

EPISTLE ECHOES

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF OCYM, ABERDEEN

In this issue

Fr. Dr. T. J. Joshua pg. 2

OCYM Update pg. 4

Verses to help Pg. 6

Prayer Corner pg. 7

Navigating faith pg. 8

Volume 1 Issue 03, September 2024

The flame is lit, now it's time to keep it burning!

As you read the third issue of our newsletter, I am reminded of the verse "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). The newsletter for our youth was being talked about for couple of years and as team we had to put in lot of effort to get the first issue out this year. I would like to thank all who contributes and makes this happen every quarter.

I believe the Newsletter develops a sense of community and connection among our youth members and helps to strengthen spiritual and social cohesion by offering a forum for sharing personal tales, testimonials, and insights. It also serves as an effective tool for timely and consistent communication, keeping members informed about updates, events, and activities.

Crafting engaging church newsletters comes with its own set of challenges. Ensuring that newsletter showcase a diverse range of content is important. Maintaining constant content quality is also key. Newsletters must try to balance educational, interesting, and spiritually uplifting content to maintain their impact.

Implementing newsletter ideas that resonate with the youth is important for sustained engagement. Addressing the difficulty necessitates careful planning, contributor teamwork, and a thorough understanding of the youth's requirements and preferences. Exploring monthly newsletter ideas injects freshness into each edition, keeping readers eagerly anticipating the next insightful and inspiring publication.



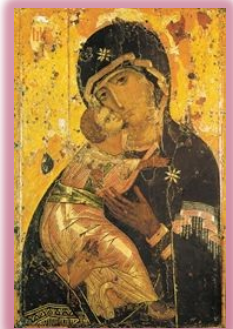
Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour - Ecclesiastes 4:9

The editorial team is actively seeking feedback, assessing data, and making required adjustments contributing to improve the newsletter quality and impact. I like to take this opportunity to humbly request more of our youth members to get involved.

- Shinoj Cheruvathoor

Virgin Mary Mother of GOD: Mary Mother of the Church

The Orthodox church honors and venerates the Virgin Mary as "More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim". Remembering Her in prayers, reflecting on her core values and exemplifying her virtues are significant components of Orthodox Spirituality and Faith. The place given to Her in Holy Qurbana and the Canonical prayers are unique and unparalleled. The Church has dedicated many festivals in honor of Virgin Mary. Some of the important festivals are *Festival of Seeds (15th January)*, *Festival of Harvest (15th May)*, *Annunciation (25th March)*, *Veneration of the Mother (26th December)*, and *Assumption (15th August)*. The 15-day period before the feast of Assumption is a time of fasting and abstinence. Many of the faithful observe lent during the eight-day period related to the birth of Virgin Mary (1 – 8 September), even though it is not a canonical fast.



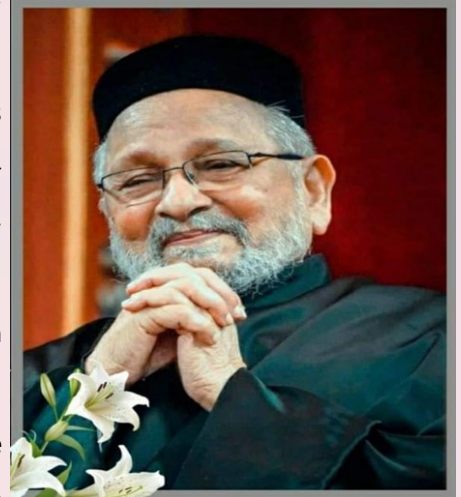
-Extract from Malankara Shaba magazine, July—Sept. 2023 edition

Remembering Malankara Sabha Guru Ratnam

Fr. Dr. T. J. Joshua

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church mourned the passing away of Rev. Fr. Dr. T. J. Joshua (known as Joshua Achen) on 20th July 2024. The senior priest was a renowned theologian, author, orator, social worker and an exceptional interpreter of the Holy Bible.

Fr. Joshua held many prominent positions for the Church during his illustrious career spanning seven decades in priesthood, such as vice-principal and acting principal of the Kottayam Orthodox Seminary (Pazhaya Seminary), distinguished member of the Malankara Orthodox Church Working Committee, founding director to both the Divyabodhanam and Seminary Parish Mission program and Director of the Sruthi School of Liturgical Music.



