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Rocket Science

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In the name of Allah,
most Gracious, most Merciful

The significance of Shaban

The eighth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, Shaban, starts in early March, insha Allah (swt). Why is Shaban important?

Abu Bakr al-Warraaq al-Balkhi (ra) was a 9th-century Persian scholar, and an uncle of At-Tirmidhi, the famous collector of hadiths. He is often quoted as saying, "The month of Rajab is the month of planting (your seeds), Shaban is the month of watering them, and Ramadan is the month of harvesting the crop." In other words, Rajab and Shaban are important because they immediately precede Ramadan.

Some scholars say that the linguistic root of the word Shaban is "a branch" because it "branches off" and leads to many good things. It acts as a bridge between the two blessed months of Rajab and Ramadan. However, many

Muslims do not take advantage of the month. Prophet Muhammad (saw) said, "(Shaban) is a month occurring between Rajab and Ramadan to which people do not pay much attention" (An-Nasai).

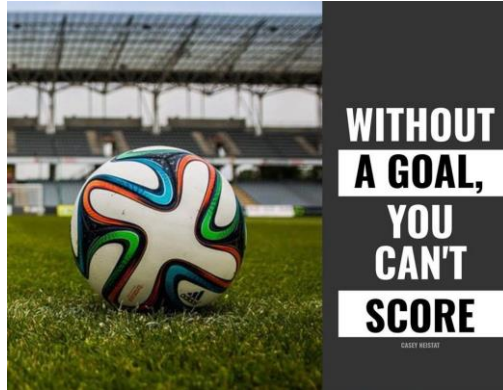
Shaban is thus the last stop before the blessed month of Ramadan, during which all blessings are increased. We therefore need to use Shaban to prepare for Ramadan. What follows is a reminder of some of the ways we can prepare.

Plan

A saying common in business circles is, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." That is, unless you make a plan, you will not know clearly what you are trying to achieve and, in all probability, you will fail to achieve it.

Make a list of all the things – internal and external – you wish to change about yourself, in your jihad to be a better person and a better Muslim. Then start taking the small steps to make those changes during Shaban. Here is a possible list:





- Stop missing prayers.
- Say all your prayers on time.
- Say your prayers with maximum concentration, humility and submission (khushu).
- Eliminate any poor manners you may have and develop good manners (akhlaq).
- Eliminate any ill feelings towards others, and increase your forgiveness.
- Hold your loose tongue, and end backbiting.

Revive the prophetic example

Another item you can add to the list above is:

- Stop avoiding the opportunities to perform simple sunnah acts.

The Prophet (saw) said, "Whoever revives a sunnah from my sunnah, and the people practise it, will have the same reward of those who practise it, without their reward diminishing" (Ibn Majah). In other words, you can revive a sunnah in your own behaviour, but you should also encourage others, such as your family, to adopt it too. The rewards are great.

The full context of the hadith quoted above is as follows:

Usamah bin Zaid said (ra), "I said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I do not see you fasting any month as much as Shaban.' He said: 'That is a month between Rajab and Ramadan to which people do not pay much attention. It is a month in which the deeds are taken up to the Lord of the worlds, and I like that my deeds be taken up when I am fasting'" (An-Nasai).

Prophet Muhammad (saw) used to love fasting during Shaban, and frequently fasted in it. There are hadiths that attest to this.

"The most beloved of months for the Messenger of Allah to fast in was Shaban" (Abu Daud).

"I never saw the Messenger of Allah fasting for an entire month except in Ramadan, and I never saw him fast more than he did in Shaban" (Bukhari, Muslim).

Needless to say, performing optional fasts during the month of Shaban prepares you well for the compulsory fasts of Ramadan.

Remembrance of Allah

As at many other times during the Islamic year, remembrance of Allah (thikr) is encouraged. The angels congregate at gatherings of thikr, and Allah (swt) casts His mercy on those who attend. The October 2021 issue of *Rocket Science*¹ gave detailed guidelines for thikr.

1 [mtalbertislamiccentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Rocket-Science-Oct-2021.pdf](https://www.mtalbertislamiccentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Rocket-Science-Oct-2021.pdf)

The meaning of Christmas part 2:

When was Jesus (Isa, as) born?

In the last issue of *Rocket Science*¹, we examined the meaning of Christmas. Firstly, we acknowledged that the majority of people nowadays who celebrate Christmas, do not do so with any religious significance. Secondly, we quoted a Jewish rabbi who gave several reasons why Jews do not consider Jesus (Isa, as) as anything more than a great human, but not the son of God. The idea of Jesus (as) as a son of God in any literal sense runs counter to the Islamic concept of *shirk*, associating humans with God. The rabbi concluded, "I am in full agreement with the Qur'an's teachings about God."

In this second part of a three-part examination of Christmas, we look at the date. Was Jesus born on 25 December?

