



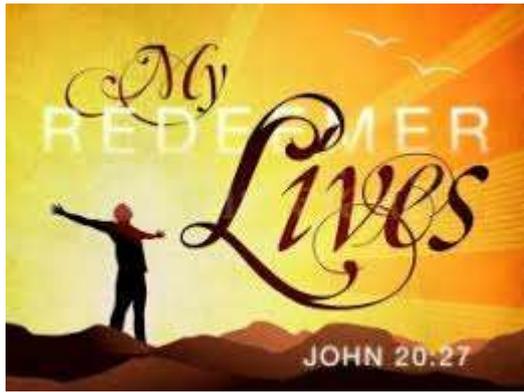
The Mar Thoma

ECHO

my
Redeemer
lives

A Publication of the Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe





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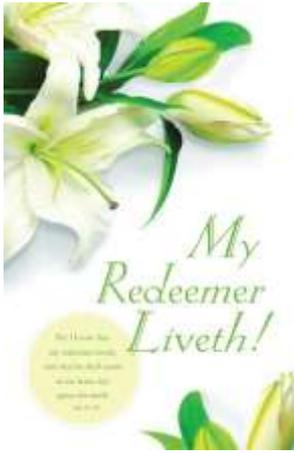
Mrs. Geena Ajay

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Editorial



I know that my redeemer liveth. And that he shall stand at the latter day upon the Earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God...

Christmas Greetings in advance from ECHO team. While preparing for the advent and making our mind ready to welcome baby Jesus, Job is reminding us about our redeemer.

Do we know the circumstances under which those words were said? Job in the middle of a contest between God and Satan. All are familiar with the story of Job, you know that in the end, for his unwavering faith in God, Job had everything restored to him. He said the above words not at the end of the story, not at when everything had been restored to him. The beauty of these words is, these were uttered by Job when things were at their worst. After all his children and servants had been killed, his flocks stolen; after he had been reduced to sitting on a dung heap with his body covered with sores; and when his “friends,” such as they were, tried to “comfort” him by telling him that he must have done something displeasing to God in order for all of this calamity to have befallen him. He says these words when he has suffered so much that his wife says he should just curse God and die. Job is placing a challenge in front of you and me, how many of us can confidently shout the

above words when we are passing the hard road in our life journey.

We praise God because we believe that in spite of the regular ups and down, some absolutely horrible time in our lives and the lives of others, that God is not capricious. That everything he does, or allows to happen has some greater purpose that we don’t know yet, and may never know. When you get right down to it, most of us believe that life may stink, but in the end, **God is good.**

Children and servants dead, flocks stolen, lands laid waste, covered with sores from head to toe, and now surrounded by a bunch of useless friends who try to convince him that he had to have done something wrong for all this to happen to him, Job still praises God. Job says, “I know that my redeemer liveth.

We fear that our battle may last long and that perhaps our feet may slip, only He who keeps Israel does not slumber nor sleep. So since we know that our Redeemer lives, this shall be our comfort in life—that though we fall, we shall not be utterly cast down, and since our Redeemer lives, this shall be our comfort in death—that though worms destroy this body, yet in our flesh we shall see God. Let’s try to see the sunlight behind the rain in our life and say “**I know that my redeemer liveth.**”

Editorial Board

World Sunday School Day Sermon

Sermon delivered on World Sunday School Sunday by **Anju Abraham Varghese**, Sunday school student, at St James Mar Thoma Church worship service on Sunday 3rd November 2019.

“Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful morning. As the Word of God says in proverbs- Train up a child in the way you should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it. Fill us with your grace and wisdom so that we may grow into strong men and women, who fear Your name and live for Your glory. In Jesus’ precious name we ask, and we pray, Amen

Today as we celebrate World SS day, I would like to briefly talk about the history of Sunday school. Robert Raikes who is from Gloucestershire, who was a newspaper publisher was the first to initiate the SS movement as he intended to save boys in slums. He happened to get involved with boys imprisoned in county jail and saw that the bad behavior should be better prevented rather than cured. He envisioned schooling as the best intervention to reduce crimes. Victorian England had a forceful practice of child labour and the only day available was Sundays for these kids. So, he did schooling for these kids on Sundays, with lay people as teachers and the curriculum as Bible. The Bible study progressed, and crime rates saw a huge fall. By 1831, 25% of the population at that time was taught this way and the movement of SS spread to US and other countries.

The SS movement progressed through the years and what we see in our church took its form in Feb 1905 at Maramon convention with the relentless commitment of Rev. V P Mammen

with the formation of Marthoma Sunday School Samajam. The role of this was to teach children of the new generation the Word of God and become better individuals to lead a flawless Christian lives as adults. The motto of our Marthoma SS is “Come to Jesus, bring every child to Jesus”.



The reason being is that spiritual maturity is in different

levels in these three age groups.

Let me start with the parent's role, ^[1]_[SEP]As for meditation today, I have chosen a verse from Deuteronomy 6: 7

It is Moses’ commandment to the parents of those days. NIV Bible says “ them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. This literally means all the time.