"Fr. Joshua touched the hearts of Malayalees through his widely acclaimed column "Innathe Chinthavishayam" which he wrote for 33 years, from 1990"

Fr. Joshua's contributions to the church were unparalleled, serving at the Pazhaya Seminary for more than five decades and teaching numerous clergy members, including the previous and present Bava Thirumeni. A divine gift to the Church, Fr. Joshua was a scholar in New Testament, Old Testament, counselling and his ability to dissect complex theological concepts with simplicity were acknowledged by all his students. Fr. Joshua touched the hearts of Malayalis through his widely acclaimed column "Innathe Chinthavishayam" which he wrote for 33 years, from 1990. The Holy Church

honoured Fr. Joshua with the title "Malankara Sabha Guru Ratnam" in 2016, having published close to 70 books and taught around 1500 priests (including all the present Metropolitans). Fr. Joshua's knowledge, humility, and loyalty to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church were exemplary and his legacy will continue to inspire future generations. May the Almighty receive him in heavenly glories.



JIJO RAJU

QUIZ

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| 1. Who helped Jesus carry his cross? | 5. In the days of Noah, how many people were saved from the flood, including Noah? |
| 2. What was the name of the synagogue ruler whose daughter Jesus raised from the dead? | 6. How old was Adam, the first man, when he died? |
| 3. On what mountain did the angel of the Lord appear to Moses in a flame of fire out of a bush? | 7. Who was given the name Zaphenath-paneah? |
| 4. What was the name of the cave in which David hid after he fled from Achish, the king of Gath? | 8. Who was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness"? |
| | 9. To what pool did Jesus send the blind man in order to wash his eyes? |

The Great Schism

A schism refers to the splitting of the Church into two separate groups over differences in beliefs. Over the years, there have been multiple major schisms in the church; the most monumental schism being the Great Schism of 1054. It split the Orthodox church in the East from the Roman Catholic church in the West and was fuelled by theological, cultural and linguistic differences.



In the 3rd century, the Roman empire was growing too large and difficult to manage.

So Emperor Diocletian decided that the Empire should be split into two distinct domains- the Western Roman Empire and Eastern Roman Empire. One of the foundations for the separation between the two empires was the language difference, as the Western Empire spoke predominantly in Latin and the East spoke mostly in Greek which caused division.

A main disagreement between the sides was the Catholic Pope's claim to papal infallibility- a dogma of the Catholic church that when the Pope spoke from the Throne of St Peter he would not make any error in his claims as God would guide him, and so he could make firm statements concerning Church liturgy. The Eastern Church agreed to respect and honour the pope, but believed that matters to do with the Church and its faith should be decided by a council of bishops rather than just one man.

At the heart of the split was the filioque clause, which focuses on the Trinity doctrine and whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone or the Father and Jesus Christ. Originally, the Nicene Creed stated that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father. But the Western Church added the filioque clause to the Nicene Creed which implied that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. The Eastern Church wanted to preserve the original version,

"At the heart of the split was the filioque clause, which focuses on the Trinity doctrine and whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone or the Father and Jesus Christ."

whilst the Western Church insisted on changing it. Both sides persevered and as the disagreement started to heat up, the theological beliefs between the two Churches were more apparent. Both churches claimed to be the true Church of God and the other Church an imposter. This led to the two churches excommunicating each other and the two sides going their separate ways.

Although we have differences with other churches and denominations, we should look past the differences and instead focus on the common denominator, our Lord Jesus Christ. We all believe that God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten son to die on the cross for our salvation (John 3:16). We also believe that Jesus thought of each and every one of us on the cross. So we shouldn't be arguing with our brothers and sisters in Christ over who is more righteous or who is walking down the right path. Instead, we should unite and show God's unconditional love through our actions as the Church and body of Christ.

