



EPISTLE ECHOES

Quarterly Newsletter of OCYM Aberdeen

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A NOTE FROM DIOCESAN METROPOLITAN

Blessing to the Vicar, Managing Committee Members, the office bearers of the OCYM and the faithful of the St. Thomas IOC, Aberdeen, in the name of Blessed Holy Trinity:

Dearly beloved in Christ,

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

It is with great joy that I have learned that our Parish in Aberdeen is publishing a Newsletter titled 'Epistle Echoes'. It is quite meaningful that you are publishing it on the Feast of Resurrection. It is an added joy that the youth of the Parish is taking the initiatives.

You are meaningfully blending together the contributions of all the spiritual organizations. I wish and pray that this venture will serve as a bridge between all the organizations, disseminating all the necessary information.

May God bless all those who had worked behind the scene.

Prayerfully yours in Christ.

+ Metropolitan Abraham Stephanos.

A INITIATIVE BY OCYM ABERDEEN

On behalf of OCYM Aberdeen, it gives me great pleasure to introduce our first edition of the quarterly newsletter 'Epistle Echoes'. Our aim is to bring readers closer to our Orthodox faith to enable them to journey together with Christ. Epistle Echoes is a culmination of articles and reflections related to various aspects of our Church including the Holy Scripture, holy Saints and Church history. We have also brought together the activities led by our respective spiritual organisations including Sunday School, OCYM and Martha Mariam Vanitha Samajam (Women's Wing). We take this opportunity to thank our Diocesan Metropolitan His Grace Abraham Mar Stephanos, our Vicar Rev. Fr. Varghese P. A. and church members for responding positively and supporting us in this endeavour.

I would encourage every member of our Church to contribute reflections, articles and any artwork for our upcoming newsletters. Please make sure your contribution is sent, at least two weeks prior every quarter, to me or OCYM Aberdeen Secretary. We will endeavour to include every submission in immediate issue of newsletter or in future issues. Once again thanking all members who have put a lot their time and effort behind this newsletter.

- Ansu Mari Saji

OCYM UK North Zone Representative

VISIT BY H.G. ABRAHAM MAR STEPHANOS

We were blessed with presence of our Diocesan Metropolitan His Grace Abraham Mar Stephanos between 13th - 15th of January this year.

It was Thirumeni's first visit to Aberdeen congregation. His Grace arrived at 17.30 and made a beeline to church to offer Saturday evening prayers. As He arrived at church Thirumeni was received by Vicar Rev. Fr. Varghese, committee members and seniors of our church. After the prayers Thirumeni spent time listening to us as we all took the opportunity to introduce ourselves.

Next day, Thirumeni offered morning prayers and consecrated Holy Qurbana. Before His Grace commenced the Holy Qurbana, it was a delight to see Thirumeni ordain two altar boys. It is reassuring that our young people take keen interest in faith, tradition and our Holy Qurbana practices. Thirumeni reassured that our Lord would help the congregation find a suitable place of worship and instructed families of congregation to read Psalm 84 every day.

His Grace had interactions with the Managing Committee, Malankara Association Members and all the spiritual organizations including Sunday school, OCYM and Marthmariam Samajam. Thirumeni stressed the importance of church being faith centric rather than being just an organisation and the importance of growing up in a relationship with Christ. Thirumeni left Aberdeen on Monday.



NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL TEXT BOOK RELEASE BY H.G. ABRAHAM MAR STEPHANOS

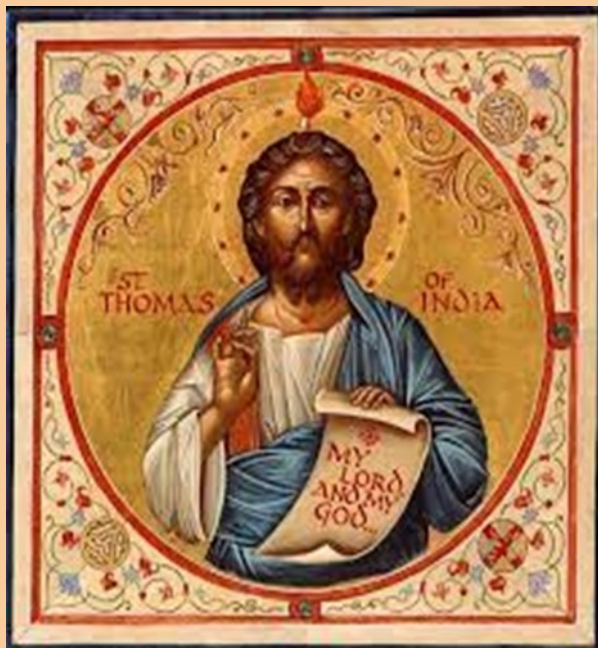


ST. THOMAS: FROM DOUBT TO ESTABLISHMENT OF CHURCH

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church stands as a living testament to the apostolic roots of Christianity, tracing its lineage directly back to St. Thomas, one of the chosen twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. St. Thomas's journey to India, as entrusted to him by Christ, is a narrative steeped in both reluctance and divine intervention.

Tasked with spreading the Gospel in distant lands, St. Thomas initially hesitated to accept this monumental responsibility. He doubted his abilities, citing concerns about his health and questioning whether a Hebrew could effectively convey the message of Christ to the people of India. Even when Christ appeared to him in a dream, urging him to embark on this mission, St. Thomas remained apprehensive.

However, the power of God knows no bounds, and St. Thomas's destiny was set in motion most unexpectedly. Through a series of remarkable events, he found himself sold into slavery to a merchant, destined to serve under an Indian king: Gondophares. This twist of fate, orchestrated by divine will, was the catalyst for St. Thomas's journey to the Indian subcontinent.



“the power of God knows no bounds, and St. Thomas's destiny was set in motion most unexpectedly”

Under the employ of the Indian king, St. Thomas was entrusted with overseeing the construction of a grand royal palace. Yet, true to Christ's teachings, St. Thomas chose to prioritize acts of charity over personal gain. Instead of using the funds allocated for the palace for its intended purpose, he selflessly donated them to those in need.

Upon learning of St. Thomas's actions, Gondophares was enraged and ordered his imprisonment. He decreed that St. Thomas would be flayed alive as punishment for his perceived betrayal. However, divine intervention came once again in the form of a heavenly vision experienced by the king's brother.

The Gondophares' brother, upon his death, beheld in heaven the magnificent palace that St. Thomas had built for the king. Moved by this revelation, he implored his brother to reconsider his judgment. Soothed by this divine intervention, the king relented, setting St. Thomas free and becoming baptised into the Christian faith along with his brother and many of his people.

The trials and tribulations endured by St. Thomas serve as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by the early apostles in spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth. His journey to India, marked by moments of doubt, hardships, and ultimately, profound faith, laid the foundation for the establishment of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. He was martyred on the 3rd of July, 72AD and has a feast dedicated for the day.

As members of this ancient and apostolic church, we are heirs to a rich spiritual heritage, rooted in the teachings of St. Thomas and the early apostles. May we draw strength from their example as we continue to proclaim the Good News and bear witness to the transformative power of Christ's love in our lives and communities.

- Elwin Sudeeb

THE GREAT LENT

The sense of resurrection joy forms the foundation of all the worship of the Orthodox Church; it is the one and only basis for our Christian life and hope. Through His redeeming Passion, Christ freed us from the tyranny of death and opened for us the door to Paradise and eternal life. To help keep us focused, the Church every year compresses for us this journey as it prepares us to greet the Feast of Christ's Resurrection. This preparatory time is the joyous period of Great Lent. Without this preparation, without this expectant waiting, the deeper meaning of the Easter celebration will be lost. By doing this we commemorate Christ's fasting before his public ministry and his blessed passion during this Lent and make use of it for fifty days for our complete spiritual renewal.

“European missionaries were astonished to see the rigorous Lenten practices of the St. Thomas Christian community “

The primary aim of fasting is to make us conscious of our dependence upon God. It is to lead us to a sense of inward brokenness and contrition; to bring to us, that is, to the point where we appreciate the full force of Christ's statement, 'Without Me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). Fasting might seem hard, but with each passing day, God's call will grow stronger and clearer.

