

THE MALANKARA SABHA

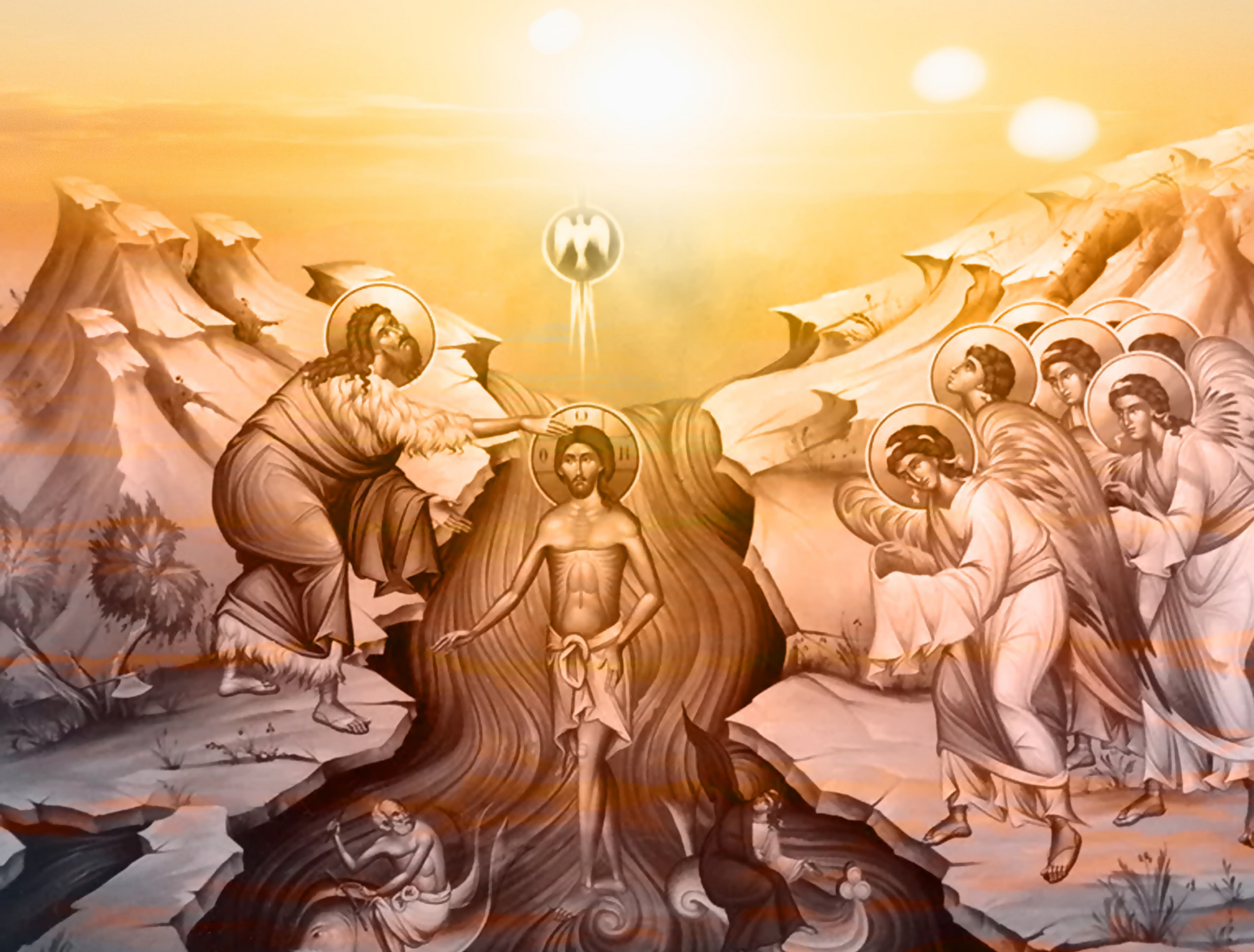
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VOLUME 2 ISSUE 1

JANUARY-MARCH 2023

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**“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.”
Isaiah 60:1**



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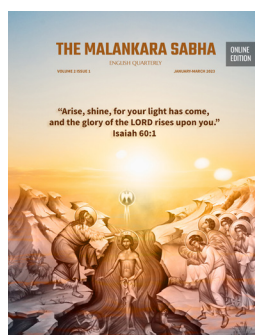
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Happy New Year
2023

Baptism of our Lord

January 6



His Holiness Writes...

We are entering a 'New Year'. Let us welcome the New Year with sanctity as renewed human beings. Let us confess before God our shortcomings in the path trod so far; and with new hope and new gifts of grace, let us continue to partake in the pilgrimage to heaven; rejoice in successes and make amends for failures. We should be able to get rid of pride and selfishness and seek God's grace and thus transform ourselves into a new creation.

"Who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles"? (Psalm 103:5). We should pray earnestly for God's clear interventions in our lives. We should open our eyes and see the different challenges that society is facing today. We can be proud of the fact that the world is making unprecedented progress in the field of science, technology and education. But terrorism, slow destruction of the society, the chaos it creates, and the increasing number of young people working alongside such negative trends are the main challenges we face. Meaningful and active interventions of cultural and religious leaders are essential in these matters.

Let us not forget the fact that there are millions of brothers and sisters around us who are facing financial

difficulties for education and medical treatment. We should open our eyes and ears to see and hear the cry of people who are in the midst of hardships and sufferings. The comforts we build out of selfishness will look ridiculous in front of our brothers who live in leaking houses. When we aim at the transformation of society, the transformation of our own hearts is the primary necessity. We have to love humanity and grow to that level which would enable us to see the whole world as our home. It is certain that a change in individuals can create great changes in the environment. May you face the New Year with clear vision, resolutions and action plans, trusting in God.

We wish you all a New Year filled with all good things. God bless!

BASELIOS MARTHOMA MATHEWS III

Catholicate Palace, Devalokam.

January 1, 2023



Editorial

Migration is at the core of the human experience and human history is a story of voluntary and involuntary migrations. Globalisation has increased the rate of migrations in an unimaginable way today. Involuntary or forced migration, like fleeing the crisis of environmental disasters, poverty related issues, violence and communalism and social boycotts are extremely painful experiences. Voluntary migration for better standards of living and higher quality of education is an integral part of life everywhere. There may be no individual, family, community or society untouched by the impact of migration.

After the Gulf-Boom which started in 1970's, the present trend is the alarming rate of migrations from Kerala to Europe, USA, Canada, Australia etc. Kerala is a key contributor to the migrant pool from India, the second largest student sending country after China. Such migrations have many positive and negative impacts. Migrations lead to a mixing of people from various cultural, religious and racial backgrounds causing a celebration of the fellowship and unity of mankind. Such migrations which keep the migrants in the foreign countries permanently cause a brain drain in places like Kerala. The number of vacant houses in Kerala as well as the empty spaces in worshipping centres are increasing due to this phenomenon. Contrary to the Gulf migrations, the present trend diminishes the economic stability of Kerala which is becoming a mega old age home.

Migration is a prominent theme of the Bible too. Abraham can be called the 'father of the migrants'. The name of the Old Testament book 'Exodus' reminds us of the migration of the chosen race to the Promised Land. The presence of God with the Jewish migrants in the wilderness who were getting shaped as a people of God as depicted in the Bible, is still shedding the light of solace to the migrants in their struggle in the new

wilderness experiences of today. The story of the migration of infant Jesus to Egypt in the care of St. Joseph and St. Mary is an example of forced migration.

A thorough research, encouraged by the Church as a whole, is essential to enlighten everybody about the widespread consequences of voluntary migrations. The mission of the members of the Church who have migrated already to invite the newcomers to be part of the Church in the new situations, is to be strengthened. A full time dedicated ministry for the new Diaspora of the Church is inevitable. At the same time, taking care of the aged who are left alone, as in the Kerala context, needs to be one of the important missions of the Church.

The greatest migration story is that of the Incarnation – the story of God migrating to humans in the person of Jesus. In other words, God the Immanuel was manifesting His empowering presence to Humans who are on a transient pilgrimage in this planet. He encouraged the migration of His disciples to spread this good news across the world. The memory of St. Thomas whose 1950th anniversary of Martyrdom we remember with gratitude, is a powerful symbol of migration with a mission to strangers. Just as traditional Malayalis migrate in large numbers to foreign countries, thousands of guest workers come to Kerala from North India. In this backdrop, let us uphold a recurring theme in the Bible, in Jesus' words, "*I was a stranger and you welcomed me...*" (St. Matthew 25:35).

Bijesh Philip Achen,

Editor,

The Malankara Sabha, English Quarterly



Feast of Baptism of Our Lord

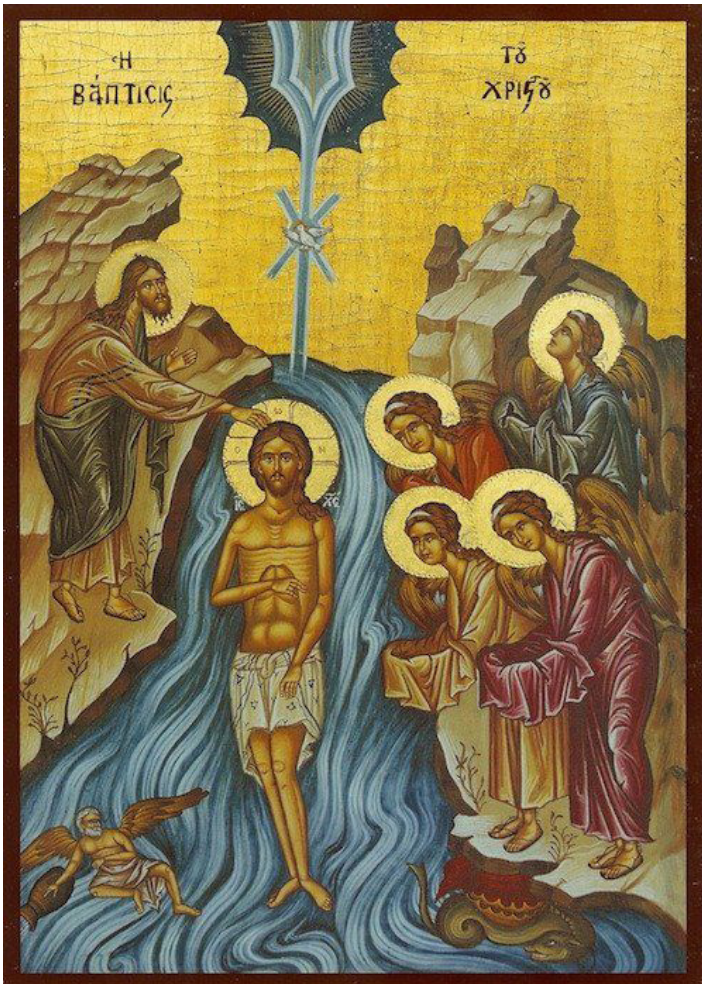
Fr. Sujith Thomas

January 6th is observed as the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was baptized in the river Jordan by St John the Baptist. This event is mentioned in all three of the Synoptic gospels (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). This feast is called *Denaha* in the Syrian tradition. The word *Denaha* means sunrise or dawn. The baptism of Jesus is the dawn of his public ministry, after which the light of Jesus rose in the world. This feast is called “*Theophany*” in English and is distinct from “*Epiphany*” which commemorates

the Magi presenting their gifts to the child Jesus. In the Syriac tradition, *Epiphany* is remembered on Christmas itself, which means that there is no separate celebration for the feast of Epiphany, as in many Western churches.

Through his baptism Jesus Christ sanctified the waters in order to open the fountain of life. Jesus’ baptism is different from ours, in that, we are baptized for the remission of our sins while Jesus was baptized “*to fulfill all righteousness*” (Matt 3:15). Through baptism Jesus purified the water and inaugurated the new baptism.

“This is my beloved Son,
in whom
I am well pleased”
(St. Matthew 3:17)



The baptism of John the Baptist was preparatory for Jesus and not sufficient for salvation (Acts 19:3-4). Jesus therefore inaugurated the new baptism for eternal life through his own baptism. Not that He was in need of it, but that we are in need of baptism of Jesus. According to the prayer of the feast, “John mixed the water of the baptistery, which Christ sanctified when He went down into the river to be baptized in it.”

In sanctifying the waters of baptism, Jesus also began his work of defeating all evil. In the Scriptures, water is seen as a place of chaos and dwelling place of evil (Gen

1:1; Psalm 69; Matt 14:22-33; Rev. 21:1). According to the prayers of the feast, when Jesus entered the water, He “*crushed the head of the dragon who lurked there.*” By defeating the evil within water, Jesus recreates the water so that baptismal waters may renew our nature when we are baptized. According to St Gregory of Nyssa, “Today He is baptized by John that He might cleanse him who was defiled, that He might bring the Spirit from above, and exalt man to heaven, that he who had fallen might be raised up and he who had cast him down might be put to shame” (Homily on Baptism of Christ). When we commemorate this feast we remember our baptism, renew our baptismal promise to abandon evil and recall the victory of Jesus over all evil.

