

FAITH

The Quarterly Newsletter of the St. Thomas Orthodox Congregation of Southern Africa

Volume 1, Issue 2

May 2018



Parish Annual General Meeting held on 01 April 2018

The Annual Meeting of the Parish General Body was held on Sunday 01 April 2018 at the Glen Venue at Pretoria. The meeting commenced by 12pm and concluded at 2.45pm. The meeting was presided by Vicar Fr. Stanly David James.

An account of all activities as well as the financial statements was presented at the meeting which was accepted and passed by the General Body. Office bearers for the year 2018-19 were also elected during this meeting.

The major decision taken was to commence, with immediate effect, construction of a boundary wall and parsonage complex at the Church's property in Midrand.

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From the Vicar's Desk:

Glory be to the Blessed Trinity.

In as much as our faith and our prayers are intended towards receiving the blessings of God, what we really need to realize is that a true follower of Christ is prepared to bear all sufferings and persevere in faith. Today, we mostly see a wave of "Prosperity Gospel" being preached everywhere. And in His grace, God will shower upon us His blessings, regardless of our actions.

In Luke chapter 9, Christ uses an example of a farmer who ploughs his field. The farmer cannot afford to look back as the plow may go off course resulting in an uneven poorly plowed field. Similarly in our lives, we need to set our focus on Christ. We cannot afford to turn back or even turn sideways. It does not matter whatever sufferings or hardships come our way, let us keep our faith strong and plow forward towards the glory of the heavenly Kingdom. God Bless!!!

- Fr. Stanly David James

JONAH : JOURNEYS FOR REFLECTION

- Mrs. Smitha Philip, Johannesburg

Where do we stand today when we compare ourselves to Jonah's journeys? We truly have nothing to boast of except for God's gracious mercy and unfailing love.

Of all the prophetic endeavours recorded in the Bible, the tale of Jonah's is probably the one that would most likely make an interesting movie. It is quite interesting to note that although Jonah's is titled as a *prophetic* book, in reality, we don't see any prophecy except the barely one sentence that he utters to the people of Nineveh. Prophecies need not necessarily be long, dramatic, fanciful or scary words uttered.

The Book of Jonah is more about a reflection of ourselves as we read through the saga of Jonah. It reflects our own personal journeys in life.

Journey 1 – Into the fish

As the book opens we see Jonah getting an amazing call from God to go and prophecy to the people of Nineveh to give a rather gloomy prophecy of God's impending judgement upon them. The Ninevites were one of the most brutal people of those times and were in fact archenemies of the Israelites. Jonah really did not want them to be *saved*. Hence, he tried to get away - as far and safe as possible. But clearly, God wasn't joking. When a storm threatened to capsize the ship that Jonah used for his escape, the sailors drew lots to figure out who the culprit of their miseries was. When Jonah was found and questioned, he confessed that 'he worshipped the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.' (Jonah 1:9). In his misplaced fear, Jonah was trying to outrun a God who fills the heavens and the earth (Jeremiah 23:24). The sailors then throw Jonah overboard hoping that the storm would calm. This where we learn that God had plans and He meant it. So along came a fish that swallowed him and there he stayed for three days and three nights.

Journey 2 – Onto dry land

Although it is beyond imagination as to how Jonah would have spent his time in the belly of the fish, we can be sure that it certainly wasn't a comfortable experience. In Chapter 2

verse 1, we read how he finally calls out to God to deliver him. After all that lamenting, he finally offers his thanksgiving to God. We witness here, a prayer being almost instantly answered. The big fish spits Jonah out onto dry land.

Journey 3 – Onwards with the calling

We see here that God's call comes a second time to Jonah (3:1,2). No different from the first time except for the fact that this time Jonah gets on with the task. He goes in to Nineveh and proclaims the message of God - all of EIGHT words. Sometimes it's certainly not the quantity that matters. The hard hearted and violent people of Nineveh repent all the way from the king right down to the cattle (3:5-9) and call out on God to have mercy. Once again we see a God who answers prayers. We see a God who forgives. All were happy, except one person.

