

# ***BASICS OF ISLAM (Week #1)***

Prepared by Pastor Daren Erisman for Bethlehem Lutheran Church, October 5, 2008

**Islam:** One of the monotheistic religions along with Judaism and Christianity.

“Islam” means to “surrender” or to “submit” to the will of God.

**Muslim:** A person who is a follower of Islam.

A “Muslim” is literally one who surrenders to the will of God.

**Allah:** God.

“Allah” is a contraction of the Arabic al-ilah (“The God”). Arab Christians call God “Allah.”

**tawhid:** Arabic word for affirming the unity of God (Allah).

Literally means “making one” or “asserting oneness.”

The word is technically not in the Qur’an, but its principle is found throughout.

Often mistranslated as “monotheism.” However, tawhid is not a static description, but rather dynamic action.

The concept of Tawhid has been revived in recent history as a theological, philosophical and sociological foundation for revival, reform and radicalism.

**shahada:** Basic Islamic Creed (“La ilaha illa Allah wa Muhammadu Rasul Allah”)

“There is no god except God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”

The first part of the shahada (“There is no god but God”) is the witness of tawhid.

Part of daily prayers (**salat**), tawhid as expressed in the shahada is heard at least 5 times a day.

The shahada expresses some fundamental ideas:

Strict monotheism: Muslims are very careful to declare that there is only one God.

Muslims believe that Christians wrongly worship Jesus as God.

Universality of Islam: Islam is meant to be embraced by all people as the one true religion. Roughly 20% to 25% of the world’s population declares themselves to be Muslim.

Importance of Muhammad: As the “Messenger of God” Muhammad is highly regarded and the mere mention of his name brings to the lips of a Muslim: “peace be upon him.”

Egalitarian nature of Islam: Anyone confessing this creed is considered a Muslim. All Muslims are regarded as equal including Muhammad.

**Muhammad:** The founder of the Islamic faith. He is considered by Muslims to be the final prophet from God to whom God’s final revelation was expressed.

An Arab businessman born in 571 AD, he later in life began withdrawing to the hills for contemplation and beginning at age 40, he received a series of revelations through the angel Gabriel (later written down by his followers as the “Qur’an”).

These revelations from God among other things called for the denunciation of paganism and polytheism focusing instead on the existence of the one true God, the need for repentance and the Day of Judgment.

Muhammad was both a prophet and a statesman and with his followers, an empire was rapidly built with Islam its professed religion.

Muhammad is beloved by Muslims. The Christian equivalent would be devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus—an example to be emulated but not a substitute for worshipping God.

**Qur'an:** The sacred book for Muslims and is written in Arabic.

"Qur'an" literally means "recitation"

Its words are regarded as those words spoken directly by God to Muhammad and therefore it is considered complete and perfect.

**Hadith:** Written record of the sayings and activities of Muhammad.

These writings are very important and are considered second in importance only to the Qur'an.

**Shari'a:** Holy law of Islam

It dictates all aspects of social, religious and political life.

There is no separation between state and religion within Islam—secularism is innately alien to Islam.

Modern Islamic fundamentalists seek Islamic governance abiding by the Shari'a.

**Sunni Muslims:** The majority of Muslims (85%).

Essentially "mainstream" Islam

Tend to highly regard tradition and community consensus when making decisions.

Sunni Muslims tend to focus on the "tanzih" (incomparability with God) aspect of tawhid.

They tend to have a practical, shari'a oriented approach to life where God has set the rules and a good Muslim simply follows them.

**Shi'a Muslims:** The next largest group of Muslims.

Referred to as the Shi'ites.

Found largely in Iran and southern Iraq.

Rely on inspired teachers who are related to Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali.

"**Twelvers**" refers to the majority of Shi'a Muslims who regard the twelve principle Imams.

Iran is 90% "twelver" Shi'ites.

Shi'a Muslims tend to emphasize the tashbih (similarity with God) aspect of tawhid through devotion to saints, pilgrimages to shrines, etc.

**Sufi Muslims:** Focused on mysticism, this group is comprised of both Sunni & Shi'a Muslims.

Famous poet, Rumi, was a "Whirling Dervish" Sufi.

**I'sa:** Jesus.

Jesus is considered by Muslims to be...

...a major prophet who is part of a long line of prophets beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad.

...the bearer of God's revelation in the New Testament but these writings are considered to have been corrupted by others.

Muslims say Jesus was...

...not the Son of God (God has no equals!)

...not crucified on a cross because God would not allow such a great prophet to be disgraced.

**Five Practices or "Pillars" of Islam:**

Confession of faith (**shahada**)

Prayer (**salat**) five times daily

Fasting (**sawm**) during the month of **Ramadan**

Almsgiving (**zakat**)

Pilgrimage (**hajj**)