

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM SERIES NO. 4

# **The Uniqueness of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible**

TITLE

**THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS IN THE QUR,AN AND THE BIBLE**

1. Truths about Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible
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**AUTHOR**

**JOHN GILCHRIST**

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### *The Uniqueness of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible*

For too long Christians and Muslims have debated their differences of belief about Jesus Christ in a context which has allowed scant room for discussion about those points in the Qur'an and the Bible where these two books are in agreement about certain features of his life and personality.

The time has come, surely, for Christians and Muslims to analyse these points of agreement for we are unlikely ever to come to a consensus of belief about Jesus until we begin by seriously reflecting on those facts where the Qur'an and the Bible are in agreement. While these two books may differ in the interpretation of the facts they both admit, we can confidently study these points as a stepping-stone to the true knowledge of Jesus simply by virtue of the fact that the facts are themselves common cause between Islam and Christianity.

It can safely be assumed that where the Qur'an and the Bible agree in any matter, that matter can henceforth be accepted as true without further ado by Christians and Muslims alike. It may well be necessary for both of us to prove these facts to outsiders but it is not necessary that we prove them to one another if they are admitted in the books we respectively believe to be the Word of God. However, as in recent years a liberalistic trend has infected and diseased both religions, where some of their nominal adherents have abandoned the plain teaching of the Qur'an and the Bible about Jesus purely so that they can reduce this man to the level of common humanity and strip him of all his glory and honour, it will be profitable to begin by briefly mentioning and proving four very significant points about the life of Jesus where the Bible and the Qur'an are in agreement about the relevant facts.

#### 1. TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS IN THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE.

##### a). The Virgin-Birth.

This first feature - so strangely denied in some of the peculiar quarters of Islam and Christianity - is one of the most obvious and unambiguous teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible and is fundamentally upheld by both books. It is referred to more than once in the Qur'an but is particularly set out in some detail in Surah 19, verses 16 to 34. The following verses from this passage are here quoted to prove the point:

And make mention of Mary in the Scripture, when she had withdrawn from her people to a chamber looking East, and had chosen seclusion from them. Then We sent unto her Our spirit and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man. She said: Lo! I seek refuge in the Beneficent One from thee, if thou art God-fearing. He said: I am only a messenger from thy Lord, that I may bestow on thee a faultless son. She said: How can I have a son when no mortal bath touched me, neither have I been unchaste? He said: So it will be. Thy Lord saith: It is easy for Me. And it will be that We may make of him a revelation for mankind and a mercy from Us, and it is a thing ordained. And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. *Surah 19. 16-22*

If Mary had conceived by another man, why would the angel have appeared to her to explain the conception of her son? Clearly from the text we can see that the angel had come not only to set her mind at rest about the pregnancy she was about to experience but to explain that this unique event was simply the effect of God's desire to make this son a revelation for mankind. She was to conceive him in a *special* way because there was to be something *special* about her son. Secondly, what other interpretation can be derived from the words "How can I have a son when *no mortal* bath touched me, neither have I been unchaste? . These words clearly imply that Mary was a virgin when the child was conceived.

It is surely not necessary to press this point further. The language of the Qur'an is unambiguous about the virgin-birth of Christ and further support for it is found in Surah 4.156. In that verse Mary is cleared from the base charge of the Jews that she had illegitimately conceived Jesus out of wedlock. Again Surah 21.91 explains the conception of Jesus as the direct action of God within an unmarried woman who was completely free of any unchastity.

Surely this is even more abundantly proved by the title Jesus is given more often than any other in the Qur'an - the son of Mary. It is common in Semitic communities to name a man as the son of his father, for example, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, Muhammad ibn Isheq (early historian of Islam), Zaid ibn Sabet, etc., but we do not find men named as the sons of their mothers. Why then is Jesus so often called the son of Mary (Isa ibn Maryam) in the Qur'an? Surely the striking repetition of this name as well as its exceptional character demand that Jesus was born of his mother alone. Is not the frequency of this title evidence of the unique manner of the birth of Jesus? In the Qur'an the names of women are conspicuous by their absence. Surely the mother of Jesus is mentioned by name so regularly because of her significant place in human history as the only woman to bear a son while still a virgin. This alone can explain the prominence Mary receives in the Qur'an. It is safe to conclude that the Qur'an teaches the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ.