The simple answer is that "No one knows the real birthday of Jesus! No date is given in the Bible"². So, the celebration of the birth of Jesus (as) is very probably on the wrong day in the year.

Is this important? Of course. It would not make sense to celebrate Waitangi Day on any day except 6 February, because the Treaty was signed on 6 February 1840. Similarly, Malcolm X Day in the USA is celebrated on 19 May, Malcolm's birthday in 1925.

Why 25 December?

"There are at least three possible origins for the December date"³.

Firstly, 25 March was given as the date of Jesus's conception by an early Christian historian, Sextus Julius Africanus (180? – 250?). In

Christian circles, this is known as the Annunciation, and is still celebrated on 25 March. The human gestation period is (just over) nine months, giving 25 December as the date of Jesus's birth.

The Annunciation is in fact described in the Quran (3:45 onwards; also see 19:16 onwards), but no indication of any date is given. "Behold! The angels said, 'O Mary! God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God.'" Note that Jesus (as) is described as one of those nearest to God; he is not God.

Secondly, the middle of winter (in the northern hemisphere) had long been a time of celebration around the world, centuries before the arrival of Jesus. There were midwinter festivals in ancient Babylon and Egypt, and Germanic fertility festivals also took place at this time. The birth of the ancient sun-god Attis in Phrygia (modern-day Turkey) was celebrated on 25 December, as was the birth of the Persian sun-god, Mithras. The Romans celebrated Saturnalia, a festival dedicated to Saturn, the god of peace and plenty, that ran 17 – 24 December. The festival of Saturnalia was followed, on 25 December, by a celebration of the rebirth of the Unconquered Sun (*Sol Invictus*) marking the return of longer days and extended hours of sunlight after the winter solstice.



Thirdly, the birthday of Jesus (as) was not celebrated by the early Christians. It was only made a formal Christian celebration in 336, under the Roman emperor Constantine. He had made Christianity the preferred religion of the Roman empire, and it seems likely that he chose 25 December as the date in order to eclipse and weaken the existing pagan celebrations (Saturnalia, etc). However, "the date was not widely accepted in the Eastern Empire, where January 6 had been favored, for another half-century, and Christmas did not become a major Christian festival until the 9th century"³. In Eastern Orthodox national churches, including those of Russia, Georgia, Egypt, the Ukraine, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and the Greek Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Christmas is still celebrated on 6 January, using the older Julian Calendar. Around the year 200, Clement of Alexandria wrote that a group in Egypt celebrated the nativity on 20 May.

In the northern hemisphere, 25 December is in midwinter, when temperatures may be freezing, people may be snowbound, and the weather is generally miserable. It is easy to see why people would want to have some kind of celebration to cheer them up. This does not make sense in the southern hemisphere, though, where it is midsummer.

There is an attractive Christian carol entitled "In the bleak midwinter", whose first two verses go:

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;

snow had fallen, snow on snow,
snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him,
nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away
when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable
place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty, Jesus
Christ.

If Jesus was born in a stable (Christians often use the word *manger*) because there was no room in the inn, this is in fact persuasive evidence that it did not occur in winter. There is another carol entitled "As shepherds watched their flocks by night" (an angel appeared to them and Jesus was born in a stable). In the northern hemisphere midwinter, no shepherd would leave his flocks of sheep out in the fields if they had a warmer stable to keep them in overnight. Shepherds used to rent out their stables at night during warmer times of year, to people who could not afford other accommodation. The stables were empty because the sheep were out in the fields. So, "in the bleak midwinter" when "earth stood hard as iron" (ie was frozen hard), the shepherds would take their flocks into the stables at night, and the stables would not be available for people to stay in. That is, it is very unlikely Jesus was born in midwinter.

In conclusion, "Bottom line: Nobody knows for sure why Dec. 25 is celebrated as Christmas"⁴.



A Turkish miniature depicting the birth of Jesus (see Quran, Surah Mariam, #19, verse 23)



The pop group Boney M had a hit with a Christmas song entitled “Mary’s Boy Child”, that is played in shopping centres, etc in the leadup to Christmas. Its lyrics begin, “Long time ago in Bethlehem, so the Holy Bible say, Mary’s boy child Jesus Christ was born on Christmas Day.” If “Christmas Day” here means 25 December, then there is no evidence that this is true. The Holy Bible says nothing about the date. If “Christmas Day” means “Jesus’s birthday”, then this is a tautology and meaningless: everyone was born on their birthday.

Was Jesus (as) born in year 1?

It may not be obvious to readers, but the Western Gregorian New Year (1 January) also celebrates the birth of Jesus (as) (unless, like Christmas for most people, it is celebrated without any religious or historical significance). Islamic New Year (1 Muharram) commemorates the establishment of the first Islamic community in Madinah,

1443 lunar years ago. Similarly, Gregorian New Year commemorates the birth of Jesus (as).

