

Congratulating others on their religious celebrations

DISCLAIMER: This reminder was originally delivered in Arabic on Friday, 18th December 2009. Any meanings lost in translation are not to be attributed to the speaker as reminders are translated by volunteers. The mosque has no official translator and volunteers often have no formal qualifications to translate on the day. Please forgive any errors as they are from our human weakness and any right guidance is from God.

God says "And mention, [O Muhammad], in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place toward the east. And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen. Then We sent to her Our Angel, and he presented himself to her as a well-proportioned man. She said, "Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of God." He said, "I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy." She said, "How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?" He said, "Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter [already] decreed.' "So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a remote place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree. She said, "Oh, I wish I had died before this and was in oblivion, forgotten." But he called her from below her, "Do not grieve; your Lord has provided beneath you a stream. And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates. So eat and drink and be contented. And if you see from among humanity anyone, say, 'Indeed, I have vowed to the Most Merciful abstention, so I will not speak today to [any] man.' "Then she brought him to her people, carrying him. They said, "O Mary, you have certainly done a thing unprecedented. O sister of Aaron, your father was not a man of evil, nor was your mother unchaste." So she pointed to him. They said, "How can we speak to one who is in the cradle a child?" [Jesus] said, "Indeed, I am the servant of God. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I am and has enjoined upon me prayer and zakāh as long as I remain alive. And [made me] dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me a wretched tyrant. And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive." That is Jesus, the son of Mary – the word of truth about which they are in dispute. It is not [befitting] for God to take a son; exalted is He! When He decrees an affair, He only says to it, "Be," and it is. [Jesus said], "And indeed, God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is a straight path." [Mariam 19:16-36].

The birth of Isa- Jesus (AS) was a sign among God's signs; a miracle among the most amazing miracles experienced by Mankind and a unique, strange and bizarre event as God created him without a father! In our belief, Jesus (AS) is a messenger as all messengers of God who was sent to the Children of Israel with guidance and truth confirming the Torah before him. We believe that he was a human being, a messenger, a man of truth and a prophet. That he wasn't killed nor crucified - rather, God raised him to Himself and he will be descended just before the Hour as just judge. Islam is a religion that orders everyone embracing it to believe in all messengers and what was revealed on them. Believing in some messengers and not believing in others is considered as abandoning the religion of God and His guidance, God says "And who believe in what has been revealed to you, [O Mu'ammad], and what was revealed before you" [Al-Baqarah 2:4] and "But they who believe in God and His messengers and do not discriminate between any of them – to those He is going to give their rewards. And ever is God Forgiving and Merciful." [Al-Nisa 4:152].

Oh Muslims, the situation of Muslims residing in the non Muslim countries was mentioned in the second book of fatwas of the European Council for Fatwa and Research [fatwa 33] regarding congratulating non-Muslims on their festive occasions. Indeed, between the Muslims and the non-Muslims are necessary and integral links for life itself that should be kept strong, such as neighbourly relations, friendship at work or study and medical purposes. After discussing the situation of the migrant and immigrant Muslim in non Muslim countries, the council summarised its fatwa in the following way: "there is nothing to prevent a Muslim or an Islamic centres from congratulating non-Muslims, either verbally or

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by sending a card that contains no symbols or icons of religious implications that may contradict Islamic faith and principles. Indeed, one finds in the customary words of congratulations nothing that carries any explicit or implicit recognition of any aspects of their faith or belief. There is also no objection to accepting gifts and presents from them, and to return their gifts in kind, on condition that these gifts are not unlawful in themselves, such as being alcohol or pork. Al-Bukhari and Muslim both reported on the authority of Asma bint Abi Bakr (may God be pleased with her), that she came to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and said: "O Messenger of God, My mother, who is a mushrik (a polytheist), has come to visit me and she desires to be close to me and to give me gifts. Shall I greet her and treat her well?" The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) stated: "Greet your mother and treat her well." The fatwa then mentioned fatawa of Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn-ul-Qayyim which adopt more stringent measures and restrictions upon the permissibility of this issue and the participation of Muslims in the celebrations of non-Muslims.

We noticed that some Muslims celebrate Christmas as they celebrate Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Idha or even more which is not permissible at all. It is even more amazing that some Muslims order their turkeys on Christmas Eve so they prepare the Christmas meal as non Muslims would do on Christmas day! This is not from our customs as Muslims and it might lead to imitating non Muslims which is not permissible.

The fatwa continued: "there is no objection whatsoever to a Muslim congratulating others in those regards, and indeed to participate therein as a citizen of those lands, while observing Islamic manners and controls in all matters. This becomes more confirmed if the non Muslims take the initiative to congratulate Muslims on their festivals and rituals as we are ordered to reward the good deed with even better one and to great back the greeting with one better than it. It is not appropriate for us as Muslims to be less generous or worse in manners than others, the prophet (pbuh) said: "I have been sent to perfect good manners". This will be better if our intention was to call them to obedience to God as God says "God does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, God loves those who act justly." [Al-Mumtahinah 60:8]. Quran used the expression 'being righteous toward them' in this verse. Reflect upon the fact that this is the same expression used to describe the greatest right upon the human after the right of God- which is being righteous toward parents.