No right-thinking man will deny that the Bible also teaches the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ. Throughout its history the Christian Church has held to this belief and we need only quote this passage to prove that the doctrine is soundly based on the Bible:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus". *Luke 1. 26-31*

Twice the mother of Jesus is plainly described as a virgin in that passage. When she replied to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Luke 1. 34), the angel then explained that the conception would not be by human means but by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. We are particularly privileged to have a second, independent account of the virgin-birth in the Bible and it is set forth in this passage:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins". *Matthew 1. 18-21*

Once again the conception of Jesus is described as being the result of the work of the Holy Spirit and once again, as in the Qur'an, it is found that an angel appears to explain the phenomenon, in this case to Joseph.

Why should there be these instances of angelic manifestations to explain the birth of Jesus if his mother had conceived him through some other man? The texts speak plainly for themselves and there can be no question about the birth of Christ. The angel appeared to Joseph and Mary to explain to them both that the conception of Jesus was by the special intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore Christians and Muslims have, in the birth of Jesus, something in which the Qur'an and the Bible are agreed. These two books both teach as a fact that he was born of a virgin-woman by the will of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### b). The Sinlessness of Jesus Christ.

It is a simple matter to prove from the Qur'an and the Bible that Jesus was absolutely without sin throughout his life. When the angel appeared to Mary, the Qur'an says that he told her I am only a messenger of thy Lord that I may bestow on thee a faultless son" (Surah 19.19). The Arabic word for faultless', *zakiyya*, implies that he was totally without sin.

In the Bible there are numerous proofs of the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. Passages proving the point are:

He committed no sin, no guile was found on his lips. *1 Peter 2.22*

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. *2 Corinthians 5.21*

You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. *1 John 3.5*

At this stage, however, it will be profitable to note that in the Qur'an and the Bible, Jesus Christ alone is described as sinless. He is emphatically described as such in both books. No other prophet or man is so described. Nevertheless both books describe the sins of other prophets and both leave us with the firm impression that Jesus alone was without sin. (In the Qur'an, in Surah 19.19, the unique birth of Jesus is explained by the angel as the medium for the faultlessness of the son of Mary. This implies that a man cannot be faultless unless he is born of a virgin-woman. Hence Jesus Christ, being the only man to be born in this way, must of necessity also be the only sinless man who ever lived). The Qur'an attributes sin to the following prophets:

1. *Adam*. "And their Lord called them, saying: Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you: Lo! Satan is an open enemy to you? They said: Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost". *Surah 7. 22-23*

2. *Abraham*. "And Who, I ardently hope, will forgive me my sin on the Day of Judgment". *Surah 26.82*

3. *Moses*. "He said: My Lord! Lo! I have wronged my soul, so forgive me". *Surah 28.16*

4. *Jonah*. "And the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy". *Surah 37.142*

5. *Muhammad*. "So know, O Muhammad, that there is no God save Allah, and ask forgiveness for thy sin and for believing men and believing women". *Surah 47.19*

Jesus Christ was never commanded to pray for forgiveness because he was faultless. We also never find him praying for any faults, wrongs and sins such as the Qur'an attributes in the verses quoted to other prophets. He never wronged his soul, nor was he blameworthy. Instead the Qur'an emphasises that he was entirely without sin and was faultless. We can therefore conclude by saying that the Qur'an teaches that of all men, Jesus Christ alone was sinless.

In the Bible the universal effect of sin is recorded often, but it will be sufficient to quote these words to prove the point:

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one. *Romans 3. 10-12*

The Bible plainly teaches that no man, other than Jesus Christ, has ever faithfully sought out God and done good all his days. Every other man has at some time turned away from him and sinned against him.

Once again, we find that Jesus Christ alone is sinless. So we find that as the Qur'an and the Bible both teach the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ, so they both also teach that he alone was sinless and faultless.

c). The Ascension of Jesus.

One of the standing orthodox beliefs in Islam about Jesus is that he ascended to heaven. The ascension of Jesus is mentioned in the Qur'an in these words:

Allah took him up to himself. *Surah 4. 158*

The text plainly implies, not that Jesus was taken to the second sky or third heaven, as some suppose, but that God took Jesus to *himself*. That is, he took him into his own glorious presence in the highest heavens.

The Bible confirms this in some detail but we need only quote a few passages here to prove both the ascension of Jesus and his exaltation at the height of the heavens in the presence of Almighty God.

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven". *Acts 1. 9-11.*

Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. *Golossians 3. 1*

Which God accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. *Ephesian.s 1. 20-21*

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify thou me *in thy own presence* with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made". *John 17. 4-5*

So we see that both the Qur'an and the Bible teach the ascension of Jesus, not just into heaven, but indeed above the heavens into the ultimate presence of God. (The only Hadith that exist on the ultimate destiny of Jesus confirm that he

went to heaven. While there are many Hadith supporting the ascension of Jesus, there are none against it).