Let’s look at the first part of the verse “Impress them on the children” – what does this mean? From the Dictionary, “Impress “means to produce mark by pressure, or image, in other words to fix deeply in mind. Another biblical version says, Teach them diligently- which means; teach them “carefully taking a lot of effort.” Anything painstaking or involving effort are the two words modern parenting wants to get rid of. It is human nature to take things lightly.

Know your church



Church and Mission

The meanings and definitions of the church and its mission have undergone considerable changes in the course of history. Each period has made its own definitions and

meanings to church and mission. Especially during the modern missionary movement various theories have emerged leading to reductionism while defining the practice of mission.¹ Reductionism is considering as simple parts while ignoring the whole, or overemphasizing one thing at the cost of others. As the reformation of the Mar Thoma Church and its mission, to a considerable extent, was affected by the modern missionary movement, it is important to look into the various mission models and theories. Hence such studies would help us to see whether we also fallen into victims of reductionism. It also helps us to regain a model that would conform to the biblical model of mission.

1. Church: A Witnessing Community.

a. Witness Misunderstood as Mission

¹ Paul G Hiebert "Evangelism, Church, and Kingdom", in *The Good News of the Kingdom* (New York: Orbis Books,1993), 153

We can't find the term "mission" in the New Testament that was used since the colonial missions of the 16th century to denote what Jesus Christ had entrusted to the church (the Body of Jesus Christ). Jesus entrusted his disciples to preach the gospel to all creation (Mk: 16.14); you will be my witnesses (Lk: 24.46-48; Acts: 1.8). When Jesus Christ entrusted this task to the church, it is the responsibility of the Church be the witnesses not of a mission society. Mission Societies were formed when the churches failed in its duty of witnessing to the Kingdom of God. Here the term mission is used to denote the witnessing task of the church because the term "mission" is the common usage to denote the task of the church.

b. Church by its very nature missionary

We found the Great commission that Jesus Christ entrusted with his disciples and hence the church in his command to become the "light of the world" and "the salt of the earth". This command becomes the foundation of the Church's mission in every generation. Based on this theme the Mar Thoma church accepted as its motto: lighted to lighten. We can not split church and its mission,

because church exists for mission or the church is for mission. We cannot separate the smell from a flower. If it is flower then naturally it emits smell. If that is the case then we cannot entrust to a group of people or to a mission agency. It is the sole responsibility of the worshipping community.

c. Parish: A missionary congregation

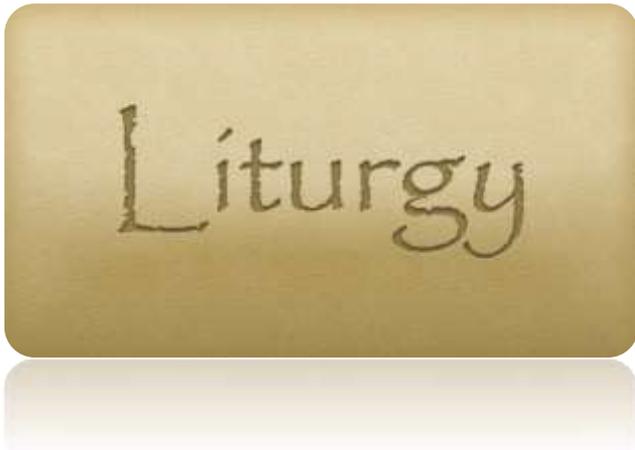
During the last decades of the previous century awareness was emerged that the church is the church because of what happens in the local church's *martyria, leitourgia, koinonia, and diakonia*.² The new paradigm shift led to the rediscovery of the local church as the primary agent of mission. This new paradigm shift led to the rediscovery of the local church as the primary agent of mission.

Church is not mere an institution or corporation, though we need an institutional framework for its function. While functioning in an institutional framework the believers are to be reminded that they belong to a **movement**. A missionary church emerges when its members increasingly participate in the church's being in the world through *martyria,*

leitourgia koinonia, and diakonia (witnessing, worshipping, providing fellowship, and serving). Thus undoubtedly makes it clear that parish becomes the mission field.

The members are to exhibit the Kingdom values within the parish community and extend it to the immediate neighborhood. Thus the church becomes the sign sacrament and foretaste of the Kingdom that the Church points to be established by God fully in God's time. The witnessing is to be strengthened by providing opportunities within parish for enriching the fellowship among members. The fellowship which celebrates the unconditional love that God gifted to us through Jesus Christ should be strengthened and should be encouraged so that our children could be nurtured and trained to share and to love each other as members of the Body of Christ within the parish. It would to some extent help the young generation to overcome the selfishness and to accept the ways of Jesus Christ who gave the unconditional love and grace for human without considering their sins. A parish that orients its community in this fellowship would help families to extend this

² David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 380



fellowship to strengthen their family bonds

The message of the Cross should be emphasized over and over again in our Qurbana and the liturgy of the Marriage. We gave rejection, hatred, cross to Jesus Christ, and in return God gave us love, grace, forgiveness, and redemption. The marriage is a sacrament for us and the liturgy is articulated as illustrating Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride. The song that is to be sung while tying the *minnu* reminds the bride and the bridegroom about the love relationship that they begin after attending the liturgy: "My dowry you have paid with your Cross."

