

## 13

## GRADE NINE

## UNIQUENESS AND CENTRAL VALUES

## Lesson 1

AN ANCIENT CHURCH BECOMING  
A REFORMED CHURCH**Aim:**

To learn how an ancient church became a reformed church and how the purpose of God was fulfilled through historical changes.

**Bible Verse:** John 16.33

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

**Main Ideas:**

It is traditionally believed that the Mar Thoma Church has its origins in a community of faith, which originated with St. Thomas, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. The history of the Christian Church in the first century does not depend entirely on historical documents. Tradition is often more true and more compelling than plain historic proof. In this sense, St. Peter's founding of the Roman church and St. Thomas' founding of

the Malabar Church, may be said to stand on the same footing. Both are supported by traditions which are sufficiently early and sufficiently strong. It is believed that St. Thomas either converted a group of locals to the faith or preached the Gospel to Jewish settlers in Kerala in AD 52. Either way, the fact is that from ancient times, there existed a church in Kerala.

**Historical evidence and traditional bases are as follows:**

1. Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (265 -340 AD) and St. Jerome (340-420 AD) write about the visit of Pantænus to Malabar in 189/190 AD, where he found a Christian group with an Aramaic version of the Gospel of Matthew.
2. Bishop John of Persia, who signed the Decrees of Council of Nicaea in AD 325, documented his representation from churches of Persia and Great India. This documents connection between Persian and Malabar churches.
3. In 522 AD, the writing of Cosmas, a merchant from Alexandria, records the presence of a strong Christian community with clergy ordained by a Bishop sent from Persia.
4. Another distinct tradition is mentioned in “The Acts of St. Thomas” describes St. Thomas assigned to build a palace for an Indo-Parthian King, Gundaphar. St. Thomas donated the money he received for construction to the poor. King imprisoned the Apostle. King's brother saw a dream that a beautiful palace was built for the king in heaven. The king accepted Christianity and Apostle was freed. A confirming evidence for this story was the finding of the King Gundphar's coins in Punjab and it is kept in London Museum.
5. At the dawn of Christianity, there existed trade routes from West Asia to the coast of Kerala. It was very much possible



for St. Thomas to have travelled by these trade routes and preached the Gospel in Kerala.

6. There is reference to St. Thomas in the Rambhan Pattu, and Margam Kalipattu and also the Hindu accounts such as Keralolpathies and even in a Tamil account about Kandappa Raja.

7. The oral traditions of the community in relation to its identity as seen by outsiders give it a distinct nomenclature prevalent only in the ancient church. They were called and are still called "Thoma Nazranikal."

### Early Relationships

There was a relationship between Christians of India and other Eastern churches. The two immigrations under Thomas of Cana (345AD) and Marwan Sabriso (825AD), the existence of copper plates giving rights of worship, authority, etc., prove the connection of the Indian church with the Persian church and other Eastern churches. The liturgy and faith practices of the church were based on the relationship between the church in Kerala with the East - Syrian and Persian church, which started in the 3rd or 4th century and continued up to the 16th century, when the Portuguese became a dominant power and brought the Thomas Christians into Roman Catholic Church (*Gleanings, from the Roman Catholic connection*). A new age dawned in the history of Indian church with the arrival of Vasco de Gamma in 1498. The sole idea of Portuguese, in addition to conquests and commerce, was to bring the Indian church under the Roman ecclesiastical supremacy. The synod of Diamper in 1599 forced the Indian church to accept the Roman doctrine and practices.

However, despite coercion and undue influence, in 1653 by taking an oath called "Crooked Cross Oath" (Koonan Kurisu prathinja), the Malabar church asserted its freedom and regained its autonomous nature. The oath also reminds us of

the tragic split that took place in the ancient Indian church; one continuing in the old tradition and the other accepting Roman Catholicism.

### Beginning of Independent Episcopacy

The resultant division in the Indian church was, in a strict sense a blessing to the Indian Church because the Antiochian Church with which it was affiliated, helped the church to have a duly consecrated native bishop of its own. Mar Thoma 1, the first Indian bishop was thus consecrated to shoulder the responsibilities of the church in India. It also inaugurated the connection of the church with the Jacobite Church of Antioch in 1665. Indian Church had to go through various convulsions due to the geopolitical and historical upheavals in a world over which it had no control. This also resulted in a distortion of the spiritual experiences of the people. Yet, there was also a remnant which held on to the faith of the fathers. At such times, God had upheld the community through external intervention and the Church acknowledges this experience of grace. The contact with the Anglican Church is such an instance. Where the Portuguese failed to accept the independent nature of the Indian Church, the Anglican Church brought a refreshing change.

### Harbingers of Reformation

Through the "mission of help" programs initiated by the Anglican Church in 1816-1817, missionaries from that Church known as the Kottayam Trio" (Joseph Fenn, Benjamin Bailey, and Henry Baker) came to Kerala and they made invaluable contributions through evangelism, education, bible translation, and printing. During this period, Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan and Kaithayil Geevarughese Malpan dedicated themselves to the cause of reform in the Indian church. Their works include the revision of the St. James liturgy, translation



of the same into Malayalam and promote the understanding of the Bible in the context of modernized world. Abraham Malpan retained the ancient traditions of hierarchy, including the Episcopacy and the rich ancient forms of worship, while removing inconsistencies.