- Elwin Sudeeb

OCYM Update



Journeys and Gatherings: St. Thomas OCYM's Season of Fellowship and Faith

It has been a wonderful summer for our youth this year. The first ever youth Awayday trip was organised on August 16 to 17. The Aberdeen OCYM embarked on its first-ever youth awayday trip to Aviemore. It was a fantastic opportunity to bond together. On the first day, we explored Huntly Castle and enjoyed games of football and cricket on the sandy shores of Loch Morlich Beach. We then settled in at the Cairngorms Christian Centre, where we had a great time playing table tennis. In the evening, the youth took the initiative to set up a BBQ and gather around the fire pit to toast marshmallows, creating lasting memories. On day two, we embraced the adventure of kayaking, with most of us managing to stay dry—though a few got a little wet! Overall, the trip was an incredible experience, and we can't wait for the next youth awayday.

Incorporation of English songs in the Holy Qurbana: On July 28, we began incorporating English songs into our Holy Qurbana services. Moving forward, we plan to continue this practice every 4th Sunday of the month, offering a meaningful way to engage more of our youth in worship.

Church BBQ: On August 18, 2024, our church community gathered at Haughton Country Park in Alford to enjoy the beautiful sunny weather. It was a day filled with fun, as we played cricket and football and indulged in delicious food. The event was a wonderful opportunity to come together and enjoy the blessings of good weather and great company.



Participation in the Mar Makarios Memorial Cricket Tournament: On August 31, 2024, a team of 13 dedicated players represented our church at the Mar Makarios Memorial Cricket Tournament, hosted by the OCYM of St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church in Newcastle. Our team demonstrated exceptional skill and sportsmanship, advancing impressively to the semi-finals. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the entire team for their outstanding performance and commitment.



Looking forward:

- Annual Youth Conference in Wales: This year, 10 of our youth members will be attending the Annual Youth Conference in Wales from October 11 to 13, 2024. We wish them a spiritually enriching experience.
- Quiz Competition: We are excited to announce the return of our Quiz Competition in October, with participation from several neighboring churches.
- New Academic Year: As the new school term begins and university classes start at the end of September, we congratulate all those who have completed their National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher Exams, as well as those beginning or continuing their university studies. We also extend our best wishes to those starting new jobs after university.

"Together we journey, in faith we grow, as each moment becomes a memory and each memory a blessing."



Jewel Jacob
Secretary,
OCYM Aberdeen

Verses to help you in different stages of your life

1 Peter 4:16- "However, if you suffer because you are a Christian, don't be ashamed of it, but thank God that you bear Christ's name."

In this day and age, majority of people around us are non-believers and atheists and us Christians may feel like the minority therefore being a Christian can sometimes lead to exclusion or isolation. Yet, 1 Peter 4:16 reminds us to stand firm and take pride in our faith. We may have encountered situations where our beliefs set us apart, making us feel left out or different. I know from personal experience how challenging it can be, especially during school years, when events and activities often clashed with my values. Despite moments of feeling ashamed, I am deeply grateful to be a child of God. Let us all strive to confidently proclaim our Christian identity, embracing it with pride and gratitude.

1 Corinthians 10:13 - "Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out."

We have all gone through tough times and rough patches throughout life, leading us to question, "God, why is this happening to me?" Yet, 1 Corinthians 10:13 reassures us that God will never push us beyond our limits. Every trial is a part of His divine plan, meant to strengthen our faith and draw us closer to Him. Without struggles, would we seek God as earnestly? Struggles are a part of life but God is always by our side, providing the strength we need to endure and overcome.

Philippians 4:13- "I can do all things through Christ because he gives me strength."

This verse holds a special place in my heart. It's my go-to reminder whenever I face tough situations. Before the start of every exam, I would sit in my seat, close my eyes and whisper this verse to myself repeatedly, feeling my anxiety ease as I placed my trust in God's strength. In moments of self-doubt, Philippians 4:13 is a powerful affirmation that with Christ, we can face anything.

Galatians 5:16- "What I say is this: let the Spirit direct your lives, and you will not satisfy the desires of the human nature."

Temptation is a reality of human life, whether it comes through greed, lust, or selfishness. Galatians 5:16 calls us to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance, steering us away from worldly desires and closer to God's image. In a world full of influences such as social media and peers that can lead us astray, we must remain vigilant, allowing the Spirit to direct our path as children of God.

Proverbs 16:3 - "Ask the LORD to bless your plans, and you will be successful in carrying them out."

As humans as we navigate our lives, we often make plans and set goals. However, Proverbs 16:3 reminds us that true success comes from God's blessing. We can plan our careers and future, but it's God who brings those plans to fruition. Everything we achieve is by His grace, and we must seek His guidance, trusting that His plan for us is perfect.