Journey 4 – In to the heart of God

While the people repented and later rejoiced at God's mercy, there was one person who was bitterly unhappy. And that was none other than Jonah. He had waited outside the town to see destruction fall upon it (4:5). But it was not to be and he knew why - because God was merciful and gracious. Now that would qualify as an absurd reason for Jonah to be mad about. He of all persons who had just a few days ago been given a second chance through the miracle of a lifetime now was upset that God had given the Ninevites another chance! And so God goes about teaching Jonah yet another lesson. What the whale couldn't get across, probably a worm could and so we read on from 4:6-11 the story of the plant that gave Jonah a respite from the harsh sun and then of the worm that

causes the plant to wilt. And finally to Jonah's anger God responds with a gentle response, is not the life of the people he had created in his own image worth much more than a plant for which Jonah had not laboured.

Where do we stand in our Journey of life?

We don't see how Jonah responds to that and what happens later. And maybe it isn't really meant to be known. Maybe it's really for you and me to respond to. Where do we stand today when we compare ourselves to Jonah's journeys? We truly have nothing to boast of except for God's gracious mercy and unfailing love. Yet we have turned him away a hundred times more than Jonah would have. We who have received mercy at the price of God's own son Jesus (Rom 8:32a) refrain from extending that to our friends, families and neighbours. Nothing matters more than our own selfish lives. Our God is a God of second chances but how much more can we turn Him away without facing the consequences? We may not be happy to answer that but just because we ignore it does not mean it isn't going to happen. God's judgment is coming. And we need to make our choice. We only need to accept what He has freely offered us (John 1:12; Eph 2:8, 9). What will it be?

Our God is a God of second chances — but how much more can we turn Him away?



Art: Jonah and Kit. (A miniature from the manuscript of Rashid ad-Din "Jami 'at-avarikh." Iran, the XIV century. Copyright: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

LIFE, The greatest gift of all

- Mrs. Joyamma Varughese, Tzaneen



There was once two men who went out to the sea to fish. Every time the first man caught a big fish, he would put it straight into his ice chest to keep it fresh. The second man however, on catching a big fish, would throw it back into the sea. The first man watching this go on all day, eventually got tired of seeing the other one throw back all that good fish, asked him ‘ why do you keep throwing back all the big fish you catch?’. The second man replied, ‘I only have a small frying pan.’

Most of us today, in our daily lives, are like the second man in the story. We throw back big opportunities, dreams and plans simply because the pan of our faith is too small. Life, the greatest gift of all, is a circle – it moves us all through despair and hope, through faith and love – till we find our place. We may fall at times; we may find ourselves short when times demand it. But let us remember that God will never give us anything bigger than we can handle.

In our daily lives, we are called to evaluate many different situations – our rights, our responsibilities, our duties, our obligations, our commitment, etc. Our responses to all these will depend on our relationship with God. Figuring out whether a particular situation is a problem or a possibility will depend on our faith in God.

As Christians, we have been trained from our earliest years to examine our consciences. Most of us wind up every day by saying that one last line of prayer to God whilst looking back over the day, asking God to pardon us from all the sins of that day. Christ is the image of the unseen God, and his words are not beyond our reach. They are not up in heaven leaving us to wonder who will go up to heaven to bring it down to us. Nor are they beyond the seas leaving us to wonder who will cross the seas to fetch it for us to hear. The Word of God is very near to us.

Our weaknesses should not cripple love, shatter hope, silence courage or kill friendships. We must rather pray to God to give us deep thoughts and high dreams. We should trust in God to give us the wisdom to have a wide outlook whenever we come upon narrow paths. With grateful hearts, let us pray that our heart be able to receive more of Him, that one day, the whole of us will be filled with the whole of Him. After all, our life – is his greatest gift of all.

