

The Christmas Festival, Imitating the Unbelievers and Preserving the Islamic Identity¹

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All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all creation—and may He extol the Messenger in the highest company of Angels, and grant him peace and security—likewise to his family, Companions and true followers.

A Note on the Origins of Christmas

It was the Roman Catholic Church who first spread the term Christmas among other Christian denominations and non-Christians. So where did the Catholic Church get the celebration from? It's not in the New Testament, definitely not in the Old Testament since that pre-dates the arrival of Jesus the son of Mary (peace be upon him) by several hundred years.

The truth is that the practice in its earliest form began more than three hundred years after Jesus (‘alaihis-salām). Christmas was not practised by the disciples of Christ or his early followers.

¹ The Khutbah on this topic can be found [here](#).

The festival was a pagan practice introduced into the Christian religion by the Catholic Church. The Catholic Encyclopaedia (1911 edition) states, **“Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church. The first evidence of the feast comes from Egypt... Pagan customs centring around the month of January gravitated to Christmas.”**

In the same Catholic Encyclopaedia under the title Natal Day, the early Catholic father, Origen stated, **“In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a banquet on his birthday. It was only the sinners who made great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into this world.”** So birthdays in general were not part of the Christian religion.

The 1946 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica states regarding Christmas, **“A feast was established in memory of this event (the birth of Jesus) in the fourth century. In the fifth century, the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman Feast of the birth of Sol, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ’s birth existed.”**

Sol was the Sun-god in the Ancient Roman religion. An ancient source dating back to 354CE states that the Romans held a festival on the 21st of December called, “The birthday of the unconquered one” which refers to their Sun-god. The winter solstice (or midwinter) marks the day with the shortest hours of daylight and the longest night of the year. The day after is the day when the sunlight hours start to extend once more, so they saw this a great day to be celebrated.

It was the 25th of December that eventually found its way into the Christian Religion, and is celebrated across the world by Christians, as well as groups of clueless Muslims and people of many other religions.

So for the first three hundred years after Jesus (peace be upon him), the celebration had no connection to Christianity, then in the fourth century it was instituted, and in the fifth, it was ordered by the Western Church. This is similar to what some Muslims have done by introducing a celebration for the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). These practices have no basis in scripture or revelation, rather they are latter-day innovations rooted in pagan festivals.

Once you understood this, you can clearly see that Christmas has nothing whatsoever to do with Jesus the son of Mary (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام) or the message he was sent with. The Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) are very clear about such celebrations; they have no place in the lives of Muslims.

Can Muslims Participate in and Celebrate the Festivals of the Unbelievers?

Let us begin by saying that every Muslim knows and believes that the Prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was the final Messenger of Allah sent as a mercy to all of creation, a bringer of glad tidings to those who worship Allah alone and a warner to the idolators, wrongdoers and opposers of the Prophets.

The Prophet (ﷺ) followed the footsteps of the Messengers and Prophets (ﷺ) before him. Abdullāh Ibn ‘Amr (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) stated,

إِنَّهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ نَبِيٌّ قَبْلِي إِلَّا كَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَدُلَّ أُمَّتَهُ عَلَى مَا يَعْلَمُهُ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ وَيُنذِرَهُمْ مَا يَعْلَمُهُ شَرًّا لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ أُمَّتَكُمْ هَذِهِ جُعِلَتْ عَافِيَتُهَا فِي أَوَّلِهَا وَإِنَّ آخِرَهَا سَيُصِيبُهُمْ بَلَاءٌ وَأُمُورٌ يُنْكِرُونَهَا

“There was not a Prophet before me except that it was a duty upon him to guide his people to whatever he knew of goodness for them and to warn them from whatever he knew of evil for them. Indeed this nation of yours, its wellbeing is in its first part and its latter part will be afflicted with tribulations and things you will hate.” (An-Nasā’ī no. 4191)

Through him, Allah perfected the Religion, and completed His favour and chose for mankind the Religion He was pleased with for them.

الْيَوْمَ بَيَّسَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

“This day, those who have disbelieved have given up all hope of your religion, so fear them not, but fear Me. This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (Al-Mā’idah 5:3)

This Revelation that was sent to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is protected from loss and corruption. So no

matter what individuals from the Muslim community engage in of misguided practices, they will never be able to alter the true message of Islam. It will remain as a preserved source for all those who seek guidance. Allah, Most High, said:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

“Indeed, it is We who sent down the Revelation and indeed, We will be its preserver.” (Al-Hijr 15:9)

Innovations and additions in belief, speech and practice of Islam are rejected just as the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said,

من عمل عملا ليس عليه أمرنا فهو رد

“Whoever does a deed that is not based upon this Religion of ours will have it rejected.” (Muslim)

Imitating the Unbelievers

It is forbidden to imitate the unbelievers and to participate in their annual festivals and celebrations. Anas bin Mālik (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) stated that when the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) migrated to Madinah, he saw the people celebrating two days annually (they were Persian celebrations popular at the time, Nayrūz and Mihrajān). So the Prophet asked, **“What are these two days?”** They informed him that these were days of celebration from the era of jāhiliyyah (pre-Islamic ignorance). So he said to them,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَبْدَلَكُمْ بِهِمَا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمَا يَوْمَ الْأَصْحَى وَيَوْمَ الْفِطْرِ

“Indeed Allah has replaced these days with days better than them: the Day of Adhā and the Day of Fitr.” (Abu Dāwūd, no. 1134)

So, Islam does not allow for innovated practices borrowed from other religions because Islam is a complete way of life and deals with every aspect of Religion and practice. And Allah does not accept the following of other Religions:

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

“And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter, he will be one of the losers.” (Āli ‘Imrān 3:85) So any religious practice or celebration that is not proven by the Quran and Sunnah is not accepted by Allah, no matter how much the people seek to justify it.