Through his baptism Jesus Christ reveals himself to the world. Jesus’ baptism marks the beginning of his public ministry: the light of the world has risen for the world. According to the prayers of the feast, “At that moment, when He came out of the water, heaven and earth paid Him honor. The sun submitted its dazzling light and the stars paid obeisance to Him who sanctified all the rivers and springs.” Baptism is the manifestation of the Holy Trinity since the words of the Father said “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17) and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove. Through this manifestation the true light of divinity was revealed to the world. Through our baptism we also become enlightened with the light of Christ so that in His light we see the True Light (Psalm 36:9).

When we celebrate the feast of *Denaha*, let us remember the new life that we ought to live because we have been baptized by the waters of baptism. St Gregory of Nyssa states, “But do ye all, as many as are made glad, by the gift of regeneration, and make your boast of that saving renewal, show me, after the sacramental grace, the change in your ways that should follow it, and make known by the purity of your conversation the difference effected by your transformation for the better.” (Homily on Baptism of Christ). Let our participation in this great feast lead to a transformed life.

(Rev. Fr. Sujith Thomas is the Assistant Vicar of St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Philadelphia and PhD student at Villanova University)



His Holiness Baselios Geevarghese II: A Leader Par Excellence

Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros Metropolitan

His Holiness Baselios Geevarghese II was an illustrious prelate, who steered the destinies of the Orthodox Christian Community of India, especially during a very critical period in the history of the Church. He was a leader par excellence and showed great determination and courage in leading the Church from the front, in the midst of several challenges and hardships. When faced with challenges, he stood up as a fortress and defended the

faith, identity and sovereignty of the Malankara Church. His tenure as the prelate of the Church can rightfully be considered as the 'Golden Era' in the history of Malankara Orthodox Church.

Biography

His Holiness was born on 16 June 1874 to Ulahannan and Naithi in the illustrious Kallacheril (Kallaserri) family of Kurichy, Kottayam and was given the name Punnoose. After elementary education, he was fortunate enough to learn Syriac and Theology in Parumala Seminary, under the guidance of Parumala Mar Gregorios Metropolitan and Vattaseril Geevarghese Malpan. He also studied English from CMS High School and M. D. Seminary and then completed his ministerial training from Old Seminary, Kottayam.

On 24 April 1892, Kadavil Paulose Mar Athanasios ordained him as deacon. Six years later, he was ordained as Priest and raised to the order of Ramban (monk) by Parumala Mar Gregorios Metropolitan, on 24 November and 27 November 1898 respectively. As per the order of St. Gregorios, he resided in Kadampanad church and helped the Metropolitan with the administration of the southern dioceses. He also served as Manager and Malpan of the Old Seminary. His published books include Sahadenmarude Charithram, Rehasya Prarthanakal, Parudaisa and Mar Yuhanon Mamdana. After the demise of Parumala Thirumeni, he was appointed as the Manager of Parumala Seminary.

On 8 September 1912, Abded Messiah consecrated him as Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Gregorios at Parumala Seminary. He was appointed as the Metropolitan of Thumpamon, Kollam and Niranam dioceses. During this time he stayed at Kundara and established Kundara Seminary and M. G. D. School. On 15 February 1929, the Episcopal Synod of Malankara headed by Malankara Metropolitan Vattaserril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius, installed him as the Third Catholicos of the East, succeeding Catholicos Baselios Geevarghese I.

After the demise of Vattaseril Thirumeni, the Malankara Association which met on 24 December 1934 at M. D. Seminary, Kottayam, chose him as Malankara Metropolitan. From that time onwards the offices of Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan came to repose in

one and the same person. It was also this Association that historically accepted and put into effect the Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church.



During his long tenure as the supreme head of the Orthodox Church of India, His Holiness exhibited extraordinary grace and vision, until he was called to his heavenly abode on 3rd January 1964 at the ripe old age of 90. He was laid to rest in Devalokam Aramana Chapel at the headquarters of the Malankara Orthodox Church.

Legacy and Contributions

Catholicos Baselios Geevarghese II was a great leader, a dedicated sage and an exceptionally kind and humble human being. Through prayer and fasting he received strength from God to lead his people for many years courageously, inspiring his people to work for their church and for the glory of God. He had unwavering faith in God and in truth. Even after going through several failures and setbacks in his life, he strongly believed that one day 'truth will triumph' and he waited patiently with prayer and faith for the same. He displayed exceptional courage and determination, in leading the Church after the unfavourable judgments from the Travancore High Court in 1946 and from High Court in 1951, all the way to the victory of truth in the form of the Supreme Court verdict in 1958. Both in failure and in victory, His Holiness

remained the same calm person, neither was he depressed nor was he overjoyed. His standpoint, after victory in the legal battle, was instrumental in making peace in Malankara Church a reality. Even before his election as the Malankara Metropolitan, His Holiness willingly travelled in 1934 to Homs in order to meet H. H. Patriarch Mar Aprem and establish peace in the Church. That effort, however, didn't turn out to be fruitful. Following the peace pact of 1958 between the Jacobite faction and the Orthodox Church, he had the good fortune to guide the destiny of the unified Malankara Church.

Apart from consecrating twelve Metropolitans, and ordaining more than a thousand priests and deacons, he founded and consecrated many churches. It was during his time that several churches and parishes were established in 'Outside-Kerala region' for the Malankara Church Diaspora. As the Catholicos of the East, he officiated in the consecration of Holy Myron (anointing oil) at the Old Seminary Chapel on 22 April 1932 and also a second time on 20 April 1951. On 2 November 1947, he declared Parumala Mar Gregorios and Catholicos Eldho Mar Baselios as saints. It was also during his time that 'Devalokam' became the new headquarters of the Church. A new Catholicate office and a Chapel were also constructed at Devalokam.

The deep spirituality and wisdom of this Catholicos earned him the title "Valiya Bava," or "The Great Catholicos." He was a man of prayer and followed strict ascetic principles. Besides praying at the canonical hours, he also found time to indulge in private prayers, especially during night. He had deep-rooted knowledge in Syriac, Orthodox Spirituality and Church History. As an ecclesiastical leader, he had clarity about his duties and responsibilities. His Holiness also maintained a personal diary, making notes of his daily activities. These diary notes remain as an important source, not only of his personal life, but also of Church history during his tenure.

He was also an eminent ecumenical leader. He took keen interest in visiting and hosting prelates of other churches in and outside India and also maintained good relationship with leaders of other religions as well. He took part in the Edinburgh Conference of World Council of Churches held in 1937. His personality created a great and favourable impression among other church leaders from



all around the globe. After the conference, His Holiness also visited Egypt, Rome, Yugoslavia, Paris and several other places, establishing good relations with the churches in those places. He also sent delegations from Malankara Church to other ecumenical meetings and conferences including the Pan-Orthodox Conference held in Greece in 1961. At the same time, His Holiness also received in Malankara several foreign dignitaries including Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia; a delegation from the Armenian Orthodox Church, delegates from Greek Orthodox Church and several participants from the WCC Conference held in New Delhi in 1961. He played a significant role in establishing the identity of the Malankara Church as an ancient apostolic, Orthodox Church before the world.

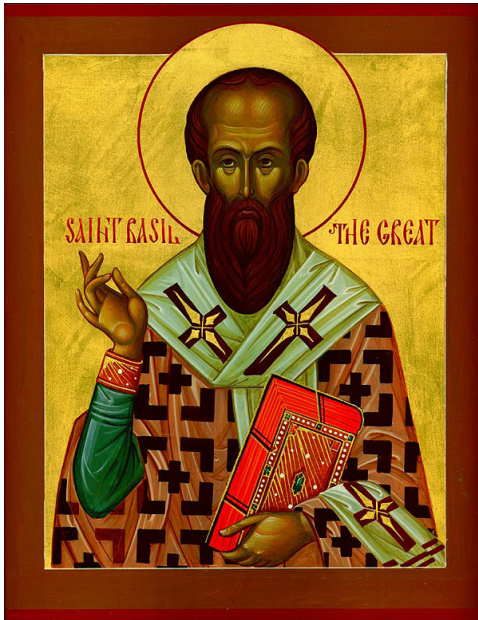
Catholicos Baselios Geevarghese II was a great reformer who always emphasized the importance of peace, harmony and service to mankind. His Holiness pioneered the dissemination of knowledge by founding several educational institutions in the underdeveloped areas of Kerala. The

establishment of Catholicate College in Pathanamthitta deserves special mention. The cultural historians of Kerala have often equipoised His Holiness with other champions of social causes like Sri Narayana Guru and Chattambi Swamikal. He was also a leader who worked for the empowerment of Dalits.

As the reigning Catholicos of the Orthodox Church for almost three and a half decades (1929–1964), His Holiness left his indelible mark not only in the ecclesiastical domain but also in the socio – cultural domains of Kerala. He was a man with an awe-inspiring and dignified personality and a divinely gracious appearance. His efforts for establishing peace in the Church were sincere and he was successful in achieving this goal to a great extent. His Holiness was a larger-than-life character whose legacy remains unmatched to this date by any other church leaders. May His prayers guide us and the Church in peace and harmony.

(H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros is the Metropolitan of the Kottayam Diocese. He also serves as the President of The Malankara Sabha Magazine and Marth Mariam Vanitha Samajam)





Success of Life and Society in the Light of the Profound Teachings of St. Basil the Great

Fr. Bijesh Philip

St. Basil the Great (320-379) was a man of high spirituality, deep social commitment, excellent education, and exemplary faithfulness to the Church. His life is a good example of authentic Orthodox Christian spirituality. A study of his life will help us to liberate ourselves from the enslaving materialism of today and from distorted spiritual traditions, bringing us closer to the Gospel of our Lord.

St. Basil was born and brought up in Cappadocia which is in Asiatic Turkey. Pontus was another district close to Cappadocia. Most of St. Basil's life was spent in Cappadocia and Pontus. As bishop, his headquarters was in Caesarea (today's Kaeseri), which was also an important city in Cappadocia.

St. Basil was born about the year 329 into a rich Christian family in Cappadocia. His father, also called Basil, was from Pontus and his mother, Emmelia, was from Cappadocia. They had four sons and five daughters. Basil, Gregory and Naucrati, the eldest three sons, followed their father's footsteps with a traditional classical education. The family is indebted to Basil's paternal grandmother Macrina *the elder*, who had been converted by Gregory the wonderworker, to the Christian faith. St. Basil's sister, Macrina *the younger*, decided to lead a life of virginity and slowly developed a community of virgins. In 380 his younger brother, Peter, succeeded Eustathius as Bishop of Sebaste.

It was when Basil went to Athens for higher studies that he developed a friendship with Gregory, another Cappadocian, who later came to be known as St. Gregory of Nazianzus. Even during his studies in Athens, St. Basil was particular about the strictness of his spiritual life.

When he came back to Cappadocia, there were plenty of opportunities for him to pursue a worldly successful profession. But he devoted himself fully to lead a life pleasing to God by being committed to the Church. His sister Macrina's life and intervention influenced him towards this wholehearted self-surrender. St. Basil visited ascetics in Palestine, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt etc. This spiritual tour of monastic foundations was shortly after St. Antony died in 356 and shortly before setting up his own monastery in 357/358. In a strict sense St. Basil was not the founder of monasticism in Asia Minor but was its reformer. It was with his friend St. Gregory that St. Basil started his monastic experiments. After renouncing his properties, he began his monastic life in Annesi in Pontus, on the side of River Iris, opposite to that of St. Macrina's convent. Socially committed services were an integral part of his vision of monasticism. Community experience was central to his monasticism. The solitary efforts and individual initiatives of the monks of Egypt and Syria were replaced by community activity.

Manual labour was also as important as prayer for the monks of St. Basil. It is noteworthy that highly educated

and well-born aristocrat St. Basil used to engage in manual labour. He condemned in strong terms the danger of idleness. In Letter 22 'On the perfection of the monastic life', probably written in 356, he writes that those who are lazy, and can work but do not, should not eat.

It is evident that serving the poor and sick formed an integral part of St. Basil's vision of spiritual life. The second commandment of the Lord, '*to love your neighbor as yourself*' is the heart of his understanding of charity and social commitment. His sermon 6 on the text from Luke 12: 18 (*I will destroy my barns and build greater ones*) and sermon 7 addressed *To the Rich* condemns avarice of the rich and their insensitivity to the poor and the needy. He unceasingly reminds us of the need to share the God given resources with the poor. The first hospital and a milestone in medical history was part of *Basileiados*, the great charity project of St. Basil. Established to assist the poor and the needy, the hospital was a practical expression of his vision of love. He and his monks literally served in this new city of charity.

St. Basil was ordained as Bishop of Caesarea after Bishop Eusebius' death in 370. As a bishop he was an efficient administrator and also a strong defender of the Nicene faith.

In spite of his time-consuming tasks, he used to write edifying theological treatises. His writings bear witness to his philosophical approach as well as to the very practical aspects of ethics and the Christian message. St. Gregory Nazianzen testifies that St. Basil's writings were highly appreciated by his contemporaries for their content as well as for their form. In addition to numerous letters and sermons, he has written a few dogmatic, ascetic, pedagogic, and liturgical treatises. *Against Eunomius*, *On the Holy Spirit*, *Hexameron*, *Moralia*, *Monastic Rules* etc are a few of his classic theological and spiritual writings.

