

Muslim Welcoming Ceremonies



Mr & Mrs Khan were very happy for a son to be born to them. Muslims believe that children are a gift from Allah and they consider themselves honoured to be entrusted with the responsibility of a new life.

News of the birth was sent to the Imam, the leader of the local Muslim community, and he came to conduct a very simple ceremony which is important to Muslims whenever a child had been born. This ceremony can be performed by any Muslim man but, in this case, it was carried out by the Imam from the local mosque.

Muslims have many things they do when a baby is born:

- The first words spoken to a new born baby are the adhan. This shows the parents want the children to grow up as a Muslim.
- A small piece of softened date or honey is rubbed around the baby's gums. This shows they wish the child a sweet and happy life.
- At 7 days old, the baby's hair is shaved off. The parents pay an equal weight in silver or gold to the poor. This is a way of thanking God for the gift of the child.
- The child is then given a Muslim name.
- A meal is served to friends and neighbours. Some of the meat is given to the poor.
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The first ceremony

After greeting Mr & Mrs Khan and congratulating them on the birth of their son, the Imam bent down over the baby and whispered words into his right ear. He was speaking Arabic. The words are known as the adhan which sound from the mosque five times each day calling the worshippers to prayer. This is a way of acknowledging that Allah has given them the gift of a child and they are symbolising their desire to introduce the child, at the earliest possible moment, to the faith. Some Muslims believe that once this has been done, the child will be protected by Allah from any harm.

Aqiqah

In the first part of the ceremony the baby's hair has to be shaved off to symbolise the baby being purified. The Imam showed Mr Khan how to do this, then Mrs Khan held the

baby while the husband did the shaving. The hair was weighed. This is done because, traditionally, the family, if they can afford it, give an equivalent amount of gold or silver to a charity which helps people in need. Usually the amount given is considerably more than the weight of the hair.

Choosing a name

The name is usually chosen from a list of great Muslims of the past, or from names of Muhammad's own family. It may be one of the prophets who lived before Muhammad, who are named in the Qur'an or it may be one of the 99 names of Allah.

Sacrifice

Years ago, people used to sacrifice animals to God to show their gratitude for some special occasion. On the birth of a Muslim child it was the custom to sacrifice 2 sheep if their child was male and 1 if it was female. Mr Khan observed this custom by asking a Muslim butcher to give the meat of two sheep to poor families. This is a way of saying 'thank you' for the gift of a child.

Hindu Welcoming Ceremonies



In some Hindu families, just after the birth of a child, the sacred syllable *aum* is written on the baby's tongue with honey. The name of God in a form the family holds dear, eg Krishna, may be whispered into the child's ear.

The Fifth Samskara - Namkaran (name giving ceremony)

In some Hindu families, 40 days after birth, the baby is taken to the community mandir for a naming ceremony. The father offers ghee-soaked wood on the fire. After announcing the baby's name, the priest pours holy water onto the baby's head and puts a few drops of amrit on the baby's tongue.

Other Hindus perform the naming ceremony on the 12th day of the baby's life. Sometimes the father whispers the baby's name into his or her ear.

Many Hindu parents decide on the first letter of the child's name by reading the astrological signs at the time of the birth and choosing a name that matches these signs. A priest or religious leader may give advice on this, or even choose the name.

In some families, the father might seek blessing from the family god or goddess by placing the baby's horoscope before the murti. In others, the father's sister has the job of choosing the name from a selection the parents have written down.

In the past, most names were either names of gods and goddesses or reflected important qualities, eg Shanti (meaning 'peace'). While many Hindus continue this tradition today, it is also becoming more popular in both the UK and urban India to invent a name or to use Western names.

Christian Welcoming Ceremonies



Baptism is a ceremony that symbolises a commitment to living a life as a Christian.

Jesus was baptised in the New Testament by John the Baptist.

Holy water is put on baptised people by a church leader as a symbol of being cleansed and made ready for a new life for God.

Some are baptised as babies, while others chose to be baptised later in life.

This is a vicar writing to explain some of the symbolism used during a baptism service

Water

Water, which gives as well as takes life is a symbol of both life and death. When Christians are baptised, they believe that the waters of Baptism wash away sin and give them a fresh start with Jesus Christ.

The candle

The Light of Christ is passed on to Christians in the form of a lit candle, which was lit from the Candle that was blessed at the Easter Service. They are called to be the light of Christ in the world and we are asked to keep that light burning brightly.

The oil of chrism

Chrism is a perfumed olive. This oil is used to anoint the crown of the head of the person being baptised. In ancient times men and women were anointed to be proclaimers of God's message to the world. Christians are given the task to bring the good news to others by the way that they live our lives

The white garment

Once Christians have been baptised, they wear a white garment. This white garment represents becoming more like Jesus and behaving more like he would.

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<p>The sacred syllable aum is written on the baby's tongue with honey.</p>
<p>A meal is served to friends and neighbours. Some of the meat is given to the poor.</p>
<p>The name of God in a form the family holds dear, eg Krishna, may be whispered into the child's ear.</p>
<p>Holy water is put on baptised people by a church leader as a symbol of being cleansed and made ready for a new life for God</p>
<p>The first words spoken to a new born baby are the adhan</p>
<p>In some families, 40 days after birth, the baby is taken to the community mandir for a naming ceremony.</p>
<p>The Light of Christ is passed on to us in the form of a lit candle given to the family of the baby.</p>
<p>A small piece of softened date or honey is rubbed around the baby's gums.</p>
<p>After announcing the baby's name, the priest pours holy water onto the baby's head and puts a few drops of amrit on the baby's tongue.</p>
<p>Oil is used to anoint the crown of the head of the person being baptised.</p>
<p>At 7 days old, the baby's hair is shaved off. The parents pay an equal weight in silver or gold to the poor.</p>
<p>In the past, most names were either names of gods and goddesses or reflected important qualities</p>
<p>The baby or person being welcomed may wear a white garment.</p>