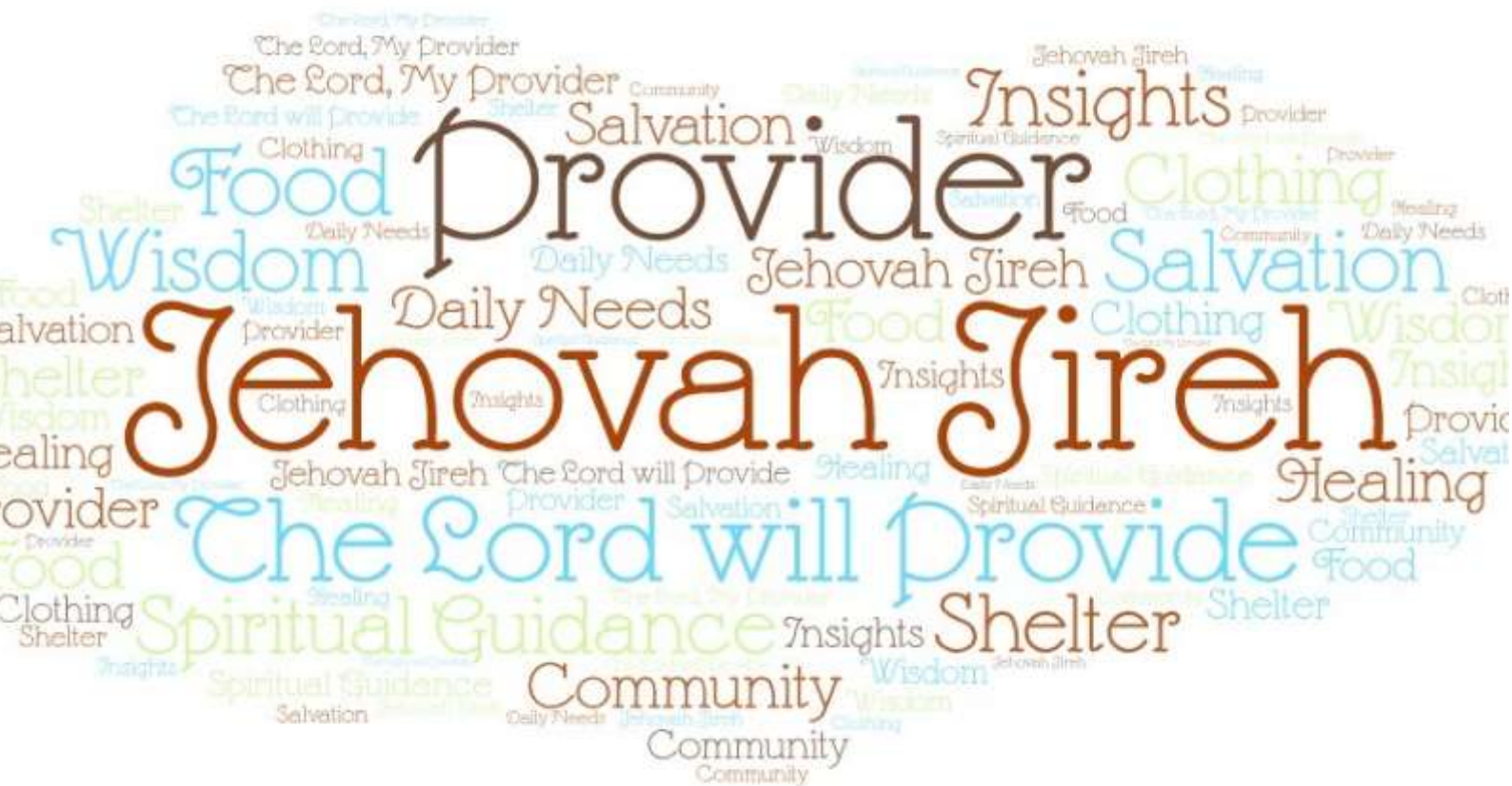




The Mar Thoma

ECHO



A Publication of the Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe





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Editorial

I shall not want – God will provide

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Psalms 23 begins by saying, *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”* (ESV). This is one of the most popular verses in the Bible. March edition of the ECHO was aimed with a theme of God’s promise on His children – I shall not want. The whole world and the life in were disrupted since beginning of 2020 with the discovery of corona virus. Its pandemic nature has affected every creature in the globe – some badly but to some the freedom returned. When aircrafts stopped flying, birds got their skies back; roaring noise of combustion engines were overwhelmed by songs of birds. Many animals found its way out to wider land. Human beings started to enjoy God’s creation and not only human’s creation. The normal life of every one of us has transformed. The disruption has caused ECHO too and we missed out on the Mar 20 issue. To many of our readers across the globe, we want to apologise. Living with COVID has strengthened each one of us and to depend on God’s provision daily. Our relationship within family became stronger; acquaintance with our neighbours are renewed and reaching out to God the Father more often. Technologies have taken over the places of choir benches and altar. Virtual worships proved omnipresent nature of our God.

In June edition we are focusing on ‘God’s provision’, which is very apt for the period we are in. When everything around us seems working against us, we tend to question God. Where are you, God? Did

you leave me alone? God, did you forsake me? It feels like God is holding back our prayers or his help seem distant or we are in a socially distanced wrong queue.

In Gen. 22.8, we can see Abraham saying, *“God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”* The faith of Abraham that the Lord will Provide (Jehovah Jireh) confirms in verses 11-14. *And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided”.* Many times, we recognise the worldly provisions by God, but rarely depend on His provision. No matter what colour of skin you have, which religion and denomination you are, where you come from, the invisible corona virus is not a friend to anyone. But our God is our friend and we trust in Him. Let’s continue to pray for God’s provision on all those who lost their loved ones, all those directly and indirectly affected by the COVID, our bishops and leaders of churches and all key workers. Whether COVID mark an era or not, as the promise of our Lord to St. Paul reminds us today that, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Cor. 12:9a).

It is very encouraging that our young children and youth from the zone are showing significant involvement in this journal. As the moto of ECHO (Engage, Communicate, Harmonise and Outreach) reminds us, we request your continued participation in the future editions.

May God Bless you!

Editorial Team.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want”.

Dr. Zac Varghese, Sinai MTC, North London

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

— Teresa of Avila

Psalms are a collection of ancient Hebrew hymns and poems; it continues to be a source of comfort and inspiration for generations from the ancient times to the present. Many people have memorised some of these Psalms which influenced their lives. The 23rd Psalm is the most familiar and perhaps best loved of all the Psalms. The most interesting image reflected in this Psalm is very personal to David, he sees himself as the shepherd-king-psalmist and then reflecting on God as being like a shepherd. It is a statement of unflinching confidence in God and sufficiency in God for everything that anyone needs. St. Paul expresses the same confidence in God to overcome his weakness when he was tested: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor10:9). We see Jesus comparing himself as the good shepherd who is willing to give his life for the sheep (Jn10: 1ff).

It is a good shepherd who provides for all the needs in times of plenty and in times of

scarcity. Sheep-shepherd image is a well explained metaphor in the gospels. Our relationship with Jesus can be like a sheep’s relationship with its shepherd. This is well understood in the agrarian social and economic structure of Palestine in Jesus’ time. David uses the word ‘want’ not in the sense he will not have any desires. He desired to build a temple to give glory to God, but God did not allow him to do that. Moses never entered Canaan, but he did arrive at an exceedingly better place as we see him in the company of Jesus and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt 17:3). The word ‘want’ has the meaning as we see it in Deuteronomy 2:7, where Moses says: “These forty years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.”

There is so much to understand about these two words ‘want and lack’. Our God of abundance knows what we actually need for our spiritual journey with him. There are so many attractions and way-side inns on the way, but the question is do we need such things which may prevent us from continuing our journey? Our God is the creator, provider and sustainer. Too much of anything is not good for this journey; there is a baggage allowance for flights, but we should be able to find our limits. This applies to everything in life including wealth, food, clothing, religiosity, professional exuberance, power, outward piety, and so on. Anything, such as the desire and exuberance of accumulating more and more to show off, will prevent us from expressing the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5: 22) and is a hindrance to journeying with

Christ. God knows how much we need and the kind of things that we need. If we were to really consider and believe that God is our shepherd, then we need to be like sheep in our behaviour and living by listening, by being meek, quiet and following His guidance. David wrote this Psalm from his experiential living: he remembers of the great things that God had done for him as his shepherd; therefore, he infers that he lacks nothing; he needs to fear no evil; he knows that God will never forsake him; in



turn he resolves never to leave or forsake from the love and mercy of God.