Basil's numerous homilies display his skills in biblical interpretation and ancient rhetoric. As Quasten rightly observes, "He is certainly one of the most brilliant ecclesiastical orators of antiquity, who combines rhetorical display with simplicity of thought and clarity of expression. Above all, he appears as the physician of souls, who does not want to please his listeners, but to touch their consciences."¹

According to St. Basil the real human being is the

'inner man'. That is why he says "*we are that which is within*". By creating man in the image of God, man is bestowed with reason. He describes "*reason as mastery of the passions*." This is the meaning of the 'command to rule' given immediately after the creation of man. He describes anger, greed, hypocrisy, lust etc., as beasts and asks the question: "Have you truly become ruler of beasts if you rule those outside but leave those within ungoverned?"² Based on this insight he highlights the contradiction in man concerning authority and freedom: "First the power to rule was conferred on you. O human, you are a ruling being. And why do you serve the passions as a slave? Why do you throw away your own dignity and become a slave of sin? For what reason do you make yourself a prisoner of the devil? You were appointed ruler of creation, and you have renounced the nobility of your own nature."³

By highlighting the God given potential in all human beings to grow towards perfection Basil was trying to develop a holistic understating of deification or *Theosis*. According to Basil, the ultimate goal of human existence is to be like God, especially in kindness. There is no contradiction or conflict between grace and work in the process of spiritual progress. He writes, "By our creation we have the first (image), and by our free choice we build the second (likeness). ... By free choice we are conformed to that which is according to the likeness of God.. ... And in giving us the power to become like God, he lets us be artisans of the likeness to God, ... If you become a hater of evil, free of rancor, not remembering yesterday's enmity; if you become brother-loving and compassionate, you are like God. If you forgive your enemy from your heart, you are like God. If as God is toward you, the sinner, you become the same toward the brother who has wronged you, by your good will from your heart toward your neighbor, you are like God. As you have that which is according to the image through your being rational, you come to be according to the likeness by undertaking kindness. If God created you also according to the likeness, what would be yours to give? Through what would you be crowned? ... now the one is given, the other is left incomplete that you may complete yourself, become worthy of the recompense by God."⁴ This is a summary of his anthropology focusing on being created in God's image. This is also a call to progress towards likeness of

God by our spiritual discipline and cooperation with the grace of God. This vision also sheds light on the importance of being in the Church.

St. Basil criticizes the consumerist culture of his time. The rich are forced to spend their money on many unnecessary things: "It is not on account of food or clothing that wealth is sought by most. Rather, some device has been concocted by the devil, suggesting innumerable spending opportunities to the wealthy, so that they pursue unnecessary and worthless things as if they were indispensable, and no amount is sufficient for the expenditures they contrive."⁵ Insensitivity and injustice of the rich are further exposed thus "*You gorgeously array your walls, but do not clothe your fellow human being; you adorn horses, but turn away from the shameful plight of your brother or sister, you allow grain to rot in your barns, but do not feed those who are starving; you hide gold in the earth, but ignore the oppressed!*"⁶

For St. Basil those who directly kill or rob alone are not murderers and robbers. Those who refuse to support the poor and the marginalized can also be counted as murderers and robbers. He explains this insight in his treatise *I will Tear Down My Barns*.⁷

After describing the oppression of the poor by the rich, St. Basil draws their attention to their mortality or transience. He challenges them for an active reflection on their destiny, "Be Attentive to yourself, mindful that you are mortal, that you are earth, and to earth you will return. Look around, examining those of like eminence before you. Where are those who possessed civil authority? Where are the unconquerable orators? Where are the leaders of public assemblies, the brilliant horse breeders, the generals, the governors, the despots? Are they not all dust? Are not the memorials of their lives a few bones? Stoop and look into the tombs to see if you can distinguish which is the slave and which is the master, which is the poor one and which is the rich. ...So having remembered your nature you will not then be conceited."⁸ Since life is transient and death can come at unexpected times, St. Basil exhorts to give to the needy as early as possible what belongs to them.

His vision of humankind as one family helps him to think of all resources given by the Creator as 'common wealth' which is to be distributed equally to all. Seeds

of an ideal socialism are seen in this Basilian teaching. As a summary statement of his vision of social justice he says, "if we took only what was necessary to satisfy our own needs, giving the rest to those who lack it, no one would be rich, no one would be poor and no one would be in need."⁹

Cappadocian Fathers generally and especially St. Basil the great, have written a lot to substantiate the Nicene Creed by refuting the teaching of Eunomius, a follower of Arius. They distinguish reality basically into two; the divine and temporal or Creator and creation. For them Father, Son and Holy Spirit, belong to the first category. So the Son and the Holy Spirit are not created beings. It is their foundational teaching that the essence of God is unknowable or incomprehensible. We know God through his revealing activities. Theology is basically a reflection on God's own revelations. So none of the names applied to God can give us a full picture of the essence of God. They unambiguously taught that Father, Son and the Holy Spirit share the same divine essence or nature but having three distinctive persons existing eternally in perfect fellowship. The Holy Trinity means three persons having the same essence and existing eternally with one will and goal.

Even if the exemplary life of St. Basil the Great in history came to an end on January 1, 379 AD, his life and teachings continue to enlighten and encourage many to grow in Christ and fulfill their being.

(Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip is a faculty member of Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam and Associate Director of Sopana Orthodox Academy and also serves as the Editor of The Malankara Sabha, English Quarterly)

Endnotes

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New Year: The Great Nativity and Pragmatic Resolutions for 2023

Minu Mathew

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.
The old has gone, the new is here!"- (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

2022 was one happening year for all of us and a huge train of emotions wrought and layered with realizations and losses trigger the same. Every New Year comes with a bag full of resolutions which tarry with us up to the end of each passing year and shoulders feeling weary, fail to pull it off successfully in the days to come. Why not try taking up small, earthy resolutions this time? Why not try cutting the carbs off a thick, heavy, ambitious and romantic diet plan of decisions this time? Why not take things slow? Why not mark to-do lists with small time tasks? Why not believe and entrust oneself with much care, promise and easy to-do responsibilities?

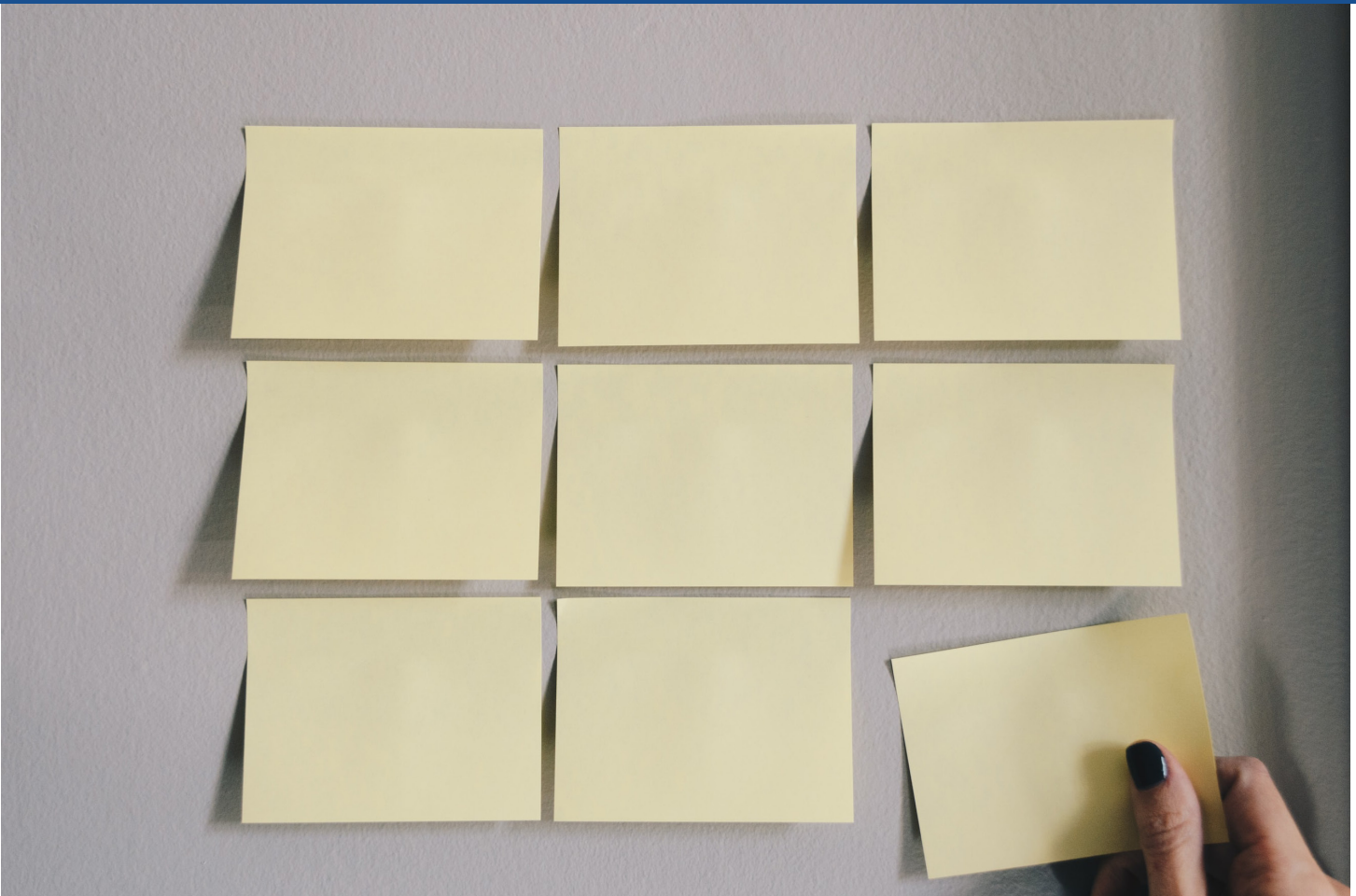
You might think dear reader, that I am exhorting you to look away from your high-end, high-time goals, but I

am sorry. That wasn't my purpose. My only vision is to make you believe in God and yourself and ask of you to not bog yourself down as you tick away accomplishments at the cost of mental health, spiritual growth and societal good.

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (St. John 1:17)

Remember, we are approaching a brand new year and are witnessing His birth. Remember, that the Word became Flesh, just so that you and I could be called His. Remember, that each time you write your faith or religion on registration forms, applications or the rest, you first write His name and move on to add alphabets that make it a historic-socio-religious identity – 'CHRISTian.'





Remember, remember that He came for us. He called us by His name. He gave Himself up, so that we needn't look down. Remember, that it is because we have a Yeldho (Christmas) that we get to observe the Haasha (Passion) and celebrate Easter. Remember, after every flood there comes a rainbow – stroked by the Almighty on the canvas of life – a promise, a covenant that from now on, there will be no more tears of sorrow but of glad tidings and praise.

The Great Nativity of our Lord brings forth great cheer and celebration all around the globe. Popularly addressed as Christmas, meaning the birth of Christ – it comes with loud, melodious carols and families and friends. But what matters is the mirth of the emotions and the many spiritual takeaways from the feast of His birth.

In a life resounding with monotony and responsibilities, seldom do we ensure as to how we communicate with our loved ones and colleagues and how we view them in lieu of our relationship with them. Despite our onus towards the family in the purview of social and religious decorum, most of us flout the norms of dealing with individuals, irrespective of our relationship with them. Intense inter-mingling and being respectfully loving

towards significant others in the workspace, college and in school, creates a relationship status wherein one can expect exploitation and not reverence or love. Sexual exploitation and eve-teasing at workplace is a rising menace not just in multi-national institutions but also in government institutions. Youngsters from lower or middle class societies are not the only ones who perpetrate violence and other forms of crimes in society, but a good number of individuals from the top echelons of society also, on the pretext of authority and convincing rhetoric, attract people from all walks of life who trust them blindly. There is a feeling of security in their presence and an assurance is easily bought on the pretext of the same. In such a scenario, being victims of abuse of all kinds goes unaddressed and out of fear of losing one's life or job or academic rewards – the survivors seldom raise their voice, instead, spend the rest of their lives in acute and chronic depression.

Drug Abuse and alcohol consumption is recklessly resulting in demonic upheavals in the domestic space and in places of work and study. As rightly pointed out by someone, 'age is just a number and abusers have none'.

In the light of which it becomes an important question of concern to ask whether we have really welcomed Christ amid us or given Him room in our hearts wrought with chaos and violence, toppled with emotional unrest. Most individuals comply with the luring calls of drug and substance abuse in order to escape their emotional chaos. This is caused due to a plethora of reasons which predominantly include stress at workplace and constantly nagging family members and other near and dear ones. In order to find solace, certain individuals love to find peace in high-end inebriation leading to toxic outcomes. It not only harms the physical health of the individual, but impacts the family of these individuals who are enslaved and ensnared by the vicious cycle of drug and substance abuse, which is on a reckless rise in the state of Kerala.

“Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’” – (St. Luke 5:31-32)

It is never too late to even think of healing, of returning like the prodigal son, of hoping and of gradually making things better. As argued previously, romantic planning and long term goals with mentally taxing labor won't fetch gold, unless one tries extremely hard in accomplishing them consistently sans failure. Christ our Lord dined with Zacchaeus and stayed home with him, something that Jews then detested the most – to be friends with anyone who works for Rome and detested twice as much when it was one of their own. The encounter with Jesus had transformed Zacchaeus so much that he gave back generously to the people whom he had exploited monetarily. St. Matthew transforms from being the efficient tax collector Levi to become one amongst the four Gospel writers. The Apostles chide children, preventing them from coming near Christ our Lord and he instead speaks of *‘how blessed the little ones are, for theirs’ is the kingdom of God*. St. Paul gets to see the martyrdom of St. Stephen. He advances towards Damascus, and gets transformed enroute. Rome institutes the punishment of death on the cross and Rome under Constantine and Queen Helena transform it making it the identity of Christians in the times to come. Transformations never happened over night. An apt English phrase being, *‘Rome wasn't built in a day.’* Transformation and change are two different English words and their basic underlying difference lies

in the duration of their process. According to scientific understanding, change is temporary and reversible. But transformation happens over a long period of time, with minimum chances of coming back to the initial order of things. These afore-mentioned prominent Biblical characters underwent transformation and not change. *‘They chose the road less travelled by’* as Robert Frost had written. Transformation rests on the bedrock of taking things slow. Transformation abides by the Japanese proverb of *‘taking down small stones just so that one can mow down mountains’*.

I choose to reiterate that our ambitious souls need a break and in retrospect make those little moves and gradually everything would fall back into place. The Israelites moved slowly and steadily and under the preparedness of a leader who stammers in speech, marched on to the shore of freedom, liberated from 400 years and more of slavery to the Pharaohs. Job suffered immensely and what he is later blessed with is abundance that knew no end.

So dear readers, if *‘God is with us who can be against us?’* (Romans 8:31)

Let our to-do lists seem simple, then it's easy to achieve targets. Let our hearts be at peace – let our needs, dreams, lists and targets be in God's hands. Let our dreams be big and our ways to get in there be simple, sleek, gradual paced and satisfying. Let us detox so as to cleanse and be ready for the brand new year. Let us smile more often so that hatred thinks thrice before crossing our paths.

Above all, let us submit ourselves more often into His care and trust that He'll make wonders happen. Let us not fail to make our goals look as glossy and as promising as they ought to be and let's not forget to make the ways seem as pragmatic and strong as possible – because, in His care everything seems perfect. Everything makes sense and everything looks greener again and again.

Welcome Practicality, adieu stress. Welcome 2023!

(Ms. Minu Mathew is a member of the St. Basil Orthodox Syrian Church, New Delhi (Rohini, Sector - 3) Diocese of Delhi. She is currently pursuing an Internship (Gandhian Research Studies) with the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, Rajghat, New Delhi.)



Presentation of Jesus in the Temple- Mayaltho

Fr. Nithin V. Rajan

Mayaltho is an Ancient Feast the church celebrates to commemorate the occasion of “The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple”. On this day, Mary and Joseph took infant Jesus to the temple along with the offerings required for the sacrifice, as per the traditions of the Jews. This event is celebrated every year on February 2nd, forty day after Christmas. Since ‘Mayaltho’ is a Maranaya Perunnal (Feast of our Lord) it is celebrated with Divine Liturgy even if it falls on a week day.

Another name for the feast is ‘The Meeting of our Lord’. Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians call the feast, ‘The Purification of the Holy Virgin’. About 450 AD in Jerusalem, people began the custom of holding lighted candles during the Divine Liturgy of this feast day. Therefore, some churches in the West refer to this holy day as Candlemas.

“When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to

the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” St. Luke 2:22-25.

Fulfillment of the Old Covenant

Jesus’ presentation in the Temple reflects how he fulfills the Old Covenant. According to the Law of Moses, every firstborn male was to be brought into the temple, on the fortieth day after birth and be dedicated to God. At that time a sacrifice for thanksgiving was also to be brought. Mary and Joseph honored this tradition by following them.

The presentation of Jesus in the temple shows Mary’s humility and trust in the Lord. Even though she knew that her son was conceived in an extraordinary manner, with the understanding that she herself had been specially equipped to bring this child into the world, she still submitted herself to the custom of purification. Did Mary actually need to be purified? Did her son really need to be purified? Not at all. But just as Jesus would later go through John’s baptism of repentance, so his mother adhered

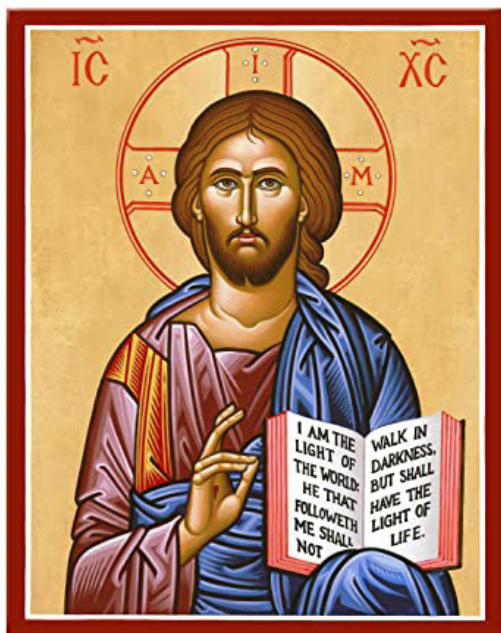
truthfully to the laws and ways of God. Without raising any objection, she united herself with every woman who has ever taken on the tremendous obligation of bringing a child into the world. And because of this, she offers herself to all mothers as a model and guide.

His humbleness

St. Luke openly says that Joseph and Mary took the option provided for poor people who could not afford a lamb, sacrificing instead a “pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons”. “God enters the temple not as a powerful ruler but as a little child in his Mother’s arms. The King of glory comes not with a show of human force and power, not with a great fanfare and noise, not causing fright and destruction. He comes into the temple as He came into the world, as an infant in silence, in poverty, and in the company of the poor and the wise.” – Pope John Paul II

No matter what we have to go through in life, Christ has already borne it- even if it is poverty. He understands us as he walked among us. This is the blessed assurance for us. Hebrews 4:15-16 says *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”*.

Your talent is God’s gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God.



Jesus’ Presentation in the Temple reminds us that, we too are to “present” ourselves to the Lord. When we present ourselves to the Lord we have to be without blemish. If we desire our sacrifice to be accepted, it must not be lame and imperfect. It would be a greater offence to offer to God a heart diseased with malicious sin. It must therefore first be cleansed by tears of sincere repentance. Our offering must be sincere and zealous, without reservations. If we give our hearts to Christ in this way, we shall receive His grace and benedictions.

Presenting gifts are part of our Christian practice, do we present gifts from our heart? Do we present our children as gifts to God? Do we raise our children in the faith and teach them so that they too may grow strong and full of wisdom? How do we present our children to God? Do we present our children as Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple? They knew that the gift they carried in their arms belonged to God and to the world. They knew the cost of giving such a gift. Ultimately, are we willing to give the gift that cost us the most? Or

do we give God from the excess we have. St Luke 6:38 says *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."*

Sharing is Caring

We would also see in both Mary and Joseph a decision to follow through with their calling from the Lord. Where they could have "redeemed" their son and kept him for themselves, they chose instead to dedicate him to God and to the mission for which he was born. Presenting Jesus in the Temple, just as Hannah presented Samuel, they generously offered this baby to the whole world, allowing all of us to embrace him just as Simeon did.

Today as parents, we hold the greatest hope for our children, but we may feel the future looks unwelcoming, ambiguous, and unpromising. On the other hand, we provide our children with the wisdom of our Christian tradition, the courage to be countercultural, and the faith to hold on to the power of God's love.

Let us as Christians learn to offer ourselves to God; let us devote ourselves with all our senses and faculties to His

service. If lethargy, or any other immorality, has made us forgetful of this essential duty, we must lament our past errors, and make a sincere and serious effort to sanctify ourselves and present ourselves to the divine majesty with greater passion, crying out with David saying *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,"* Psalm 51:1-4.

He is inviting us to present ourselves and our most precious possessions to him. He is asking us to look to His Spirit so that He can shower us with His grace and show us His will. He is telling us that our lives can have great value in His kingdom, even if we feel insignificant in this world. And He is telling us that it is never a waste to spend time in His presence, waiting for Him to show Himself to us.

(Rev. Fr. Nithin V. Rajan, is a priest from Bangalore Diocese. He is currently pursuing Masters at United Theological College (UTC), Bangalore)



H.G. ABRAHAM MAR
STEPHANOS METROPOLITAN
(UK EUROPE AND AFRICA DIOCESE)



H.G. DR. THOMAS MAR
IVANIOS METROPOLITAN
(SOUTH WEST AMERICA DIOCESE)



H.G. DR. GEEVARGHESE MAR
THEOPHILOS METROPOLITAN
(AHMEDABAD DIOCESE)



H.G. GEEVARGHESE MAR
PHILOXENOS METROPOLITAN
(MADRAS DIOCESE)

**NEWLY ORDAINED
BISHOPS'
DIOCESAN
APPOINTMENTS**

**CONGRATS AND
BEST WISHES**



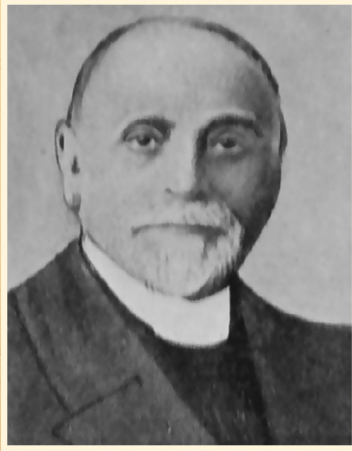
H.G. GEEVARGHESE MAR
PACHOMIOS METROPOLITAN
(MALABAR DIOCESE)



H.G. DR. GEEVARGHESE MAR
BARNABAS METROPOLITAN
(SULTHAN BATHERY DIOCESE)



H.G. ZACHARIAH MAR
SEVERIOS METROPOLITAN
(IDUKKI DIOCESE)



Rev. Fr. Dr. Shapurji Dadabhai Bhabha M.D.: A Pious and Purposeful Physician and Priest

Dr. Meledath Kurian Thomas

He was born in a prominent Parsi family following Zoroastrianism in India. Did his higher education in United Kingdom and became a physician. During his studies, he was interested in Christianity and became a Protestant Christian. Later he was attracted towards the Malankara Orthodox Church and became a priest. He lived as a pious member of the Church until his last breath. He is none other than Rev. Fr. Dr. Shapurji Dadabhai Bhabha M.D. *alias* Dr. S. D. Bhabha, the 'Ambassador of the Malankara Church' to London and the first priest of the Malankara Orthodox Church in England.

Dr. Bhabha was born in Surat in 1859. At the age of 14, Bhabha moved to Ireland for higher studies with the assistance of his uncle and Indian nationalist leader Dhadhabai Naoroji who was known as the 'Grand Old Man of India'. He took his post-graduate medical degree from Glasgow University, Scotland. He started his practice in London and within a short time Dr. Bhabha gained the reputation as a well-known physician. He was a prominent member of the British Medical Council from 1881 to 1926.

During his study in the United Kingdom, Dr. Bhabha was attracted towards Christianity. He embraced the Presbyterian Church and became an active Church worker. He was elevated as deacon. His mission area was among the Jews who had migrated to United Kingdom and several of them converted into Christianity. As a result, the Presbyterian Church initiated a separate mission to work among the Jews and established a centre at Jerusalem.

In April 1886, Dr. Bhabha's parents, who were aware about his entry to Christianity, wrote a letter to Dhadhabai Naoroji requesting him to work for Dr. Bhabha's return

to the folds of Zoroastrianism. Naoroji did eventually meet with Bhabha and presented him with letters from his family, but he quickly recognized that the convert's Christian fervor was far too great to expect any religious reversion. Regardless, he told Bhabha that he could not help but sympathize with his father's 'agony'.

Even during his active service in the Presbyterian Church, Dr. Bhabha did not cease his research on Christianity. Those higher studies made him aware about the Malankara Orthodox Church. Though he had no connection with anybody belonging to the Malankara Church, he was conscious about its doctrines and had an in-depth knowledge about its history. Dr. Bhabha wrote several articles in British periodicals and published many pamphlets about evangelization in India and especially about the Malankara Church. He argued that "...the indigenous Church of India is the (Malankara) Syrian Church and that only they have the right to administer the Church in India. Since the Malankara Church is not capable to change/convert India through its own mission work, the missionaries from other Churches must hand over the converts through their work to the (Malankara) Syrian Church and they should be governed by the Metropolitan of the (Malankara) Syrian Church..."