PENTECOST:

The Descent of the Holy Spirit

The term Pentecost comes from the Greek Πεντηκοστή (Pentēkostē) meaning "fiftieth" (50th). It refers to the festival celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover, also known as the "Feast of Weeks". In early Judaism the Festival of Weeks was a harvest festival that was celebrated seven weeks and one day (total of 50 days) after the first Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In Christian tradition, Pentecost is the event that marks the shifting of God's redemptive purpose from the "descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" to all peoples. The biblical narrative of Pentecost is given in the second chapter of the Book of Acts. Fifty days after the Resurrection, while the disciples and many other followers of Jesus Christ were gathered together to pray, the Holy Spirit descended upon them in the form of "tongues of fire," with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and they began to speak in languages that they did not know. There were many visitors from the Jewish diaspora to Jerusalem at that time for the Jewish observance of the feast, and they were astonished to hear these untaught fishermen speaking praises to God in their alien tongues.

The Orthodox Church sees Pentecost as the final fulfillment of the mission of Jesus Christ and the first beginning of the messianic age of the Kingdom of God, mystically present in his Church. It is traditionally called the beginning of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Besides celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit, the feast also celebrates the full revelation of the divine Trinity- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hymns of the service celebrate the sign of the final act of God's self-disclosure to the world of His creation. To Orthodox Christians, the feast of Pentecost is not just a celebration of an event in history. It is also a celebration their membership in the Church. They have lived Pentecost and received "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" in the sacrament of chrismation.

SAINTS CORNER

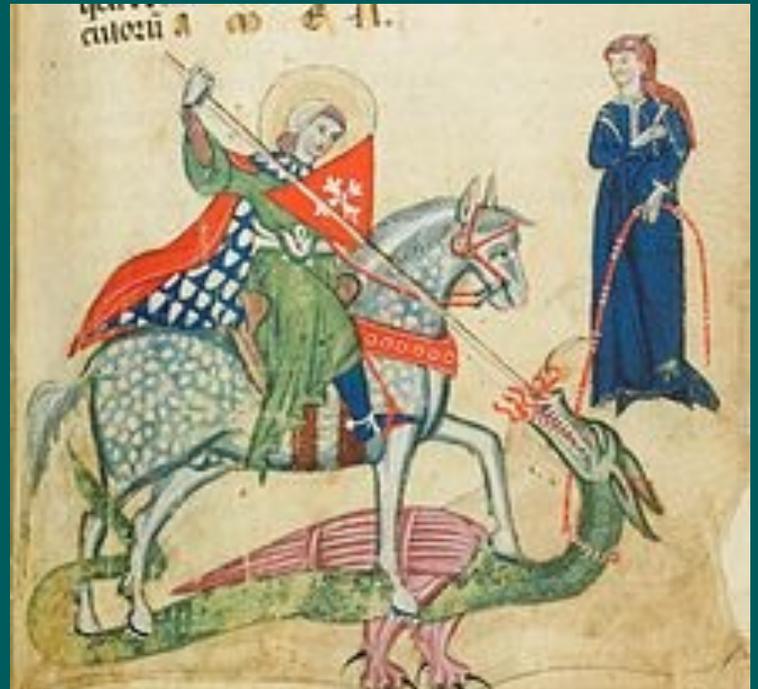
St. George the Martyr

- Compiled by Mrs. Bernice James

Saint George (martyred C.E. 303), according to legend, was a Roman soldier and an officer in the Guard of Roman emperor Diocletian. Legends are many, but this much is certain – he was sentenced to death for refusing to renounce his Christian faith. As a Christian martyr, he is one of the most venerated saints in Christianity. Several Malankara Orthodox Churches as well are named after this true defender of faith. Traditionally, St. George's Day, is celebrated on 23 April.