The liturgy should mould us as a witnessing community that serves the community. Involve children, youths and adults in social development programmes to train them to care and share. Teach about the joy of Christian giving and encourage children

and youth to set apart time for mission work.

d. Liturgy after liturgy.³

Liturgical worship has an important role in Eastern spirituality. Liturgical worship should transform the congregation to continue the worship in the community. The worshipping community after the engagement in worship turned to be a missionary community. That is the liturgical worship is not the reciting of prayers and creeds, it should equip us for mission. The faith that is repeated in the liturgical worship should be practiced in the community life. John Chrysostom points two altars; one at the private and the other at the public square. The worship at the private altar should shape us to continue our worship to dedicate ourselves and loving sacrifice for others. Sharing of Bread during the Qurbana should transform us to share our bread with the poor. Reception of the unconditional forgiveness and healing from the Lord should shape us a reconciling and healing community. One of the main challenges for mission is to guard against ritualism, and the

³ See James A Scherer, Stephen B. Bevens, ed. *New Directions in Mission & Evangelization* 1 (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 212-228

tendency to become self-serving parishes.

d. Ensure the Lay Participation in Parish as well as church activities.

One of the main features of the reformation movement within the Mar Thoma Church was the regaining of the lay participation in church life. Hence Mar Thoma Church was blessed with lay leadership both in church and society. But at present the church life revolves round the pastor. We should discard the ‘achen-entered ministry’ to a lay-centered ministry.

2. Does a reductionism has taken place in our church?

According to Paul G. Hiebert, Evangelism, Church, and Kingdom are the three central themes in the modern missionary movement. How we define and relate them determines our mission paradigm and practice. The over emphasis of any of the three would lead us to reductionism.⁴

a. Evangelism

There are people and groups who give priority to evangelism and argue that without this there will be no church and no manifestation of the kingdom. During early

period of the Protestant missionary movement evangelizing “unevangelised” was the primary aim of missionaries.



Preaching is the important and the task of discipling converts was secondary in this model. The problem with this model is it often leads to shallow Christianity for three reasons: 1. lack of instruction and support of a Christian community so that many converts backslide due to opposition or persecution. Little knowledge of biblical truth or life and the result was a shallow Christianity affected with syncretism. 2. Shallow ecclesiology of giving little attention of building churches into mature communities of faith and witness. 3. Salvation is defined in modern individualistic terms, i.e., a spirituality of “God and Me”, and not a spirituality that affects my relationship with people. Faith is privatized; success is measured by the number of converts, not transformed lives. Peace, justice, and other social concerns are secondary tasks.

b. Church

A second reductionism places priority on the church as the agent and goal of missions. Our task in missions is to build the church. For that we must organize congregations, train leaders, and nurture children in faith.

⁴ Paul G Hiebert “Evangelism, Church, and Kingdom”, in *The Good News of the Kingdom*, 153-157.

It is the church that preserves the Gospel from generation to generation.

The strength of this paradigm is its concern with worship, community, and spiritual growth. One danger in this approach is that the church becomes ingrown and self serving and loses its sense of evangelism. There are so many needs in the church, and so little time and resources that of evangelism is lost, evangelism became one among many of the projects. A second danger is that this approach focuses on our human efforts. We come to believe that we build the church by planning, programs, and activities, and has little place for prayer to God seeking guidance.

c. Kingdom

A third group focuses on the Kingdom of God as the central theme of missions. Conversion and church are not ends in themselves, but means to proclaim the Kingdom already come. Here mission is equated with bringing in the Kingdom by struggling for peace and justice on earth. The strength of this model is the concern for righteousness on earth. Mission is not finished until the Kingdom has fully come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. One weakness of this view is that too often it loses sight of the lostness of human beings without Christ and the urgency of evangelism. Another weakness is that the church becomes a political player in the arena of world politics. Christianity becomes a civil religion used to justify democracy, capitalism, communism etc.

Against this many missions attempted to combine evangelism, church, and Kingdom

in a single paradigm. Evangelism without the church is incomplete. The church without evangelism is sick. We can not bring Kingdom by human efforts; it is God's action



and humans participate with God in His mission. In this paradigm we must begin with the work of the Father, who in creation made humans in his image for fellowship with him and he reaches out to save those who repent and return to him. We must focus on Jesus Christ who made salvation possible in his incarnation and opened door for fellowship and reconciliation. The eschatological dimension of mission keeps us from becoming too much institutionalized in the church and too much at home in this world.

Mar Thoma Church integrated these three to some extent in its liturgy and mission. Mar Thoma Church never doubted about the centrality of the Church as place to orient and to disciple the worshipping community. It gives equal importance to the proclamation of the Gospel to those who have never heard it. The aim of evangelism is not proselytism and not to add members to the church. The aim is to invite people to have repentance and to orient their life to begin a life that suits the kingdom values. The believes that God is continuing His mission in the world and trying to

participate with God to enhance the kingdom by ensuring justice, peace and reconciliation among people. Thus the church has no hesitation to join with people and communities who share this goal of establishment of a Kingdom community in the contemporary society.