Joshua 1:9 - "Remember that I have commanded you to be determined and confident! Don't be afraid or discouraged, for I, the LORD your God, am with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9 encourages us to embrace change and face the unknown with confidence. Personally, I find this verse incredibly comforting as I embark on new chapters in life, such as starting university. The uncertainty of a new environment is daunting to me, but knowing that God is with me every step of the way brings me peace. Even in unfamiliar places and among new people, I am never alone, for God is by my side always and I couldn't ask for anything better.

Songs of Solomon 4:7- "You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you."

In a society where beauty standards are often dictated by social media, Song of Solomon 4:7 is a powerful reminder of our worth. As a teenage girl, this verse resonates deeply. We are each uniquely crafted by God, made in His image, and are flawless in His eyes. Our true beauty lies not just in our outward appearance but in the purity of our hearts. Embracing this truth allows us to see ourselves through God's eyes and appreciate the divine beauty within our hearts and souls and that is what matters most.



Jeffline Jacob

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Prayer Corner

O Holy Father, guard us by Your Sacred Name, O Son of God, our Savior, protect us with Your victorious Cross †. O Holy Spirit, make us worthy temples of Your Holy habitation. O Lord, our God forever shelter us under Your divine wings, at all times, for ever.

Amen

OUR CHURCH FACTS

His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III was enthroned as the Catholicos of the East & Malankara Metropolitan (the Supreme Head of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India) on Friday, 15th October 2021. His Holiness is the 92nd Primate on the Apostolic Throne of St. Thomas.

Navigating faith through University

University is a pivotal time in our lives—a time of young adulthood, newfound independence, and the exploration of our future paths. Amidst the excitement and challenges, staying steadfast in our faith can be difficult, especially when we find ourselves in a new city, far from family and familiar support systems. Yet, no matter what we face, we must never lose sight of our Lord Jesus Christ.

the Lord
is my
Strength
and my
Shield

Psalm 28:7

In our schools, universities, and workplaces, do we boldly declare our Christian faith? A verse that resonates deeply with me is from Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV): "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

This scripture reminds us that we are called to be a light in the world, radiating our faith through our actions and letting others see the light of Jesus in us. This light should be evident in our love, service, and care for others—in how we speak to and about others. While we may sometimes struggle to live out our faith, we must stand firm as children of God, proudly proclaiming our Christianity not just through words, but through the way

we live our lives.

Living in the UK, where we are often a minority in a largely secular society, can be challenging. It's common to find ourselves surrounded by classmates and colleagues who may not share our beliefs, but we must not be disheartened or swayed from our path. Instead, we should cultivate a habit of attending church, participating in the Holy Qurbana, and engaging meaningfully with the prayers and songs, ensuring that our worship is conscious and heartfelt.

As Matthew 18:20 reassures us: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." No matter how small the gathering, the presence of Jesus Christ is with us, offering His unwavering support. Let this assurance strengthen us as we navigate university life, holding fast to our faith and letting our light shine for all to see.

"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." — Matthew 5:16

As a Christian, I find purpose in life through my faith, and I believe we all do. In challenging moments—whether it's facing difficult exams or managing tough situations with patients—I take comfort in knowing that God is with me. But it's important to remember that we shouldn't only turn to God in times of struggle.

We must also give thanks for the countless blessings in our lives, both big and small.

From the food we have each day to the freedom to worship, from the luxury of a home to the opportunity to receive an education, all of these are gifts from our Lord. It's easy to overlook these blessings in the hustle of daily life, but we must make it a habit to express gratitude every day. Let us never forget to thank God for His abundant grace and for every blessing He has given us.



Jewel Jacob
Secretary,
OCYM Aberdeen



ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Fourth issue of this newsletter will be released on 30th December this year, members are encouraged to contribute any pictures, articles, achievements and reflections for future newsletters.
2. This year OVBS will be on 21st & 22nd December. All young members are encouraged to register and participate; please get in touch with Sunday School Head Teacher Jibin John for details.
3. Our church will go around for Christmas carol singing on 8th and 15th December.
4. Feast of St. Thomas: Our church will celebrate the Feast of St. Thomas on October 27th. All are invited to join in this special occasion.



Memories