It is well-known to Christians and Muslims that the Qur'an and the Bible differ on the time and cause of the ascension of Jesus, but what is of extreme importance is that they both agree on the fact - that Jesus did indeed ascend to heaven and is alive there to this day.

#### d) The Second Coming of Jesus.

The last point of agreement between the Qur'an and the Bible on the life of Jesus that concerns us is the second coming of Jesus. As with the ascension, the Qur'an is backed by many Hadith on this point. The one verse in the Qur'an which does appear to clearly teach the second coming of Jesus is this one:

And (Jesus) shall be a sign for (the coming of) the hour (of Judgement). *Surah 43.61*

The text is somewhat briefer in the original Arabic but the interpretation of it in the English is ostensibly correct. Again Christians and Muslims differ on the manner and effect of the second coming but agree on the fact. The second coming of Jesus is one of the grandest and most extensive subjects of the prophetic texts of the Bible, but just a few quotes will suffice:

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". *Matthew 24.30*

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. *1 Thessalonians 4.16*

Behold he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. *Revelation 1.7*

We can conclude by saying that the second coming of Jesus to herald the Day of Judgment is a fact upon which the Qur'an and the Bible are agreed.

It is significant also to note that many illustrious titles of Jesus in the Bible are repeated in the Qur'an. For example, he is called the Word of God in both books. The Qur'an agrees with the Bible in calling him the Messiah. Likewise he is also called a Spirit from God in the Qur'an. These titles, however, are treated in the companion booklet to this one in this series entitled *The Titles of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible*. As we intend to show presently that the four features dealt with thusfar in this booklet-make Jesus especially unique in his life and personality, it will be profitable to bear in mind, nevertheless, that the Qur'an and the Bible also give him titles which are applied to no one else.

## 2. THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS.

We have outlined four features of the life of Jesus which are taught in both the Qur'an and the Bible. What can we learn about Jesus from these features? Firstly, they reveal to us a man who was quite unique in the history of mankind. Secondly, they show that this uniqueness implies singular greatness - such as no other man possesses. Let us briefly analyse the uniqueness of Jesus in the four features we have thusfar considered in this booklet.

a). The Virgin-Birth. Being born of a virgin-woman, Jesus had an exceptional and unique beginning to his life. He is the only man in all human history who was born in this unusual way.

b). The Sinlessness of Jesus. He alone led a sinless life. Every other man has, at some time or other, thought or done evil as the Qur'an and the Bible jointly testify. But Jesus alone led a sinless and totally pure and holy life. Not only, therefore, did his life begin exceptionally, but it was conducted in a unique way as well.

c). The Ascension. If the life of Jesus began in unusual circumstances, it ended in an even more remarkable way. While other men return to the dust, Jesus ascended into heaven. In this he is unique as well - no other man without any change in his nature ascended to the very presence of the living God as the Qur'an and the Bible both teach. He alone could go where no angel dared to tread -to the ultimate throne of the God of glory. The Qur'an and the Bible do not teach that any other man ever did this. In this Jesus is unique as well.

d). The Second Coming. The Christian and Muslim worlds await the return of Jesus from heaven. The Qur'an and the Bible both teach that he alone is to herald the hour of Judgment. Christians and Muslims may differ in what they expect Jesus to accomplish on his return but both in any event expect him to take complete control of all the earth with himself as Judge of all. This alone puts him head and shoulders above all other men in accomplishment and again makes him unique among men - a uniqueness which is vested in majesty and glory.

Though he has been in the highest heavens for nearly two thousand years, he will return looking not a day older than he was when he first ascended to heaven. Over all these centuries neither death nor time have been able to make any impression on him. On this the Qur'an and the Bible are agreed as well.

Of no other man in history can we read of such a phenomenal beginning and end to his life on earth. And no other man than Jesus is now awaited by Christians and Muslims - and that from heaven as well. In the light of these admitted facts we can only conclude that Jesus Christ is a remarkably unique man. No one compares with him. In his birth, his character, destiny and ultimate glory he stands head and shoulders above all other men who have ever lived on earth.

Be it noted that the uniqueness of Jesus is not the consequence of favourable circumstances, nor the result of the favour of men, but solely the effect of the special will of God who in every way alone is responsible for his eminent

greatness. It is God who has made Jesus unique among men. It is by his power and will alone that we behold a man whose very being from start to finish is charged with exceptional greatness and honour. It is from heaven that his majesty originates and comes.

All this demands serious consideration. Certain questions are begged by these circumstances. Why did God vest Jesus with such uniqueness? What is implied by all these exceptional features of his life? What sort of man is this who does not share these features with other great men but has all of them vested in himself? And lastly - and most importantly - *who* indeed is this man Jesus, when these exceptional features of his life and personality demand that he cannot just be an ordinary man like all other men? The rest of this booklet will be devoted to a comparative study of the Qur'an and the Bible to find the ultimate answer to these questions.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS.