Conclusion



As we are celebrated the 175th anniversary of the Reformation that had taken place within the Mar Thoma church we need to recapture the intension of the Spirit of the Lord who inspired Abraham Malpan and others to initiate a reformation within the church. The ancient church of St.Thomas continued as a caste community (a *smudayam*) forgetting their being as movement and a witnessing community. By reformation we regained the given identity as liturgical community and a witnessing community. Abrham Malpan never attempted to create a new liturgy, rather retaining the biblically sound doctrines and practices and removed those that are not conforming to the biblical teachings. Abraham Malpan and the reformers were not against retaining rituals, rather they opposed the ritualism. Liturgy as an important source of theology and a tool for teaching the Orthodoxy is considered equal with

scriptures as source of theology. The Bible is not a reference text for preaching, rather to be lived or for re-orienting one's life with a repentance to begin a kingdom –oriented life. It is a life on Christ's way. Liturgy helps the worshipping community to become a witnessing community of the Gospel by enacting the liturgy in their daily life. There are tendencies from the members of the Mar Thoma church to avoid the liturgy of the church and to associate with those who prefer spontaneity by avoiding formal order of liturgy. The danger is that such attempts not only prevent the new converts to be oriented with the traditions of the Church and its doctrines but also prevent the existing members of the church to be oriented by the lived out faith experience of the church , its traditions, and its history. There should be a deliberate attempt from the church to teach the members about the importance liturgy in their lives, and to encourage the new generation to have a meaningful engagement with the liturgical life of the community.

FAMILY WEEK MEDITATIONS

By Rev. George Achen

ABRAHAM FAMILY

Genesis 12:1-9

Family of Abraham was a living testimony to who God is and what God is doing for us and people around us.

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." 4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. 9

And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Abraham was moving on from Mesopotamia to the Promised Land. He did not know where to go. But he went after God and willingly took each step in faith. His life was framed by God's presence. His paths were illuminated by God's wonderful promises. He lived always in a 'sacramental space'. Wherever he pitched his tent, he built an altar to worship God. His family steadily progressed in life's journey and always celebrated the presence of God.

Abraham was:

1. Obedient to the commands of the Lord
2. Recipient of God's promises
3. Obsessed with the worship of God

Let us review our life in the light of the Abraham family. Are we journeying within the plan of God? Do we know the wonderful promises for us in the Bible? How is our lifestyle which bears witness to the holy name of God? How do we as a family engage in worship each day?

In the liturgy of Holy Matrimony we chant remembering the patriarchal fathers and mothers: *Abram and Sara ennivare vazthiya sarveshan bahulmathal than kriypayal evare vazhattee Deva krupa cheyyaname nee...* ("May God, who blessed Abraham and Sarah bless these servants with his abundant grace.") Let us be in the shoes of those patriarchal families for our children. Let us be 'models' for them in faith, worship and service.

JOSHUA FAMILY

Joshua 24:1-25 (vs. 19-24)

Christian Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. Holy Matrimony is a sacrament of the church. God of the Bible is a God of the Covenant! God made a covenant with the people of Israel and they became a chosen people and a Holy Nation. The people of Israel were exposed to many trials and temptations in the wilderness. Moses always gave them assurances from the Lord God of Israel. Now they are in the land of Canaan. They seemed to have reached their destination and are now secure! No, the troubles only started! The people of Israel in the land of Canaan needed a different resolve and a renewed commitment to live in the Promised Land, i.e. a new 'software'. Joshua was with Moses and he is now leading the people to inherit the land. God told him that, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you." (Josh. 1:5) Joshua and his family stood firm for the Lord God of Israel and faithfully walked in His ways. Joshua 24 is a Covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem. It is also called Shechemite covenant. Joshua affirmed his faith in public before the people.

*14 "Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; **but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**" 16 Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; 17 for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among*

all the peoples through whom we passed; 18 and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God." 19 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good." 21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, we will serve the LORD!" 22 Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." 23 He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." 24 The people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey."

Joshua and his family would teach us and our children a few valuable lessons to live in this British soil as a pilgrim community:

1. Joshua and members of his family were not attracted or influenced by the foreign gods (Canaanite gods)
2. Joshua and members of his family were sincere and faithful to serve the holy God of Israel
3. Joshua was ready and willing to renew his covenant with Yahweh, the God of Israel at Shechem and the people followed his initiative

Among the emerging realities of 'diaspora', the fathers and mothers of our faith community have to take a definite stand for Jesus. Our children grow up watching their parents and witnessing their faith expressions and evaluating their spiritual moorings. Let us pray God to make us instruments of their faith formation of our children to make decisions for Christ and His Kingdom. Let us echo the affirmation of faith by Joshua, "**but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**"

ZECHARIAH ELIZABETH FAMILY

Luke 1: 5-23 & 57-66

Married life is not a 'bed of roses'. There will be difficulties, troubles or problems. Some uninvited problems can even torpedo our relationships.