Did the birth of Jesus (as) take place in year 1? (There is no year 0; we go from 1 BCE immediately to 1 CE.) That is, was it 2,021 years ago? Again, there is no conclusive evidence, in the Bible or elsewhere, to determine the year.

In September 1994, the BBC World Service radio wished everyone a happy new millennium because, they argued, the most reliable historical date for the birth of Jesus was September in the year 6 BC (BC meaning “before Christ!”).

Conclusion

As even Christians are prepared to admit, nobody knows for sure when Jesus (as) was born. However, all the evidence points to the conclusion that he was not born on 25 December, and it did not take place in year 1.

1 mtalbertislamiccentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Rocket-Science-Feb-2022.pdf

2 www.whychristmas.com/customs/25th.shtml

3 www.britannica.com/story/why-is-christmas-in-december

4 www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/12/25/why-is-christmas-on-dec-25-a-brief-history-lesson-that-may-surprise-you

The rain held off for Peacenic

Wellington Abrahamic Council (WAC) went ahead and held its third annual Peacenic on what was forecast to have been a wet Sunday afternoon in February. Miraculously, after heavy rain all night continuing late into the morning, it remained dry for the duration of the three-hour event.

Someone commented dryly (no pun intended), "What's the worst that can happen? We get wet!" And a Jewish member of the council said, "Funny thing is, we have prayers in Judaism for dew and rain, but I'm not aware of any for dryness."

Like all WAC events in current times, this one was entry by vaccine pass. All three religions are clear on our obligations to protect ourselves and others from harm, including infection.

The small gathering of Christians, Jews and Muslims met in the newly selected, family-friendly location of



WAC organiser for this event David Blocksidge chatting with fellow WAC member Parwaiz Karamat

Trentham Memorial Park in Upper Hutt, half an hour's drive from downtown Wellington.

The food people brought to share was mainly vegetarian and it was good to see the sensitivity shown towards others' religious requirements in this respect.

One attendee who was welcomed was Massey University chaplain Jill Shaw, who had driven from Auckland for other reasons and took the opportunity to meet the diverse faith group.

New connections were forged and beneficial projects were discussed.

Peacenic began in Auckland in 2016 under the auspices of the Council of Christians and Muslims (CCM). It grew out of a desire to replace the polarising bad-news stories that dominate the media with real experiences of hospitality and friendship in our own backyard. The simplest gift of sharing time and food is rewarding in itself but goes beyond that to offer a glimpse of the world as it could be.

In our increasingly multi-religious, multi-ethnic community, the desire was to help build bridges across the divisions that have historically separated Muslims, Jews and Christians.

The weather and the pandemic combined to put many people off attending this year's event, so WAC are looking forward to next year's Peacenic and clearly hoping for better weather, a pandemic in retreat, and greater numbers attending. WAC generally holds several public events each year; details are on their website (<https://abrahamic.nz>).





Sam (left), a trainee Salvation Army minister, in conversation with a couple who attend the Reformed Church in Brooklyn, Wellington



Salvation Army Captain David Wardle chats with Roman Catholic Nick Polaschek; both are WAC members



WAC Jewish co-chair Dave Moskovitz in conversation with a Christian

Israel declared an apartheid state

In the last issue of *Rocket Science*¹, we reported the passing away of Bishop Desmond Tutu, and the censoring of his position, and that of Nelson Mandela – both world-famous anti-apartheid campaigners – towards Palestine.

A report has just been published by Amnesty International entitled *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity*. In fact, over the last year, three global human rights organisations have declared Israel an apartheid state.

What are the criteria that allow people to make this claim? "The crime of apartheid under the Apartheid Convention and Rome Statute consists of three primary elements:

1. an intent to maintain a system of domination by one racial group over another
2. systematic oppression by one racial group over another
3. one or more inhumane acts, as defined, carried out on a widespread or systematic basis pursuant to those policies.

Among the inhumane acts identified in either the Convention or the Rome Statute are:

- forcible transfer
- expropriation of landed property
- creation of separate reserves and ghettos
- denial of the right to leave and to return to their country
- [denial of] the right to a nationality."²

Readers are encouraged to consult the original reports by these three organisations, and the conventions:

Human Rights Watch: *A threshold crossed: Israeli authorities and the crimes of apartheid and persecution*. 27 April 2021.
www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution (52,552 words)

Amnesty International: *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: a cruel system of domination and a crime against humanity*. 1 February 2022.
www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/02/israels-apartheid-against-palestinians-a-cruel-system-of-domination-and-a-crime-against-humanity (2,384 words)

B'Tselem (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories): *A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid*. 12 January 2021.
www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid (4,321 words)

United Nations (18 July 1976). *International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*.
www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.10_International%20Convention%20on%20the%20Suppression%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Apartheid.pdf

United Nations (1999-2002). *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*.
legal.un.org/icc/statute/romefra.htm

The Human Rights Watch report is by far the longest, and most detailed. It also contains many graphics, two of which are reproduced on the following page.



