



*Do Muslims Celebrate
Easter and Christmas?*

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Introduction

In these days of excess entertainment and consumption, it is easy to get caught up in the so-called "holiday season", rarely stopping to consider its significance. I say so-called, because the very word holiday is derived from the two words holy and day. However, under closer scrutiny from the Judeo-Christian and Islamic perspectives, these days are anything but holy. Celebrations such as Easter, Christmas, All Saints' Day, and Halloween all find their roots in pagan traditions, alien to the prophets (may peace and blessings be upon all of the prophets). Proof of these lies in the lack of historical evidence that the prophets ever celebrated their birthdays, decorated eggs, placed ornaments on trees, or dressed up in costumes. Through an examination of these holiday myths as religious innovation, or bid'ah, this article is a small attempt at warning people of the dangerous implications and subtle attitudinal changes that come with such celebrations.

Bid'ah: Religious Innovation

Before any discussion on the origin of holidays such as Christmas and Easter, it is important to define a term called bid'ah. A bid'ah is any invention, creation or addition of any religious matter, which was not found in the original teachings.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "He who innovates something in this matter of ours (religion), will have it rejected." [Bukhari and Muslim]

«من أحدث في أمرنا هذا ما ليس فيه فهو رد» متفق عليه

To illustrate the bid'ah involved in Christmas and Easter simple questions beg asking. Did Jesus (peace be upon him) celebrate his birthday? Did his mother, Mary (peace be upon her)? Did his disciples? The answer, of course, is no. Did Jesus (peace be upon him) speak of an Easter bunny? Did he decorate evergreens? Of course not.

To believe that Jesus (peace be upon him) came with the truth, and to then add or delete from his message is to mix truth with falsehood. The above practices find their origins in pagan rites and rituals. I have heard with my own ears, Christian learned men and leaders acknowledging the true origins of Easter and Christmas, but putting it off as "all in good fun." So, I ask, would Jesus (peace be upon him) approve of mixing his teachings with those of the pagans?

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Furthermore, to illustrate the gravity of bid'ah and of imitating non-believers, I refer you to the words of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who said what translates as follows: "Whoever imitates a people is one of them." [Related by Ahmad with an authentic chain of transmission]

«...من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم» رواه الإمام أحمد، إسناده صحيح

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) once saw the Ansaar celebrating a certain day. He inquired about that and was informed: This is one of two days that we used to celebrate in Jaahiliyyah (pre-Islaamic ignorance) and we continue to do so. He replied: "Nay! Allaah has substituted for you two better days: the day of al-Fitr and the day of al-Adhhaa." [Related by Abu Dawud, authenticated by Al-Albani]

«قدم رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم المدينة ولهم يومان يلعبون فيهما فقال ما هذان اليومان قالوا كنا نلعب فيهما في الجاهلية فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إن الله قد أبدلكم بهما خيرا منهما يوم الأضحى ويوم الفطر» رواه ابو داود، صححه الألباني

Easter, Fertility, & the Origin of the Cross

While holidays like Christmas, New Year's Day, and Valentine's Day have names which indicate either the holiday's origin or its significance, Easter stands out. Most people have no idea what the name Easter means. It turns out that Easter is a corruption of Austre, the name of the ancient pagan Scandanavian goddess of life and fertility.

As noted above, many holidays celebrated today represent a synthesis between Christian doctrine and pagan ritual. The basis for most of these "holy" days revolve around natural phenomena such as the autumnal equinox, vernal equinox, summer solstice, and winter solstice. With regards to the spring season and the vernal equinox, pagans, especially the pagans of cold, northern Europe, celebrated the renewal of life, as was demonstrated by the budding of the leaves, blooming of the flowers, return of the birds, and the re-emergence of many mammals previously in hibernation. These celebrations often utilized symbols of fertility and life such as the egg, the baby chick, and the rabbit.

The use of these same symbols in present day celebrations of Easter is quite obvious. Decorating eggs, Easter egg hunts, and the Easter bunny are all familiar icons. These things have carried over from pagan traditions via a synthesis with Christian doctrine. In particular, the worship of the sun god has been incorporated into the once monotheistic Christian teachings. The vernal equinox represents a time in which the hours of daylight equal the hours of night.

