

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Celebrating the Holy Day of Eid al-Adha; remembering Abraham

Editor's note: This week, I was invited by my friend Dr. Aly Mageed to join him for one of the most important Muslim holidays, Eid al-Adha. This Holy Day celebration is a joyous occasion, with more than 1,000 people at just one of several sites in Grand Rapids. It recognizes the faithfulness of Abraham, considered the father of many faith traditions.

The celebration also reminded me of the many Muslims in our community who contribute so much to our life together.

I have asked Dr. Mageed to share his description of this very important event.

— Douglas Kindschi, Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute



Kindschi

By Dr. Aly Mageed

Muslims' Holy Days follow the lunar rather than solar calendar. The wisdom behind this practice is that it sends the message that everything in existence changes except God.

The lunar calendar depends on the birth of a new moon once the phases of the moon complete the cycle around the Earth in 29.53 days. The lunar year, therefore, is 11 days shorter than the solar.

Because of this revolving nature of the Islamic Holy Days, one of Muslims' Holiest days, Eid al-Adha, was celebrated beginning Sept. 12 this year.

The three major religions share a common thread in their ancestral origin and relationship to Prophet Abraham, Peace Be Upon Him. The Quran describes him as an ummah — a nation unto himself. Some scholars have

explained this as indicating that at this point of time, he was the only believer in God on Earth, and therefore he was — by himself — the whole nation of believers. Another potential explanation is his faith in God was so strong that it would equate to that of a whole nation of believers. With the strength of his faith, even when he had a vision of God commanding him to sacrifice his son, he prepared himself and his son to start the process of sacrifice on the altar. Before the sacrifice occurred, God sent archangel Gabriel with a lamb to sacrifice in his son's place.

At another point in Abraham's life, upon command from God, he did not hesitate to leave his wife and newborn baby in the middle of the Arabian Desert. His wife, Hagar, ran back and forth on top of the hills of Safa and Marwa looking for help. God rewarded

her efforts and for trusting Allah would take care of them by erupting the well of Zamzam to save her and her child, Ishmael; Muslims to this date follow her footsteps during these days of the Hajj pilgrimage, walking back and forth between these two hills seven times.

The life story of Abraham is an example of strength and purity of a faith based upon logical reasoning for the presence of God, clarity of vision, commitment and dedication to the cause of good, and the reciprocal mercy of God to reward such dedication.

This year, Eid al-Adha is a chance to contemplate these lessons from the story of this great man and apply them to our current-day events. With the coincidence of these Holy Days falling around the same time as the tragic and horrific events of 9/11, it is also a reminder of the evil

among those who do not wish to follow God's commandments. God saved Prophet Abraham from sacrificing his son. He also gave us the opportunity to save ourselves, our children and the whole human family from an evil path we may take toward wars, walls, distrust and divisiveness.

Remembering and honoring the innocent lives lost on Sept. 11, 2001, should strengthen our resolve to band together in unity against evil, while promoting good and working toward our common goal of a better life for all.

— Dr. Aly Mageed is director of the pediatric blood and bone marrow transplant program at Helen DeVos Children's Hospital. He is an active member of the At-Tawheed Islamic Center in Grand Rapids.

— Email: interfaith@evsu.edu