The symbolism of shepherd and sheep was very familiar to the people of Jesus' time; it was based on their everyday living. In order to appreciate the importance of Jesus' teachings, we need to work out our modern equivalents of these analogies of sheep and a shepherd who will go all out to help us and others. In the UK, people often think that it is the responsibility of the welfare state; it is a way of abandoning our God-given responsibilities; I have quoted Teresa of Avila of her understanding of these responsibilities in the beginning of this reflection. We all have our own very special

heart-rendering stories of experiences of how God provided for our needs when we first arrived in this country and later in our diaspora existence through many well-meaning and sensitive people who felt our needs and helped us.

This is also true in the life of the Mar Thoma Church at the time of its reformation in 1836. Our ancestors experienced this blessing of 'I shall not want' reality after the Royal Court judgement of 1889; the church had lost all but a few worshiping places and properties, but our people with their total trust in God, 'tasted and saw that God is good' and God provided for all their needs through their Christ-centred living. Metropolitan Thomas Mar Athanasius in his letter of 1882 to Kuriannur parish appealed to the women folk to emulate the women mentioned in Exodus chapter 35 and donate a handful of uncooked rice to the church for its maintenance. This practice known as '*pidiari*' has continued until recently in all our parishes. Yes, 'we shall not be in want', because God is our shepherd; our needs are many, not only for the mere necessities of life for survival but also for our spiritual growth. When Jesus was tempted to make bread out of stones, he replied: "Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4; Lk 4:4). Yes indeed, we need more than food for our spiritual existence and for our Journey with our Lord. We are a community, we are related to each other through the unconditional love of God and our love for God only can be expressed in and through the love for our neighbour. As a church we are the body of Christ and

every cell and organ in the body are interconnected to each other. We, the members of the church, are interconnected in fellowship (*koinonia*). It is this fellowship, with teaching (*Kerygma*) and service (*Diakonia*) that we build our faith community, which is the foundation of our life in Christ to enjoy the blessing of 'I shall not be in want'.



We have over a sixty-year history in this country as a Mar Thoma Diaspora community; it is our God-given responsibility to build this community for establishing the kingdom values through God's mission. For this we need an organised ministry, both laity and clergy working together in partnership for its effectiveness; now we are a Zone of the church, an interconnected and integrated group; it has many needs and we should wake up and feel the needs and respond to it generously. God provides for the needs of His people through the agency of His people so that we can say with humility: 'we shall not want'. St. Paul's advice to the members of the Corinthian church is worth remembering at this time in our life in the

UK. "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (1 Cor 3:9); "As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain" (2 Cor 6:1).

Now we live in a world characterized by human misery, squalor, oppression, disease, and overcrowding. This dystopian reality is set against our utopian hope for a world with God's kingdom values. Jesus announced these values in his 'Nazareth Manifesto' and in the 'Sermon on the Mount/Plain' (Lk 4:16-19; Mt chapters 5-8; Lk 6:17-49). It is our responsibility to make these expectations to come true so that 'God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' Compassion is an important aspect of living the gospel. There are two kinds of compassion: compassion-competence and compassion-presence; the first is showing compassion from a distance with an analytical and logical mind by working out the pros and cons then offering help by expressing our sympathies through emotion-filled letters or utterance through the social media and even by sending money. Compassion-presence is emotionally supporting a suffering person by our physical presence and nearness to the person by internalising his/ her pain. This is what Mary, the mother of Jesus, was doing by standing at the foot of the cross with Mary Magdalene, other women and John. This is what we saw in Kerala from the fishermen during the flood; it was an amazing expression of God's love in a very practical way. Any model that reduces the pain is most welcome in this troubled world.

In the 23rd Psalm David teaches us three ideas for following Jesus in our journey of life: i) we are saved by the love and care of the good shepherd, our Lord and our God; ii) our hope is well grounded in the God who created us in his image; iii) all the days of our lives we should dwell in a relationship with the God in the 'house of the Lord'. Under the grace of God we should become temples of God in order to have an indwelling experience in Christ, with Christ and for Christ for God's mission and to give glory to God as his image bearers in this world.

Let me conclude this reflection using one of Anthony de Mello's stories. Two monks were on their travels. One of them practised the spirituality of acquisition, the other believed in the spirituality of renunciation. All day long they discussed their respective spiritualities, towards evening they came to the bank of a river.

Now the believer in renunciation had no money with him. He said, "We cannot pay the boatman to take us across, but why bother about the body? We shall spend the night here, chanting God's praises and tomorrow we are sure to find some kind soul who will pay for our passage."

The acquisition-monk said, "There is no village on this side of the river, no hamlet, no hut, no shelter. We shall be devoured by wild beasts or bitten by snakes or killed by the cold. On the other side of the river we shall be able to spend the night in the safety and comfort. I have the money to pay the boatman."

Once they were safely on the other bank, the acquisition-monk remonstrated with his companion, "Do you see the value of keeping money? I was able to save your life and mine. What would have happened to us if I too had been a man of renunciation like you?"

The Renunciation-monk replied, "It was your renunciation that brought us across to safety, for you did part with your money to pay the boatman, didn't you? Moreover, having no money in pocket, your money, your pocket became mine. I observed that I never suffer, I am always provided for." What a confidence!



Yes indeed, the God - our shepherd - will provide and we shall not lack. Let the Bible speak to us and help us in our daily encounters. "He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses" (Prov 28: 27). ". . . The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (Mt 25:40).

The Lord has always provided and will continue to provide

Isaac George

St. John's Mar Thoma Church

All of God's provisions come with a condition and that is something that we



conveniently ignore or have selective memory or are complacent about or worse take for granted - and this is something we cannot and must not do!

AW Tozer in the chapter 'The blessedness of possessing nothing', makes the following observation - *"Before the Lord God made man upon the earth He first prepared for him by creating a world of useful and pleasant things for his sustenance and delight."* Everything we have - our mind, our health, our talents, our possessions, land, wealth, etc. - all have been **provided** by God. But as Tozer says, *"they were always meant to be external to the man and subservient to him."*

Abraham possessed nothing. In the eyes of the world he "possessed" everything and was a rich man. **BUT** - Abraham clearly understood that he owned nothing and that his treasures were eternal.

The first time we encounter the words **Jehovah Jireh** in the bible is when Abraham called the place - **the Lord will provide** - where the Lord provided the burnt offering in place of Isaac. Abraham trusted God to provide - he didn't know how or what - he just trusted. Because he realised what Jesus would say to us 2000 years later - *Are you*

not much more valuable than the birds and flowers?

But somewhere along the journey of life, we have conformed to the way of the world to make these material

possessions & provisions central to us and forgotten the Provider and the way of His Word.

In these days of lockdown and Covid, we have come to realise that the possessions and wealth do not actually mean much. We have managed with the minimum of our creature comforts. And we have realized with Covid-19 that with a lot of those we can do without. We have had a chance to slow down from the normal rat race. We are working and living in ways we never imagined. And it will be the case into the future. The skies are blue-er! We have given of our time and money to support the needy.

In God's provision, there has always been the condition and that condition has always been consistent - The Lord must reign supreme in our hearts. Our gifts and our talents are a loan from God to us - they were never ours. What Jesus said in the Parable of the Talents is exactly about that.

In Exodus 15 the Lord God says to the people of Israel - *"If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees,"* - that was the condition.

In Jeremiah 11 the Lord is distraught, in deep sorrow, *"From the time I brought your ancestors up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, "Obey me." But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts. So, I brought on them all the curses of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep."*

We know the Lord was pleased with Solomon asking for Wisdom and The Lord God blesses him with more than he asked for but there was a condition - *"And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."*

We read later in 1 Kings 11 how Solomon disobeyed the Lord- *"You did what you wanted and not what I told you to do. Now I'm going to take your kingdom from you and give it to one of your officials.* Solomon not only lost his physical kingdom but God's grace upon him.

Jesus simplified the condition into a single sentence - "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? In the Gospel of Luke that is followed by the famous parable of the house built on sand and rock. **Our houses need to be built on the Rock of Christ.**

The King of Kings, our Lord Jesus, our Saviour gently reminds us - *"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

God has always provided and will always provide. We need to provide a space for Him in our hearts, nay, we need to give our whole heart to him. Why?

Because - first and foremost, we are God's children and He has made us in His image. That implicitly means that as a loving parent, he will always provide for us. The Lord says in Isaiah *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"* He inspires the Psalmist to say - *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."*

Abraham possessed nothing - **BUT** - he possessed everything - eternal.