In Lent we limit our life to extremely necessary things and minimum needs with regard to food, media like T.V., internet, and the use of technology in general. Along with many useful advantages, our scientific technological paradise some-

times makes us slaves of materialism. It is noticeable that two questions repeated continuously in America are about how to lose weight and where to park car.

Lent gives us a wonderful experience of simple life. This freedom from the grip of over luxurious life and enslaving consumerist culture make us sensitive to the basic needs of the poor and the suffering and share with them our resources. In the book of Isaiah there is an enlightening description about the Lent which is pleasing to God: "Is it not this, the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58: 6-7).

Our forefathers have been observing Lent for centuries and the European missionaries were astonished to see the rigorous Lenten practices of the St. Thomas Christian community of Kerala in 16th century. The letters sent by these missionaries from Kerala to their mother congregations in Europe reveal many things about the Lent in those days. St. Thomas Christians used to have fasted till evening and they used to go to their churches for daily prayers during the great Lent. Most of them even avoided coffee and chewing Vettilla during this time. Dr. James Aerthayil CMI has done a good study about these documents in his book *The Spiritual Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*. According to this study St. Thomas Christians used to have almost 225 days of fasting a year. Although they were leading a simple agrarian life, our forefathers and mothers took Lents and thus their spiritual growth seriously. This may open our eyes to see the greater need of Lent today in our more complex and challenging situation. May the Holy Spirit help us to use this Lent for our holistic rejuvenation.



- Shinoj B. Cheruvathoor

JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT: LESSONS FROM LUKE 17

As we find ourselves immersed in the Lenten season, a time of introspection and spiritual preparation, let us pause and delve into the profound teachings encapsulated in Saint Luke chapter 17. In this sacred text, Jesus imparts invaluable lessons to His disciples, guiding them—and us—through the challenges of stumbling blocks, forgiveness, faith, and humble service.

Stumbling Blocks: Inevitable Yet Can Overcome

The opening verses of Luke 17 remind us that stumbling blocks are inevitable in our journey of faith. Lent serves as a poignant reminder of this reality—a time for self-awareness and acknowledgment of the temptations that may hinder our spiritual progression. Yet, through God's strength, we can overcome these obstacles, drawing closer to Him with each step.

Forgiveness: Extending Grace in the Lenten Season

Jesus's words on forgiveness resonate deeply during Lent, a season characterized by repentance and reconciliation. As we reflect on our own shortcomings, let us embrace a spirit of forgiveness, mirroring God's boundless grace and mercy. By extending forgiveness to others, we foster healing and restoration in our relationships, embodying the transformative power of Lent.

Faith: Cultivating Growth in the Lenten Soil

Amidst the Lenten journey, we are called to deepen our faith, echoing the disciples' plea for increased faith in Luke 17. Even the smallest measure of faith, akin to a mustard seed, has the potential to yield remarkable outcomes. As we navigate life's challenges, let us nurture our faith, placing unwavering trust in God's providence and sufficiency.

Humble Service: A Call to Duty

In Luke 17, Jesus underscores the importance of humble service through the parable of the unworthy servant. Lent beckons us to reflect on our service to God, emphasizing the humility and gratitude with which we should approach our duties. Our acts of service, however small, are offerings of love and obedience to the One who deserves our utmost devotion.

Embracing Transformation

As we journey through Lent, may the timeless wisdom of Luke 17 guide our reflections and actions. Let us confront stumbling blocks with unwavering resolve, extend forgiveness with grace, cultivate faith with diligence, and serve with humility. May this Lent be a transformative season, drawing us closer to God and preparing our hearts for the joyous celebration of Easter.

May God's grace and peace accompany us every step of the way, illuminating our path with His love and wisdom. Wishing you a blessed and reflective Lent, filled with abundant blessings and spiritual growth. Amen



EMBRACING ST. MARY'S GUIDANCE IN THE LENTEN JOURNEY

As we delve into the sacred season of Lent, we immerse ourselves in reflection, penance, and preparation for the profound events of Good Friday and Easter. Lent calls us to journey alongside Christ in His Passion, to contemplate His sacrifice, and to ready our hearts for the joyous resurrection.