Accounts differ regarding whether George was born in Cappadocia or Syria Palaestina, but agree that he was raised at least partly in Lydda in Palestine. His parents were Christian, of the nobility and of Greek heritage. His father Gerontius was a Roman army official from Cappadocia, and his mother Polychronia was from Lydda in the province of Syria Palaestina. His father died when he was fourteen, and his mother returned with George to her homeland of Syria Palaestina. A few years later, after the death of his mother, when he was seventeen, he travelled to the capital at Nicomedia and following the customary course of a young Roman noble, joined the Roman army. By his late twenties, George was promoted to the rank of military tribune and stationed as an imperial guard of the Emperor at Nicomedia. Soon enough, he was promoted to the rank of legatus.

History records that Emperor Diocletian in C.E. 303, issued an edict that every Christian soldier in the army should be degraded and every soldier required to offer sacrifice to the Roman gods. Seeing the edict, George freed his slaves, distributed his wealth to the poor, and prepared to meet his fate. He then confronted the emperor about the edict and declared himself to be a Christian. Diocletian attempted to convert George, offering gifts of land, money, and slaves if he would sacrifice to the gods, but he refused. Recognizing the futility of his efforts and insisting on upholding his edict, Diocletian ordered that George be arrested. In an effort to undermine his resolve, the emperor sent a woman to the prison to spend the night with George, who having little time for earthly concerns managed to convert her instead. George was brutally tortured and finally executed by decapitation before Nicomedia's city wall, on 23 April 303. A witness of his suffering convinced Empress Alexandra of Rome to become a Christian as well, so she joined George in martyrdom. His body was returned to Lydda for burial, where Christians soon came to honour him as a martyr.



Miniature from a 13th-century *Passio Sancti orgii* at Verona, Italy.

St. George has been immortalised in the myth of *Saint George and the Dragon*. Legend has it that a town was terrorised by a dragon, who had to be appeased by the offering of a human. When a young princess was offered to the dragon, George heard about this he rode into the village, slayed the dragon and rescued the princess. In the Middle Ages the dragon was commonly used to represent the Devil. The slaying of the dragon by St George was first depicted as a battle against the devil himself.

LITURGICAL STUDY

QUQLIYON (Intercessory Prayers)

Quqliyon is generally used to refer to a cycle of intercessory prayers, which is a small order of service in musical form. The Syriac word Quqliyon refers to a verse of Psalm. There are generally five Quqliyon in use in our prayer services today: i) Mother of God, ii) Saints, iii) Departed souls of priests, iv) Departed souls of faithful and v) Holy Cross. Quqliyon is always sung whilst offering incense.

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The Quqliyons of Mary, the mother of God and the saints are offered after the creed after the Evening prayer, morning prayer as well as at the end of most Sacraments. The Quqliyons of the departed priests and all departed faithful are usually offered on Sundays, Feast days or remembrance days. It is a practice nowadays to recite all Quqliyons at the end of the Holy Qurbana. The Quqliyon of the Holy Cross is sung on Fridays.

A Quqliyon has four parts in it, namely: i) *Pethgaumo* (A verse of Psalm), ii) *Eqbo* (a stanza), iii) *Qolo* (a song), and iv) *Hoothomo* (concluding verse).

Communion of the Mother of God (Ninnaal Sthuthiyodu Raajakmakal... / BETHMALKO) Psalm 45:9-11.

This part of the Psalm is a song sung in the presence of bride and the bridegroom when the princes of Israel's royal family got married. The bride is advised to stay hereafter with the bridegroom prince. The picture is drawn here to resemble both the Mother of God as well as the Holy Church, the bride of Christ. The king (God) desires your beauty (faithfulness) now!

Communion of the All Saints (Nayavaan panapole thallirthidume... / SADIKO) Psalm 92:12-14.

Orthodoxy believes that all the faithful of the past are not dead, but simply *departed* from this earthly life. They are still alive in the presence of God. The righteous shall prosper like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. In old age they shall thrive and be flourishing.