May we also realise the faith that was credited to Abraham as righteousness. May we love God back and give Him the rightful place of honour in our hearts. Because the Lord Provides - even for the most imperfect of us. He always has, and He always will. He just wants us to love Him as Father, as Provider.

God's provision is spiritual - not material. The material follows and as Christ reminds us in the Lord's prayer - Give us this day our daily bread.

Youth Corner

My Gracious Provider

Ligy Mary Thomas

Belfast MarThoma Congregation

1 Kings 3:9

"So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and distinguish between right and wrong."



The above is the prayer of one of the greatest kings of Israel who was chosen by God- Solomon and his request to God for what he would like to acquire as a gift from God and what a unique answer Solomon gave is an example we need to start requesting in our daily prayers.

The words that stand out of the above prayer, that is of importance for us today as we live in a world of run and chase to reach the top ladder of success but we forget to stop and strive to attain is a - "Discerning heart" and it is the attribute that only and only God our Heavenly Father can provide it to us.

Few of the attributes that God's word guides us to have a discerning heart are:

1.To see the wrong:

We know what is the right thing to do and all the ten commandments but living in a world where we have so much going on in our busy lives we fail to see the wrong and try to justify the wrong aspect of things.

A young man was asked if he will succeed in what he is trying to do? He answered the 100 times I have failed, I have learnt 100 ways of how not to do it and this young man was the inventor of electricity-Thomas Edison.

Sometimes God can allow us to see where we are wrong instantly in our lives. One such instance that I do remember is during my college years in Delhi, whole I was travelling, one day in the scorching heat during the month of June, I was so tired and dreaded the another 2 hours I would have to spend in the traffic in the bus to reach back home, and I prayed that God would find a solution for this and within minutes after while the bus had stopped at the red light and as I looked out I saw a young girl around 6 years walking barefoot in that heat carrying two heavy containers of water probably for her family living in the street and I could just look at her and think about the luxuries I was having and that God had provided me, God allowed me to see my pain which was so less compared to others and to see what I was thinking wrong.

In the New Testament Acts chapter 9, we read about a young Pharisee who was a highly respected teacher and who held pride in his education and nobility but how

God healed his blindness of the world to see the real nobility of the heart.

Acts 9:18 "Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptised."

Another example in the bible is of a Moabite woman Ruth who trusted in the God who was shown to her by her mother-in-law could see and experience the hope and peace in worshipping a living God in the midst of despair and loss which was completely different from the teaching she had been brought up with worship of foreign gods and statutes.

The answer of Ruth is one to remember:

Ruth 1:16 "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my god."

2.To listen to God's voice



Our hearts are in a constant battle with the devil trying all his tricks to keep us in a false shadow of shine and pleasures of the world which is so difficult for us to overcome sometimes.

In the midst of all those voices surrounding us the answer which will save us is in 1 Samuel 3:10 " Speak Lord , for your servant is listening."

Samuel was a child born after much prayers of his parents especially his mother and his mother fulfilled her promise by dedicating her son to God's service from his young age. While in Judges 13 we read about a baby being born according to God's plan and will, brought up by his parents according to God's advice. That baby being Samson who grew up and got lost in the lust of this world and forgot God's plan for him and was faced with a horrible death.

Thus, listening to our father's voice needs us to spend time with him, not just by reading the bible but rather meditating on his Word and his promises will enlighten us for a hope for our future.

3.To be mindful of one's actions

Solomon, a young man was made to be a king of a big nation like Israel was struggling how to lead these many people on his own as he had lost his father who was there before to advise him but now he was in need of a yet greater knowledge and understanding to lead these people. His actions would be scrutinised by everyone and his decisions would impact in a bigger way, thus he asked for wisdom to God rather than wealth.

Likewise his actions and decisions were based on wisdom from God as we read further in the story about solving the case of the real mother of a baby.

In Acts 16: 16-38

This portion tells us about how our actions can lead us to witness Christ even in the pain and sorrow also.

Paul and Silas after being flogged and put in stocks in the prison for healing a female slave were singing praises and singing hymns even in their pain and being in chains. And later on this story we read about the conversion of jailer and his family, what an exemplary life shown by the apostles of being witnesses by suffering in Christ.

Furthermore, In the present unprecedented times the above pointers from the bible about God providing a discerning heart in times of distress shows us that our thoughts, words and actions should be of hope even when there is an uncertainty of what our future holds because we have a father who lives yesterday, today and tomorrow who provides us with everything we need as we continue to trust in his promise as in 1 Corinthians 2:9

“ However, as it is written:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard and what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him”.

For it is by
grace
you have been
saved
through faith-
and this not from
yourselves,
it is a gift
from God -
not by works,
so that
no one can boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9

Testimony of mental wellbeing deliverance from God while battling infertility.

Anisha Mary Varughese

St. James Mar Thoma Church

My battle with infertility started about 3 years ago when I received the diagnosis at the age of 28 that I had a low ovarian reserve despite maintaining a healthy lifestyle and taking care of my body. The conclusion was if we wanted children sooner I had to consider IVF or I could wait for it to happen naturally at some point in my life but they couldn't tell me when it might be. This was probably not a diagnosis I was expecting so early in my life and I was aware of the fact that as women mature in age (they keep quoting around 35yrs) our ovarian reserve is on the decline. For me to hear that this time of waiting was taken from me and I would have to act quick at the age of 28 instead of waiting for it to happen naturally put a lot of pressure on me.

There was also the all too familiar societal pressure for whenever I would go to Kerala and who ever I met asking us the same



questions as to how many years we have

been married and why we don't have children yet. I didn't think there was a need to explain ourselves to everyone but soon it all started piling up and eventually even I got to a point where I would constantly think about this to figure out what I need to do to make this happen. I started questioning my existence as a woman if the bible mentions procreation is God's plan and I was incapable of doing this one thing that God created me for. As months and years passed by and other couples around us started having their good news while we were still waiting for our miracle to happen it started confusing us why it won't happen. In the hope that we must keep all our options open we even applied for NHS IVF. After about 5 blood tests and few other fertility checking tests over the period of 2 years we were finally told I wasn't eligible for treatment through NHS because my hormonal count was higher than what they would have expected as per their criteria for a successful IVF. Given that conclusion they suggested we could try considering IVF privately should we still wished to have our own child. During this entire period of trying naturally for 5 years and receiving the diagnosis of what might be wrong with me.

My mental health started varying from upsetness, panicking, confusion and anxiety all while going into a weird form of depression which I couldn't understand. As a believer in God I need not have all these fears but I did. Halfway through this journey I started realising I wasn't coping too well because I noticed my hands started shivering, there was eczema marks



appearing on my body due to stress and breathing difficulties. A lot of people from our community may not have even realised I had all these issues when they would have seen or spoken to me. However, I did get to a point in 2018 when I decided to quit my dream job for some peace of mind as I realised I wasn't solving my personal concern and neither was I being focused at work. Then on started my journey of healing my mind. As I wasn't working for few months there was an opportunity from the Zonal Youth Fellowship for volunteering with our mission fields in India. I chose to go to volunteer for a week

with Navjeevan Centre in Mumbai. There I met a lot of selfless and devoted volunteers and staff working to improve the lives of the children living in the care of the centre. It got me thinking about the kind of lifestyle that we live in where we want everything to be comfortable and quick. My time over there also allowed me to ponder a bit more over the lifestyles of our achens as to how challenging it must be for them to move every 3 years and live according to the lifestyle provided by the parish. It got me thinking how open would we be to a lifestyle designed by others or one by God of selflessness. I came back to the UK with a



different perspective to life than the one I left with. One that showed me how simple our lives need to be and that we only need to trust and walk with God.

2019 then became a year of trusting God and moving ahead in life. I got a new job within the same industry as before again in April 2019 but closer to home. I also signed up as a volunteer with quite a few charities in the UK such as Girl guiding, Independent Age, Transitions UK and also as a school governor. All of the volunteering and people interaction was proving healing to my mind and allowing me to establish my sense of self again. Romans 5:3-5 says "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

I choose to write this testimony in 2020 despite not having our own child yet. I don't know how long we will continue to be on this journey of infertility. However, I do want to encourage other couples on this path that God knows you and he sees you no matter how many years you have been waiting for his promise. Just like he saw Hagar when her son Ishmael was not

treated fairly or Hannah whose prayers from her brokenness and humiliation were answered by God.