Such arguments of Dr. Bhabha caught the attention of *Edvazhickal* E. M. Philip, the Malankara Association Secretary and the Editor of the periodical '*Malankara Edavaka Pathrika*'. They started mutual correspondence and became close friends. E. M. Philip introduced Dr. Bhabha to the primate of the Malankara Church, Pulikotttil Joseph Mar Dionysius V, Malankara Metropolitan. Dr.



Bhabha was attracted to the Malankara Church and expressed his desire to be a member of it and become a priest.

Mar Dionysius V happily agreed to his yearning. For convenience he directed Dr. Bhabha to Jerusalem to get ordained and issued necessary letters in this regard. Accordingly, Dr. Bhabha reached Jerusalem at the end of 1902. Metropolitan Mar Ivanios Elias, then Syriac primate of Jerusalem did the Chrismation of Dr. Bhabha on Saturday, December 20, 1902 and ordained him as deacon (*Shamsono*) on the same day at St. Mark's Monastery, Jerusalem.

On the next day, Sunday, December 21, 1902, Metropolitan Mar Ivanios Elias ordained Dr. Bhabha as Priest. December 21st is celebrated as the Feast of St. Thomas according to the western tradition and as the last Sunday before the Feast of Nativity, known as the '*Sunday of Genealogy*,' according to the Syriac tradition. He left Jerusalem on January 1, 1903 to London with the credentials from Mar Dionysius V as the Ambassador of the Malankara Church to United Kingdom. According to E. M. Philip, Dr. Bhabha was a pious and zealous priest. He used the English translation of the Anaphora of St. James to celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

Dr. Bhabha's name is recorded in history in golden letters for his role in the enthronement of St. Vattasseril Mar Dionysius VI in 1909. The Malankara Association held in 1908 elected Very Rev. Fr. Vattasseril Geevarghese Remban as the assistant and successor of the Malan-

kara Metropolitan. He, along with Very Rev. Fr. Kochuparambil Paulose Remban, another bishop elect, was sent to Jerusalem for being consecrated by the Patriarch of Antioch. Even though Patriarch Ignatius Abdullah II consecrated Geevarghese Remban as Metropolitan with the Episcopal name 'Dionysius', he refused to give the '*Sthathikon*' (certificate of the consecration of bishops in Syriac Christianity) as the successor of Mar Dionysius. Such a document was essential for the valid succession of Mar Dionysius VI after Dionysius V according to the Travancore Royal Court judgement of 1889.

The verdict of the Travancore Royal Court judgement of 1889 was pronounced in the Church litigation, popularly known as the '*Seminary Case*', between Mar Dionysius V and Thomas Mar Athanasius, the founder of the Malankara Marthoma Church. The judgement clearly ascertained that the Malankara Metropolitan should be elected by the Church members and consecrated by the Patriarch and that both factors are equally important and unavoidable. Mar Dionysius VI was unanimously elected as the successor of Mar Dionysius V by the Malankara Association held at Old Seminary, Kottayam, on 27 February 1908. He was consecrated as Metropolitan Mar Dionysius on 31 May 1908 by the Patriarch of Antioch at Jerusalem. Yet, the latter declined to give the '*Sthathikon*' in the form the Malankara Church desired because of another clause in the Royal Court judgement of 1889.

The Royal Court judgement of 1889 clearly ascertained that even though the Patriarch of Antioch is the spiritual head, he has no temporal authority over the Malankara Church. This verdict disturbed the Patriarch intensely since they tried to interfere even into the everyday temporalities of the Malankara Church. To overcome this hurdle, the Patriarch repeatedly demanded a registered deed by the Malankara Church accepting his temporal authority. That was declined by Mar Dionysius V and the Malankara Association Managing Committee. During his consecration, Vattasseril Mar Dionysius too was asked by the Patriarch for such a document. That was also duly refused. Hence, the Patriarch refused to issue the '*Sthathikon*' as the successor. He envisaged that during his planned tour to Kerala soon, he would 'bargain' for a registered deed in his favour, in exchange for the '*Sthathikon*,' which was an important document.

In 1909, Mar Dionysius V fell ill, which eventually led to his demise. At that time Patriarch Abdullah II was staying in London as the guest of Dr. Bhabha for three months *enroute* to Kerala. The Malankara Church understood the gravity of the lack of the 'Sthathikon'. E. M. Philip repeatedly requested the Patriarch for the document, which he kept declining.

It is in such a critical situation that E. M. Philip requested Dr. Bhabha to intervene. Dr. Bhabha persistently put pressure on the Patriarch who was then his guest at London. Finally, Patriarch Abdullah II was forced to issue the 'Sthathikon' from London. The enthronement of Mar Dionysius VI as Malankara Metropolitan took place smoothly before the arrival of the Patriarch. If the enthronement would not have taken place prior to his arrival, the fate of the independence of the Malankara Church would have been unpredictable, because of the turmoil created by the Patriarch in 1911. The Malankara Church is permanently obliged to Dr. Bhabha for his valuable role during this crucial period.

Dr. Bhabha was loyal to the Malankara Church till his demise in 1941. In 1937, 78 year-old Bhabha visited Catholicos Mar Baselius Geevarghese II several times during the Catholicos' stay at London while he was travelling to Edinburgh. He also hosted the Holy Father at his residence. Dr. Bhabha received Holy Communion from the Catholicos, at the Eucharistic service celebrated by him at the Armenian Apostolic Church in London on September 9, 1937.

It is assumed that Dr. Bhabha fell sick soon after. Very Rev Fr. C. M. Thomas Remban (later Metropolitan Thoma Mar Dionysius) who accompanied Catholicos Mar Baselius Geevarghese II to England and stayed back till 1939 for his higher studies at Oxford, stated that he had visited Dr. Bhabha several times during his illness and sadly also administered the sacrament of 'Anointing the Sick'.

Dr. Bhabha, who was a bachelor, lived the last phase of his life with his brother's grand-son Dhorabji Bhabha at London. He entered into eternal rest on 3 January 1941. Since there were no priests from the Malankara Orthodox Church in England at that time, he was laid to rest by a Roman Catholic priest at Brockley Cemetery under the local city council. But, Dr. Bhabha assigned

the possession of his tomb in writing to the monastery of Holy Transfiguration, Pathanapuram, India, founded by Metropolitan Thoma Mar Dionysius.

In the course of time, sadly Dr. Bhabha vanished from memory. Yet, a serious enquiry about him began after the establishment of the UK-Europe-Africa Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church. After a painful search, his tomb was identified in the Brockley Cemetery adjacent to St. Gregorios Indian Orthodox Church, the flagship parish of the Malankara Orthodox Church in England. The monastery of Holy Transfiguration, Pathanapuram handed over the possession of his tomb to the diocese. Then, by the initiative of the Diocesan Metropolitan, the tomb was restored and rededicated in 2021 to mark the 80th anniversary of his demise.

Fr. Dr. S. D. Bhabha was the first Malankara Orthodox priest in England. He entered into eternal rest on 3rd January 1941. Catholicos Mar Baselius Geevarghese II, the first primate of the Malankara Church to set foot in England went to his heavenly abode on 3rd January 1964. Considering this, H. G. Dr. Mathews Mar Timothios, former Metropolitan of UK-Europe-Africa, directed all parishes and congregations in the diocese to commemorate both of them together on 3rd January, every year, or the nearest day, with Eucharistic service. He also gave special instructions to St. Gregorios Indian Orthodox Church, London, to offer incense prayer at the tomb of Dr. Bhabha to mark his memorial annually.

There are similarities between St. Luke the evangelist and Fr. Dr. Shapurji Dadabhai Bhabha M.D. Both were physicians. St. Luke was a gentile Christian hailing from Antioch in Ancient Syria. Whereas Dr. Bhabha was a Parsi Christian of Indian origin and lived in London. Both were missionaries. St. Luke penned a gospel and the Acts of Apostles. Though the literary contributions of Dr. Bhabha are plenty, they are yet to be explored.

(Dr. Meledath Kurian Thomas is a reputed historian and a prolific author. He has published numerous books about the heritage of Indian Christianity especially of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Currently he is serving as the general editor of 'Paithrukam Malankara Sabha Sahithe Sarani' and as visiting faculty member of St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary, Nagpur.)

Spiritual Seclusion is a Necessity for The Making of a Worthy Priest

Fr. Alexander J. Kurien

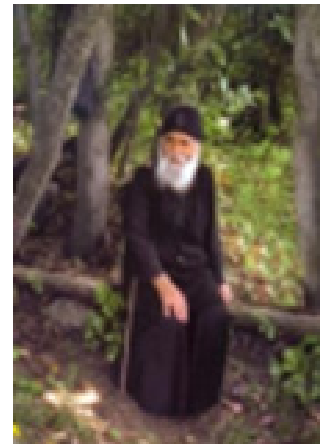
Mount Athos is commonly referred to in Greek as the Agion Oros ('Holy Mountain'). Mount Athos, an autonomous monastic state, is the spiritual capital of the Orthodox Christian world, consisting of 20 monasteries and 13 Sketes with approximately 3,000 monks. I began my first pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain at the age of 19 during the summer of 1980, and thereafter I spent my summers and religious holidays on the Holy Mountain. After thoroughly studying the Orthodox faith at the seminary and on the Holy Mountain, I was baptized and chrismated into Orthodoxy during a Great Lenten Presanctified Friday Holy Liturgy in 1982. Coming up as an Orthodox Faithful after a complete submersion in the Aegean Sea was an extraordinary life event which I shall cherish eternally. When I was on the mountain, at night, I was often tormented by the secular thoughts, "What am I doing here? Is this really my place? Maybe I should abandon everything: my life, family, and material things—and leave for Athos? Yes, after seminary, I finally abandoned everything in life and left for the Holy Mountain in 1983 at the age of 22, to labor ascetically there, where I began my life on Mount Athos as a Novice.



I have visited and spent time in 17 of the 20 monasteries. Mt. Athos is a concentration of ascetic and hesychast monasticism established on tradition and based on experience. To this day, Athos has been a space in my life where an absolute feeling of the greatest human measure and ascetic extremes reigns. The things I have encountered there are closer to the Divine and transcendent than the human and natural.

On my first visit in 1980, before reaching my final destination on the Holy Mountain, my spiritual father

Archimandrite Dionysius wanted me to first visit Elder Paisios who was canonized as a saint in 2015 as St. Paisios. I reached his hermitage after walking 13 kilometers. What an amazing introduction into the spiritual life of the Holy Mountain. His first questions for me, a spiritually weak 19-year-old, was - What does Christ demand from us? Can



one reach all virtues? If it is impossible, how can one keep from falling into despair? While I sat there in a lost state, Elder Paisios gave the following answer: "Purity, divine justice, humility, love, non-possessiveness and all virtues — all these are one and the same thing. One virtue contains all virtues in the same fashion as one passion contains all passions. Our soul has to purify itself and decrease its desires. Divine grace cannot act where there is no struggle against passions. During my many subsequent visits, Elder used to say that "we need to cleanse our soul from passions. The more the person cleanses himself, the more the Divine grace acts in him. One depends on the other. When the person is cleansed from passions, then he can see both: the Divine grace and the fulfillment of what Christ has promised us." His final advice before I left the Holy Mountain was, "My child, egoism is a great enemy of ours. All of us without exception should struggle against it." Often, I ran with great spiritual hunger to hear his precious stories and pearly spiritual wisdom. St. Paisios' divine words and guidance became the strong foundation for preparing me for Holy Priesthood.

Athonite spirituality is the need for experience and a "sign". My attraction and inquisitiveness began with my own personal experiences of a Mount Athos replete with miracles. Fragrant relics, legends and stories associated

with miraculous icons, supernatural miracles, the charisma of holy monks, apparitions of saints, miraculous solutions to problems, corpses that retain their suppleness and do not emit the smell of decomposition and submission to the powers of nature, formed a picture that developed in a natural way to describe, reveal and present God deep in my heart not as a strange and faraway miracle, but as a transcendent truth and reality easily confirmed by those who have eyes to see. So, I was first an innocent boy on Mt. Athos introduced to a spiritual life, strengthened by the firsthand experience of this glorious holy mountain.

There I lived and breathed God's mystery, which does not correspond to any rules and was not an identity of opinion, an impressive similarity, or an amazing coincidence, but manifested itself as a peaceful difference, an immeasurable and unexpected diversity, an inimitable uniqueness, a compatibility of opposites and a harmony of incompatible things. Everything is expressed naturally, with ease and simplicity. I sat in front of monks like a child for hours listening to their living experiences, the miracles they have witnessed, the unwritten stories, and the lessons they have learned.