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The days following the vernal equinox mark an increase in the number of hours of daylight over the night. This time, then became viewed as the time of sol invictus or the unconquerable sun, demonstrating its supremacy by conquering the night.

The synthesis with Christian ideas was simple. Just as the sun conquered the night, the son conquered death. Thus, the pagan holidays of fertility and life were replaced with the Christian concept of the resurrection of Jesus (peace be upon him).

The Church adopted spring equinox celebrations as Easter. As this time had already been one of celebrating the sun's resurrection and return to prominence, celebrating the resurrection of the son of God required no great change in understanding. In fact, the Easter celebrations were so similar to earlier celebrations - particularly those which recognized the resurrection of the Babylonian Adonis, the Greek Apollo, and the Roman Attis - that a bitter controversy arose with pagans claiming that the Christian Easter celebration was a spurious imitation of the ancient traditions. Vernal equinox bonfires, originally prohibited by the Church, found their way as Easter fires into the official liturgy of Rome by the ninth century. Fertility symbols associated with spring, such as the egg and the incredibly prolific rabbit, survived as well. (Ellerbe p.148)

In fact, the very symbol of the cross is derived from pagan fertility practices. It is known by many that the symbol of the cross was utilized by many civilizations prior to the emergence of Christianity. The ancient Egyptian symbol of the ankh, then, deserves mentioning for its connection to fertility. The ankh is a symbol which resembles the Christian cross, except that it has a loop at the top. Some sources indicate that this symbol derives its shape from ancient Egyptian studies of human anatomy. The loop, it is said, represents the gravid (pregnant) uterus, while the arms of the cross represent the Fallopian tubes. And the base of the cross serves as the vaginal canal. The ankh, then, serves as the ultimate fertility symbol. In support of this theory of the derivation of the ankh, the fertility dolls of many African peoples, in particular the Ashanti, are shaped like the ankh. The animated graphic to the right illustrates the similarities.

Christmas

An extract from *The Paganism that is Modern Day Christianity* by Misha'al Al-Kadhi

Let us now move on to the "birthday of Jesus", Christmas. Jesus (peace be upon him) is commonly considered to have been born on the 25th of December. However, it is common knowledge among Christian scholars that he was not born on this day.

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It is well known that the first Christian churches held their festival in May, April, or January. Scholars of the first two centuries AD even differ in which year he was born; some believing that he was born fully twenty years before the current accepted date. So how was the 25th of December selected as the birthday of Jesus (peace be upon him)?

Grolier's encyclopedia says: "Christmas is the feast of the birth of Jesus Christ, celebrated on December 25.... Despite the beliefs about Christ that the birth stories expressed, the church did not observe a festival for the celebration of the event until the 4th century.... since 274, under the emperor Aurelian, Rome had celebrated the feast of the "Invincible Sun" on December 25. In the Eastern Church, January 6, a day also associated with the winter solstice, was initially preferred. In course of time, however, the West added the Eastern date as the Feast of the Epiphany, and the East added the Western date of Christmas".

So who else celebrated the 25th of December as the birth day of their gods before it was agreed upon as the birth day of Jesus (peace be upon him)? Well, there are the people of India who rejoice, decorate their houses with garlands, and give presents to their friends on this day. The people of China also celebrate this day and close their shops. The pagan god Buddha is believed to have been born on this day when the "Holy Ghost" descended on his virgin mother Maya. The great savior and god of the Persians, Mithras, is also believed to have been born on the 25th of December long before the coming of Jesus (peace be upon him).

The Egyptians celebrated this day as the birth day of their great savior Horus, the Egyptian god of light and the son of the "virgin mother" and "queen of the heavens" Isis. Osiris, god of the dead and the underworld in Egypt, the son of "the holy virgin", again was believed to have been born on the 25th of December.

The Greeks celebrated the 25th of December as the birthday of Hercules, the son of the supreme god of the Greeks, Zeus, through the mortal woman Alcmene. Bacchus, the god of wine and revelry among the Romans (known among the Greeks as Dionysus) was also born on this day.

Adonis, revered as a «dying-and-rising god» among the Greeks, miraculously was also born on the 25th of December. His worshipers held him a yearly festival representing his death and resurrection, in midsummer. The ceremonies of his birthday are recorded to have taken place in the same cave in Bethlehem which is claimed to have been the birth place of Jesus (peace be upon him).