Remembrance of Departed Clergy (Charthum neethiye nin aacharyenmaaram... / KOHANAİK) Psalm 132:9-10.

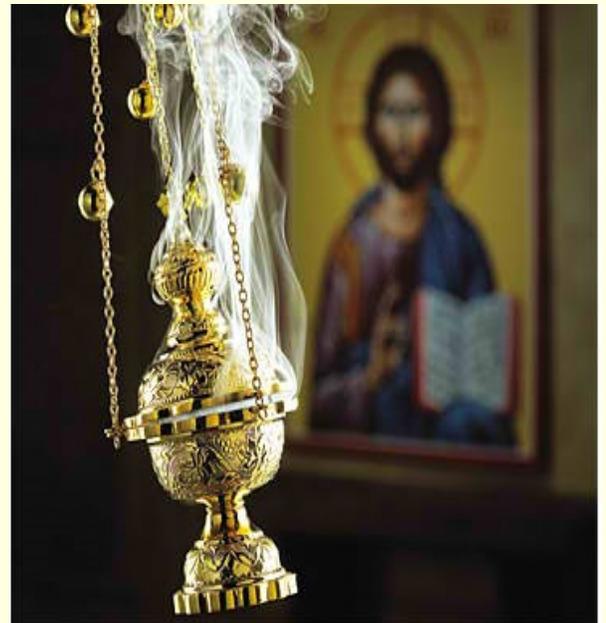
The Holy Church worships God together with the Mother of God, the saints and all the departed clergies. Let your priests be clothed in righteousness and let your faithful shout for joy. For your servant David's sake do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

Remembrance of All Departed Souls (Makkallilappen krupacheyvadhupole...) Psalm 103:13,15

In this part, the Holy Churches sings praises along with all the faithful departed. As a father has compassion for his children, so this Lord has compassion for those who fear him. As for mortals their days are like grass. This part reiterates the mercy of God and the mortality of men.

Quqliyon of the Holy Cross (Vellum shathrukkalle ninnaal njangal...) Psalm 44:5,7

The truth proclaimed here is that God gives salvation. The Holy Cross should not merely be thought as an instrument or as a design of ornament. It is rather a reminder of both the suffering of Christ as well as the glorious victory over the forces of evil.



Holy Week services held with Vibrant participation from all over South Africa

The Holy Week of 2018 was indeed a blessed experience for many faithful. The Palm Sunday (Hosanna) service was held at the St. Gregorios Chapel at Groblersdal and the Maundy Thursday (Pesaha) service at the St. Xaviour's Catholic Church in Zeerust. The Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter services were held at The Glen Venue, Pretoria. Vicar Fr. Stanly David James led the services.

By the grace of God, it was also possible to arrange services in the Eastern Cape region at Mthatha Holy Cross Educational Center and the St. Thomas Private School Chapel at King Williams Town. Rev. James E. Mathew Corepiscopa (Prakkanam) led the services.

The Holy Week services witnessed several faithful from all across South Africa participate. We thank the Lord Almighty for all blessings showered so as to make the services meaningful.

Parish blessed with the presence of Visiting Priests

The St. Thomas Orthodox Congregation of Southern Africa was blessed with the presence of two visiting priests who were in South Africa for short personal visits.

Rev. James E. Mathew Corepiscopa (Prakkanam, Pathanamthitta) visited South Africa during the month of March while Fr. V.C. Jose (Mangalore) visited during the month of April.

Rev. James E. Mathew led the Holy Week services in the Eastern Cape region. Fr. V.C. Jose was able to celebrate two services for the parish at Mokopane and Johannesburg.

What does Jesus mean to me?

- Ms. Alannis John, (age 9) Johannesburg

Jesus means the world to me. I love Jesus Christ. I talk to him through my prayers. I can tell you about Jesus but unless you know him yourself, you will not fully understand.