After visiting Elder Paisios, I walked 18 kilometers through the Hills of Holy Mountain for four and a half



hours, to reach my final destination at the Monastery of Simonos Petra. My spiritual father greeted

me with the three traditional kisses on the cheek, a warm embrace, a glass of water, shot of Ouzo, and some Loukoumi (Greek name for Turkish Delight). Vespers were at 4 pm, then a 10-minute meal eaten in silence, and return to the church. During my first night at the monastery, I was standing in church at 3:30 am for early morning prayers followed by Morning Prayer and Holy Liturgy which concluded around sunrise. There was no electricity in the church, candles were burning and prayers were being read. It was stuffy, my head was spinning, and I went to the narthex and sat on a bench. It was fresher there, with cool air coming in from outside, and the sound of the

service reached me from the church. I closed my eyes and began to pray. Two days later, I was exposed to the great feast day of St. Mary Magdalene in the Monastery of Simonos Petra (Simon Peter) on July 22. Among the many holy relics of Simonopetra Monastery on Mount Athos is the left hand of the Myrrh-bearing woman, St. Mary Magdalene. It is the most sacred treasure of Simons Petra. This hand is incorrupt, exudes a beautiful heavenly fragrance, gives off a bodily warmth as if it is still living, and works many miracles. Because of these many miracles, St. Mary Magdalene is held with great reverence by the monks of Simonopetra, who consider her to be the second foundress of the Holy Monastery.

Simonos Petra was founded by St. Simon, a hermit who lived in a cave, a five-minute walk downhill from the monastery. Inside a tiny chapel, a few rocky steps took me up to Simon's cell. It was tiny, cold, and bare. I was blessed beyond human imagination to have stayed in his cave for two weeks. He had a vision in a dream of a monastery on the rock in front of his cave and then had the audacity to build it. As one elder monk told me with a smile, this is the world's first skyscraper. An improbable-looking 10-story building is somehow wrapped around a huge rock with the church at its center. My personal cell where I stayed for 3 years was located 7 floors underground carved from the rock. The monastery (the wooden portion above the rock has been burned down on several occasions), but then rebuilt with great effort. Inside is a bewildering array of staircases, a labyrinth that leads down to the monastic library (there is no elevator), where I spent many hours reading the writings of the church fathers.

Holy Mount Athos is known as the Garden of the Most Holy Theotokos, a unique place where the Person of the Most Holy Mother of God is honored, revealed, acts and rests. Everywhere and always, in every place and at every point, there is a unique occasion and opportunity for people to feel the embrace of the Most Holy Theotokos. I felt this comfort of her divine embrace and unconditional love throughout my stay on the mountain.

Those all-night vigils on the Holy Mountain raised me to the heavens. Although, the body sleeps out of nature's need during an all-night vigil, my heart always stood awake out of its great love for St. Mary Magdalene



and the spiritual experience out of this world. Singing of the Polyeleos (Psalm 135) which is a festive portion of the all-night vigil service, is heavenly. The Polyeleos (=of much mercy) is considered to be the high point of the service and contains the reading of the matins Gospel.

Towards the end I experienced a spiritual feeling and an event that I had no idea about. The choir intensified the celebration. The monks showed by their whole appearance that they were experiencing something the likes of which I could not perceive. The only thing that I was able to do was to follow what was going on—superficially and with curiosity. Soon the monks standing next to me left their places and by turn, went up to the relics. Making three prostrations, they kissed the hand of St. Mary Magdalene, was anointed by the priest, and with deep emotion returned to their place. My Abbot, Elder Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra came and took me by hand and said “You go, too, don’t be shy—today the Saint is fragrant. Receive some of her grace.” I did what he said and went up to the relics. And I was astonished by the fragrance. I returned to my place—physically—but mentally I stayed with the St. Mary Magdalene. My heart melted while my faith increased. It was the “sign” that I had been asking for and needed. I couldn’t believe it. I was experiencing and melting away in faith through what was going on without reasoning or arguments. This was the turning point in life.

This is a special place—people are not born there—they live, pray, and die there to enter into the Heavenly Kingdom. Although they live in the body, the monastic life is the angelic life. And Athos itself is much closer to Heaven than to Earth. As you know, I was on Athos nineteen times, and lived and worked there for a few weeks each time. What is Athos for me? It is hard to answer succinctly. I was spiritually very weak when I entered the seminary. But, Mt. Athos is the spiritual school, a rigorous school which I badly needed to become who I am today. I have started first grade in spiritual school on Mt. Athos. I got tired of porridge and began seeking for solid food. And on Athos I found this solid food. To live

on Mt. Athos is all asceticism. Mt. Athos is no resort; it is a hospital for my soul and heart. Everything falls into place there. You get such a spiritual jolt there! Athos sobers a man, and you understand how you should live, and what you should do.

The main weapon in spiritual battle is prayer. All monks in monasteries are always praying. We need spiritual help and support, and the monks on the Holy Mountain blessed me to pray at the Athonite holy places—there, where Heaven is closer to Earth, where continuous prayer is offered up for the whole world. During my stay on the Holy Mountain, I went everywhere on foot to offer my labors to the Lord.

During my stay on the Holy Mountain, I had a major injury which crippled me with paralysis below my waist for 9 months. I personally experienced the supernatural miracle of Most Holy Ever Virgin Mary. I tear-up every time I tell the story (including right now while I write this); knowing the abundant Joy that awaits us simply by turning to Him. To me, there is nothing better! We are beneficiaries of such majesty only washed by the Blood of Christ, for all of humankind’s sins. This is the Greatest Gift! The thought is so precious that the tears are clouding my eyes again. I need Him so.

In 1926, a decree by the Greek government made the Monks Republic an official part of Greece while allowing it to retain an autonomous theocratic government. Since the 1950’s there has been a gradual reawakening of interest in the monastic life and currently more than 3000 monks live amongst the monasteries and forest hermitages of Athos. Most of the monasteries are along the coastal lands and consist of a quadrangle of buildings enclosing a church. The churches contain some of the finest examples of Byzantine art, icons and treasures, and the monastery libraries hold a vast number of classical and medieval manuscripts. There are 17 Greek monasteries, 1 Russian, 1 Bulgarian, and 1 Serbian. While a few of the Greek monasteries have basic electricity, most function very much as they did in medieval times. The monks grow their own food, spend long hours each day in prayer, and rarely venture off the peninsula.

Many ask me about visiting Mt. Athos. The traveler will not be able just to walk in: the territory is closed to intruders. You will have to request a permit, if possible,

months in advance. 'Athos' is connected with the world through two ferry lines which run a service from the small Greek village of Ouranoupoli (south border) or from Lerissos (north border). If you want to visit Mount Athos the first step is to submit a copy of your passport



to the Mount Athos Pilgrims' Bureau. Each day, 100 Orthodox and 10 non-Orthodox male pilgrims are admitted for a three-night stay in one of the peninsula's 20

monasteries. Women will not be granted a permit.

It is a common misconception that monks do nothing but sit and pray all day. In fact, they spend a lot of the day working on the tasks given to them by the abbot. Every effort is used for whatever job a monk is given as they believe it is a job given to them directly by God and are often reciting a prayer while they work. The monks eat silently, often listening to one of their members reciting a prayer in the refectory of the monastery. Their food is usually rather simple – comprising mainly of vegetables and sometimes fish, complimented with water and wine. Most of the ingredients are commonly grown on the monastery's farms and they all have their own vineyard for the supply of the wine.

If a monk would rather not live the monastic life, they can live in a Skete, a small community which allows relative isolation. Monks may choose this life of complete isolation and simplicity to feel closer to God and be far away from any distractions to their prayer. Not long ago, hermits (the monks that live in the Sketes) could only access their cells by hauling themselves up with ropes or chains that passed over makeshift pulleys. In some of the most inaccessible cells, if the hermit ever needed help they would have to raise a flag which would alert their neighbor – and only then would someone visit. As most of the cells are inaccessible, supplies such as firewood and food need to be brought over in baskets suspended from ropes.

The skulls of the deceased monks are kept in the monastery with the names of the more recently deceased etched onto the foreheads. While the skull display underscores human transience, the 20 monasteries and a

host of smaller dwellings on Mount Athos seem eternal. Monks have been chanting psalms here daily for centuries. The monks, mostly Greek, spend about six hours in church daily. Even while working, most pray, their lips constantly moving with the refrain, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."

A monk's life on the Holy Mountain is summarized as - "He is happy, because he has nothing, but he has everything." My Abbot Archimandrite Aimilianos told me to always remember that "today you are here, the next day you are not. If you remember death every day, it keeps you from doing evil."

(Rev. Fr. Alexander J. Kurien is a senior priest of the Malankara Orthodox Church and a member of the Senior Executive Services (SES I), Deputy Associate Administrator/ Executive Director, United States Government in Washington, D.C.)

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**H.G. Dr. Geevarghese
Mar Yulios Metropolitan**
Kunnamkulam Diocese



St. Gregorios Dayabhavan: The House of Compassion

Susan Jacob

If the *National Mission Board*, with its numerous mission and charitable activities all over India, is the *crowning glory* of the Malankara Orthodox Church, then *St. Gregorios Dayabhavan*, Kunigal, Karnataka is the *jewel in her crown*.

Established in 2003, by Late Lamented H. G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, *St. Gregorios Dayabhavan* is the Church's response to the struggle against HIV and AIDS. The main objective of the centre was to rehabilitate orphans and children vulnerable to the risk of being infected with AIDS, but later expanded to bring under its shelter HIV positive children and people living with HIV&AIDS. While maintaining this core focus till date, the vision and understanding of the multidimensional impacts of HIV&AIDS, has, over the years encouraged the management to diversify into many new projects. Dayabhavan is presently running 23 projects, which includes two Rehabilitation Homes (one for healthy children of HIV +ve parents & another for HIV infected children); two Hospitals, one exclusively for HIV/AIDS & TB Patients and the other a Medical Mission hospital for the village community; a much appreciated Infant Care and Adoption Center; and a Kidney Foundation.

Dayabhavan courageously helped the hungry and the needy during the COVID 19 Pandemic, and selflessly supported the Government's endeavour to break the chain of the Corona Virus. Amazingly, a 24th project, a *de-addictive drive* called *Daya-Vimukthi* launched in early December this year, dealing with the drug menace, is the latest feather in its cap.

Pioneered and managed by Secretary-cum-Manager Rev. Fr. Jinesh K. Varkey recently ordained as Very Rev. Abraham Ramban, *Dayabhavan* is completing its 20th year in the service of humanity.

In the Beginning

Distressed by the stories of stigma, marginalization and suffering of HIV positive people and their families, particularly the plight of children, Very Rev. Dr. Yuhanon Ramban, HG Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, icon of compassion and missionary zeal and his close follower the Very Rev. K I. Philip Ramban, desired to find a way to redress this pathetic situation. Subsequently, Very Rev. Philip Ramban, was nominated by the Mission Board in Nov 2002 as Project Director for establishing a Care home. As the prevalence of HIV was high in South India, especially in Karnataka, he mooted the idea of

establishing the Care home in Karnataka, and began exploring the availability of a suitable location. It was at this juncture that Late Mr. K. K. Mathukutty Vaidyan of Jalahalli, a philanthropist and a devout Orthodox Christian, offered 10 acres of land in Vanigere village in Kunigal to the Malankara Orthodox Church Mission Board for a nominal sum. He had also constructed a small two-room building on it to facilitate the initial activities. Dayabhavan had its humblest of beginnings in this small building and started functioning with 4 children in the year 2003. Fr. Jinesh K. Varkey was deputed by H.G. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios Metropolitan as Manager and Secretary.

In the Steps of the Master

The creation of human beings as the Image of God (Gen 1:27) is one of the basic tenets of Orthodox Theology. Distortion of the image of God could occur due to various reasons like sin or sickness. As diseases like AIDS are believed to be caused by certain lifestyles, HIV



positive people are regarded as sinners. However, the life of Jesus teaches us that no one is excluded from God's love and mercy and a good physician does not sit in judgement over the cause of the illness but initiates the healing process with compassion and kindness.

With the abundant blessings and grace of God, the Malankara Church undertook to launch this daring initiative, at a time when the world knew very little about the disease, except that it had global dimensions and that death tolls were on the rise. They put their lives at risk, but believed, trusted and moved forward in the steps of the Master.

The Banyan Tree

Dayabhavan, the House of Compassion, grew like a Banyan Tree and brought under its refreshing and restoring shelter not only the affected and infected, but the whole community, giving them holistic treatment

and loving compassionate care. It serves as a grass-root organisation in the areas of *rehabilitation and education, health care, capacity building, outreach programs and other community services* in Vanigere Village of Kunigal Taluk in Tumkur District of Karnataka State.

Rehabilitation: Dayabhavan and Dayatheeram

Though Dayabhavan started functioning in a 2 room facility with 4 children, the number later increased to 12 affected children in June 2003. The children were happy to move into a newly constructed building by Nov 2005. When children living with HIV&AIDS (PLWHA) were also brought under its shelter, *Dayatheeram*, a new building with a ten-bed facility was added in May 2006 to accommodate them. Today, Dayabhavan rehabilitates 72 inmates of various ages from above 6 years at the Home of Compassion and 25 kids from 0-6 years at the special infant care centre. They also take care of 253 non-residential patients who stay in their own homes, and visit them twice a week.

Education

All inmates are enrolled in formative schools and in professional courses, to enable them to pursue employment opportunities to support themselves and their families. It is heart-warming to note that some of the children from Dayabhavan are now pursuing professional courses and a few have also gained employment. Their academic and professional achievements are an inspiration to all resident inmates. *The Nagesh Memorial Merit Award* in memory of Nagesh, a promising inmate who succumbed to AIDS, was instituted for the best performer pursuing Bachelor's Degree in Social Work (BSW) at Tumkur University.