In this spiritual pilgrimage, we find a comforting and steadfast companion in St. Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Throughout the Lenten period, we are reminded of her unwavering presence at the foot of the cross, where she endured a martyrdom of the heart as she witnessed her beloved Son's suffering and ultimate sacrifice.

In the Orthodox tradition, St. Mary holds a revered position as the Theotokos, the Mother of God. Her blessedness is celebrated, and her intercession is sought as the defender and protector of Christian people. Through her divine motherhood, St. Mary exemplifies humility and obedience, saying "yes" to God's will despite the challenges and trials that lay ahead.

St. Mary's role as the Theotokos reminds us of her unique and intimate connection to Christ, making her an ideal guide for our Lenten journey. Just as St. Mary intervened at the wedding feast of Cana, obtaining fulfillment for the hosts in their time of need, she stands ready to assist us on our Lenten journey. We are invited to approach her with our shortcomings and inadequacies, trusting that she will intercede on our behalf to fill our vessels with the wine of contrition, prayer, and mercy. As John 2:5 reminds us, His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." In echoing St. Mary's directive, we too are called to heed the words of her Son and follow His teachings with trust and obedience.

As we journey through Lent, let us emulate St. Mary's unwavering faith and devotion. Like her, let us entrust our struggles and burdens to her maternal care, knowing that she intercedes for us tirelessly before her Son.

St. Mary's apparitions across the globe serve as poignant reminders of her continued presence and

concern for humanity. Through her messages of peace and renewal, she beckons us to draw closer to Jesus, encouraging us to live lives of holiness and virtue.

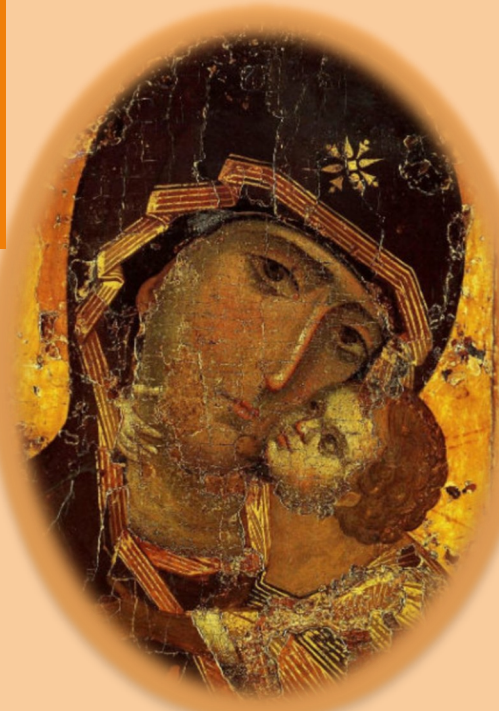
In St. Mary, we find a loving mother who desires nothing more than to see her children fully prepared to celebrate the victory of Easter. Her unwavering resolve and boundless love serve as beacons of hope and inspiration as we navigate the challenges of Lent.