The unique features of the life of Jesus demand that he is more than a prophet. God has raised up many prophets who were ordinary men, who were born naturally, who died naturally, had failings common to other men, and were therefore in no way especially distinguished from other men except for the gift of prophecy and the work of God in their lives. But the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ, his sinlessness, his ascension and his second-coming demand and imply that he was not just a prophet. In the light of these unique features of his life, surely the Christian cannot be blamed for believing that he is pre-eminent in all things above all other men. Surely even the Muslim can see that, by the glorious nature of his life and destiny, there is more to him and his relationship with God than first meets the eye.

Quite obviously Jesus was not just a messenger. Whereas the Qur'an appeals to the fact that other messengers like him went before him (Surah 5.75), nevertheless in respect of his birth, life, destiny and second coming, it can hardly be said that those other messengers were like him. If Jesus was just a messenger of the same kind as the others, why did God interrupt his process of pro-creation to conceive Jesus in the womb of a virgin-woman by the power of his Spirit? Why did he lead him without blemish whatsoever in the ways of righteousness while leaving other messengers to wrong their souls occasionally? Why did God take Jesus to be with himself for all these centuries in his own glorious presence while leaving the other messengers to return to the dust whence they came? And why send him back to this world to take control of it and also choose him to be the herald of the Day of Judgment?

The suggestion that Jesus was just a messenger like all the others cannot be sustained against this wealth of evidence of his distinguished and exceptional life and honour - and particular closeness to God. While all other men have come by nature 'S way and gone by the way of nature, God seems to have deliberately pushed nature aside to have a direct influence and involvement in the life and

destiny of Jesus Christ. God brought him into the world by having him conceived by his Spirit in the womb of a virgin-woman. God raised him to heaven to be with him in his own glorious presence for all these many centuries. God is to send him to earth again to wind up human history and herald his Judgment. It is quite obvious that God is in every way involved in this man Jesus Christ. While other men come from the dust and return to it, Jesus came from God and returned to God (John 16.28). In some way God and Jesus have a relationship that transcends that enjoyed by any other being that has ever lived.

The Qur'an admits Biblical evidence that implies that Jesus has this exceptionally intense relationship with God which correspondingly demands that he was far more than just a messenger. Does the Qur'an give us any significance of the uniqueness of Jesus and does it harmonise and reveal what it is about him that makes him so exceptional in human history? Let us see whether it does - or whether we have to turn to the Bible to find the answer we are looking for, and to discover just who the man Jesus Christ really was.

#### 4. THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS IN THE QUR'AN.

We shall consider the four unique features of the life of Jesus as they appear in the Qur'an to discover whether we obtain any light on their significance.

a). The Virgin-Birth. The Qur'an treats the birth of Jesus purely as an expression of God's power and declares that it is no more significant than the creation of the first man Adam. We read:

She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal bath touched me? He said: So it will be. Allah createth what He will. If he decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is. *Surah 3.4 7*

Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is. *Surah 3. 59*

The second verse does not directly refer to the virgin-birth but by comparison with the first it is quite clear that this is what the Qur'an has in mind. In both verses the Qur'an teaches that Jesus was created and that this was purely a manifestation of God's power. In the second verse we read that his creation is neither different to nor more wonderful than that of Adam.

Let us briefly consider these two points. Firstly, was the virgin-birth just an expression of God's power? That it was brought about by the power of God goes without saying but this does not explain its meaning or purpose. Surely the great act of creating the whole world out of nothing, and the other allied facts of creation (the giving of life to men, animals, and other creatures) are sufficient proofs of God's creative power. What necessity was there to give a new demonstration of this power? In the Qur'an there are many occasions where Muhammad is told that, if the people will not believe in the evidence present in creation, nor will they believe if new portents and signs come to them. (See

Surah 6. 1-41, for example). So likewise the Qur'an teaches that no proof of the ultimate resurrection is needed for the unbelievers - the mere fact that God could create men out of nothing is surely proof that God can raise them from the dead (Surah 22.5). So we also consider that the creation itself is sufficient evidence of God's creative power - and if men will not believe in him despite this evidence, no latter portent will be able to make them do so. The virgin-birth of Jesus cannot just have been a manifestation of God's power. Indeed it would require only a very limited exercise of this power to cause it and there was also no visible demonstration of it. The virgin-birth could not be physically proved - there was no visible evidence of it. We accept it as a fact by faith in God's word that it did indeed so happen. But there was no way of physically proving it. Therefore we conclude that the virgin-birth could not have been an arbitrary demonstration of the power of God for the visible demonstration is entirely lacking. There must have been another reason for it.