Health Care:

Dayabhavan and its struggle against HIV&AIDS:

Daya Sparsha Hospital and Dayabhavan Medical Mission Hospital

As early as 2006, three years from the date it started its activities, Dayabhavan took the initiative of starting a Community Care Centre, a free clinic for the benefit of the villagers living near Dayabhavan. This later evolved into *Dayasparsha Hospital* for the exclusive treatment of HIV&AIDS and TB, and in 2014 was relocated to Tumkur. Much acclaimed for its performance and hailed as one of

its kind in Tumkur and adjoining districts, the hospital gives complete medical and counselling support to AIDS and Tuberculosis patients, such as anti-retroviral therapy, nursing, and palliative care. The staff conduct health camps and outreach programs among rural communities. Meanwhile, the foundational Community Care Centre continues to function as *Dayabhavan Medical Mission Hospital* located in the campus of Dayabhavan Children Home and serves the village community at a nominal cost.

Recognition as a major contributor in the field of HIV and AIDS

A milestone that confirmed Dayabhavan as a major contributor and a meaningful presence in the journey of health care, was the declaration of the Community Care Centre as a DOT centre (Directly Observed Treatment) for TB patients and as a Centre for Integrated Counseling and Testing Care (ICTC) for HIV and AIDS patients, by the Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT). Though there was initial reservation among the public and the local villagers towards the idea of having a HIV&AIDS Centre in the neighbourhood, the commitment and earnestness of the Dayabhavan team under the Very Rev Philip Ramban and Fr. Jinesh, managed to overcome these obstacles and gain their confidence in a very short time. It is highly commendable that Dayabhavan not only works with the local people, but also operates in close liaison with National Aids Control Organization (NACO), Revised National Tuberculosis Control programs (RNTCP), Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT), Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society (KSAPS), Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI) and Mother Teresa Children's

Foundation (MTCF).

A Series of Honors and Awards from Governmental and other Organisations

The award that projected Dayabhavan onto the national stage and served as a major fillip for further action and development was the 'A' Grade Certificate, awarded by NACO, (Govt. of India), in 2010. This award, which came in its 7th year of existence, was a major recognition for all the hard work and meticulous management done by the Community Care Centre. Awards and recognition from Govt. agencies and others include 'Best Services Providers for HIV&AIDS (2012 KSAPS Govt. of Karnataka); 'Selfless Contributors Award' for 'Selfless Service' (2013 MTCF UK); 'Best NGO Award', for its 'Tuberculosis Control Program' in Tumkur District (2014 RNTCP, Govt. of India); 'Tippu Jayanthi award' for *Improvement of the Quality of life of people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS* (2017 Dept. of Kannada and Culture, Tumkur, Govt. of Karnataka); 'Honor Award' for 'Outstanding service to HIV patients' (2020 District Administration, Tumkur); 'Honor award' for 'Outstanding Services to HIV Patients'; (2021 Health and Family Welfare Dept., Tumkur) and a prestigious and highly commendable 'Kannada Rajyotsava Award' for 'Services rendered to the Society from 2003,' (2022, District Administration, Tumkur, Govt. of Karnataka). Such recognition from the Government on *Karnataka Rajyotsava Day* is indeed significant and overwhelming.

Apart from Regional, National and International recognition and awards, Dayabhavan has been receiving almost annually many other awards from religious organisations and sister churches of the Orthodox Syrian Church.

Follow up and Awareness activities:

DayaDeepthi, DayaVarsha, DayaSahayatra, Daya-Sanchalana, DayaACSM and DayaArogyapariपालाना

Dayabhavan's unique methodology of keeping in touch with patients who have undergone treatment in DayaSparsha hospital, extending follow up care and keeping them abreast with the developments in treatment and medicines through their *Dayadeepthi* program and helping them learn Income generating skills at the *DayaVarsha* Community Service Centre at Hebbur,



Tumkur, keeps the community united, rendering them moral and life support. Apart from intervention services the centre also conducts preventive activities through awareness and guidance programs on universal precaution for medical and para-medical staff in its *Daya Sahayatra* program, and other residential training programs on home based care for HIV patients called *Daya Sanchalana*.

Awareness programs on HIV and TB, mental health, suicide prevention and hygiene under the project *Daya ACSM* were initiated as early as 2006. This was the need of the hour, as in the early days, being positive made one depressed and desperate, leading to suicide. *Daya Arogyaparipalana* which began in the year 2008 conducts Community outreach programs, in which medical camps are held at villages, creating awareness on health and hygiene.

Daya Prakasha: Residential Camp for Teenagers

Care doesn't stop with this, but includes residential camps for HIV +ve teenagers under the Dayaprakasha project started in 2022., in which they focus on gender equality, creating equal opportunities, making friends, sharing inner feelings, life skills and following a strict medical schedule.

Nutritional Support: Many national and international researches have emphasized the need for good nutritional support as an integral part of comprehensive care facilities. UN General Assembly and WHO had passed resolutions stating that member-states should integrate nutrition-support for People living with HIV&AIDS, especially small children. This is easier said than done. Concerned



V. Rev. Fr. Abraham Ramban
Formerly Fr. Jinesh K. Varkey

about this situation, *Daya Chiguru* program was initiated in 2008, making available the much needed nutritional, medical and material support for children below 6 years. Survival kits were distributed to HIV infected widows and educational materials to 20 children (affected and infected). 422 ready-made dresses were supplied to 16 Anganwadis in Kunigal Taluk.

Daya RakthaDhaana Mission, initiated in 2012, spread awareness about blood, blood donations and transfusions, which are very important factors in the occurrence and treatment of HIV&AIDS. Apart from conducting regular Blood donation camps, during the struggle against COVID 19, this mission achieved the phenomenal job of collecting 307 units of blood through camps held at various places and handed it over to the authorities. This was widely appreciated and was specially mentioned in the citation of one of the awards given to Dayabhavan.

The HIV&AIDS care and the additional projects that were started to solve each related issue, made Dayabhavan a much sought after NGO, gaining respect and acceptance among both ordinary people and Governmental authorities.

Editor's Note: Due to paucity of space, more about the other important and praiseworthy projects like the Kidney Foundation, Infant Care and adoption centre, COVID 19 etc initiated by Dayabhavan, will be shared in the next issue.

The Malankara Sabha English Quarterly will be featuring a series of articles highlighting the Mission Centers, Monasteries and Convents of the Malankara Orthodox Church. This article on St. Gregorios Dayabhavan, Bangalore, is the third of the series.



NEWS SECTION

Inauguration of Marthoma Smrithi Karma Padhathi



‘The advent of St Thomas to India is not a myth but a verifiable historical truth’, stressed Goa Governor Adv. P S Sreedharan Pillai. His Excellency was speaking at the Inauguration of the Marthoma Memorial Action Plan (Marthoma Smrithi Karma Padhathi) in connection with the 150th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of St Thomas, held at Niranam Orthodox Valiya Palli, on December 21, 2022. His Holiness Baseline Marthoma Mathews III presided over this historic event. Major Archbishop Cardinal George Alenchery (Syro-Malabar Church) delivered the key note address and Most Rev. Dr. Theodosius Metropolitan (Marthoma Syrian Church) extended felicitations and blessings on the special occasion. Taking prime place as the first major initiative of the one-year long celebration of the 150th Anniversary

of the Martyrdom of St. Thomas, the Digitizing of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church named Malankara Orthodox Virtual Environment (MOVE), was inaugurated by His Holiness the Catholicos. Reaffirming the church’s social commitment to the poor and the needy, His Holiness also announced that the church would build 50 houses for disadvantaged people and would facilitate the marriage of 50 girls from the economically weaker sections. H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos (Secretary of Holy Synod); Rev. Fr. Dr. Saji Varghese Amayil (Priest Trustee); Sri. Rony Varghese Abraham (Lay Trustee); Adv. Biju Oommen (Association Secretary) and Rev. Fr. Thomas Mathew (Vicar, Niranam Valiya Palli) also spoke on the occasion.

Priests Symbols of Unity: His Holiness



Piravom: His Holiness the Catholicos Baseline Marthoma Mathews III, in a memorable address here affirmed that priests are symbols of unity. His Holiness was inaugurating the North Zone One Day Conference of All Malankara Orthodox Clergy Association at St. Mary’s Orthodox Cathedral, Piravom. The Holy Father added that priests must be able to keep the entire world alongside them without caste-creed-religious considerations. Metropolitan His Grace Dr. Mathews Mar Thimothios presided over the meeting. His Grace Dr. Yakob Mar Irenaios Metropolitan presented the theme of the meeting. His Grace Dr. Yuhanon Mar Polycarpus Metropolitan offered words of blessings. Metropolitan H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Meletius and H.G. Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasios graced the occasion with their presence. Rev. Fr. Dr. Ninan V.

George, General Secretary of the clergy association, and Rev. Fr. Shibu Kurian, Secretary, spoke on the occasion. Other speakers were Rev. Fr. Skaria Vattakkattil (Vicar, St. Mary’s Cathedral), Rev. Fr. Jose Thomas Poovathumkal, Rev. Fr. John Jacob, Dr. Tiju Thomas and Rev. Fr. P.A. Philip. Around two hundred priests from Kandanad West, Kandanad East, Thrissur, Angamaly & Kochi dioceses attended the conference

Balasamajam Central Level Camp, Parumala Seminary, 3-5 October 2022

The Akhila Malankara Balasamajam Central Camp was conducted on the 3rd, 4th and 5th of October 2022 at Parumala Seminary. The annual camp was organised with the theme “*But small is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life*” (Matthew 7:14) and had over five hundred participants. The opening ceremony was presided over by His Grace Alexios Mar Eusebius Metropolitan and was inaugurated by His Grace Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos Metropolitan. Rev. Fr. Jithu Thomas introduced the theme of the year following which several classes and music programs were held. H.H. Baseline Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan, inaugurated the closing ceremony which was presided over by His Grace Alexios Mar Eusebius Metropolitan. The camp was successfully coordinated by Very Rev. K. V. Paul Ramban (Parumala Seminary Manager), Sri. Rony Varghese (Lay Trustee), Rev. Fr. Biju P. Thomas (Balasamajam Vice-President), Rev. Fr. Jithu Thomas (General Secretary), Thalim Abraham (Treasurer) and Joint Secretary Libin and Lissy.

National Meeting of the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement, 3-5 October 2022



The 84th National Meeting of Orthodox Christian Youth Movement was held on 3rd, 4th and 5th of October at Mavelikara Punnamoodu Paulose Mar Pachomios Nagar. Sri. Suresh Gopi, Former Rajya Sabha Member inaugurated the meeting that was presided over by His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios Metropolitan. Along with Bible study sessions, classes on relevant contemporary issues such as 'Drug Abuse and Social Media Overuse' were conducted. Sri. Suresh Gopi inaugurated the 'Anti-Drug Awareness Program' following which an awareness seminar and march was organised. The closing ceremony presided over by His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios Metropolitan, was inaugurated by H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III. During the event, M.S. Arunkumar, MLA launched the PSC Online Coaching Program, started by the

Youth Movement. The national meeting was attended by more than 800 representatives and was led by His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios Metropolitan (President), Rev. Fr. Geevarghese Koshy (Vice-President), Rev. Fr. Aji K. Thomas (General Secretary), Sri. Paul Kanneth (Treasurer), Rev. Fr. Johns Eapen (Secretary, Mavelikara Diocese), Rev. Fr. Aji Varghese (Vice President, Youth Movement, Mavelikara Diocese), and other committee members.

International Association for Mission Studies (INAMS) 78th National Conference



The 78th National Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies (INAMS) was held from October 3 to 6 at St. Gregorios Dayabhavan in Kunigal, Bangalore. The conference was inaugurated by H.G. Dr. Gheevarghese Mar Coorilos and chaired by H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Theodoros. During the four-day conference, INAMS President, H.G. Dr. Gabriel Mar Gregorios, Bishops Dr. Joshua Mar Nicodemos, Dr. Abraham Mar Seraphim, as well as Mar Sebastian Edayanthrathu (Bishop of Mandiya, Syro-Malabar Church), chaired different sessions based on the main theme "I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit" (St. John. 15:16).

