THE REMARKABLE CAMEL

Why do they not reflect on the camels and how they are created? (86:17)

Of all the animals mentioned in the scriptures—dogs, horses, birds, locusts, etc.—why did God pick the camel as the one we should reflect on? Because its creation is its own miracle. The camel is not always seen as a beautiful animal. But it is also difficult to live on, but completely unlivable. All of the camel is practical for his survival and for his service. This is a gift from God. Without camels, no one could travel in the deserts, so huge sections of the world would be not far difficult to live in, but completely unlivable.

Most incredible is how the camel deals with heat and lack of water. First of all, camels have a low metabolic rate, so energy is used slowly. The body temperature has a wide range of variation. It may start the day at 94 and hit 105 in the heat of the afternoon. (Our normal temperature is 98 and at 101, we’re sick.) The camel is one of few animals that can sweat. The camel is not always seen as a beautiful animal. But it is also...

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The wife of Annas said, "My Lord, I have dedicated (this baby) in my belly to You, totally, so accept from me. You are Healer, Omniscient." When she gave birth to her son, she said, "My Lord, I have named her Mary, and I invoke Your protection for her and her descendants from the rejected devil." Her Lord accepted her gracious acceptance, and brought her up a great Prophet and Imama of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah entered her sanctuary she found provisions with her. He would ask, "Mary, where did you get this food?" She would say, "It is from God. God provides for us whenever He chooses, without limits." (3:35-37)

She followed this by reading from Surm 19, which is entitled 'Mary'. As she went on reading the chapter, the class became very quiet. Her voice mesmerized us, and her story brought us across continents to a completely different era. Somewhere in the lands of the prophets, two millennia before our own time.

Mention in the Scripture Mary. She took refuge to herself from her family, into an eastern location. While a barren woman from them, we sent to her Our Spirit. He went to her in the form of a human being. She said, "I seek refuge in You, O Our Lord. I have given you to You a pure son." The Scripture said, "She said, 'I am the messenger of your Lord, to bring you a pure son.' She said, 'How can I have a son, when no man has touched me, and I have never been uncircumcised.' He said, 'Thus said your Lord. 'It is easy for Me. We will render a sign for the people, and mercy from us. This is a matter already predicted.'" (19:16-21)

I was very familiar with the traditional Christmas story, having spent my first five years of education in private Catholic schools. Although it was somewhat surprising for me at the time that the Quran contained such a detailed account on Mary, what I heard from Mrs. J. so far was in agreement with the Biblical account. She then continued with the story, which by now was describing the events of Mary's burden of pregnancy, and of Jesus' birth.

When she bore him, she isolated herself to a faraway place. The birth process came to her by the trunk of a palm tree. She said, "I am so ashamed!" I wish I were dead before that, and completely forgotten." (19:22-23)

At this point, Mrs. J.'s voice started to crack and her eyes began to flow. Very soon her eyes were not the only ones filled with tears in the room. Suddenly, all the people around me felt at peace. Mrs. J. continued on with the story, how Mary struggled with her distress, how, by God's will, the baby Jesus miraculously comforted his mother in times of need. (The infant) called her from beneath her, saying, "Do not grieve. Your Lord has provided you with a stream. If you shake the trunk of this palm tree, it will drop ripe dates for you. Eat out their seed, and be happy. When you see anyone, say, 'I have made a vow of silence, I am not talking today to anyone.'" (19:34-36)

Then it hit me. The Quranic account of what happened to Mary and Jesus had parted company with the traditional Christian version that we, and the world, have been taught. And yet, this Quranic account that came out through her story, or rather, history, was much more gripping, and more astounding. Telling of the hint of the ripe date palms as an indication of the time of year when Jesus was born. "The month of December in the pre-Christian celebration of the winter solstice, the actual Christmas must have been in late September or early October. That is the time of the year. This lesson, ironically, is still found even in today's Gospel, for example the Gospel of John 2:16. That was Jesus, the son of Mary; and this is the truth of this matter, about which they continue to doubt. It does not befit God that He begets a son, be glorified. To have anything done, He simply says to it, "Be," and it is. (Jesus) also proclaimed, "I am your God, and your Lord, you shall worship Him alone. This is the right path." (19:34-36)

There was no manger, nor any mention of the loss that were full. No mention of the shepherds, no mention of the three Kings from the East either. And, for that matter, no mention of Joseph, who in the traditional Christmas story was made a husband to Mary and hence would have acted as her protector from the people. Thus, just Mary and her baby, alone and deserted by all, risking her reputation and her life by daring to submit to God's will — to carry a baby, miraculously, without the benefit of having a husband. And who would be crazy enough to believe her? After all, she found in a society where adultery — basically, what she was accused of committing — was punishable by stoning to death, according to their Jewish law. Her only protector was God, who made; the baby Jesus speak to the people in defense of his mother's innocence. That is a heart-rending account, what a touching story!

Whether Mary was eventually married and bore more children was immaterial, as far as the birth of Jesus was concerned. The Quran, unlike the Gospel, did not mention any of this. In God's own proven words of the Quran, the truth story of Jesus is recorded. "God is His servant and His messenger, the son of Mary. He spoke to his mother in the cradle and said: 'My Lord, I have dedicated this baby to You.'" (19:33-36)

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