Jesus will always love me no matter what I do. Even if I hurt Jesus, he will still love me. Jesus loved me before I was even born. Not even my parents have loved me like that. Many people believe that you have to do certain things to get God's love - that you cannot go to God as you are. But he loves me as I am. Even if I don't believe in Jesus he still loves me. Do you know what that means? Imagine you go to your best friend and say, "You don't exist and I don't believe in you." Would your friend still be your friend? Probably not, but Jesus will.

Jesus is someone I can trust. There have been times when I feel that my parents love my sister much more, but Jesus comforts me during these times. I hide secrets from everybody but God. I know he will not gossip about me. When he answers me I might not always get what I want, but I know it is what I need. Sometimes I have bad dreams but when I pray to the Lord, I have a peaceful sleep.

Jesus is the gateway to heaven. Although Jesus will love me even if I don't believe in him, I have to believe in him in order to go to heaven. This means I cannot pray to other gods to get to heaven. I cannot ask Mother Mary to give me a ticket to heaven. Also just because my parents believe in God doesn't mean I can go to heaven. Even if I do only good in my life, I cannot enter heaven. I cannot make a deal with God. I cannot bribe him. The only thing I can do to enter heaven is to believe in him.

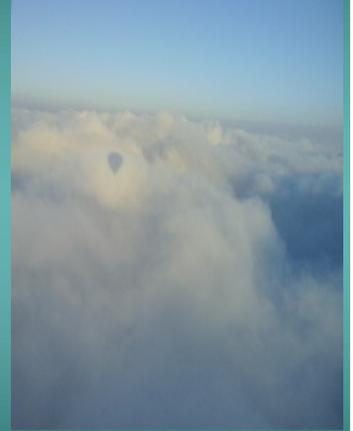


Up in the Air

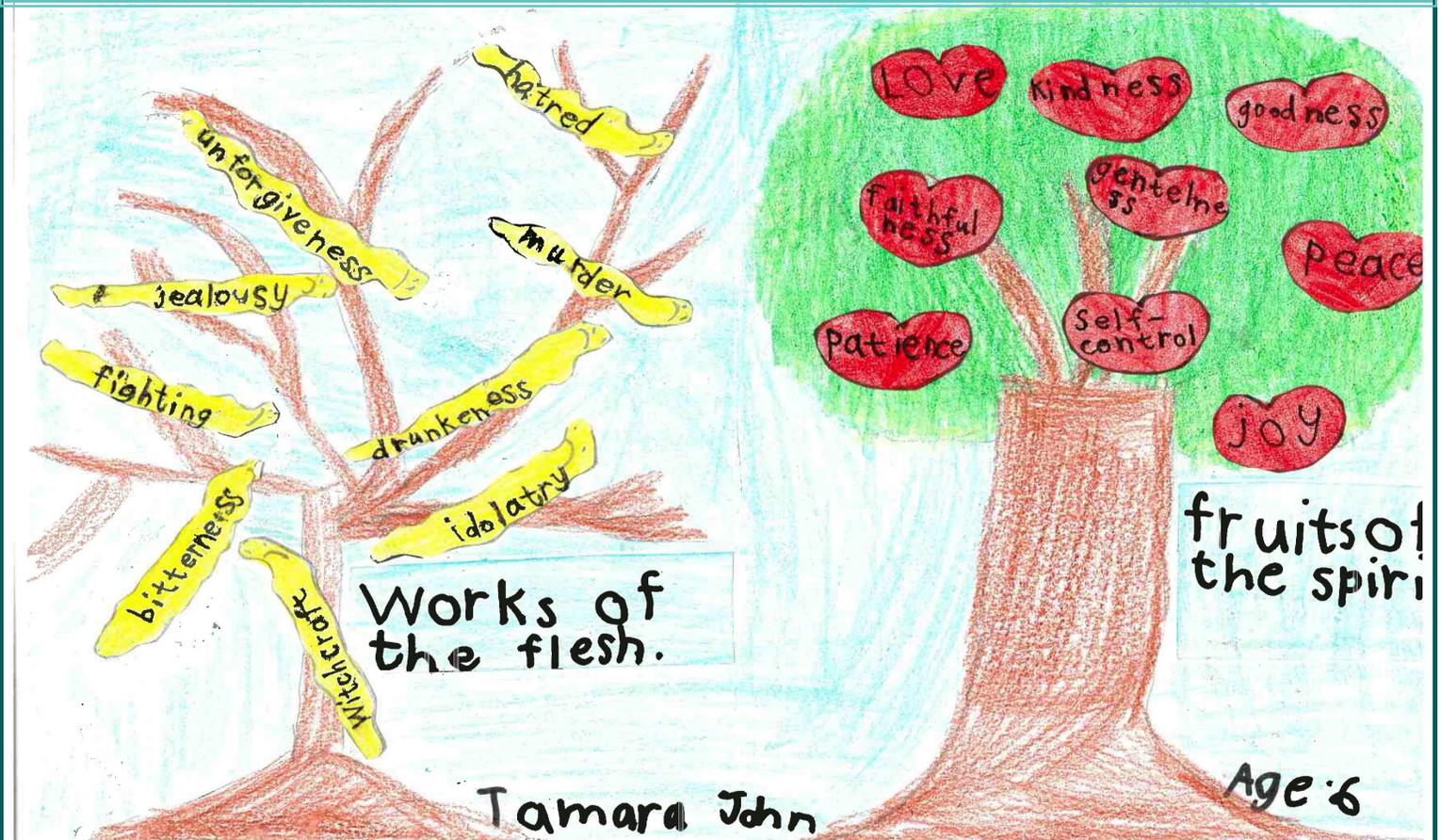
— Mr. Solly Thomas, Polokwane



Up in the air, among the clouds;
One with the elements
and the ground below;
The celestial calm to uphold our souls;
Beyond the earth and the oceans below;
