

Festive Seasons: Ramadan and Pentecost

Unless you belong to one of the mainline churches you might know as little about **Pentecost** as about **Ramadan**. Is that true for you?

This year **Eid-ul-Fitr** and Pentecost are just one week apart, so it may be worthwhile to learn more about it. You can't miss the beginning of Ramadan. Watch out and check the newspapers when they will be hotly debating if the fast starts on **Friday 24th** or not until **Saturday 25th**. It all depends on the sighting of the moon, a century-old Islamic tradition. Once it starts the daily cycle of any religious Muslim changes significantly: getting up before sunrise to prepare breakfast which needs to be taken before it is bright enough to differentiate a white from a black thread. After that there will be no more food or liquid passing through the believer's throats until sunset. That is really serious, and it becomes real hard to keep up after the first two weeks when the body is already considerably weakened. Only healthy people will be able to master this.

But why would anyone want to submit his body to such a rigorous punishment? What is the motivation for such a religious obligation? Some say it teaches them to practice self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice, and empathy for those who are less fortunate, thus encouraging actions of generosity and compulsory charity (zakat). Others maintain that their good actions bring a greater reward during this month than at any other time of year, because "this month has been blessed by Allah" They also believe that it is easier to do good in this month because "the devils have been chained in Hell, and **so** can't tempt believers." According to the Qur'an it is "a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the criterion (of right and wrong). And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month, and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, a number of other days." (Sura 2:183-187.194)

Whatever opinion is held, one thing is for sure: It is not something taken freely, lightly, or even joyfully. Rather it serves as a religious obligation and is enforced by community pressure even on those who would rather skip it and go straight to the celebration time of Eid-ul-Fitr when feasting and generous gifts lifts the spirits for a few days once again.

In contrast at **Pentecost** the believers who loved and lived with the risen Jesus Christ were meeting together in one place not out of a sense of duty, nor because of hoping to attain any religious reward but simply for following Jesus' instructions and waiting for the promised **Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)**. Instead of being worn out and exhausted they were filled with a new spirit of joy, excitement, and a special gift to communicate the great miracles of God to people from every nation (Acts 2:5). It completely transformed them and made them believers who loved to share the glory of the risen Jesus Christ with everyone around (Acts 2:28). If you like, this was the best birthday party anyone could possibly prepare, because in fact, that day the church of those following Jesus as their Saviour and Lord of their lives was born! Let's remind each other:

- CHRISTMAS = God became man when Christ was born in Bethlehem.
- EASTER = God gave proof of his love by giving his Son to die in our place.
- PENTECOST = God filled his people with the Holy Spirit and celebrated the birth of his church.

It is a time to celebrate, and to invite others to join us!

Walter Eric, April 2020