For it says in Isaiah 44:24:

"This is what the Lord says—

your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb." and in Psalms 139:13 - 14: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

If this is the promise that God gives each and every one of us that HE made us and we are made by a Creator who knows the purpose for which we were created then why should we fear about what our future will be like. Infertility is just a name for one kind of struggle in life. There are others related to financial struggle or health concerns or dealing with the loss of a loved one. We will always have one struggle or the other but our constant must always be to live a life worthy of God's glory and one that we live as a child of God. Let's leave the rest to him.

Isaiah 40:31- But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Trusting in the Care of God

A Lesson from Ruth

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Tabore Mar Thoma Church, Manchester



The crisis that the world is undergoing today is one of the toughest periods that humanity has faced in recent years, which is the threat of the corona virus pandemic (Covid-19). In the last couple of months, our movements have been restricted and we are constrained from doing things we like. Physical contact has reduced, and the virtual realm has taken charge. The changes that we have encountered in the past few months and are continuing to encounter are some things that we least expected to happen at the beginning of this year. These situations tend to raise many questions in us. But amidst all these conflicts and problems we are reminded each day that the Lord will provide. As we approach the Scripture, we come across many such situations where everything seems lost, but the result is that of redemption and hope. In the book of Ruth, the life of Naomi and

Ruth is a model of hope when all seems lost. Ruth's life story began in Moab as a young Moabite woman who marries a man from Bethlehem. Her husband, along with his family, had moved to Moab because of a famine in the land of Judah. Tragically, Ruth's father-in-law died, and so did her husband and his brother after some years. It was a tragedy for Naomi to be stranded in Moab, having lost her husband and her two sons. So, Naomi decided to return to Judah, since she heard the famine was over (Ruth 1:6). Her two widowed daughters-in-law were now faced with a choice of either returning to their families or going with Naomi to her land. Naomi urged them to return to their families in Moab, for Naomi had no security or resources to offer them for their future. One of her daughters-in-law, Orpah, reluctantly followed that advice and went back to her family. But Ruth made a vow in devoted faithfulness to Naomi, a vow that is famous for its graciousness. Ruth willingly submitted herself in the hands of God and followed Naomi to an unknown country, facing an uncertain future. Once they reach Naomi's land, we observe Ruth's willingness to work to provide for her mother-in-law Naomi and herself (Ruth 2). The field in which she gleaned belonged to Boaz, a wealthy relative of Naomi, and Ruth found favour in his sight. Boaz had heard of Ruth's selfless actions, in leaving her parents and her homeland and returning with Naomi (Ruth 2:11). Boaz was kind to Ruth, and we can see how Naomi was instrumental in securing a better future for Ruth in the hands of Boaz. Ruth gained acceptance in a land that was not her own. An important

lesson that we learn from of the life of Ruth is to believe in the providence of God and to remember that it will happen at the right time. Often, the time of waiting on God to work can be agonising for us. This leads us to want to take matters into our own hands, to see if we can move things in the direction, we want them to go. But Ruth reminds us that waiting patiently on the Lord with hope requires courage and patience. As the Psalmist reminds us in Psalms 27:14, "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" Truly, it takes courage to wait; yet this verse tells us that God will provide the strength we need while we wait. As we continue our journey through this tough phase, let the life of Ruth remind us of God's providence and care.



The Lord will provide

Anna Mary Ajay

Belfast Mar Thoma congregation.

When we hear the sentence 'The lord will provide', most of us will think of when God provided the lamb for Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah or when the raven provided for Elijah and many other countless events when the Lord provides for us.

But the most important example of the Lord providing was when he sacrificed his own son for us. He provided us with his son to save humanity. People will refer to this as a sacrifice from God, yet this is also a major example of the Lord providing.

These are all examples from the bible of the Lord providing. But in our lives, there are also many countless events of when the Lord has provided.

For me, the Lord has provided many times. One unforgettable memory of the lord providing was when I moved to Northern Ireland. I had never imagined of moving house because I had spent almost 8-9 years in Peterborough. Leaving my friends, who were like family to me, was very difficult. This was something I had never imagined of doing. In England I had just finished my 11+ exams which contained of Nonverbal and verbal reasoning papers. But when I reached Northern Ireland, they had a completely new system and they had English and Maths papers instead. I reached Northern Ireland on the 1st of November and my exams were in two weeks. So, with almost no preparation, I went and wrote the exams. Fortunately, with God's grace, I got

good marks in my new exams and the Lord provided me with an amazing grammar school. This proved to me that with Gods help and Grace anything is possible. I am very thankful for God for this.

This made me realize that there are many events in our own personal lives where the Lord has provided yet we take for granted. For example, when we have a birthday party, we will probably be thinking about all the fun we are going to have with our friends and family but also along with that we must also thank God for providing us with many lovely years on earth. We must also thank him for giving us such amazing parents who set up the whole party for you. In Northern Ireland, I got used to my new home, new friends and a new school but in the midst of this the unexpected happened. We had been hearing about Coronavirus affecting China and Italy but things drastically changed when it reached mainland England. We watched the news as it said 'the first coronavirus case' until to the point where it said 'first death'. These words were frightening but we kept our hopes up for the best. That was when Northern Ireland got hit with this pandemic and at that moment our lives changed. The pandemic got so bad all people and children were told to stay indoors. You might be thinking why I am telling you about this. Even though we had many struggles the Lord provided for us even in these times of hardship.

When we were told that schools were going to be closed for a long time, it was a struggle for all of us. Doing school work from home was something we had never done before. It

was a big struggle for all the students but the Lord provided us with dedicated teachers who worked and did their best during the pandemic. Without them we would not have any guidance in our learning and we would all be confused and would not have a road to walk on.

Coronavirus wasn't just a struggle for schools but for also the NHS. They not only had to look after coronavirus patients but also many other patients who were in intensive care. Even though those nurses and doctors had children to look after and families to take care of, they sacrificed their lives just to take care of us. The Lord has provided us with these amazing people and their service. They are like guardian angels for us. We should thank God for the NHS and those who work on the frontline.

This period of lockdown was very hard for us all especially when people started to panic buy food and groceries which made it for all of us to get the food we needed. But the Lord provided us with all the necessities that we needed to survive this pandemic such as the amazing people who delivered food right at our doorstep and those who worked at the supermarket. We are very grateful that the lord provided us with these people.

The pandemic also gave me the opportunity to find out new hobbies and new interests about me. I got to learn about myself and I was able to relax. I was also able get interested in things that I never had time for. Me and my family even have time to

pray to God every day and I am able to read the bible. I thank God also for this.

Exodus 15:26

He said, "If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."

When I read the bible, a verse that really stood out to me in this time of struggle was Exodus 15:26. This verse gave me a lot of faith that the Lord will take care of us and our loved ones during this pandemic. This verse forces the point that if you believe in the Lord, he will heal us. What may not be possible for man is possible for God.

A short prayer

Dear Lord our Heavenly Father, thank you for this wonderful day. Thank you for providing us with amazing teachers, the NHS, key workers and our parents. Please look after every one of these people and their families to make sure that they are ok. Please guide the families who have lost their loved ones and are in a hard time. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen



Father, Defender, Protector

A Poem by Tammy

St. John's Mar Thoma Church

*"You are my defender and protector,
You are my God, in you I trust"*

*When the whole wide world is crying out loud,
This is our chance to make you proud,
We submit ourselves wholly to you,
Cleanse us, replenish us and make us new.*

*You are the creator of all things, great and small
Which is why at this time, you are the one we
call,
To put our minds at ease,
This crisis, only you can seize.*

*Bestow upon us, your outstretched arms we
cannot see
So we can lead our lives oh so graciously
And spread the good news of your coming again
To release mankind from sufferings and pain.*

*This virus is spreading rapidly each and every
day,
Jesus, our Messiah, show us the way
Ease our hearts and minds and cleanse this air,
We know your presence is always there.*

*We anticipate the day of peace and serenity,
This will encompass the majestic earth and sea,
Like a rising dove, every living thing will learn
At the end of the day, there is only one place to
turn.*

*Come O God, with your glorious light,
Come and illuminate the sky so bright,
Hold our hands and touch our heart,
So that we can all make a new start.*

*"I will save those who love me,
And will protect those who acknowledge me as
Lord"*



Maramon Convention-2020

Bible classes for Men

*Dr. Ninan Daniel Kurunthottikal**

The Maramon Convention of 2020 was a very special one as we celebrated 125 years of the convention. It also marked the centenary of the solemn oath our forefathers had taken in denouncing tobacco chewing. The Bible classes from Monday to Saturday, 7.30 to 8.30 am were well attended. We had one speaker throughout-Rev. John Samuel, Principal of Lutheran Seminary, Chennai. Our achens did a superb job in translation.