Creates a mood –
so full of happiness and freedom;
Behold your maker, the creator of all;
Meditate with your soul, mind and body;
Full of bliss, invigorating you with a feeling
..... surpassing your 'self';
Transcending you with a spiritual ecstasy
To be one with Him in His glory!



KIDS ART CORNER



Tamara John (6 Years) - Johannesburg

His Holiness Moran Mar Baselios Mar Thoma Paulos II

Malankara Metropolitan And Catholicos of the East



H.H. Moran Mar Baselios Mar Thoma Paulos II is the Supreme Head of the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Syrian Church. He is the Malankara Metropolitan and the 91st Catholicos of the East. He succeeded Baselios Thoma Didymos I and was enthroned as Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan on 1 November 2010 at Parumala, Kerala.

Baselios Mar Thoma Paulos II was born on 30 August 1946 into the ancient Syrian Christian family of Kollannur to K. I. Ipe and Kunjeetty at Mangad in Kunnampulam. He was baptized at St Mary's Orthodox Church Pazhanji. He completed his schooling in the Kunnampulam region and holds a Bachelor in Science degree (Physics) from the St. Thomas College.

His spiritual nurturing began from a very early age under the guidance of his uncle Iyukutty and was also an active member of the Mar Gre-

gorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement (MGOCSM). He enrolled for theological education at the Kottayam Orthodox Theological Seminary in 1969 under the guidance of the LL Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, Fr. Abraham Malpan and Fr. Koruthu Malapan. After completing the Graduate in Sacred Theology (GST) and Bachelor in Divinity (BD) degrees, he also pursued an MA in Sociology from the CMS College at Kottayam.