Secondly, we must consider the suggestion in the Qur'an that the birth of Jesus is no different to the creation of Adam. We will immediately agree that, as an expression of the power of God, the virgin-birth is indeed no more wonderful than the creation of Adam. Rather it required a negligible exercise of this power in contrast to the creation of Adam, but this suggests all the more that there was some other purpose behind it.

What was the necessity for the virgin-birth of Jesus? God surely does not do such unusual things arbitrarily if they are unnecessary. He would surely only cause the virgin-birth if it were necessary to do so. Something must have required that Jesus be born in this way.

The comparison with Adam does not help us at all. Adam was *created* out of dust and could not have had a father or mother - it was necessary that the first man should be created without father or mother. But Jesus was *born* of a woman when the creative work of God had long ceased and the pro-creation of the human race had long been in existence. We can see why it was necessary for Adam to be created without father or mother - but what was the necessity for Jesus to be born of a mother alone? The comparison with Adam does not answer this question at all.

This question really demands a thorough answer when we put it in this way: why was *Jesus* born of a virgin -and no one else? Why should the mother of *Jesus* be the most eminent woman in the Qur'an and the Bible rather than some other woman? Compare these two verses:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb". *Luke 1.42*

And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah bath chosen thee and made thee pure, and bath preferred thee above all the women of creation. *Surah 3.42*

These verses unambiguously teach that Mary was the greatest woman who ever lived. Why was this? Because she was the virgin-mother of *Jesus*. She was the greatest among women because she mothered the greatest among men. All this demands that there was something extremely unique about her son - and that this uniqueness in some way made it necessary for Jesus to be conceived and born of a virgin-woman.

The only clue the Qur'an gives us is that the purpose of the angel's visit was to bestow on her a "faultless son". Somehow this exceptional holiness of Jesus made the virgin-birth necessary. But this only leads to the next feature that, with the others, leads up to the conclusion of the uniqueness of Jesus and does not actually reveal what that uniqueness was. But let us press on and see what light we can obtain.

b). The Sinlessness of Jesus. Why should Jesus be the

only man who was without sin among men? The Qur'an admits his sinlessness but gives us no reason for it. The fact that he was a prophet does not answer our question. Other prophets are not described in the Qur'an as faultless and quite a few are shown to be wrongdoers. But we must again ask - why was *Jesus* sinless and not other men? We could understand that he was only a messenger if he had one unique feature while all the other prophets

had exceptional features of their own. But *all* these unique features are vested in *one* man at the expense of all the others - and that man is *Jesus*. Here again the Qur'an does not reveal *what* made Jesus so unique.

c). The Ascension of Jesus. The Qur'an only gives one reason for the ascension of Jesus - God took him to heaven to save him from the murderous intentions of the Jews. But this hardly explains why God has elected to enjoy the presence of Jesus for nearly twenty centuries. If the sole purpose was to save him from the Jews, why did he not send him back when those who sought his life were dead? Surely God could have found more mundane ways of delivering Jesus if he was just a messenger like those who went before him. This was surely a most extraordinary and drastic way of saving him from the Jews.

We have concrete support for this argument from the Bible for shortly after Jesus was born, Herod, the King of Judea, sought his life when word came to him that the long-awaited Messiah had been born in Bethlehem. Immediately an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying:

"Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him". *Matthew 2. 13*

Joseph and Mary duly left for Egypt by night with the child. But when Herod died shortly afterwards, the angel again came to Joseph, saying:

"Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead". *Matthew 2. 20*

Surely God could have adopted a similar procedure the second time if he intended to rescue Jesus from the Jews. We must reject the theory that Jesus was taken to heaven solely as an escape-route from the hands of the Jews. Those who sought his life perished nineteen centuries ago, but God remains pleased to keep Jesus in his presence in heaven and has done so over all these generations since he ascended from the earth.

We can only conclude that it was the express purpose of God to raise Jesus to heaven in any event and that he most certainly did not do this purely to save him from the hands of the Jews. We must again ask - why did *Jesus* ascend to heaven, and not some other man? (John 3.13). Why did God will, between the time of the life of Jesus on earth and the end of time, that Jesus should reign with him in glory in the highest heavens? With all due respect we are constrained to conclude that the Qur'an gives us no answer to this question.

d). The Second-Coming. Why has God chosen Jesus to bring the whole world under his control? Why not Muhammad? Why will he not raise another man but instead has elected to vest Jesus with another glorious office that transcends any of those given to the other messengers?