Some ignorant Muslims claim that they celebrate these festivals as a part of their integration into the host country and its culture—but their claim is rejected because Islam has its own unique identity and Sharī’ah that has been explained in the Qur’an and Sunnah.

And whoever opposes the Sunnah, which is the Path of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), is threatened with punishment:

وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ الرَّسُولَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ نُوَلِّهِ مَا تَوَلَّىٰ وَنُصَلِّهِ جَهَنَّمَ ۗ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا

“Whoever contradicts the Messenger after the guidance have been made clear to him, and then he follows other than the path of the believers, We shall surely leave him in the path he has chosen, and burn

him in Hell—and what an evil destination.” (An-Nisā 4:115) So integration into any society should never entail a Muslim contradicting the commands the Messenger (ﷺ), nor his guidance.

And when a Muslim seeks to resemble the unbelievers in such matters, it shows that he is not confident about his own religious identity and seeks the favour and approval of the unbelievers who are themselves misguidance and devoid of knowledge. So our children are enticed into these practices that lead them away from the Religion and into misguidance. And the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

مَنْ تَشَبَهَ بِقَوْمٍ فَهُوَ مِنْهُمْ

“Whoever resembles a people is from them.” (Abu Dawūd, no 4031) The more a person resembles a group of people, the more he counted among them. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, **“You will surely follow the ways of those who came before you, handspan by handspan, cubit-length by cubit-length such if one of them entered into a lizards hole, you too will enter it.”** They asked the Prophet (ﷺ), **“Do you mean the Jews and Christians?”** He replied, **“Who else?”** (Bukhārī and Muslim) This narration perfectly illustrates the state of those who follow the crowd in their celebration of Christmas, because it involves following them blindly, without thought or respecting the laws of Islam. They imitate without thinking seeking short-term worldly pleasures.

It is obligatory for a Muslim to avoid gathering at the non-Muslim places of worship and where they hold mass. Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr (رضي الله عنه) said, **“Whoever settles**

in the lands of the non-Muslims, then he celebrates their festivals of Nayrūz and Mihrajān (or any other festival), he imitates them and then he dies whilst in that state, he will be gathered with them on the Day of Resurrection.”²

Similarly, ‘Umar Ibn Al-Khattāb (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said, **“Do not visit the Mushriks in their churches on the days of their celebrations because that is when Allah’s anger descends upon them.”³**

Ibn Taymiyyah (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) after his citation of several narrations in this topic stated, **“So if the anger of God descends upon them on the day of their festival due to their practices, then whoever joins them in their practices or in some of their practices, then is he not also subject to the same punishment?”** (*Al-Iqtidā*, 1/458) He then proceeds to explain that the texts prove that the greater one’s participation in the religious celebrations of the non-Muslims, the more he exposes himself to Allah’s anger.

Fatwas of the Scholars

The Permanent Committee of Scholars (Al-Lajnah Ad-Dā’imah), which had at its head, Imām Abdul-‘Azeez bin Bāz (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) stated, **“It is not permitted for the Muslim**

² Sunan Al-Kubrā of Al-Bayhaqī, 9/234, Ibn Taymiyyah stated that its chain of narration is authentic in *Iqtidā As-Sirāt Al-Mustaqīm*, 1/457

³ *Sunan Al-Kubrā*, 9/234, Abdur-Razzāq in *Al-Musannaf*, no. 1609, Ibn Taymiyyah stated that its chain of narration is authentic in *Iqtidā As-Sirāt Al-Mustaqīm*, 1/455

to eat that which was prepared by the Jews and Christians or idol-worshippers specifically for their days of festivities. And it is not permitted for the Muslims to accept a gift from them in celebration of those festivities because that contains honouring and cooperating with them in making apparent their religious symbols and furthering and promoting their innovations and partaking in the happiness of their festivals. And this may ultimately lead to taking on their festivals as our own festival.”⁴ And around the world we see how millions of misguided Muslims participate and celebrate the annual festivals of the unbelievers such as Christmas, Easter, Diwali, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, International Women's Day, etc. And they have taken them as their own celebrations. And this causes them to lose and abandon their Islamic identity and heritage as well as disobeying Allah and His Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).

Al-‘Allāmah Ibn ‘Uthaimen (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) stated: “If they congratulate us during their celebrations, then we do not respond to them, because it is not our celebration – and it is a celebration that Allah is not pleased with. That is because either it is a celebration that they have innovated into their religion or it is one that is legislated in their religion but was abrogated with the advent of the religion of Islam which the Prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) was sent with to the whole of mankind. It was regarding this that Allah said,

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

⁴ Fatwa no. 2882, (22/398-399).

“And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter, he will be one of the losers.” (Āli ‘Imrān 3:85)

Therefore, to accept an invitation from them at Christmas is forbidden because to participate with them (in a Christmas meal) is even more severe than congratulating them.”⁵

So when a situation arises where you are greeted with, “Merry Christmas” or “Happy new year” then you should respond with, “Good day” and then say, “Christmas is not my religious festival, I am a Muslim and do not believe in its practice.” If they seek further clarity, then direct them to a website, audio, or give them a booklet, leaflet or send them an article through your mobile device.

At this time of year, have a few leaflets with you (in your handbag, care or pocket) so that you can help people understand our Religion.

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⁵ Majmū’ Fatāwā 3/45-46, abridged.