

# The Descriptive Titles of Jesus in the Quran

وصف سيدنا عيسى عليه السلام في

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Islam, besides Christianity, is the only major world religion that recognizes Jesus. A Muslim's belief is incomplete without Jesus. Prophet Muhammad said:

“If anyone testifies that none has the right to be worshipped but God alone who has no partners, and that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger, and that Jesus is God's servant and His Messenger and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a Spirit from Him, and that Paradise is true, and Hell is true, God will admit him into Paradise with the deeds which he has done even if those deeds were few.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, without sound belief in Jesus, one can never earn God's Paradise. As with other prophets of God, Muslims add to his name, *alai his-salam*, which means, ‘Peace be upon him.’<sup>2</sup> Even though Jesus said, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you,”**<sup>3</sup> in the Gospel, Christians rarely use any honorific

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1 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

2 This is the ‘literal’ meaning. The most knowledgeable scholars have interpreted it to mean, ‘**may God keep him safe from all evil**’.

3 John 14:27

term but ‘Christ’, and this as part of his name. Though this may be due to the idea that the Christian does not pray for him, but to him, it shows that Muslims have a great deal of respect for him despite not sharing such a viewpoint.

Quran is the sacred scripture of Islam, and in it, more than ninety verses spread across fifteen chapters of the Quran discuss Jesus. Three chapters of the Quran are named after their reference to Jesus: the third chapter of Quran, ‘The Family of Imran,’ is named after the father of Mary; the fifth chapter, ‘The Table,’ is likely named after the last supper. Lastly, the nineteenth chapter is named after Mary.

### **His Name in the Quran**

In Arabic, Jesus is known as *Eesa*. In sixteen of the 25 places in the Quran where *Eesa* is used, he is called “the son of Mary” (*Ibn Maryam*). Since he had no father, he was named so after his mother.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Descriptive Titles of Jesus in the Quran:**

#### **(1) The Messiah**

Prior to the appearance of Jesus, belief in the coming of the Messiah has been a basic and fundamental part of traditional Judaism. It is part of Maimonides’ Thirteen Articles of Faith which are considered the minimum requirements of Jewish belief.<sup>5</sup> In the Shemoneh Esrei prayer<sup>6</sup>, recited three times daily, modern

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4 The Bible refers to Jesus as the ‘son of Mary’ as well (Mark 6:3): “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary...”

5 “12. I firmly believe in the coming of the Messiah; and although He may tarry, I daily hope for His coming.” The Jewish Encyclopedia  
(<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>)>

6 “Give us understanding, O Eternal, our God, to know Thy ways, and circumcise our hearts to fear Thee; and do Thou pardon us that we may be redeemed. And remove from us bodily pain; and fatten us with the fertility of Thy land; and our dispersed ones from the four corners of the earth do Thou gather together; and they

Jewry prays for the Messiah who will be their king from the line of David to come and restore the glories of its golden age. In Hebrew, 'Messiah' means the 'anointed one.' It is interesting to note that the Old Testament prophecy emphasizes the humanity of the Messiah by referring to him as the "son of man" (Daniel 7: 13)<sup>7</sup> and not God.

The ideology of the Messiah has a central position in Christian theology. According to the Bible, Jesus claimed to be the expected Messiah of the Jews (John 4:25-26)<sup>8</sup>, but they rejected him. Therefore, Christians apply 'Christ' - the Greek word for 'Messiah' - to Jesus. In addition, they also maintain the Messiah will be the son of God.

The Quran corrects Jews and Christians in their excesses. It considers the Jews to be in the right in believing the Messiah to be human, but equates their rejection of Jesus to disbelief,

"And (We cursed them) for their disbelief... and their boastful claim: Indeed, we have killed the [so-called] Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of God. And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him." (Quran 4:156-157)

On the other hand, the Quran agrees with the Christians who identify Jesus to be the Messiah, but considers their insistence that the Messiah is the son of God to be blasphemy:

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that go astray against the knowledge of Thee shall be judged; and upon the evil-doers do Thou lift up Thy hand: but may the righteous rejoice in the building of Thy city, and in the refounding of Thy Temple, and in the sprouting up of a horn unto David Thy servant, and in the preparing of a light for Jesse's son, Thy Messiah. Before we call Thou wilt answer. Blessed be Thou, O Eternal, who hearest prayer". The Jewish Encyclopedia (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>).

7 "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him."

8 "(6) The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.' (7) Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he.' "

“Indeed, they are unbelievers who say, ‘God is the Messiah, the son of Mary.’” (Quran 5:72)

The truth, according to the Quran, is that:

“The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger; messengers before him had indeed passed away.” (Quran 5:75)

Furthermore, the Quran states that the Messiah called to the worship of “the true God” like all the prophets before him:

“But the Messiah said, ‘O Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’” (Quran 5:72)

The Quran refers to Jesus as the Messiah (*al-Maseeh*) at least nine times.<sup>9</sup> One of the explanations given by Muslim lexicographers is that Jesus was the Messiah because he anointed the eyes of the blind to cure them (Quran 3:43; Mark 6:13; James 5:14), or because he used to lay hands on the sick.

## **(2) Sign**

The Quran describes Jesus to be a ‘Sign,’ an *aayah* in the Quran. In the terminology of the Quran a miracle is a ‘sign’ of God to display divine might and unrestricted ability to do acts outside the chain of cause and effect. In this sense, the virgin birth of Jesus is a miracle; a wonderful show of God’s mighty power to do as He pleases. Therefore, Jesus is a ‘sign’ not only to the Israelites but to the entire world:

“And We made the son of Mary and his mother as a Sign.” (Quran 23:50)

“...We may make him a sign to men...” (Quran 19:21)

“and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.” (Quran 21:91)

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<sup>9</sup> Quran 3: 45, 4: 157, 171, 172, 5: 17, 72, 75; 9: 30, 31.

