

Talking Points

Salaam means “peace” in Arabic and comes from the same root word (SLM) as *shalom* in Hebrew. (These two languages sometimes drop vowels when writing words.)

The words *Islam* and *Muslim* also come from this SLM root. The word *Islam* means to surrender to God, and also connotes the peace that comes from surrendering to God. A *Muslim* is a person who surrenders to God.

Allah is the word *God* in Arabic, just as *Diós* in Spanish or *Gott* in German. Arabic Bibles refer to God as Allah. Christians in Arabic-speaking countries call God Allah in their worship services, and refer to Jesus as the son of Allah.

Muslims have deep reverence for Jesus and believe he is a great prophet. They believe in the virgin birth, in Jesus’ miracles, that he is the Messiah, and that he will come again at the end of the world. They believe that because of Jesus’ holiness God intervened to prevent the crucifixion. They do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead or is divine.

Muhammad referred to Jews and Christians as “People of the Book” and the Qur’an calls for cooperation and peace among the three faiths.

It is important to distinguish between *religion* and *culture*, and between *a religion* and *those who practice a religion*. Religion is practiced in an imperfect world and is shaped by imperfect people and their cultures. Religious wars almost always are fought for political and economic reasons, using religion as a justification.

The Qur’an was written in the 7th century and calls for women’s rights in ways that were rarely see elsewhere until the 19th century. The Qur’an stipulates that women can own property, form contracts, have a say in the selection of a husband, and are to be treated with respect. The Qur’an outlawed infanticide, which was commonly practiced against infant girls, and put limits on polygamy, which was considered the norm at the time (Abraham belonged to a similar culture.) Practices such as female circumcision existed long before Islam and have persisted in spite of, not because of,

the Qur'an. Current oppression of women is a result of persistent culture rather than religion.

Muslims trace their ancestry to Ishmael, the first-born son of Abraham and Sarah's slave Hagar. After Sarah became pregnant and Isaac was born, she drove Hagar and Ishmael out into the desert. Muslims believe that Abraham rescued them, and that God called Abraham to sacrifice Ishmael rather than Isaac. Because of this, some people call Judaism, Islam and Christianity the Abrahamic faiths.

Muslims do not worship Muhammad. They believe he is the last in the line of great prophets that includes Jesus, Abraham, Noah, Moses, and many other prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Islam calls both men and women to modesty in dress. The symbolism of head covering varies widely throughout history and culture. 1 Cor. 1:3-6 calls for men to uncover and women to cover their heads during worship. In the 19th and 20th centuries U.S. men removed their hats as a sign of respect when entering a building, particularly a church, and tipped their hats as a sign of respect when encountering women. No Catholic woman would have dreamt of entering a church with her head uncovered until the mid-1960's, and many Orthodox women still cover their heads in church. *Hijab* is the name for the head covering traditionally worn by Muslim women. While some cultures impose highly restrictive dress and other sanctions on women, a hijab is not a symbol of oppression.

The Qur'an does not tell the story of Muhammad's life in the same way that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus' life. The Qur'an is the message that was revealed to Muhammad over a period of many years and is therefore more comparable to the book of Revelations than to the Gospels or the stories of the Hebrew Scripture.

Most Muslims are not Arabic. The six countries with the largest Muslim populations are, in order: Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Egypt. Islam was introduced in China in 616 and currently has a significant Muslim population there. Only about 20% of Muslims live in Arab countries.