Zechariah Elizabeth couple's family life was plagued with 'childlessness'. Zacharias was a Priest and Elizabeth was from a priestly family. They started their married life well. As we read from Luke's Gospel that "*they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren.*" (v. 7)

Social stigma was more than they could bear. We cannot blame them, if they might have thought, "Why did God punish us like this?"

It was a 'miracle' that they kept their family life clean, transparent and holy. Gospel attests that, "*Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.*" (v. 6) They did not engage themselves in a 'blame game' or cursed God or each other for this hopeless situation.

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. 60 But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." 61 They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." 62 Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. 63 He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout

the entire hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

The Lord God of Israel moved again in history spreading new hopes for the People of God. God has broken His 'silence' and initiated life when everything was clinically and practically impossible. Zechariah Elizabeth couple's family life and their experiences became a 'paradigm' for the plight of the community.

In total dark situation a beacon of light was emerging. In utter hopelessness there rose signs of God's hand at work. Impossible is made possible in the family life of Zechariah and Elizabeth with the gift of a son called John. This family teaches us a few lessons of life, worship and witness:

1. Zechariah Elizabeth's 'family altar' was alive and constant. They prayed and asked God for their every need.
2. Zechariah Elizabeth family did not know that God was preparing them for a great mission of God (*missio dei*)
3. John the Baptist was a special gift for his parents, but he was sent by God as a forerunner to Jesus, to prepare the way of the Lord.

The shame was transformed into a celebration for the Zachariah Elizabeth family. The special experiences in life, like 'dumbness' were clear signs of God's grace and wonder. The beautiful friends and neighbours of the family were understanding and supportive in this special time of need and joy. Zechariah and Elizabeth would witness to the following:

- Do not give up on prayer. God would answer our prayers in unexpected time and ways.
- Hang on to each other. God can and will use you for His greater purpose and take glory through your family life
- Children are always God's gift in the family to prove His love for you and His redeeming love for the world.

Where do we stand on these lessons in our family life? "*Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*" (Isa. 40:31)

MARY JOSEPH FAMILY

Matthew 1:18-25 & Luke 2:40-52

Have you ever thought that Jesus would be growing up in your home? Mary and Joseph family is called 'Holy Family' or 'Jesus family'. How would you get Jesus to come and be part of your home and celebrate with Jesus each moment of your life?

Luke's Gospel very clearly illustrates the profile of a young girl named Mary. *"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary."* (Lk. 1:26-27)

It is usually said that, "Marriages are made in heaven and consummated on earth." Mary Joseph marriage was more complex than our normal understanding of marriage. Heaven is involved in this marriage. Angel Gabriel is understood as chief of the angels and he was delegated to inform the candidate.

It was not easy for Mary to receive and accept this news. Her dialogue and reasoning with Angel Gabriel was simple and beautiful. She was ready to accept the assignment from heaven and her words of surrender was very beautiful, *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."* (v. 38)¹⁸ *Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph,*

son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife. (Matt. 1:18-24)

Joseph was chosen to be part of this divine drama! He was afraid and reluctant to undertake this huge assignment. They did not plan to have a child and to 'have and to hold pregnant Mary' was an insult to his manhood. *"Her husband Joseph being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace planned to dismiss her quietly."* (Matt. 1:19)

We see that for Mary and Joseph family life was the following:

1. It was a call from God
2. It was a commitment to God
3. It was a service to the Almighty

The interactive spaces between heaven and earth were beautifully crafted to become creative spaces for the 'holy family' to engage in a divine exercise and godly enterprise. They had visits from the shepherds and three wise men. They have heard about their child from Simeon and Prophetess Anna in the Jerusalem Temple, as they were fulfilling all the requirements of the Law of Moses.

The child Jesus was their son and he was the 'Son of God' with a mission. The visitation and vision given to Mary and Joseph were

supernatural in character, but they were guiding lights and pillar of strength in their life together as a family.

Children are God's gift to parents in a family. They should have that divine spark kindled through the spiritual engagements of the parents in a Christian home. A Godly-father and a Godly-mother in the sacramental space would give birth to a Godly-child. Children should be like the Jesus child to grow.

- a. Jesus was born not in the comforts and security of a palace, but in a manger.
- b. Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt to save their life and the life of the child
- c. Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus grew up in Nazareth in total obedience to his parents

How did Jesus grow? "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him." (Lk. 2:40) Family is a sacramental space where children are loved and helped to grow as good human beings. Parents have to be good models to impart wisdom (Fear of the Lord) and values of the Kingdom.

1. Our children should know the challenges and difficulties parents are facing in raising them and provide for them. May they be always grateful to God and thankful to their parents
2. Love imparted by parents without discipline would reap rebellion and anarchy in the family
3. May our children learn the greatness of sacrifice in service to the nation and humanity. Such children would make

their parents proud and bring glory to God.