Far from answering questions like these, the Muslim world has, in our view, devoted itself to efforts to explain away the uniqueness of Jesus rather than disclose wherein it consists. This tendency to explain away the glory of Jesus rather than investigate it can only lead to the path of error.

The wonderful birth of Jesus was caused by God's direct intervention. His whole life was one of absolute communion with God. The same God vested Jesus with majesty and glory by raising him to heaven and has decreed that he will be the herald of God's final sentence on all human history. Does not this pattern demand that there is something particularly glorious about the person of Jesus to knit all these unique features together? Surely they are all meaningless if Jesus was only a prophet and a messenger from God.

These circumstances are collective evidence that there is something majestic about the man Jesus but whatever it is, the Qur'an is silent on the matter. Why is this so? The answer is found in what follows. The Qur'an is known to the Christian world not so much for what it admits about Jesus but for what it denies about him. The Qur'an denies that Jesus is the Son of God and it denies that he was crucified. In our view - and we say this solely with respect to our right to state what we believe to be true and with no desire to cause offence - the Qur'an, by denying these two striking points about Jesus, has simultaneously robbed all the unique features it concedes of their significance. We shall proceed to behold how all these unique features harmonise and find their meaning and significance in the two fundamental doctrines of Christianity - that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for our sins.

## 5. THE REASONS FOR THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS.

a). Jesus is the Son of God.

The Virgin-Birth. If Jesus is the Son of God, it is absolutely necessary that he be born of a virgin-woman if he comes in the likeness of men. To be the Son of God he must have existed from all eternity. Therefore he could not have been born of a human father if he is the Son of God, when he became man. The life of the human race is in the male seed - Jesus could not be procreated by means of a human father if he is the Son of God. Any man born of a human father must be man and man alone. Only God can be the Father of the Son of God.

This explains the necessity of the virgin-birth and gives the reason for it. At last we see the significance of the virgin-birth. The necessity for it is now realised. Jesus had to be born of a virgin-woman if he is the Son of God and accordingly existed before becoming man. The reason for the exceptional birth of Jesus is also made clear by this fact as well as the necessity for it. He was born in this unique way by the special involvement and intervention of God because he is the Son of God. This is why God has caused all other men to come into the world by natural means (including Adam who was created out of the natural realm he found himself in) but was especially involved in the birth of Jesus. All other men are made out of the same dust Adam was created out of, but Jesus was conceived solely by the Spirit of God - because he is the Son of God. This is why he had this unique beginning to his life on earth - because he himself is unique in that he is the Son of God. This is indeed what the angel told Mary when he came to explain the miraculous conception:

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High ... therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God". *Luke 1. 32, 35*

The Sinlessness of Jesus. No Christian would believe that Jesus is the Son of God if he had ever sinned against God. It is essential that he be sinless if he is the Son of God for, if the Father and the Son be one as Jesus said they are (John 10.30), the Son must always do the will of his Father. And this we always find him so doing, as it is put in the following words:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise". *John 5.19*

If he is the Son of God, he must be one with the Father. Therefore he can do nothing of his own accord, for if he did anything independently of his own accord, he would no longer be one with the Father, nor would he be doing what the Father does - so he would not be the Son of God. One who is always doing the absolute will of God cannot sin against him. So we see why it is absolutely necessary that Jesus be sinless if he is the Son of God - because the Son of God can only be doing the will of his Father at all times. So Jesus said:

"I always do what is pleasing to him". *John 8. 29*

So we see why Jesus is the only man who is faultless and without sin. Ordinary men do things of their own accord, but the Son of God can only do the will of his Father in heaven.

The Ascension of Jesus. If Jesus had returned to dust like all other men naturally do, no Christian would believe that he is the Son of God. The Son surely must have his home in heaven. Therefore if he became man, he could not naturally go the way of all men but must ultimately return to heaven. If Jesus is the Son of God, his ascension to heaven is a necessity and also a fundamental feature required to prove the point.

We are seeing that the unique features of the life of Jesus not only, with one accord, support the belief that he is the Son of God, but are totally necessary features in his life if this belief is to be proved true. But surely it is also becoming clear that the very presence of these unique features - necessary only if he is the Son of God - imposes on our minds the realisation that he is indeed the Son of God. These unique features of necessity imply that the man they point to must possess the only uniqueness that can possibly make these features necessary - he must be the Son of God.

