



St Luke's in the City

150 years - 2009

Celebrating at the Crossroads

20th Sunday after Pentecost

28 September 2008

RAMADAN

Our Muslim cousins began the fasting month of Ramadan on Tuesday 2 September. This means that Muslims in reasonable health may take no food or drink between the hours of sunrise and sunset. It tends to follow, of course, that a substantial meal is taken very early in the morning, and family and community feasts characterize the evenings. These festival dinners are known by the Arabic word *iftar* – literally, breaking the fast. Ramadan ends with the feast *Eid-al Fittr*, 'Feast of the Breaking of the Fast', on Thursday 2 October.

During Ramadan, Muslims acknowledge both their absolute dependence on God and the religious obligation to care for all people in need. Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, and so is the *zakah* practiced especially at this time of year. As one Islamic website explains –

"To the Qur'anic word *zakah* and the meaning it conveys, there is no equivalent in any other language as far as we know. It is not just a form of charity or alms-giving or tax or tithe. Nor is it simply an expression of kindness; it is all of these combined and much more. It is not merely a deduction of a certain percentage from one's property, but an abundant enrichment and spiritual investment. It is not simply a voluntary contribution to someone or some cause, nor a government tax that a shrewd clever person can get away with. Rather, it is a duty enjoined by God and undertaken by Muslims in the interest of society as a whole. The Qur'anic word *zakah* not only includes charity, alms, tithe, kindness, official tax, voluntary contributions, etc., but it also combines with all these God-mindedness and spiritual as well as moral motives."