Monday the 10th February

Rev. John Samuel began his discourse by referring to 2 Samuel Chapter 12 where we read that the Lord had sent Nathan to King David. Nathan rebuked David for taking his general Uriah's wife Bathsheba. He did this by narrating the story of two men, one rich and the other poor. Rev. Samuel stated that it was God's story. It is a parable where one can witness the pain in the heart of King David, later becoming pain in the heart of God.



Nathan describes the story very dramatically to David--A guest arrived in the rich man's house. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle. His poor neighbor had nothing except one little lamb. The rich man took the lamb of his poor neighbor to make a feast to entertain his guest. Rev. Samuel asked, "Can you feel the pain of the poor man?"

When King David heard the story, he uttered "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die." But Nathan retorted "You are that man".

The rape of Bathsheba and the premeditated murder of her husband, Uriah, was a dark chapter in the life of King David. Rev. Samuel reiterated the fact that what had happened to Bathsheba should not happen to any woman in this world. Rev. Samuel unraveled the characters in the parable that Nathan had told David---

Bathsheba---the poor neighbor

David-the rich man

Lamb--Uriah

Guest- the baby

David came out of his sin with deep and painful repentance. In Psalm 51, David pleads with God." Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

Rev. Samuel referred to Psalm 32 where David prays " Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven; whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."

Rev. Samuel mentioned that four great personalities were punished by God--1- Abraham, 2-Hezekiah, 3-Job, 4-David. What was unique about David was that he was asking God to punish him more and more. Rev. Samuel concluded his class by remarking " Who can be greater than David in the Bible?"

Tuesday the 11th February

Rev. John Samuel based his talk on the Book of Ruth. He described it as a festival book ; the festival being that of harvest. This festival teaches us about some stories. When children read the Bible, it becomes a Children's book. God's words can be what everyone needs. When people with humble hearts read the Bible, they get blessed. The more we read the Bible, the humbler we become.

The Book of Ruth is the book of mothers. This book depicts God in the best way. Rev. Samuel highlights three facts-

- How nice it would have been if everyone was good?
- How can we be good in this bad world? Those whom we trust most, we take to the inner chambers of our house.
- It is easy to be good when life is comfortable. Can we still be good when the going gets bad.?



Naomi took charge of the family when tragedy struck them. We are touched by a kind mother-in-law and a kind daughter-in-law. The daughters-in-law showed kindness to their husbands. When Orpah left Ruth to return to her mother's home, Ruth had clung on to her mother-in-law.

In Chapter 2: verse 3, we read that Ruth, a foreigner and a young widow, came to glean in the fields of Boaz. Did God plan this or was it just a coincidence? There is a plan behind every incident in our life, masterminded by the Lord. Rev. Samuel asked," Are we able to affirm that our neighbor is an angel sent by God?" God's wisdom transcends ours.

Ruth started work in Boaz's field. We see Boaz reassuring the safety of Ruth and allaying her worries and concerns. The personal safety of Ruth, a young widow, was of special importance to Boaz. He was also aware of the cultural barriers and differences between the Moabites and Israelites. It is very noteworthy when Ruth asks Boaz " Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner."

Rev. Samuel remarked that our conversations should be beautiful and reveal our holiness. He referred to ' Genesis' as the 'Fathers' book and 'Ruth' as the

'mothers' book. Boaz comforts Ruth by saying that the God of Israel would protect her. He shares bread and wine with her and she was satisfied. Rev. Samuel referred to Matthew Ch.14: Verse 20--"They all ate and were satisfied."

Boaz was impressed by Ruth's kindness to the living and the dead. He was very kind to Ruth. Rev. Samuel reiterated that our communion table and our bed are sacrosanct. Leviticus Ch.19: verse2-"Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy."

Boaz was holy. His table was holy and his bed was holy. Rev. Samuel sums up by mentioning two extremely good people-- Naomi and Boaz. A son was born to Boaz and Ruth. Naomi took the child and cared for him. The women living in the locality said, 'Naomi has a son.' And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Rev. Samuel concluded 'The Lord who built up the house of Israel will bring humanity together.'

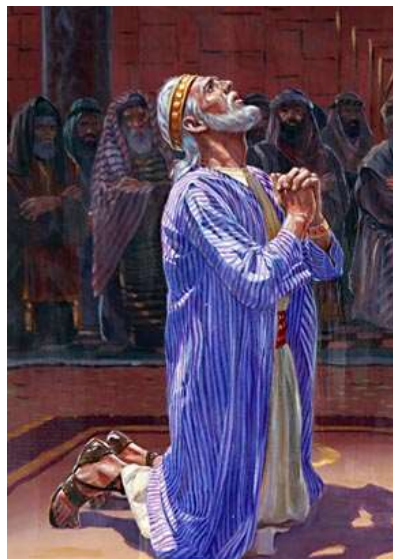
Wednesday the 12th of February

Rev. John Samuel based his talk on 2 Kings Ch. 18: verses 1 to 6. Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, king of Judea, was twenty-five years old when he assumed the throne. He reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-nine years. In verses 5 and 6, we read " Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judea, either before him or after. He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow him."

Rev. Samuel said that when we hold on to God, our life changes. God never fails us. "My trust is in my God." We must hold on to God under all circumstances. King

Hezekiah obeyed God's commandments. Our life becomes strong when we obey His commands. In addition, our church becomes strong.

In verse 7 we read that the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he had undertaken. God is my strength. Rev. Samuel referred to 2 Chronicles Ch.29 where we read that in the first month of the first year of his reign, Hezekiah opened the doors of the temple of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and asked them to consecrate themselves and then consecrate the temple of the Lord, the God of their fathers. He believed strongly that the priests must be holy.



Rev. Samuel declared that Reformation must be an ongoing process. Whatever had been stagnant must be removed and that we must have salvation as early as

possible. In 2 Chronicles Ch.29: verse 20, we read that early next morning King Hezekiah the city officials and went up to the temple of the Lord. This showed in no small measure the immense enthusiasm and commitment of Hezekiah. Verse 29 says-the king and everyone present with him knelt down at the altar and worshipped.

Hezekiah had won many a battle. As a result, he became very proud. But illness

struck him and he was at the point of death. He prayed to God as he lay ill. God listened to him and extended his life by fifteen years. Satan can destroy any steadfast Christian. Hezekiah humbles himself before God.

Rev. Samuel concluded the session by saying that sufferings inhuman life is unavoidable and that we have to hold on to our Lord God and obey His commands.

Thursday the 13th February

Rev. John Samuel chose the very important and sad story of Cain and Abel as the basis of his discourse. This is a familiar story-- Cain and Abel were brothers, sons of Adam and Eve. We read in Genesis Ch.4 that God gave great regard to Abel's offering and did not look at Cain's offering with any favor.



As a result, Cain got angry. Seeing this God advised Cain never to let sin

get the better of him but to learn to master it.

Rev. Samuel explained that none of us would like to identify with Cain. But the truth is that we are all sadly a combination of Cain and Abel. In the beginning they were equal and complementary. Family played an important role in the brothers' lives. Differences can set in brothers' and sisters' lives. God Almighty can reverse privileges. Cain had always wanted to be prominent and powerful.

Brother, let us go to the field, said Cain. In a fit of anger, Cain kills Abel. Cain

was fully aware of his sin. He did not look up to God. When we turn away from God, we fall into sin. Rev. Samuel remarked that there is a geography for sin. Absolute secrecy is the fertile ground for committing sin.

When God asks Cain Where is your brother Abel? Cain replies "Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain was supposed to be part of a family and a community. God says to Cain " You have polluted this earth with Abel's blood. You have become a fugitive on the earth and a wanderer." Can God give protection Cain? Yes, He can. God tells him that nobody would harm him. God decides to break the chain of violence.

In Luke Ch. 15, we read the Parable of the Lost Son-the story of a father and his two sons. The prodigal son is asking himself " Can I be allowed to be a servant in my father's house?" The fact of the matter was that he was always living in the heart of his father.

Rev. Samuel remarked that ethics is important but relationships are more important. If we have good relationship with God, we will not exclude anyone from our midst. He concludes the session by saying that the issue of sin is a very complex subject. We are reminded of the father who tells his older son that the one who has returned to the father with remorse and repentance was his own brother.

