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Prepared by the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations of the Office for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These Talking Points are not intended as position papers, but as discussion starters, with the hope of eliciting a broad range of responses and the deepening of relationships through understanding. Feedback is welcome at the address below or via e-mail to [erinfo@elca.org](mailto:erinfo@elca.org). Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version. English interpretations of the Qur'an are as found in [The Qur'an: A new translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem](#), Oxford University Press, 2004.

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## TALKING POINTS

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#2

### TOPICS IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

#### JESUS AND MUHAMMAD IN THE QUR'AN

*The angels said to Mary, "Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure. He has truly chosen you above all women." Q 3:42*

*The angels said: "Mary, God gives you news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, who will be held in honor in this world and the next, who will be one of those brought near to God. He will speak to people in his infancy and in his adulthood. He will be one of the righteous." Q 3:45-46*

Jesus and Mary both play a prominent role in the Qur'an; chapter 19 even bears Mary's name. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus is God's Messenger, sent to reveal the Gospel and call His people back from their erring ways. Jesus performed miracles, healed the sick, and raised the dead (by God's permission). Muslims believe that Jesus was miraculously conceived and born of the Virgin Mary, that he was taken bodily into heaven at the end of his (first) earthly ministry, and that he will come again at the end of time.

Like Muhammad (who is regarded as the final Messenger and "seal of the Prophets"), Jesus receives the highest honor among Muslims as a Prophet and Messenger. According to the Qur'an, there have been many prophets and messengers throughout history, beginning with Adam and continuing through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and others. In fact, the Qur'an asserts that God has sent a messenger to "every nation;" some of these messengers are known, but others unknown to history. Whenever the name of a known Messenger or Prophet is pronounced, Muslims invoke the blessings and peace of God upon him.

*God and His angels bless the prophet—so you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace. Q 33: 56*

The Qur'an emphasizes the high calling of Muhammad as a Messenger and Prophet and admonishes his followers to pay him their respects. He is described essentially as a warner and giver of good news, and as a prophet and messenger of God like the ones sent before him. The Qur'an encourages Muhammad not to give up in the face of adversity, reminding him that messengers before him faced similar problems.

Muslims hold a deep love for their prophet Muhammad. They consider him an exemplary human being and are confident that living in imitation of his faith, practice, and compassion brings the believer closer to God and the God-willed life on earth. On the Day of Judgment, many Muslims believe, the Prophet Muhammad will plead on their behalf before God. He is closer to them than their own kin, and many are prepared to suffer in defense of his good name and honor. Parents often name their male children Muhammad to elicit his blessing; the celebration of his birthday is in many places one of the most joyous events in the Islamic calendar. Love for the Prophet Muhammad has been expressed in poetry and songs throughout the Islamic world.

*So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a "Trinity"—stop [this], that is better for you—God is only one God, He is far above having a son.... Q 4:171b*

*When God says, "Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God"?" he will say, "May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say...." Q 5:116a*

The Qur'an teaches that Jesus, while an extraordinary messenger and prophet of God, is not the Son of God. In Islam, anyone who makes a human being equal to God is guilty of *shirk* (the sin of associating anything in the honor that belongs to God alone). Therefore, according to the Qur'an, God is One (whereas Trinitarian language gives the impression that Christians believe in more than one God). Furthermore, the Qur'an does not mention divine redemption through the atoning passion and death of the Son of God. In fact, the Qur'an appears to deny that Christ was crucified at all (see Q 4:155-159; many Muslims believe that someone else, perhaps Judas or one of the disciples, died on the cross in Jesus' place). Instead, the Qur'an places the

responsibility for one's sin on the individual human who will be judged by God on the basis of his or her works. In judgment, however, God is merciful and forgives the sins of those who are truly repentant.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Many Muslims around the world were dismayed when, some years ago, a Danish newspaper published derogatory cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Can you understand this dismay? Can you think of treatments of Jesus or Mary that have made *you* very upset?
2. Is belief in the Trinity belief in three gods? As a Christian, how do you explain your belief in *one* God who is "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"?
3. Many Muslims have believed that Jesus was too honored by God to suffer the terrible shame of crucifixion, and that it is fitting that God rescue Jesus from such a fate. As a Christian, how do you explain that God the Father abandons the beloved Son to such an ignominious death?