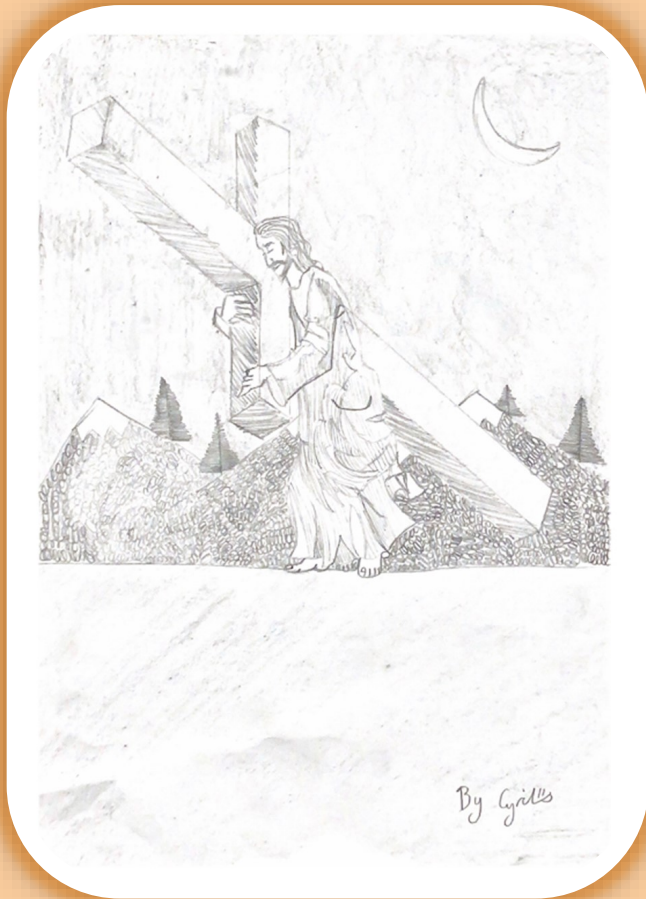
As we continue through this sacred season, let us turn to St. Mary as our guide and companion, seeking her intercession and following her example of faith and obedience. May her presence illuminate our Lenten journey and lead us ever closer to the heart of her Son, Jesus Christ, both during and after this holy time of reflection and renewal.

In St. Mary's embrace, we find solace, strength, and the promise of Easter joy. Let us journey together with her, confident in her maternal care and confident in the transformative power of God's love.

**"we find a
comforting
and steadfast
companion in
St. Mary"**

- Merlin Mathew





HUMBLE HEART

In the humble heart, true strength does reside,
Where resilience and grace serenely abide.
Intertwined, they weave a tapestry divine,
Forging a spirit that stands the test of time.

With every trial faced, with every tear shed,
The humble heart remains unbowed, unafraid.
For it knows that strength lies not in might alone,
But in the gentle courage that it's shown.

Through storms and struggles, it stands tall and true,
A beacon of hope for all who pass through.
For in its depths, a quiet strength does dwell,
A force that conquers every tumultuous swell.

So let us embrace humility's gentle art,
And let it guide us in every part.
For in the humble heart, we'll surely find,
The strength to endure, the grace to be kind.

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A beacon of hope for all who pass through.
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- Joel Koshy



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This newsletter is only for internal circulation among the members of St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church, Aberdeen (SC046256)

PRAYER CORNER

"O Lord Jesus Christ! Do not close the door of Your mercy on our faces. Lord, we confess that we are sinners, have mercy upon us. O Lord! Your love made You descend from Your place to us that by Your death, our death was abolished; have mercy upon us."



ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a. The youth members have been working on a quarterly newsletter for our church and were hoping to have the first issue released on the 30th March following the Easter service. Second issue will be released on 30th June, members are encouraged to contribute any pictures, articles, reflections for th newsletter. Please send any contributions to member of the Youth Committee before 15th June.
- b. The inter-church quiz competition for this year will be organized on 26th and 27th October. We look forward to support from all of our youth members to make this a successful event. The expectation is to have six teams, which will include participation from Scottish churches as well.
- c. The youth committee is organizing a blood donation camp and we have managed to arrange group bookings which allow up to 4 people to donate at the time. If you wish to donate or know anyone who is willing, please kindly fill in the eligibility quiz that has been sent in the WhatsApp group.
- d. During summer the youth is planning to organize a away trip for 1 day & night. More details of this trip will be available in coming weeks.
- e. Our choir has come leaps and bounds and have definitely helped few of us to re-discover our sweet voices. We organize choir practices every weekend, please join the choir WhatsApp group if you like to participate in choir or attend practice sessions.

- Megha Jacob

MEMORIES



Quiz Corner

- 1) Who is the first martyr of the Christian Church?
- 2) Where did Peter and John heal a crippled beggar?
- 3) Which couple tried to deceive the Holy Spirit?
- 4) Who celebrated Holy Qurbana for the first time after Jesus Christ?
- 5) Where did Moses dwell after he fled from Egypt?