Friday the 14th February

Numbers Ch: 32 formed the basis for the morning's Bible study. Israelites were on the final phase of their journey on the banks of the river Jordan. They were about to enter the promised land. At this juncture, the

tribes of Israel go to war over possession of the land the Lord had promised them.



Rev. Samuel stated that the first generation of Christians were filled with lot of enthusiasm to get settled. But later, only Samson was left to fight as the masses lost their spirit to carry on.

Moses is negotiating with the tribal leaders, Garth and Reuben. Chapter 13 starts by the Lord saying to Moses," Send some men to explore the land of Canaan which I am giving to the Israelites. Thus, Moses selects twelve leaders from the tribes to go and explore Canaan, the promised land. Ten leaders reported back that milk and honey flowed in the land. Caleb said that they should go and conquer the land.

Rev. Samuel mentioned that salvation is more important than destination and that we must walk with God. Joshua and Caleb follow the instructions of Moses and reach Hebron and visit the tombs of Abraham and Sara. In Joshua Ch:24 we read Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Sheahan and exhorted them to serve the Lord; a holy God. And they assured Joshua that they will serve the Lord and obey Him. Joshua now tells the people to return to their land and stay with their families.

Saturday the 15th of February

Elisha, the prophet, has some very important stories about him; removing the poison from the pot of stew by adding flour to it and the feeding of one hundred people with twenty loaves of barley bread. (2 Kings Ch: 2 verses 38 to 44. But the story of Naaman, commander of the Syrian army of the king of Aram, being healed of leprosy has been told in great detail in Ch:5. Syria was a very powerful country in the Mediterranean.



Naaman had free access to the king. He had had many victories to his credit. He was an extraordinary man. But he had suffered from leprosy. A young slave girl from Israel is presented alongside Naaman's wife. The girl prays to God to cure her master's leprosy. She told her mistress," If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria. He would cure cure him of his leprosy. Naaman visits the king of Aram and asks for permission to go to Israel. The king sends a letter to the king of Israel with presents such as gold, silver and clothing worth a huge amount of money. We read that the king of Israel did not take kindly to the letter. In fact, he misunderstood the contents of the letter and felt angry and agitated.

When Elisha the man of God heard this, he sent a messenger to the king. As a result, Naaman goes to see the prophet. But he did not come out of his house to see the commander. Instead he sends a messenger to tell him to go to the river Jordan and dip himself seven times. But Naaman went away angry, feeling that the prophet could have come out and cured him then and there. Moreover, he was asking himself whether Abana Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus not better than the waters of Israel.

Rev. Samuel mentioned that our humanity is great but we do not recognize it. The servants of Naaman pacify him and advise him to obey the prophet. The reverend father opined that it is always the ego that hinders our progress.

Naaman dipped seven times into the river Jordan. His skin got healed. He



became very happy. He got physical healing. But was he healed spiritually?

asks Rev. Samuel. In verses 15 to 19, we read that Naaman went to Elisha's house. He stood before Elisha and said " Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant." But Elisha refused to accept it. Naaman promised Elisha that he would worship only the God of Israel. Elisha told Naaman to go in peace. Naaman is physically and spiritually healed.

Gehazi, the servant of the prophet's house was not happy that Elisha did not accept the

gift from Naaman. The servant took the money from Naaman and deposited it secretly. Gehazi repented later. Rev. Samuel referred to Isaiah Ch: 55 verse 8." For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" declares the Lord. The reverend father brought his talk to a close by saying "However much we grow, God's ways are always higher. Let our ways get higher and higher." Thus, the Bible classes of Marmon Convention 2020 came to an end. Apart from His Lordship Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheus, former president of the Evangelical Association who by his constant presence and prayers blesses the Bible classes, their Lordships Rt. Rev. Joseph Mar Barnabas, Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenosis, Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios, Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Theethos Episcopa Thirumenis graced the classes.

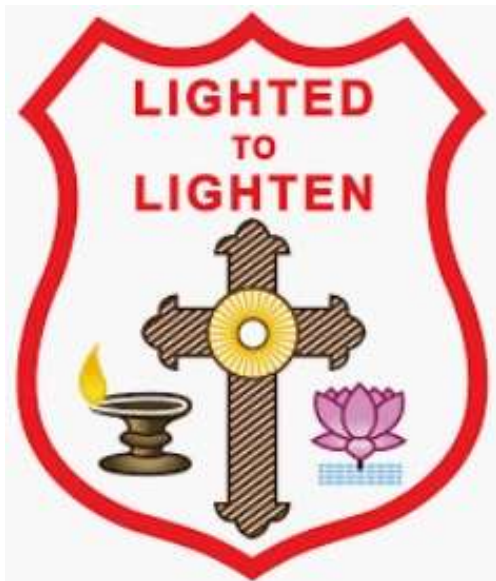


This humble columnist thanks God Almighty for the privilege and opportunity of attending the Bible classes and studying the Words of the Holy Book.

** This is Compiled by, Dr. Ninan Daniel Kurunthottikal who is a Member of Tabore Mar Thoma Church, Manchester and his Mother Parish is St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church-KOZHENCHERRY. He has been providing this very valuable service for many years and the editorial board is very grateful to him.*

Know Your Church

Lighted to lighten¹



Mar Thoma Church is indebted to the CMS "mission of help" for the reformation movement that took place within it during the first half of the 19th century, because the inspiration to begin such a movement came from the CMS.

Claudius Buchanan played an important role in introducing the Christians in Travancore to the Christians in England, and motivated the Church Missionary Society to send a mission of help to Travancore. In 1806 he made a tour throughout Travancore, interviewing the Syrian Christians, their Bishop and their clergy. Buchanan had two chief objectives when he proposed his tour to explore the condition of ancient Syrian Christians of Malabar: "to investigate their literature and history, and to collect Biblical manuscripts. Secondly, if he should find them to be an intelligent people, and well acquainted with the Syriac Scriptures, to endeavour to make

them instruments of illuminating the Southern part of India, by engaging them in translating their scripture into the Native Languages." ²

The translation of the scripture into the vernacular and using the Syrian Christians to evangelize India was a great shift in the understanding of mission at that time. During the time of Buchanan, people from western countries undertook Christian missions. Buchanan believed that the receptive culture and people could be made the locus of the proclamation of the gospel. His good intention came true when the Mar Thoma Church became a witnessing community within its immediate



neighbourhood and then to outside Kerala during the early decades of the 20th century. The Holy Spirit awakened this ancient

¹ Continued from last Edition

² Rev. Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 71

community of Christians in Kerala to undertake its responsibility to be the light of the world. Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma after pinning this objective provided the motto for this Church: "Lighted to Lighten". Though we could not fully accomplish this vision, the history of the mission of the church during the previous century illustrates its attempts to be faithful for its historic calling as a light of the world. Though we can sight many examples of the pioneer mission activities among the Western Missionaries in India, the reformed Mar Thoma Church became pioneer in various mission activities that had been undertaken by the St. Thomas Christians in India.

1. Breaking Barriers.

The caste Hindus branded the low castes as untouchables and outcastes, and kept the low castes at a safe distance to avoid ritual pollution. Slavery existed in Travancore where Dalits were bought and sold along with landed property. The St. Thomas Christians occupied a high social status in Kerala and enjoyed many social, political and even royal privileges, and they remained as an exclusive community in the caste society. In order to maintain their high caste status they not only abstained from social interaction with the outcastes but also never questioned the validity of the caste system or the evils of slavery. Hence there was no attempt to evangelize the Dalits or any possibility of incorporating them into the existing Syrian Churches.

The reformation within the Mar Thoma Church motivated the members to break this caste barrier when the Evangelistic Association began its first missionary work

among dalits in Othara. The schools of the Mar Thoma Church also facilitated the crossing of boundaries when it admitted the children of the dalits along with the Christians and the Hindus.

2. Inception of the Evangelistic Association

The formation of the Evangelistic Association was a significant step towards the indigenous missionary movement in India. It was the western mission societies alone undertook missionary during this



period. The spiritual revival that took place within the members of the Mar Thoma Church during the last decades of the 19th century accelerated their sense of urgency to share the gospel message to the people of other faiths. Those who attended the revival meetings were convinced of their duty to spread the gospel message, and thus twelve persons including an ordained pastor gathered in a place named Kalliserry in Travancore on September 5, 1888, for prayer. In that meeting, they decided to organize a society to deepen the spiritual life of their church members and to preach the Gospel among the non-Christians. Those gathered at this meeting conveyed the aims and objectives of the proposed society to Thomas Mar Athanasius, the Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church. He named the

society *The Malabar Mar Thoma Syrian Evangelistic Association*.