St. Luke recorded again: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour." (Lk. 2:52)

Our children are reared and groomed in British soil with apparent luxury around them. Let us harness Kingdom values in our Christian families to equip them to withstand the challenges and temptations schools, universities and work places. Let us be prepared today so that we will not be sorry tomorrow and live with regret.

We need to have Jesus in our home. May He be the head of the family and let our children grow and go with Jesus. Let us do everything possible to keep our families a 'heavenly' places of grace and celebration.



ZACCHAEUS FAMILY

Luke 19:1-10

God has given to all His creation two basic things: Time and Space. Christian family is a sacramental institution with sacramental space where they celebrate God-appointed time. Then our ordinary time is connected to eternity. Our families would become 'heavens' and you live in the light of eternity today and God is our Immanuel.

How to give 'quality time' to our families is a challenge. Our family relationships have to be 'greased' to be effective and efficient. A father has to present himself as an effective and dynamic presence to give necessary leadership and passion. A mother has to be a pastoral presence to give ample strength and order. Children have to be searching and seeking to discover their place and rightful role in the family as they grow up from childhood to adulthood. You may think that there will be confusion! Family is an 'interactive space' where we are given grace and power of the Holy Spirit to know and understand our potentials and possibilities for life.

The character for our reflection is Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector. He became very rich and famous! As far as his family was concerned (imagination!) he made his wife and children happy with providing them with every possible goods and resources that money could buy. I am sure, he built a big house for his family so that they had ample space to live comfortably. Zacchaeus was an 'absent husband'! He was also an 'absent father'! At the same time, he was also an 'absent neighbour'! In his plight to earn more, how could not make himself available to his family.

Luke 19:1-10

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of

the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." 6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." 8 Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." 9 Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Zacchaeus was physically of short stature. He was dwarfed in the crowd and he was afraid of it. All his advantages would not compensate for this handicap.

- a. Zacchaeus thought that Jesus would never be able to meet him and connect with him, so he wanted to see Jesus without him knowing of it.
- b. Jesus saw Zacchaeus sitting on a tree and called him by name to come down to meet him face to face
- c. Zacchaeus received from Jesus more than he has bargained for. He not only got an audience with Jesus, but also an offer to come and be a 'guest' at his house.

Zacchaeus left his tax collector's booth in search of Jesus was a giant leap to reach Jesus. In the crowd, Jesus could listen to the 'panting' of a searching soul. Jesus could see the face to a person who is 'hungry' after God. Jesus could understand the desire of a longing heart to be at peace and being forgiven.

We do not know what happened at the foot of the Sycamore tree in Jericho, but it was transformed into a sacred place and that moment became a sacred time, where the Saviour has met with a sinner.

Zacchaeus was a single person to have come into contact with Jesus, but it was the beginning of a transformation to his family. Jesus said, "*Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.*" Last thing that he would have wished was to take Jesus to his family. He, for a moment, thought of his wife, his children and others who were part of the household. His 'confessions' were very personal, but impinged on the economics of his family. He has schemed many a time ways to amass wealth, now he stated scheming how to get rid of his 'guilt' and liabilities. He found the right words and formula to articulate his decision. He said publicly to Jesus, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Zacchaeus became a transformed person with a new identity and appreciation.

1. Zacchaeus was restored to his family and his heritage.
2. In the presence of Jesus he was reconciled to his community
3. His family became a place of celebration for all who were marginalized and ostracised.

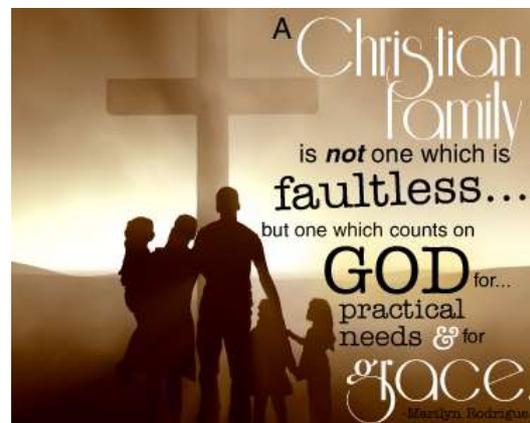
Zacchaeus family was transformed into a beautiful family with values of the Kingdom of God. The faith of Abraham became 'hallmark' of the family.

Today many families are 'lost' through their misplaced priorities. Relationships are

superficial and often conditional. Money, influence and luxury control the lifestyle and interactions. Children of such families are a bad influence in the society. They are prone to addiction and substance abuse. There are instances of breakdown in many family relationships soon after marriages which are conducted with pomp and pageantry.

How can we recover values and vitality in our Christian families? We need to go back to the 'drawing board' and plan our lives. We have to go back to the Bible. We need to go back to the family prayer tradition. We need to regain the sacramental space and sacramental grace in our family relationships as a community of faith.