The Qur'an, to make known to our finite minds and give us some understanding of God's glory, often tells us of the throne on which God sits (Surahs 10.4, 7.54, 13.2, etc). This metaphorical language makes us aware of the royal sovereignty that God enjoys over the universe. The Bible makes the same point, but to give us a concrete understanding of the status of Jesus in heaven, says in similar language that he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God:

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God". *Acts 7.56*

God accomplished his great might in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places. *Ephesians 1.20*

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. *Hebrews 8.1*

This is not to be taken hyper-literally but purely in the sense that the Qur'an speaks of the throne of God. In both the Qur'an and the Bible the expression reveals the regal authority God has over the universe and the Bible speaks of Jesus at the right hand of the throne to express the relationship and status he enjoys in heaven with God the Father.

In most kingdoms in Biblical times every person had to bow before the King on his throne - his son alone being excepted. His wife, his daughters, lords, princes officers and subjects had to bow before him on his throne and acknowledge his rule, but the king's son did not do so - he stood or sat at the right hand of the throne. The reason for this is surely obvious - he is the heir to the throne. The father's throne is his also. This is why the Bible says Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of God and sometimes speaks of it as his throne

(Hebrews 1.8 and Revelation 3.21). As a son was in those days to his father the King, so is Jesus towards his Father in heaven. He ascended to heaven to be in God's own glorious presence (as we have seen from both the Qur'an and the Bible) because he is the Son of God. The Qur'an speaks of the throne of God - the rightful place of Jesus in heaven is at the right hand of him who sits upon it.

The Second-Coming. Who but the Son of God could bring the judgment of God? This alone explains the second coming. The Son of God, by becoming man, has become the obvious medium of the judgment of God for two reasons. Firstly, he has revealed God to men. The Qur'an only professes to reveal the will and attributes of God. Jesus claimed to reveal God himself to men. The following verses make this clear:

"All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him". *Matthew 11.27*

"He who sees me sees him who sent me". *John 12.45*

"He who has seen me has seen the Father". *John 14.9*

Secondly, he has brought men face-to-face with God. It is fitting, therefore, that, having become a man, the Son of God should become the medium of the judgment of God to be revealed at the last time:

"For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself also, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man". *John 5. 26-27*

This alone explains the second-coming, gives a reason for it, and makes it necessary. Thus the secondcoming also harmonizes with the uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God. He stands for God's judgment in heaven as the one who reveals God to men and, having become a man, is fitly appointed to call them to judgment.

So we see that all the unique features in the life of Jesus owe their necessity and reality to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Indeed the fulsome existence of all these features demands the conclusion that he is the Son of God. If any one of them was lacking, Christian belief would fall to the ground. But in the Bible every crucial circumstance exists to support the doctrine that he is the Son of God.

What is fascinating, however, is that the Qur'an admits all these unique features! While denying that Jesus is the Son of God, by the features it admits, it is tacitly and unreservedly implying that he is indeed the Son of God. For there is nothing in the Qur'an on the features of the life of Jesus that can be brought as evidence against the theory that he is the Son of God. For every feature that it allows implies that he is. We can draw only one conclusion - Jesus is unique in the Qur'an and the Bible because he is the Son of God. Even though he was a

man on earth, everything about him places him ultimately on the level of deity rather than on the level of humanity.

b). The Crucifixion of Jesus.

We have seen to some extent why Jesus is coming a second time to earth, but we are at this stage constrained to enquire why he ever came from his heavenly abode the first time to dwell among men. Why did the Son of God become the unique man Jesus? Whenever God wished to send a message to mankind, he raised up prophets. Why then did he send his Son? Why did the eternally holy Son of God come down to live among sinful men in a mass of corrupt humanity? The adjectives in that question give the answer. Jesus was a unique man - he came to earth because he had a unique mission to fulfil.

God had given laws, messages, covenants, warnings and exhortations to men in times past through the prophets, but none of these helped to turn the human race from its wickedness and love of sin. No matter what God sent, men continued to sin. When he told the Israelites to have no other God but himself, they promptly made a golden calf and worshipped it. All men sinned because they were sinners. Sin is an integral part of human nature - no man is free from its power. As Jesus himself said, "Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8.34). Within the body of flesh that weighs the human soul down is every fountain of lust, greed, pride, envy, malice, and all manner of iniquity. From the head to the foot the human body is the breeding ground and playground of sin. Every sinful thought, word and deed has its source within man and not within the world in which he lives. It is his own evil heart that makes him stray after sinful passions. The temptations of the flesh, the love of money and the pride of life are rooted in men because sin has a vicious control within which makes it impossible for men to follow after God in sinless and perfect purity. Neither the law of God on tablets of stone nor the commands he gave through the prophets could overcome the basic tendency in us to commit sin and to follow its impulses.

Jesus came down to earth from heaven to do what the law and the prophets could not do:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. *Romans 8. 3-4.*

The pure and sinless Son of God took on human flesh with all the power of God's holiness that he possessed without measure. This ensured that the coming battle between the Son of God and sin in the flesh could only result in victory for the former. Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" - that is, he took on the very thing that has been in all ages the fountainhead of sin and wickedness - the human body.