At the very inception of the Evangelistic Association, it turned its attention towards the Dalit community of Kerala, especially those of Central Travancore. The work of the Evangelistic Association was undertaken in four divisions. These were the Central Travancore Mission (1889), the North Travancore Mission (1902), the South Travancore Mission (1905), and the Sea-Coast Mission (1911).

The Central Travancore Mission was also known as the *Sadhu Jati Mission*, which was considered to be the first mission field of the Evangelistic Association. The people among whom this mission was commenced belonged to the Pulaya, Paraya, and Kurava communities. The evangelistic work among them was started in 1889. The work began with the co-operation of a new convert, Thomas, from the *Vetton* community. In this place the members of the Association conducted elementary education, Bible study and worship services. More than 60 men and women usually gathered for worship, and this work continued for two years. In 1891 on the day of Ascension, Rev. K. T. Thomas baptized 85 people. Another project was started among the Dalits in a place called Eraviperoor by Edavumelil Mathai. Here an elementary school was started. The work extended to other places and the mode of work was both spiritual and educational. The evangelists of the Evangelistic Association also functioned as teachers and were known as evangelists-teachers. One of the primary concerns of Abraham Malpan and his supporters was spiritual regeneration of persons through

the gospel of Christ. Along with spreading the gospel among the Dalits, the Mar Thoma Church gave attention to their educational uplift.

The revival movement in Kerala during 1896 accelerated the work among the Dalits. During this period new congregations and schools were established in various places. The work of the Evangelistic Association, especially among the Dalits, was an epoch making event in the history of the Christian church in India. It was not only the first indigenous missionary society in India, but also the first organized evangelistic effort by the Syrian Christians. Besides preaching the Gospel, the Evangelistic Association started schools, which not only provided opportunity for education to the Dalits but also shattered barriers created by the caste system. The high caste attitude was broken when children who belonged to different caste groups studied together.

3. Marmon Convention



The inception of the Marmon Convention is also had significant impact upon the Mar Thoma church to become a witnessing church. Marmon convention was a product of the revival movement took place within the Mar Thoma Church. The meetings of the Maramon Convention began with the inspiration and encouragement of the two



CMS evangelists: David and Wadsworth. They conducted gospel meetings, especially for the Syrian Christians, for three months, from December 1894 to April 1895. David felt the need to have a revival meeting for all those who wished to hear his messages. Thus Maramon was chosen as the venue because it was the headquarters of the Mar Thoma Metropolitan at that time. A *pandal* was erected on the sand bed of a river at Maramon, and the great convention was held from 9th to 18th March 1895. The convention meeting held in Maramon was the first one of its kind. Before this meeting, revival meetings had been conducted in the church facilities of the Syrian Christians. Following the example of the annual Keswick conventions, the Mar Thoma Church decided to conduct the Maramon convention annually. The inception of the Maramon convention initiated a missionary movement within the society of Kerala crossing caste boundaries. The Maramon convention meetings became a significant event in the history of Kerala. In due course, it provided an opportunity for people of various castes to congregate together under one roof and hear the gospel. It initiated a movement that transcended the high caste mentality and called for the dignity of low caste people.

The impact of the Marmon convention felt at various levels acing s it continues its journey more than a century.

Through the gospel messages that were spoken by Rev.Thomas Walker, Dr.Stanley Jones and other eminent speakers of the convention motivated not only the members of the Mar Thoma church but also the community at large about the purpose of God to be a witnessing community of the Kingdom values unveiled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Maramon Convention became a forum for addressing the issues facing by the community, including the social evils like corruption, addictions like alcoholism etc. Thus various movements emerged from the convention such as the work among the alcohol addicts, house for the homeless, rehabilitation of beggars (the destitute homes) and so on.

4. The First Cross-Cultural Mission³

Another wave of revival took place through the messages from the Maramon convention. Rev. Thomas Walker, an outstanding speaker in the meetings at Maramon inspired Mar Thoma Christians to venture into their first cross-cultural mission. Thus in 1910 the first cross-cultural mission began in North Kanara through the St.Thomas School in Honavar, and evangelistic c activities in Karvar and extending it to Ankola by the establishment of Christa Mitra Ashram in 1940. The

³ Refer Alex Thomas, *A History of the First Cross-Cultural Mission of the Mar Thoma Church 1910-2000* (Delhi:ISPCK,2007)

Evangelistic Association and the various Dioceses of the church subsequently began cross-cultural missions in various states of India among the less privileged sections of society. The Mumbai and the Delhi Dioceses of the Church now became missionary dioceses, carrying out the education/evangelistic mission through schools in urban areas and Gramajyoti schools in the rural sector.

The aim of cross-cultural mission is not proselytism; rather it aims at the transformation of both individuals and communities. The church provided opportunities for people to grow as human beings by creating new avenues for education, medical work and community development activities. There are criticisms from various forums about the authenticity of the Christian mission in India as western, foreign and so on. The cross-cultural mission of the Mar Thoma Church proves that it is neither western nor foreign rather it is indigenous, culturally authentic, and struggles to create an authentic witness to the reign of God.

5. Diversified ministries for various age groups⁴

To equip the children, youth, woman, and the lay people the Church began separate organizations to work among these age groups. Thus Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam (1905), Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam(1933), Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sangham(1919), and the Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelist's Association (1924)

⁴ Refer *Mar Thoma Sabha Directory*, 3d ed. Tiruvalla: Publication Board of the Mar Thoma Church, 1999

were started in the Maramon Convention meetings. As these movements had its beginning in the Maramon Convention, it is evident that it was an expression of its commitment for mission in each age group. History proved that these movements became cradle for each groups to equip and empower themselves for carrying out their witness within and outside the church.

6 Ashram Movement⁵

The Christian ashram movement in India began as a response to the indigenization movement emerged in India to free the Christianity in India from western control and its forms so as to make it Indian. Stanley Jones, a great proponent of indigenization, believed that the ashram was an ideal way to produce a Christianity that was truly Christian and truly Indian. He maintained that it was a “yoking of the Christian Spirit and the Indian Spirit.” A love of simplicity, sensitiveness to the divine, gracious modesty, renunciation, and a sense of unity with all of creation are the main features of Indian spirituality. Thus, Jones proposed that a Christian ashram would be a place where there were no racial distinctions, and the dress, food, and manner of eating would be Indian. An ashram would make Indian spirit creative in art, in music and in Christian thinking. An ashram would be a place where people of other faiths could come and study in an Indian atmosphere, the meaning of the gospel. Jones started a summer ashram at Sat Tal, in the foothills of the Himalayas, in 1930.

⁵ Alex Thomas, *A History of the First Cross-Cultural Mission of the Mar Thoma Church 1910-2000*, 96-103.

Through Christian ashrams, Indian Christians envisaged national reconstruction and the establishment of a community in line with the Kingdom of God on earth. Jones and others realized that the ashram would offer identification with India in which the kingdom of God on earth was experienced in a community that lives and shares together. The Ashram was an exemplary communitarian structure, which allowed Kingdom values to be lived, as Gandhi was demonstrating in his Ashram. Dr. Jesudason, an Indian doctor, and Dr. Forrester Paton, a European doctor, together founded the earliest Protestant Christian ashram in 1921 in Tirupattur. There was a general feeling that western missionaries considered Indian Christians as second class citizens. The Christukula ashram at Tirupattur was born in opposition to this concept. Equal participation in mission and the adoption of mission methods suited to the Indian culture were planned to be its main features. Between 1920 and 1940 several ashrams were founded in various parts of India. Christian ashrams in India were an attempt at contextualizing and indigenizing the mission in India.

The inspiration to start Christian ashrams within the Mar Thoma Church came from early Protestant ashrams, and their search for indigenous methods of evangelization. Most of the Mar Thoma ashrams were established during the time of Abraham Mar Thoma (1917-1947), who was known as a missionary bishop. The Mar Thoma Church started a mission in 1924 in Palghat, a place in Kerala, among the Ezhavas who were a people of low caste origin. Deacon P. John Varghese of the Mar Thoma Church,

while serving as a missionary in this area, visited the first Protestant ashram at Tirupattur. He and his colleagues started an ashram in Palghat in 1928 with the name, Christu Dasa Ashram. Another ashram began in 1931 at a place in Kerala, known as Perumbavoor, to manage a high school in that area. The first Mar Thoma ashram that was founded outside of Kerala was the Christa Mitra ashram at Ankola in 1940. In subsequent years several ashrams were established in different parts of India: Christa Panthi Ashram at Sihora in Madhya Pradesh (1943), Christu Sishya Sangham at Hoskote near Bangalore (1947), Christiya Bandhukulam at Satna in Madhya Pradesh (1952), Christu Shanthi Sangham in Nepal (1952), Shanthi Mandiram in Andhra Pradesh (1955), and Christa Prema Kulam at Bhopal (1955).