He was ordained as Fr. Paul in 1973 and served several Churches until his consecration as Bishop Paulos Mar Millithios in May 1985 at the age of 38. Soon enough, he was entrusted as Metropolitan of the then newly formed Kunnampulam Diocese. The Holy Synod which gathered in September 2006 nominated him as Catholicos Designate and in 2010, he was enthroned as Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan at the St. Peter's and St. Paul's Church, Parumala succeeding Basilius Mar Thoma

Didymus I who abdicated office at the age of 90 due to health concerns.

It is His Holiness' keen interest that the Church should have effective and meaningful Inter-Church relations. It is with this emphasis that His Holiness has journeyed and met with the heads of all Oriental Orthodox Churches as well as other Eastern Orthodox Churches, Roman Catholic Church and other Protestant Churches, thus enhancing bilateral and Inter-Church relationships. His Holiness' unassuming character and his philanthropic interests, have given new dimensions to the life of the Church. He has authored a few devotional and contemplative books in Malayalam.

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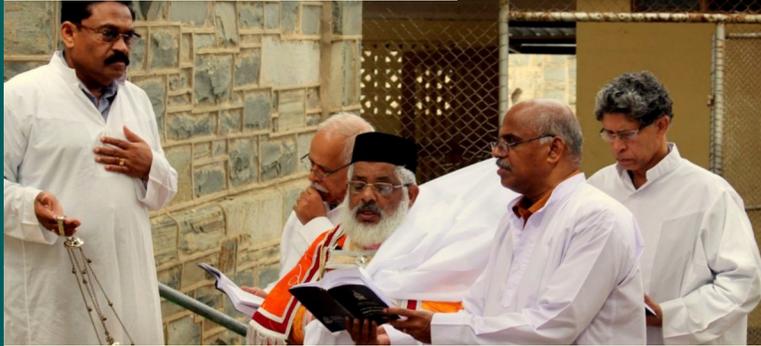
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PHOTO GALLERY



Procession at Good Friday Service



Service at King Williams Town by
Rev. James E. Mathew Corepiscopa (Prakkanam, Pathanamthitta)



Service at Mokopane by
Rev. Fr. V.C. Jose (Mangalore)



Song session on Holy Saturday at Pretoria



Micky and Ashly



*Wishing a
Blessed Marriage*

Nevin and Shilpa



Tony and Megha



Deepak and Sherin

Upcoming Holy Qurbana and Events

- 20 May 2018: Holy Qurbana—Tzaneen (Pentecost and Feast of St. George)
26 May 2018: Ecumenical Youth Fellowship at Marthoma Church Pretoria
27 May 2018: Holy Qurbana—Johannesburg
03 June 2018: Holy Qurbana—East London
10 June 2018: Holy Qurbana—Burgersfort
17 June 2018: Holy Qurbana—King Williams Town
23 June 2018: GLOW (Children's One Day Christian Event) - Cape Town
24 June 2018: Holy Qurbana—Cape Town
30 June 2018: GLOW (Children's One Day Christian Event) - Midrand
01 July 2018: Holy Qurbana—Johannesburg (Feast of St. Thomas)
07 July 2018: Medical Camp at Itirelang (Near Laudium)
08 July 2018: Holy Qurbana—Pretoria
14 July 2018: Holy Qurbana—Mmabatho
15 July 2018: Holy Qurbana—Gaborone, Botswana
22 July 2018: Holy Qurbana—Mokopane
29 July 2018: Holy Qurbana—Durban
29 July 2018: GLOW (Children's One Day Christian Event) - Durban
04 August 2018: GLOW (Children's One Day Christian Event) - Nelspruit
05 August 2018: Holy Qurbana—Whiteriver, Nelspruit
12 August 2018: Holy Qurbana—Groblersdal
19 August 2018: Holy Qurbana—Phalaborwa (Feast of Assumption of St. Mary)
26 August 2018: Holy Qurbana—Johannesburg

Our Church: Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Syrian Church

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Diocesan Metropolitan: HG Dr. Mathews Mar Thimothios

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