Jesus made all the difference in the personal and family life of Zacchaeus. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Let us affirm this statement in letter and spirit, "***Christ is the head of our house. The unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.***"



A CLOSER LOOK AT MY FAMILY

Psalms 128:1-6

After five days of meditation on different families in the Bible, we saw different dimensions of Christian family life and now we have come to look at our own family. Today is a day of self-examination and reflection. We are celebrating tomorrow as the 'Family Sunday'. Let us be sincere and committed to the one who has begun the good work in us to bring it to completion and perfection in Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). Let us wait with patience, eagerness and confidence.

Holy Matrimony is a sacrament in the Mar Thoma Church and a family is created by God in the Body of Christ. A man and a woman are joined together to become 'one body'. It is a mystery and it is in living out that mystery that the husband and wife realize the magnitude of this chemistry and impact of this enduring relationship.

Christian marriage is covenant making ceremony. Marriage creates a 'covenant community' with a commitment to live out the plan of salvation. Psalm 128 refers to Israel and it is that covenant community in the Old Testament. Yahweh has called Israel out of Egypt and led them into the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. God gave them commandments to obey and follow as they continued their sojourn as a covenant community.

Human strength alone cannot hold two persons together for a very long time. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that gives this lasting energy. During the service of Holy Matrimony the Gospel is read over the joined hands of man and woman. Cross is invoked during the service. It is the symbol of God's love for the humanity. The love that is ruling over the marriage relationship is the 'Calvary Love' and it is not just conditional, but covenantal.

Psalms 128 beautifully captures the profile of a family under God. It is one of the Psalms of Ascent sung by the people as they have gone to

worship God in Jerusalem. Let us have a closer and objective look at the message of the Psalm.

Psalm 128: A Song of Ascents (NRSV)

1 Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways. 2 You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you. 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. 4 Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. 5 The LORD bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. 6 May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

1. It is the desire of the creator God that all our families live a life according to the plan of God in creation and election. The word here can be translated as "Happy," "Blessed," or "Successful." The magic word here is "Fear of the Lord." It is used in the Wisdom tradition to substitute for obedience to Torah. This verse reminds us of Psalm 1:1-2 ("*Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.*")
2. Family is like a 'garden of love' in a world of sin and evil which reminds us of the Garden of Eden. Two images are helpful to go deeper into the beautiful relationship within the family circle. Wife is a beautiful vine both fruitful and pleasing. Her contribution for the welfare of family is greatly appreciated. Children are shoots of olive. They are placed around the table to make the parents proud of their potential, vitality and bubbling joy.
3. Family has both Zion and Jerusalem as its centre, just as both are the same and understood as the capital of Israel. Zion is understood as the 'spiritual' capital and Jerusalem as the political capital. "Shalom" (peace) is a holistic

understanding of wellness. The health of families is the health of the nation.

Family is a local unit of the 'Kingdom of God'. This small unit is critical for the life of the church and the nation.

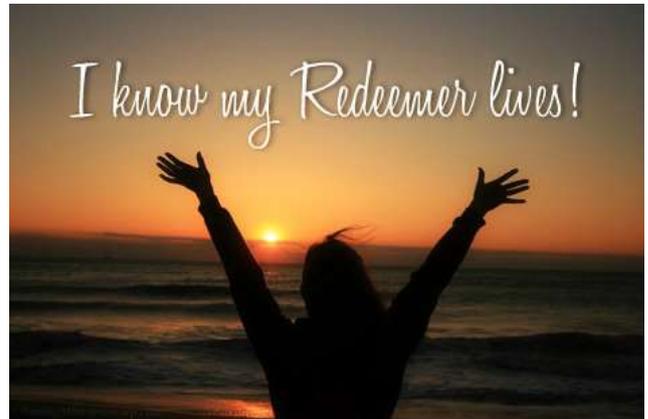
Images in Psalm 128 are set up in an agrarian context. We live in an urban-diaspora context in Metropolitan cities. These images are hard to understand or misunderstood. It is a distant reality for our children. They know how to be happy or successful. It is the responsibility of parents to inculcate the idea of 'blessedness' and seek God in the life of the family every step of the way.

In the light of Psalm 128, we may ask certain questions and evaluate our family life:

1. The father (husband) knows the Bible enough to give spiritual leadership to the family.
2. Most of the cases, mothers (wives) are working and are they able to be fruit-bearing vine around the family?
3. Are our children around the 'table'? Are they growing up in the 'fear of the Lord' and become witnesses of the good news of the Gospel?
4. What is our responsibility to country that we live in? Are we contributing for the healing of our world at least in a small way?

Our families as a social institution and as a spiritual organ of the church are facing innumerable difficulties to live up to the expectation of the Creator.

The celebration of the 'Family Week' and 'Family Sunday' let us focus on our families to bring some meaningful and qualitative difference. God will honour the desires of our heart and bless our families for the glory of God.



News

37th Mar Thoma Family Conference

UK & Europe

Dr V Samuel Varughese

The 37th UK and Europe Zone Marthoma Family Conference was held at Yarnfield, Stone, Staffordshire, UK from 23rd-25th August 2019. The theme for the conference was “My Redeemer Liveth” based on Isaiah 60:16b “you shall know that I, the Lord, am your Saviour, your Redeemer”. The conference was organised by our small parish of 42 families, at Carmel Marthoma Church, Liverpool with the faith that we would succeed through Christ who has given us strength (Phil 4:13). We are grateful for everyone’s prayers and support which allowed so many of our brothers and sisters from across Europe, to attend and enjoy an eventful weekend filled with thought provoking messages, fun, fellowship and good weather.