He did not conquer it from without - he entered it from within. For centuries sin had found an irresistible spring in the human body for the exercise of its designs and purposes. Jesus, as it were, met sin in its own lair. He went right into its camp and fortress. He became man and assumed a body which in all other men had fallen victim to the power of sin.

Jesus allowed that power to try its worst on him. He went into the desert and fasted for forty days and nights without any food or water until he was emaciated from hunger. The evil one fired his deadliest darts of sin at Jesus. The Spirit of God had made stones his companions. Satan tempted him to disobey God and satisfy the hunger of his flesh by turning them into loaves of bread. Jesus refused this.

God had made the wilderness his domicile - Satan offered him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment, that for which emperors of many nations have striven without success. By the power he possessed, Jesus could conquer them all. He needed only to listen to Satan as other men do rather than to his Father who had another kingdom prepared for him. Jesus duly resisted and defied this temptation as well.

God had made him the loneliest man on earth in that wilderness - Satan offered him the homage of all peoples if he would only seek their obeisance for himself alone against his Father's will. Jesus rejected this. He did not want men to honour him according to the senses of human pride such as Satan was offering him. He did not wish to be a ruler after the order of this world - a companion of kings who have achieved fame and prestige solely because they have sought the praise of men rather than the praise of God which Jesus always sought. He was not prepared to go the way of so many before him by seeking to rule the earth according to his own devices, rather than humbly submit to God in total faithfulness.

He "condemned sin in the flesh". No human body at that moment was, by its emaciation, less inclined to resist the power of sin. But Jesus destroyed the power of sin in its own lair and all that remained was to pass on the fruit of his victory to the captives of sin whom he had come to liberate.

But to do this he had to not only suffer the fullest temptation of sin but also its direst consequences. He voluntarily went to the cross to achieve this. God will vent his full wrath against sin. The human body is the only place it will be found and it was accordingly in a human body that Jesus endured on behalf of all men everywhere on the cross the full consequence of sin. He entered its deepest chamber when he died. Death is the worst effect of sin. Jesus drank its dregs to the last to obtain an absolute triumph over it. When he was crucified he endured the wrath of God against sin and when he died he paid its penalty once for all.

When he rose from the dead three days later, he had once for all gained a glorious and inestimable victory over God's greatest foe. When he ascended on

high he sent down the Spirit of God to his disciples so that they might share the full spoils of his victory.

He had made it possible for men to be reconciled to God, to be forgiven of their sins, and to obtain power within their weak bodies to live triumphantly by the indwelling strength of the Spirit of God within them. He had made it possible for men to walk by the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ, to be fully controlled by it, and so fulfil the requirement of God's law that men should love him with all their hearts, souls and minds. He had opened the door so that all men could be delivered of their sinful tendencies and become partakers of the divine holiness and walk in the ways of righteousness.

## 6. THE GLORY OF JESUS IN THE BIBLE.

Jesus came into this world the first time to become like us in every respect so that he might free us from the evil that besets us. By emptying himself of the glory which he has had with the Father from all eternity, he became a man like us and looked so much like a man and nothing else during his period of voluntary condescension on earth that millions of people to this day think he was nothing more than a man. But Jesus will come a second time and this time the roles will be reversed. He will come as he really is with all his glory and the radiance of his majesty will make the sun seem like a faint flicker in comparison. As he said of his coming:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". *Matthew 24. 29-30*

Every other form of light will fail and pass away when he is revealed in all his resplendent glory. But as he came into the world the first time to be made like us so he will come a second time to make all his true followers just like himself. When he appears from heaven on that day in all his glory,

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father".  
*Matthew 13.43*

Then every vestige of sin will be torn away and he will raise his own in glorious, sinless bodies. As he in his immeasurable love for sinners took all our evil deeds and sin upon himself when he died on the cross, so by his inestimable grace and love he will give us his righteousness and sinlessness in its place.

This man Jesus is unique because he is unique in his love, glory, holiness, righteousness and eternal majesty. He is the eternal Son of God and he showed us how much he loved us, and what are the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us, when he died on the cross for our sins.

What will you do with this unique man Jesus? Will you fall at his feet in awesome wonder at his honour and grace, or will you fall under his feet on that Day when God's judgment is revealed and his enemies are trampled underfoot? Will you choose to believe in the Son of God and find eternal life in his name, or will you continue to reject him in his resplendent glory and the salvation he is offering you and find instead that the wrath of God rests upon you?

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. *John 20.31*

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