Mar Thoma ashrams were evangelistic in their nature. They were founded for evangelistic, medical, educational, social, and economic development of the villages. At present the Mar Thoma Church has only three ashrams: Christu Dasa Ashram, Christa Mitra Ashram, and Christa Panthi Ashram. Among these three, only the Christa Panthi Ashram has celibate members.

The male and female members of the Mar Thoma ashrams lived in separate buildings. They dined together and prayed together. Their daily activities began with prayer and private devotions. They had no private possessions. They shared funds contributed to them by the members of the Mar Thoma Church. The members of the ashram consisted of pastors, evangelists, doctors, nurses, and other medical staff. Most of

them were lifelong members of the ashram detached from their family members

7. Educational/Medical Mission



The medical and educational mission was also a feature of the post-reformed Mar Thoma church. The schools/colleges, the technical institutions are not only centers of learning but also aimed at imparting the Kingdom values to the students. It was also placing to provide education for those who were untouchables and for the as less privileged people in society. Though few in number, the Mar Thoma hospitals provided quality medical service for the poor and the under privileged of the villages. These institutions were begun not for monetary gain or as tools for proselytism, but for sharing the love of God and the transformation of the individual. Are we still having this vision?

8. Social Development Activities

Mar Thoma Church has engaged in various social development activities for the uplift of less privileged ones. We have social welfare institutions for the mentally/physically challenged children, for orphans, de-addiction centers, caring homes for the aged and so on. It is significant to note that the church began these projects neither for publicity nor as a

tool for conversion. Rather those projects were emerged out of its vision as a witnessing community.

9. Mission through the Mar Thoma Diaspora Community



The history and development of the Mar Thoma Church is very much related to its members' migration to various parts of the world. The St. Thomas Christians are a prosperous and industrious community which made use of the opportunities that came in their way for the betterment of the community. As students and seekers of new careers, this community moved out from Kerala and settled in various cities of India as well as various parts of the world. Wherever this community reached, they organized prayer groups and then those groups turned out to be congregations and full-fledged parishes of the Mar Thoma Church.

The migrant community of the Mar Thoma Church as a worshipping community equips its members to continue its witness in their given context as light of the world and salt of the earth. Various migrant parishes began missionary activities in villages of South India and Northern India, and emerging as missionary congregations by supporting, sponsoring, adopting the missionary activities of the respective Dioceses.

10. Lay Participation in Nation building

The Mar Thoma Church believes that the laity shares the ministerial function along with the ordained ones. So it gives utmost importance to lay participation in the mission of the church to the community. The Constitution of the church declares: "Laity are full participants in the priestly ministry of the church which is the gift of Christ to the church. Like other offices in the ministry, lay persons are called to profess and practice in their daily life Christian truths and teachings. They are called to conform their life in the world to the will of God and to perform responsible witnessing in the community and to establish the lordship of Christ in the life of the people." (Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar Constitution, Part II, Chapter II, Ministry, 6.) The faith community within the reformed Marthoma Church during the reformation and after were people who were faithful in their public life as good neighbours, and especially in their business. The exemplary character of the reformed Marthozites had spread through their children. Hence as a community spread around within India and outside, the laity of the Church try to accomplish their calling as witnessing community by serving the community as merchants, social workers, employees in various government/non-government offices, doctors, nurses, Paramedical staffs, teachers, factory workers, entrepreneurs, and so on. For the past and the present generation of the Marthomites, the vision for this leavening presence was received from their homes and their active participation and role in the activities of

their respective parishes. Are we lacking this nurture in our parishes?

Conclusion



The Mar Thoma Church had an historic calling of being a witnessing community of the Kingdom of God unveiled in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has awakened the Church through a reformation coupled with a revival movement to undertake its historical vocation of light to the world. The history of the mission of the Mar Thoma Church reveals that the church attempted to carry out the mission of God to some extent, though we want miles to go. There are tendencies to lose our identity as a witnessing church by becoming a self-serving church and becoming a prey to the prosperity gospel and the modern consumer culture. We have to regain our identity as a witnessing community, and to be vigilant against the dangers that deviates us from the goal to become a witnessing community of the Kingdom of God.

News

Achievements



Dr Prince Thomas has been elected as the President of Christian Dental fellowship, UK. The Christian Dental fellowship is an inter-denominational association of Christians working in dentistry. He is the son of Mrs.Ponnamma Thomas and Late.Mr.K.Thomas, from Madras Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Chetpet and presently the member of Carmel Mar Thoma church, Liverpool, United Kingdom where he resides with his family Dr.Julie John and children JeremyThomas Prince and Grace Mariam Prince.

*I can do all
things through
Christ which
stengtheneth
me.*

Phil 4:13



Mar Thoma Suvisesha Sevika Sanghom (UK-Europe zone)



“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” - Acts 1:14

Covid 19 is real and has affected many of our dear family and friends. Most of our Sevika Sanghom members are working as nurses, doctors, paramedics and all other essential services. We thank the Almighty for giving them prudence and courage in this war against the virus. During the time of great lent in 2020, even amid the pandemic, Sevika Sanghom had the ongoing lent meditation with contributors from different parishes of UK and Europe. Sevika Sanghom members and Achens gave their contribution, that started from Feb 23rd till April 12th, 2020. Feeling the severity of this disease coming nearer and the need to pray, we started our plea to our Father in Heaven by organizing chain prayers. Most of the members observed it as the day of fasting. All the parishes and

congregations in UK - Europe zone joined and participated in the prayers; committing to chosen prayer slots starting from 6 AM till 12 AM every alternate Friday, of every month. Our steadfast prayers have, been a blessing to us and also for those whom we prayed for. Many testimonials came from people who have recovered from the illness. We remain blessed to have been able to join the world chain prayer representing UK - Europe zone through the chain prayer organised by Mar Thoma Suvisesha Sevika Sanghom from Thiruvalla and we were part of opening prayer on 22nd March 2020 @ 11:30 pm to 23rd March 2020 @ 6am (IST). Sevika Sangham continues to support the families that has been in difficulty due to social distancing and we have offered support by telephone calls and attending to the needs of those friends admitted in hospitals and those who were confined in their homes. We are hoping that it has been a blessing to many during this difficult period in this world. As we continue with our lockdown, we continue with our fasting chain prayers, with a hope to overcome the situation.

Rev Jacob K A (Vice President)

Mrs. Shiby Varughese (Secretary)



Youth League

Following the lockdown, the UK and Europe Zonal youth under the leadership of Rev Jobi Koruthu and Rev Sijo John swiftly acted to support the Indian students located in various universities in the UK. A notice was issued to all the churches and subsequently shared in various social media outlets. The key objective of the group was to provide immediate support to the students by providing food, grocery, legal, accommodation, and well-being support. In total, the zonal organisation was able to support:

- 118 students located within East Ham and Southend area
- 7 students located in South London
- 19 students in Central London
- 5 students with accommodation outside London
- 11 students with medial concern within the London area

In addition, every Tuesday a weekly youth worship service was initiated to re-engage with the youths from UK and Europe organised by Zonal youth fellowship President Rev. Jobi Koruthu, Mrs Anisha Varughese and the Youth fellowship Committee. Several youths from churches volunteered to support the worship service with support from all the Vicars of various parishes in the region, providing the weekly sermon. An average of 60-70 youths participates weekly in these worship service.

Rev Jobi Koruth (President)

Rev Rony Eapen (Secretary)

Zonal Intercessory Prayer



Mar Thoma Church UK-Europe Zone has started an Intercessory prayer on every Sunday evening at 8.00 pm. The focus of the Intercessory prayer is mainly for the Corona affected people and especially for all the Key workers who are working in hospitals, care homes and other areas of our society. Every Sunday around 100 families are participating in this prayer and the archbishops in our region is giving leadership to this prayer.

Kindly participate the Zonal Intercessory Prayer

Time: 8.00 pm on every Sunday

Meeting link:

<https://meetingsemea10.webex.com/meetingsemea10/j.php?MTID=mf93fd450a1f88c5b7c6ea9c4eb626d4d>

Meeting Number: 143 157 471

Meeting Password: marthoma

Phone number: 020-76608149

Be still
and know
that I am
God
-PSALM 46:10

