

## Two versions of the same event

Many who grew up in Britain, white South Africa, the USA, Australia and New Zealand probably know the words to the popular Christmas carol, *Away in a Manger*, whether Christian or not. It was first published in 1885 with the popular tune by [J Kirkpatrick](#) being added in 1895 ([ref](#)). On the Thursday before Christmas 2016 I was introduced to new words using this popular tune. The carol, sung by Muslim children, was called *Oh, Under the Palm Tree*. For readers interested in the story behind 'Under the palm tree', read [here](#).

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head,  
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.  
I love you, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,  
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay  
Close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,  
And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

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Oh under a palm tree away from the town  
That's where Jesus was born with nobody around.

His blessed mother Mary used to worship and pray  
Then Gabriel came down and to Mary did say  
"I am only a messenger sent by your Lord  
to give you the news of a son, most pure."

Mary left from the town, for what would they all say?  
She was troubled and worried then a voice to her came:

"Don't worry, don't worry, shake the dates from the tree,  
And drink from fresh water, look below is a stream!"

Then Jesus was born and they went back to the town.

And the baby amazed them when he spoke out aloud:

"I was sent down by Allah to show you the way,  
I must pray for my mother, pay zak-at\* and pray."

After Jesus, there was only one more prophet to come,  
And Muhammed, like the others, taught us Allah is one.

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\*zak-at is a form of alms or in the Christian tradition – tithes.

What struck me was the similarity between the two songs, and how put together the Christmas story becomes so much more. It was also striking at how much more real *Oh, under a palm tree* seems to be and how the story resonates with the 21st century:

Isn't it time we put our differences aside, stop labelling people and give gifts (kindness, tolerance and acceptance) every day?

Whatever day of the year you read this, may it be peaceful and all you wish it to be.

AS adapted from 26 December 2016,