In addition, the Quran declares Jesus' second coming to be a 'sign,' an announcement that the Judgment Day is coming close, **“And indeed, Jesus will be a sign for the Hour (of Judgment), so have no doubt about it, and follow Me. This is a straight path.”** (Quran 43:61)

### **(3) “Word” from God**

Jesus is referred to as a “Word” from God in three passages in the Quran. No other prophet has been described with such a title.

“...O Mary! Behold, God gives you good news of a word from Him, who shall become known as the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary...” (Quran 3:45)

“...The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary...” (Quran 4:171)

“...God gives you good news of (a son whose name is) John, (who comes) to confirm a word from God...” (Quran 3:39)

Christians believe that in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus is identified as “the Word” (*logos* in Greek) incarnated, or made flesh. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...”**

The Christian idea of the *logos* is completely different from the simple Islamic understanding of the ‘Word.’ The idea of the Greek *logos* may be traced back at least to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC philosopher, Heraclitus. He proposed that there was a *logos* in the cosmic process analogous to the reasoning power in man. The Greek speaking Jewish philosopher, Judaeus Philo of Alexandria (15 BC - 45 CE), taught that the *logos* was the intermediary between God and the cosmos. The writings of Philo were preserved and cherished by the Church, and provided the

inspiration for a sophisticated Christian philosophical theology. “The identification of Jesus with the *logos*... was further developed in the early church but more on the basis of Greek philosophical ideas than on Old Testament motifs. This development was dictated by attempts made by early Christian theologians and apologists to express the Christian faith in terms that would be intelligible to the Hellenistic world and to impress their hearers with the view that Christianity was superior to, or heir to, all that was best in pagan philosophy.”<sup>10</sup>

Islam provides a clear explanation of how Jesus was a “Word” from God. But first the process of human procreation must be understood. The Might of God is behind everything. Whenever God decides to do something, like giving life or causing death, He says the word “Be” and it happens,

“It is He who gives life and causes death; and when He decrees a matter, He but says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.” (Quran 40:68)

The first step in human procreation is the biological union between male and female reproductive cells in addition to the will of God. Since Jesus was born without a father, he was not conceived by the male sperm cells. Instead his creation, similar to Adam, is solely attributed to the Word of God, ‘Be.’ God says:

“Indeed the likeness of Jesus to God as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was.” (Quran 3:59)

The Quran gives details of Jesus’ conception. Mary was not impregnated by a man. Angel Gabriel, referred to in the Quran as the Spirit, brought the soul of Jesus – his soul was created by God

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10 “logos.” Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9048773>)

like other human souls - to breathe it into Mary. On seeing the angel, she expressed with surprise,

**“My Lord,’ said Mary, how shall I have a son when no man has ever touched me?” (Quran 3:47)**

The angel answered,

**“Thus it is: God creates what He wills: When he decrees a matter, He only says to it: ‘Be,’ and it is.” (Quran 3:47)**

Gabriel then blew the soul of Jesus into Mary, **“so We blew into it (her womb) through Our angel.” (Quran 66:12)**

In essence, Jesus is God’s ‘Word’ because he came into existence by God’s Word - ‘Be’ - as the Quran describes in another passage,

**“His word which He conveyed unto Mary...” (Quran 4:171)**

#### **(4) “Spirit” from God**

In the Quran, God attributes certain creations to Himself as a means of respect and honor. For example, God calls the sacred mosque in Mecca “My House” as a means of veneration. God says:

**“And We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael saying: ‘Purify My House for those who circumambulate (it), and those who abide (in it) for devotion, and those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves.” (Quran 2:125)**

The Quran describes Jesus to be a ‘Spirit’ proceeding from God:

**“We breathed into her (Mary) from My Spirit.” (Quran 21:91)**

**“...a Spirit created by Him.”(Quran 4:171)**

**“We blew into (her womb) through Our angel.” (Quran 66:12)**



Jesus was a spirit, or more correctly, a soul created by God, brought by Gabriel, a mighty angel of God, and breathed into Mary:

**“We blew into (her womb from her garment) through Our angel.” (Quran 66:12)**

Jesus was not a ‘part,’ ‘person,’ or ‘activity’ of God that separated and dwelled inside Mary. He is called a ‘Spirit’ from God as a symbol of respect and honor, not divinity.

Likewise, God also gives Adam this characteristic of being His spirit. God said when He ordered the angels to prostrate to Adam upon his creation.:

“So, when I have fashioned him (Adam) completely and breathed into him (Adam) the soul which I created for him, then fall down prostrating yourselves unto him.” (Quran 38:72)

Indeed Jesus is given an honored status in the Quran and is has been given certain titles and descriptions not given to other prophets, but this in no way should cause a person to believe that Jesus was anything other than mortal. This can be summarized in the following verse in which God says:

“O People of the Book (the Jews and the Christians)! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak (lies) against God, but (speak) the truth; the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, is only a messenger of God and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a Spirit from Him; believe therefore in God and His messengers, and say not, ‘Three’. Desist, it is better for you; Indeed God is only one diety; far be it from His glory that He should have a son, To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth, and God is All-Sufficient as a Disposer of affairs.” (Quran 4:171)