

Do Christians Worship Three Gods?

Both Christians and Muslims sometimes judge each other wrongly, and that is not good. At times we denounce beliefs that the other person does not even hold. Some Christians consider all Muslims guilty of supporting violent acts committed by some of their brothers, when this is not the case. Some Muslims severely condemn Christians in general for beliefs that true Christians have never accepted, or they may condemn Christian teachings without understanding them.

Christians and Muslims all worship the Supreme Being, the Creator of all things. We are all agreed on the duty of honoring Him, of knowing His will for men, of serving Him, of humbling ourselves before His greatness and of loving Him with all our hearts. On the other hand, we have differing ideas when it comes to His nature. The divergence is real, but it is not so great as people often think it is, partly because many Muslims do not know what the Christian faith teaches on this subject. (And again, we should not forget that quite a few so-called Christians are ignorant of the truths taught in their own Bible, even though it is available in their own languages. One should not reject Christianity because of those who do not know or practice it well.)

“DO NOT SAY: ‘THERE ARE THREE GODS’”

Muhammad, just like us, had to deal with Christians who did not know the Bible very well. Among those who wore the name of Christian in Arabia at the time of Muhammad were people whose beliefs were very different from the beliefs of most of those who consider themselves Christians, and more importantly, very different from what the Bible teaches. It was surely of these heretics that the Qur'an was speaking in Surah 4, aya 171, “So believe in God and His messengers and do not say: ‘There are three [gods].’ Desist, it will be better for you. Indeed, God is the one and only God.” Or again, in Surah 5:116, Allah will say, “Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as two deities besides God?’” Even if these people in Muhammad's time did not know what the Bible says and they believed in several gods, Muslims today

need to understand that this is not what the first disciples of Jesus believed, and it is not what the vast majority of churches teach today.

Consider these passages from the Torah and the Injeel:

Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!”

Isaiah 45:21-22: “Declare and set forth your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”

Marc 12:29,30: “Jesus answered, ‘The foremost [commandment] is, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”’”

Romans 3:30: “Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”

James 2:19: “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”

You see then that the Christian Bible does not teach that there are three distinct gods; there is only one God. We should add that the Bible nowhere authorizes men to worship Mary, the mother of Jesus. Men have done wrong to make her into a goddess. She rightly called herself “the servant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38).

“HE HAS TAKEN NEITHER A WIFE NOR A SON...”

Another idea which the Qur'an condemns, an idea which was probably taught by certain false Christians in Muhammad's time, is that God had had sexual relations with Mary in order for her to give birth to Jesus. What blasphemy! I do not know

of any Christian who accepts such a horrible idea. The Qur'an says in Surah 6 – *Al-Anam*, aya 101, “the Originator of the heavens and the earth. How could He have a son when He has no consort?” and in Surah 72 – *Al-Jinn*, aya 3, “and exalted is the majesty of our Lord—He has taken neither a wife nor a son.” In passages like these, the Qur'an is speaking neither to the church of the first century nor to modern churches, for we do not believe that God married Mary or that he had sexual relations with her.

Actually, there is a striking resemblance between the story of the conception of Jesus as it is described in the Bible and the story contained in the Qur'an. Read both of them, and you will see that the two versions agree:

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold, the bonds have been loosed from the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.’” (Luke 1:26-38)

Now look at the account of the same event as it is told in the Qur'an:

“Recount in the Book how Mary withdrew from her people to an eastern place and kept herself in seclusion from them. We sent her Our angel, who presented himself to her as a full-grown human being. When she saw him, she said, ‘I seek refuge in the compassionate God from you; [do not come near] if you fear the Lord.’ ‘I am only the messenger of your Lord,’ he replied. ‘I shall bestow upon you the gift of a son endowed with purity.’ She said, ‘How can I have a son when no man has touched me; and neither have I been unchaste?’ [The angel] replied, ‘So shall it be; your Lord says, “This is easy for Me; and We shall make him a sign to people and a blessing, from Us. This has been decreed.”’” (Surah 19 – *Maryam*, ayat 16-21).

In both accounts, then, it is emphasized that Mary would bear a child while still a virgin, and that this would take place by the power of God, who is fully capable of doing even what appears impossible to men.

“HE BEGETS NOT, NOR IS HE BEGOTTEN”

According to the Qur'an, Allah “begets not, nor is He begotten” (Surah 112 – *Al-Ikhas*, aya 3). It is true that certain English translations of the Bible use the word “begotten” or “only begotten” in speaking of Jesus, but let us take the time to understand what the Bible is saying before we conclude that it is teaching on this point what the Qur'an categorically denies. As we have just seen, the Bible does not at all say that God had sexual relations with Mary and that it was in this way that he “begat” a son. Absolutely not. That is not what Christians believe. No, we are dealing with what is called in literature an example of “anthropomorphism.” This long word just means that in speaking of God we use expressions that attribute to Him, in a figurative way, a human form or human activities. Both the Bible and the Qur'an use this kind of language. For example, one might speak of the hand of God (Surah 48 – *Al-Fath*, aya 10), of the face of God (Surah 55 – *ar-Rahman*, ayat 26,27), of the eye of God (Surah 20 – *Ta-Ha*, ayat 38,29; Surah 11 – *Hud*, aya 37); we speak of Him as being seated on a throne (Surah 57 – *al-Hadid*, aya 4), or as a warrior wielding a sword. In speaking of the Christ, it is written that He was begotten of God.

We don't take all this language literally, but we do look for the ideas that these familiar expressions are intended to communicate.

So what idea would the Bible be expressing by the word “begotten”? It depends on the context. Let's take two passages where we find it. In Acts 13 Paul was preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. He was trying to convince his hearers that the resurrection of Jesus really was the fulfillment of the promises concerning the posterity of David, the Messiah. He quotes the second Psalm, a passage which had been used at the coronation of the kings of Israel. In this passage God says to the king, “Today I have begotten you.” The king obviously existed before his coronation. He had been begotten in the physical sense by his biological father. The word “begotten” in this passage did not refer to the birth of the king but to the fact that God recognized the new king as, in some way—figuratively, of course—his special “son.” The Jews believed this passage was partially fulfilled in the kings who followed each other on the throne of David, but that it would be fulfilled in a deeper sense by the Messiah. Paul said that Jesus was “begotten” by his resurrection. This is therefore referring neither to a time before the foundation of the world when Jesus supposedly began to exist, nor to his physical birth at Bethlehem.

In other passages we find the expression “only begotten of the Father,” or according to the French translation, the “unique Son” (John 1:14; 3:16). The Greek word in these passages is the word *monogenes*, composed of “*monos*” (only, unique), and “*genos*” (kind, type), and meaning “one of a kind.” Some translations, following the Latin translation known as the Vulgate, translated this word as “only begotten,” but the word had long before lost his strictly physical meaning—the word simply speaks of the uniqueness of Christ as the only Son of God. Contrary to what Muslims think, God has deigned to call men and women his “children” to testify to the great love that He has for them. The fact that Jesus is called the “only begotten Son” clearly distinguishes him from these other “children.” The closest English equivalent to the Greek *monogenes* would be the expression “one of a kind.”

There are other ideas that we need to consider regarding the nature of God and the relationship that exists between God and Jesus Christ, but hopefully we have corrected at least some misconceptions about what Christians believe: they do not believe in three gods; they do not believe that God had sexual relations with Mary, they do not believe that Jesus was “begotten” literally or physically.