We were honoured to have the conference inaugurated by His Grace, Right Revd. Dr Isaac Mar Philexonos Thirumeni. Thirumeni gave the introductory message and during Holy Communion, he enlightened us on the role of the Holy Sacrament in our redemption and salvation. Thirumeni also presided over a moving dedication and witness ceremony.

Our keynote speaker Revd Eapen Varghese Achen (Delhi) instructed us on the significance of our Redeemer, from the start at creation to the Holy Sacrament we partake in through the sacrifice of Christ, the second Adam who took our sin on the cross, was resurrected without sin and thus opened the gates of heaven for our salvation. He encouraged us to reflect and re-examine our understanding of the Redeemer and challenged our response as a Christian community, living in the modern world.

Revd Dr PG George Achen mentored our 91 youth, his messages renewed their understanding of Christian life, so that they hold

fast the challenge the Redeemer gives them in their life. He also enlightened us about our relationship with the Redeemer in terms of real, historical and sacramental time and space. He emphasised the importance of the Redeemer not only in our personal life but our responsibility to witness the Living Redeemer to others.

During the dedication service, for those children, who have chosen to devote their lives to spreading the Gospel, Revd Sam T Koshy Achen delivered an inspirational message based on Ephesians 2 to encourage and guide them in their future calling. He reminded us all that we are Gods workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

Pastor (Dr) Olly Goldenberg (Children Can Ministry) was a blessing to our 71 Sunday School children. His passionate vision to see God move in the next generation and reconnect all generations, since we are all children of the heavenly father, irrespective of age, was felt by all who came across his ministry. He emphasised Joel 2:28 and Proverbs 22:6 as a guideline to discipline, train and empower our sons and daughters, so that they can step out for God, being biblically correct, not just politically correct.

In addition to the meaningful messages and spiritual guidance from our speakers and all the Achens that attended, the beautiful music from our budding choir and talented, young musicians, we also enjoyed a varied programme of events. This included all the parishes taking part in an entertaining Talent Night, a stimulating quiz on the liturgy and history of our church, as well as a challenge to write Psalm 119 from memory, which was undertaken by a few brave youngsters and finally a spirited sports afternoon. As a lasting memory, we also published a souvenir magazine with spiritually enriching articles.

We have felt the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through this challenging year and especially

during the conference. The conference highlighted the importance of a close relationship with our Living Redeemer, so that we experience Him in our everyday life, not just as a historical figurehead. We trust that the conference and the Word of God shared has renewed minds and transformed spirits, while also allowing the opportunity to experience, fun, friendship and community, as we all seek to grow spiritually and ecumenically. Finally, we wish Peterborough Parish all the best to organise an even better conference next year.

Rapid Prayer Movement at Peterborough

ASMTC Edvakamission Rapid Prayer Team

July 2019

From the bottom of our heart, we thank all ASMTC members for their support to complete another successful round of RPT prayer fellowship. We are all connected through the chain of prayers and as RPT team, we humble and thank God for choosing us for this extraordinary mission. Our entire journey of 46 days was a great blessing for us by having the opportunity of praying alongside with you and your family. During the course of RPT visits, we have heard many distressed stories like; family issues, personal issues, physical illnesses, employment problem, children's issues etc., but in the midst of such trails and tribulations our team witnessed amazing faith that helped them and their loved ones to keep moving forward. Time spend with you in prayer fed, RPT team with faith, hope and love which inspires us to keep burning for the mission of proclaiming the Good News of Salvation. RPT assures you that every month end Saturday we fast and pray together for you and the request given to us by name.

Prayer requests received from previous rounds, we can happily declare that GOD converted most PRAYER points to PRAISE points. Our prayer list is shrinking rapidly which confirms that the spirit of God is in action in the midst of his people. Let your faith guide you to a transformed life.

It gives me immense pleasure to address you all through RPT News published and circulated under the banner of All saints MTC Edavaka mission. We live in a world where all are busy making their own plans, but the church is a called out community inspired and motivated by the Holy Spirit to help each other to envision the kingdom of God where everyone is accommodated. The mission of the Church is to reach out many who are in pain, distress, disappointment and helpless. I am glad to understand that a team of our edavaka mission, is touching the hearts of many with the prayer and fellowship, and the result of this mission can be seen in the spiritual growth of our parish. Spending time to hear others is a sacramental act. So, let's all be a sacramental community, who holds the other when in need. May the Almighty enable us to be an interceding community, who takes our brothers and sisters in prayer to God and bring peace and comfort from God. I thank all the active members of the RPT for their timely support and fellowship extending to the families of our parish. May God bless us all.

Rev. Jobi Koruthu—Vicar



Photo Gallery



*"Alone we can do so little; together we
can do so much." –Helen Keller*