ב'תס"א
 B'TSELEM
 بتسيلم



UNITED NATIONS

1 mtalbertislamiccentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Rocket-Science-Feb-2022.pdf

2 www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution

INTEGRATING JEWS SEPARATING PALESTINIANS

6.8M JEWISH ISRAELIS
Free to live throughout Israel, East Jerusalem, & most of the West Bank

6.8M PALESTINIANS
PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL
Barred effectively from hundreds of small Jewish towns in Israel & largely concentrated on about 3% of the land

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY
EAST JERUSALEM RESIDENTS
Israel guarantees residency rights to Jewish Israelis, but for Palestinians, residency is conditional and revocable

WEST BANK ID HOLDERS
Barred effectively from building in the majority of the West Bank or entering Israeli settlements

GAZA ID HOLDERS
Barred with few exceptions from leaving Gaza or living in the other part of the OPT (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem)

Map statistics:
 - 1.6M (Yellow circle)
 - 2.7M (Red circle)
 - 0.4M (Yellow circle)
 - 2.1M (Green circle)

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH VISUALIZINGPALESTINE SOURCES HRW (2021). A Threshold Crossed WWW.VISUALIZINGPALESTINE.ORG @visualizingpale /visualizing_palestine fb.me/visualizingpalestine APR 2021

INTENT TO DOMINATE

1. GALILEE
“I intend to Judaize the Galilee”
Bezalel Smotrich, 2019
Former Transportation Minister of Israel
Decades of land grabs and discriminatory planning hem in Palestinian local authorities, while nurturing the growth of neighboring Jewish communities

2. WEST BANK
“We are the ones dictating security rules ... they will remain Palestinian subjects”
Benjamin Netanyahu, 2020
Prime Minister of Israel
Government plans for decades have sought to hold maximum territory for Jewish settlement and box Palestinians into dense enclaves

3. JERUSALEM
“I am worried about... Arab growth within and around Jerusalem”
Teddy Kollek, 1984
Former Mayor of Jerusalem
Jerusalem Outline Plan 2000 sets a goal of “maintaining a solid Jewish majority in the city” and sets a target demographic ratio of 60% Jewish to 40% Palestinian

4. GAZA
“We are disengaging from Gaza due to demography”
Shimon Peres, 2005
Former Prime Minister of Israel
Israeli policy seeks to isolate Gaza from the West Bank and effectively remove its 2+ million inhabitants from the demographic balance sheet, resulting in a Jewish majority across the rest of OPT and Israel

5. NEGEV
“They [the Bedouin population] are gnawing at the country's land reserves”
Ariel Sharon, 2000
Former Prime Minister of Israel
Israel refuses to recognize 35 Palestinian Bedouin villages with 90,000 or so residents, and regularly demolishes Bedouin homes to make land available for Jewish settlement

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH VISUALIZINGPALESTINE SOURCES HRW (2021). A Threshold Crossed WWW.VISUALIZINGPALESTINE.ORG @visualizingpale /visualizing_palestine fb.me/visualizingpalestine APR 2021

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Rocket Science editorial board

Editor in chief: Dr Adam Brown

Board members / writers: Dr Sharif M A Fattah, Sheed Ali, Wajahat Khan

Circulation manager: Sharif Nazre Hannan Saadi

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Postal Address: P O Box 16138, Sandringham, Auckland

Phone: (+64)(9) 629 4222

Email: mtalbertmasjid@gmail.com

Website: www.mtalbertislamiccentre.org

Bank	Kiwibank
Branch	St Lukes
Address	Shop 791 Westfield Shopping Ctr, St Lukes, Auckland 1025
Bank phone	(+64)(9) 846 3887
Account name	Mount Albert Islamic Trust
Account no	38-9009-0739910-01

Why attend Rocket Park jumuah?

Prayers are held at the **Senior Citizens' Association building, Rocket Park, New North Road, Mount Albert.**

- ✓ Central location
- ✓ Plenty of free parking
- ✓ Facilities for ladies
- ✓ Heating and air-conditioning
- ✓ Bayan (religious talk) before jumuah prayers
- ✓ All bayans and khutbahs in English

NB We are only open for Friday prayers – not for the five daily prayers.

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SwT, saw, as, ra

SwT: subhanahu wa ta'ala "Glory to Him, the Exalted" (when mentioning Allah)

saw: salallahu alaihi wassalam "May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him" (when mentioning Muhammad)

as: alaihis salam "Peace be on him" (when mentioning other prophets)

ra: radi allahu anhu/ha/hum "May Allah be pleased with him/her/them" (when mentioning members of Muhammad's family, companions, etc)