The main theme presentations were done by Fr. Dr. K.M. George and Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip. The conference also featured an ecumenical meeting,

panel discussion, mission experience, group discussion, youth meet, unit reports, and discussions on INAMS's future programs. These sessions were led and attended by Fr. Saji Babu (Marthoma Church, Tumkur), Fr. Joyson Kizhakkethil (Syro-Malabar Church), Very Rev. Thomaskutty Remban, Very Rev. Yuhanon Remban, Fr. Thomas Myalil, Dr. Philipose Joshua, K.G. Mathaikutty, Fr. Anish Varghese, Fr. Y. Mathaikutty, Dr. Siby Tharakan, Fr. Sobin Daniel, Fr. Jinesh Varkey, Sr. Mariyam, Fr. Thomas K. Chacko, Fr. T.U. Thomas, Mrs. Leelamma M.M., retired Justice P.G. Chacko, Reji Sam, Stephen Samuel, Reni Philip, Dr. Lissy Cherian, Prasad Samuel, Jose P.T., Aleena Shajan, Megha John, George Thomas, T.C. Thomas, C.George, C. Babykutty, Susamma Mathew, and David Thomas. The main organizers of the conference were Fr. Jinesh Varkey (Very Rev. Fr. Abraham Remban), N.M. Achenkunju, K.C. Raju, Sathyan Parakadavil, D. Rajan, Joseph Kurian, Regi Sam, Dr. Lissy Cherian, Fr. Sobin Daniel, M.J. Thomas, Aleesha, Fr. Biju Mathews, Jinod Kurian, Reena Joseph, Ramesh, Latha, Murali, Prof. P.K. Kurian, Thomas A. Koshy, Saramma Syriac, and Thomas Paul.

The conference appreciated the dedicated efforts of Prof. P K Kurian who served as the General Secretary of INAMS for the last twelve years and congratulated the newly appointed General Secretary, Mr. Thomas Paul, Pathanamthitta.

First Anniversary of the Enthronment of H. H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III as Catholicos



The first anniversary of the enthronement of H. H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III as Catholicos was held at Parumala on October 15. The ceremony was inaugurated by Sri. K.N. Balagopal, Kerala State Finance Minister. Felicitating His Holiness, the minister stated that the leadership of His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III has impacted not only the Orthodox Church, but the whole society. The glorious charitable projects led by His Holiness unite all churches and people despite differences and portrays an exemplary figure for all. On this auspicious occasion, His Holiness inaugurated the *Saukhyam* Five Year Charitable Mission organised in association with St. Gregorios Hospital, Parumala. The meeting was presided over by His Grace Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrisostomos Metropolitan.

Cypurs Archbishop Passes Away



Archbishop Chrysostomos II, Head of the Cyprus Orthodox Church passed away on November 7th morning. He was 81. His mortal remains were interred at St. Barnabas Cathedral in the capital city Nicosia on 12th November. His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople led the funeral service. Pope Theodoros II of Alexandria, Archbishop Ieronymos II, Head of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Presidents of Cyprus and Greece attended the funeral. His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the East offered condolences.

(Archbishop Makarios III of Cyprus (1950-1977) was also the first president of Cyprus (1960-1974). When he visited India in November 1962, he had discussions with then Catholicos, His Holiness Baselios Geevarghese II at

Thiruvananthapuram. There is a road named Mar Makarios Marg in New Delhi. The road got its name from the historic visit of Mar Makarios to the capital city.)

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Award Presented to Shri. Sonam Wangchuk



The prestigious 7th Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Award instituted by the Sophia Society, Delhi, was conferred on Shri. Sonam Wangchuk, an engineer, innovator and education reformist from Ladakh, on Sunday, 27 November 2022, at St. Thomas School Auditorium, Indirapuram, Delhi.

The Sophia Society, a registered charitable society under the Diocese of Delhi catering to social and educational objectives, had resolved to uphold the memory of Metropolitan Mar Gregorios, by instituting a prestigious biennial award called the Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Award, to be granted to an eminent person who exemplified the ideals and aspirations of the late Metropolitan. The recipients in the previous years, since its inception in 1997, have been H.H. The Dalai Lama, for Interfaith Dialogue and Co-operation; Dr.

Vergheese Kurien, for Community Self-renewal; Dr. P. K. Warriar, for Holistic Medicine; Dr. Baba Amte, for Creative Compassion; Dr. Karan Singh, for Interfaith Dialogue and Culture; Ms. Aruna Roy & Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) for Community and Human Renewal.

The 7th Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Award function was presided over by H. H. Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews-III, the Supreme Head of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. H.E. Shri Venkaiah Naidu, former Vice President of India, presented the award consisting of a cash award of Rs. 5 Lakhs, a citation and a medallion bearing the imprint of the Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios, to Shri Sonam Wangchuk. Former External Affairs Minister, Shri. Salman Khurshid, presented the Keynote Address and the Delhi Diocesan Metropolitan H. G. Dr. Youhanon Mar Demetrios welcomed the gathering. Rev. Fr. Saji Yohannan, the Diocesan Secretary read the citation and Rev. Fr. Dr. K. M. George, Director, Sopana Orthodox Academy, Kottayam, expressed thanks on behalf of Sophia Society. A huge gathering from different walks of life attended the function. A book titled 'Gregorios, the Gifted' was also released during the function.

22 Houses blessed and handed over under the Koottikkal Bhavana Nirmana Project



The Koottikkal Bhavana Nirmana project was the outcome of the visit of His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III and His Grace Yuhanon Mar Diascoros to the flood affected regions in Kootikkal, Mundakayam. A committee consisting of Rev. Fr. Mathew K. John (Manager, Kuriakose Dayara, Pampady), Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Mani and Rev. Fr. Yohannan, was formed to take immediate action on building houses for those affected. 22 houses were built under the aegis of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and were blessed by His Grace Yuhanon Mar Diascoros. The house keys were handed over to the respective families by Adv. Sebastian Kulathunkal, (MLA Poonjar).

Shruti School starts Certificate Course in Sound Reinforcement for Places of Worship



Shruti School of Liturgical Music at the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, is starting a Certificate Course in Sound Reinforcement for Places of Worship from January 2023 onwards. The course will be delivered via a mixture of lectures, demonstrations, online classes and videos. The period of the SPW course will be 6 months from January-June and July-December, with classes of five hours duration held once a week, constituting 60 hours for theory and 30 hours practical.

Jerry Amaldev, one of the advisory board members of this course reiterated the importance of knowledge of sound engineering and acoustic management principles to experience and preserve the liturgical beauty of sacred music and worship. Fr. Dr. Reji Mathew, the Principal of the Orthodox Theological

Seminary mentioned that this course is a significant leap forward and a step in the right direction in the historical journey of the seminary. The classes will be led by Fr. Mathew Koshy and Fr. Shino K Thomas.

In addition to popular Music Director Jerry Amaldev, other reputed professionals from the music and sound industry such as Sarab Daman Kumar Sood, Pramod Thomas, Jose Sankoorikal and Vijay Thomas Kurien have been roped into the Advisory Board to guide the program and the Shruti School of Liturgical Music.

For more information contact 9447409452 or refer www.srutimusic.org

H.G. Dr. Paulos Gregorios' Book Release



The Book *Philosophy and Quest for Meaning : Selected Works of Paulos Gregorios* edited by Fr. Dr. K.M. George was released at Mahatma Gandhi University on November 23rd by the Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Sabu Thomas. The book was published by Mahatma Gandhi University.

Prof. Dr. Ninan Abraham entered into eternal rest



Prof. Ninan Abraham (101), former Vice Chancellor of Kanpur University passed away on 17 December 2022. He belonged to Vadasseril family in Puthuppally, Kottayam. After his primary education, he pursued Masters in English Literature from the University of Madras and started his career as a teacher at U C College, Aluva. Subsequently he graduated from Oxford University, England, with an MA in Philosophy and Psychology and obtained B. Lit in English, followed by M. Lit.

A noted educationist, he has contributed in enriching the educational landscape of the nation through positions such as Professor at Hislop College, Nagpur, Principal of Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta and the Principal of Christ Church College, Kanpur. He was instrumental in making the Christ Church

College a premier educational institution. During his tenure many new courses including post graduate courses were started in the college and it received the honour of being the best educational institution in the State of Uttar Pradesh. He was later appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of Kanpur University and initiated many reforms there as well.

After his retirement, he served as the Director of the University's College Development Council, the President of All India Association for Christian Higher Education and then returned to Kerala and gave responsible leadership to Kerala Centre of Christian Higher education. As a result of the efforts of the committees under his leadership, they were able to provide guidelines for further improvement of the courses in the colleges of Kerala. He was a member of Payyappady Vellukkutta St. Thomas Orthodox Church. He has served as a Governing Board member of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam

Appointments



Rev. Fr. Viju Elias was designated as the General Secretary of Malankara Orthodox Youth Movement by His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III. He is the Council member of Kandanad East Diocese.



Sri. Thomas Paul, Pathanamthitta was appointed as the General Secretary of International Association for Mission Studies (INAMS)

(All the above news items are from the previous quarter October - December 2022)

Important Dates

2023 January 1	-	First Sunday after Yeldho, Circumcision of our Lord, New Year Day
2023 January 3	-	Oath of Koonan Kurishu, 59th Memorial of H.H. Baselios Geevarghese II (Devalokam Aramana)
2023 January 6	-	Denaha
2023 January 7	-	Beheading of St. John the Baptist
2023 January 8	-	First Sunday after Denaha, St. Stephen's Martyrdom
2023 January 15	-	Second Sunday after Denaha, Feast of St. Mary for Seeds
2023 January 22	-	Third Sunday after Denaha
2023 January 26	-	17th Memorial of H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews II (Mount Horeb, Sasthamkotta),
2023 January 29	-	Fourth Sunday after Denaha, Commemoration of all Saintly Fathers & Malpans
2023 January 30	-	Nineveh Fast Begins
2023 February 2	-	Mayaltho, End of Nineveh Fast
2023 February 5	-	Sunday of all the Departed Priests (Kohne Sunday)
2023 February 12	-	Sunday of all the Departed Faithful (Anide Sunday)
2023 February 19	-	First Sunday of Great Lent (Wedding at Cana)
2023 February 20	-	Service of Reconciliation
2023 February 23	-	89th Commemoration of St. Dionysius Vattasseril
2023 February 26	-	Second Sunday of Great Lent (Leper)
2023 March 5	-	3rd Sunday of Great Lent (Paralytic)
2023 March 12	-	4th Sunday of Great Lent (Canaanite Woman)
2023 March 15	-	Mid-Lent
2023 March 19	-	5th Sunday of Great Lent (Crippled Woman)
2023 March 25	-	Annunciation to St. Mary
2023 March 26	-	6th Sunday of Great Lent (Blind Man), Catholicate Day
2023 March 31	-	40th Day of Great Lent
2023 April 2	-	Palm Sunday

ST. BASIL ORTHODOX CHURCH, NEW YORK

WISHING YOU AND YOUR FAMILY A

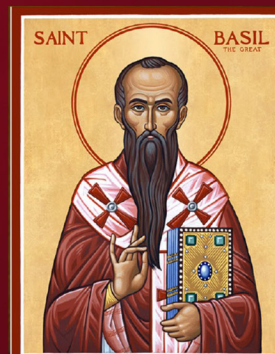
HAPPY AND BLESSED NEW YEAR

St. Basil Malankara Orthodox church was started in 1990 with less than ten families worshipping in a chapel owned by the Episcopal Church in Garden City, New York by Rev. Fr. P.S. Samuel and the church moved to its own building in Franklin Square, New York in 2001. Currently, the church is standing as a lighthouse for the community with about 100 families under the leadership of its Vicar for thirty years Rev. Fr. Thomas Paul (Johnson Achen). The Church has evening prayer every day of the year and the congregation is thriving through various spiritual organizations, including three prayer groups (sorted per age group): Marth Mariam Samajam, Student Movement, Choir, and Sunday School. St. Basil Church continues its journey with an ambitious young generation as a promise to the future.

Happy New Year 2023

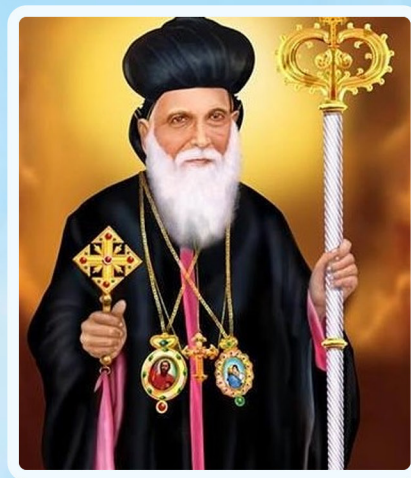


Vicar, Rev. Father Thomas Paul
Secretary, Lovin Johnson | Treasurer, Varghese Mathew
Members of St Basil Orthodox Church





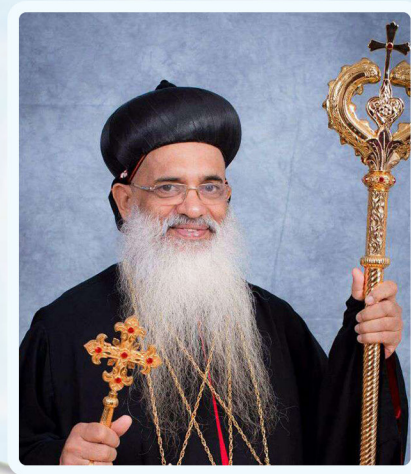
HIS HOLINESS BASELIOS
GEEVARGHESE II



HIS HOLINESS BASELIOS
AUGEN I



HIS HOLINESS BASELIOS
MARTHOMA MATHEWS I



HIS HOLINESS BASELIOS
MARTHOMA PAULOSE II

COMMEMORATION OF HOLY FATHERS

AT DEVALOKAM ARAMANA ON JANUARY 3, 2023