, not solar, so that Hajj and Ramadan fall sometimes in summer, sometimes in winter). Pilgrims wear special clothes: simple garments which strip away distinctions of class and culture, so that all stand equal before God.

The rites of the Hajj, which are of Abrahamic origin, include circling the Ka'ba seven times, and going seven times between the mountains of Safa and Marwa as did Hagar during her search for water. Then the pilgrims stand together on the wide plain of Arafah and join in prayers for God's forgiveness, in what is often thought of as a preview of the Last Judgment.

In previous centuries the Hajj was an arduous undertaking. Today, however, Saudi Arabia provides millions of people with water, modern transport, and the most up-to-date health facilities.

The close of the Hajj is marked by a festival, the Eid al-Adha, which is celebrated with prayers and the exchange of gifts in Muslim communities everywhere. This, and the Eid al-Fitr, a feast-day commemorating the end of Ramadan, are the main festivals of the Muslim calendar.

### **Does Islam tolerate other beliefs?**

The Quran says: God forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for [your] faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them; for God loveth those who are just. (Quran, 60-8)

It is one function of Islamic law to protect the privileged status of minorities, and this is why non-Muslim places of worship have flourished all over the Islamic world. History provides many examples of Muslim tolerance towards other faiths: when the caliph Omar entered Jerusalem in the year 634, Islam granted freedom of worship to all religious communities in the city.

Islamic law also permits non-Muslim minorities to set up their own courts, which implement family laws drawn up by the minorities themselves.

The Patriarch invited him to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but he preferred to pray outside its gates, saying that if he accepted, later generations of Muslims might use his action as an excuse to turn it into a mosque. Above is the mosque built on the spot where Omar did pray.

### **What do Muslims think about Jesus?**

Muslims respect and revere Jesus, and await his Second Coming. They consider him one of the greatest of God's messengers to mankind. A Muslim never refers to him simply as 'Jesus', but always adds the phrase 'upon him be peace'. The Quran confirms his virgin birth (a chapter of the Quran is entitled 'Mary'), and Mary is considered the purest woman in all creation. The Quran describes the Annunciation as follows:

'Behold!' the Angel said, 'God has chosen you, and purified you, and chosen you above the women of all nations. O Mary, God gives you good news of a word from Him, whose name shall be the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, honored in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near to God. He shall speak to the people from his cradle and in maturity, and shall be of the righteous.'

She said: 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?' He said: 'Even so; God creates what He will. When He decrees a thing, He says to it, "Be!" and it is.' (Quran, 3:42-7)

Jesus was born miraculously through the same power which had brought Adam into being without a father:

Truly, the likeness of Jesus with God is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, and then said to him, 'Be!' and he was. (Quran, 3:59)

During his prophetic mission Jesus performed many miracles. The Quran tells us that he said:

I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal the blind, and the lepers and I raise the dead by God's leave. (Quran, 3:49)

Neither Muhammad nor Jesus came to change the basic doctrine of the belief in One God, brought by earlier prophets, but to confirm and renew it. In the Quran Jesus is reported as saying that he came:

To attest the law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, so fear God and obey Me. (Quran, 3:50)

The Prophet Muhammad said:

Whoever believes there is no god but God, alone without partner, that Muhammad is His messenger, that Jesus is the servant and messenger of God, His word breathed into Mary and a spirit emanating from Him, and that Paradise and Hell are true, shall be received by God into Heaven. (Hadith from Bukhari)