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The Scandinavians celebrated the 25th of December as the birthday of their god Freyr, the son of their supreme god of the heavens, Odin.

The Romans observed this day as the birthday of the god of the sun, Natalis Solis Invicti ("Birthday of Sol the invincible"). There was great rejoicing and all shops were closed. There was illumination and public games. Presents were exchanged, and the slaves were indulged in great liberties. Remember, these are the same Romans who would later preside over the council of Nicea (325 AD.) which led to the official Christian recognition of the "Trinity" as the "true" nature of God, and the "fact" that Jesus (peace be upon him) was born on the 25th of December too.

In *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon says: "The Roman Christians, ignorant of his (Christ's) birth, fixed the solemn festival to the 25th of December, the Brumalia, or Winter Solstice, when the Pagans annually celebrated the birth of Sol" vol. ii, p. 383.

Christmas is not the only Christian festival which was borrowed from ancient paganism and foisted upon the religion of Jesus (peace be upon him). There is also Easter the Feast of St. John, the Holy Communion, the Annunciation of the virgin, the assumption of the virgin, and many others have their roots in ancient pagan worship.

Time of Year Pagan Traditions Christian Synthesis

Winter Solstice; The birth of the sun. The birth of Mithra on December 25th. Often celebrated with yule fires, processions of light, and tree decorating. Christmas & the Epiphany

Winter Season; A time of nurturing and honoring inspiration and creativity. Common practices involving festivals of light, wearing animal masks and skins in hopes of augmenting the coming year's supply. Candlemas

Spring Equinox; The sun is resurrected and gains prominence over the night. Fertility celebrations involving symbols such as the egg and the prolific hare. Easter

Spring Season; The mating of the earth and the sky from which will come the year's harvest. Often celebrated with maypole dancing, decorating with new foliage. Pentecost & the Feast of the Ascension

Summer Solstice; The peak of the sun's light. Celebrated with large bonfires, burning fragrant herbs, decorating with flowers. Feast of St. John

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Summer Season; The sun's energy transfers to the crops. Ritual blessings of the harvest, herbs, fields, mountains, and ocean. Assumption Day

Autumnal Equinox; A time of gratitude for the harvest. Feasts and decorating with fall fruits, grains, and vegetables. Michaelmas & the Nativity of Mary

Fall Season; Acknowledgement of the year's completion. Honoring the dead, honoring and releasing the past. All Soul's Day & All Saints Day

(Borrowed & edited from Helen Ellerbe's The Dark Side of Christian History, permission pending)

Conclusions

The pagan roots of holidays celebrated in the name of Christianity testify to its having been altered. Christianity, as it exists today, does not represent the message of Jesus, the son of Mary (may peace be upon both of them). And this is not merely a Christian issue. This is an issue for all God-fearing people. We, as Muslims, must be aware of the pieces that make up the puzzle that is Christianity, first to protect ourselves and our families, then to warn others and to call them to the right way.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, «You (Muslims) will follow the ways of those nations who were before you, span by span and cubit by cubit (i.e., inch by inch) so much so that even if they entered a hole of a lizard, you would follow them.» We said, «O Allah's Apostle! (Do you mean) the Jews and the Christians?» He said, «Who else?» [Sahih Al-Bukhari Hadith, Narrated by Abu Said Al Khudri]

«لتتبعن سنن من كان قبلكم، شبرا بشبر وذراعا بذراع، حتى لو دخلوا جحر ضب تبعتموهم. قلنا: يا رسول الله، اليهود والنصارى؟ قال: فمن» رواه البخاري

There is no "good fun" in displeasing Allah, the Most High. So, we must provide alternative activities for our children; camping trips, sporting events, halaqaat, field trips, etc. We should do our best to avoid television, year-round. And if we find this difficult, we should at least avoid it during these "holidays". If we have non-Muslim family members that celebrate these days of bid'aa and shirk, then we should avoid their homes at these times. Visit them the month before Christmas, or the month after.

Most importantly, however, we should study our deen and we should surround ourselves with those who do. We should seek righteousness among the righteous. We should seek the pleasure of Allah among those who please Allah.

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The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that "whoever imitates a people is one of them." [Authenticated by Al-Albani]

«من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم» صححه الألباني

Let us imitate those who are on the straight path, not those who have gone astray.

Allah knows best.

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