### **Reformation in the Malankara Church**

The study of the Word of God showed the people in the Malankara Church (Malabar Church of St. Thomas) that the church is the Body of Christ. The church must be a witness to Jesus Christ and spread the light of the gospel to others. During the time of reformation, the study of the Word of God and witnessing were lacking in the church.

Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan (1796-1845) from Maramon and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan (1798-1855) from Kottayam were much concerned of the need for this reformation. They were professors in the Old Seminary, Kottayam, at that time. They took a bold step in the field of reformation, remaining within the church. Abraham Malpan started the celebration of Holy Qurbana in Malayalam in his own church at Maramon. Until then the liturgy was in Syriac that derived from the ancient Aramaic language, the mother-tongue of Jesus. Malpan Achen made a few alterations in the liturgy to remove the sections that were not based on the Word of God. He realized that salvation is by the grace of God through faith, but not through mere observance of rites and ceremonies. By accepting Jesus Christ, a person becomes a new creation. The new creation is accepted as a child of God and one's life is renewed according to the life of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. This must result in loving God with one's whole heart and loving one's neighbor and serving them in the fellowship of the church. Abraham Malpan made further changes as per the Word of God and made this Liturgy

as a book available for the use of common people to deepen the understanding and participation in the worship.

The reformation brought about powerful currents of change in the Church. The Church emphasized the importance of the Bible in personal life, purity and simplicity of apostolic faith, right of self government and the uncontaminated life and work of St. Thomas Christians of early period. The Church experienced the right form of worship, intelligent understanding of the Bible, and responsible freedom and activity. Along with the reformation in liturgy the Malabar church of St. Thomas was confronted with property ownership disagreements. The opposing views were to go under the supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch or to remain independent. The Malabar church of St. Thomas thus divided into two denominations after a series of court cases and finally the Royal Court decision of 1889 resulted in the formation of Jacobite church that opted to continue under the Patriarch of Antioch and Mar Thoma Church.

### **Conclusion:**

The Mar Thoma Church forms part of the ancient church of Malabar. As a church holding on to the fundamental principles of reformation, it has been recognized as a reformed church. There is an amicable blending of two tracts, namely, the Eastern Church features and reformation ideals. This feature of the church points to its uniqueness when compared to other churches. The Church finds its place among that family of churches called the "lesser Eastern Churches." The Church also maintains relations with other Christian denominations. The Church affirms itself as an essential part of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Reformation and revival movements brought out an added sense of responsibility for the spiritual and moral welfare of the church and its people.

Reform, revival, and spirit of Ecumenism joined together in molding the Mar Thoma church as it is seen, known, and accepted today.

**Assignments:**

1. Make out a chart showing clearly the stages through which our church has attained its present position.
2. "We are a unique church, but we are not an exclusive church." Discuss.
3. "In a world which is traumatized by cultural and social upheavals, new and varied interpretations of faith are taken up by people who try to find easy answers to faith." Such practices end up in becoming cultic as also preclude acceptance of the other. Discuss.

## GRADE NINE UNIQUENESS AND CENTRAL VALUES

### Lesson 2

## EASTERN ORTHODOX ORIENTATION AND EPISCOPAL NATURE

**Aim:**

To show the ancient heritage of the Mar Thoma Church as a primal church and the inclusive character of the body of Christ which rejects none and encourages the equality of spiritual experience, as also the tradition of historic episcopacy

**Bible Verse:** Matthew 16:18

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it".

**Main ideas:**

Ancient Christianity had two forms - i.e., Eastern and Western. Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (which developed from the 16th century and has taken on various forms in the modern day) are the developments of Western Christianity and were to a great extent identified with the state for many centuries. Eastern Christianity found its identity in an oriental culture and was to a great extent influenced by Judaic traditions. The Mar Thoma Syrian church of Malabar which developed in this oriental culture and was geographically placed in the East retained its Eastern Orthodoxy. It is part of the



"Lesser Eastern Churches". It is oriental in worship, autonomous in administration and missionary in action. The church follows an orthodox (true worship) liturgy and a catholic (to all, for all) missionary and evangelistic approach. When it came into contact with Western Christianity, it blended as much relevant aspects to become an "Eastern Reformed Church".

Abraham Malpan (teacher), who initiated reformation in the church, wanted to maintain the oriental nature of the church by keeping the old traditions and also maintaining consistency with the modern understanding of the Bible. He therefore made minimum changes in the liturgy and kept the ancient forms of worship and ritual. He didn't want to adopt Western forms of worship. In retaining the worship forms and liturgy of the Eastern churches, the following theological and symbolic expressions were continued:

#### **Worship:**

The body of Christ as a corporate body finds expression in the worship service. Proud individualism is negated and pedestal Christianity is diluted through the corporate experience of a holy priesthood of believers. Its common platform of prayers resists the temptation to create "halos" around those who are more spirit filled and uplift the weaker in faith, enabling equality of experience for the sinner and the saved. The worship has the use of symbols and expressions which symbolize the presence of Christ in the community.

#### **Liturgy**

The use of a liturgy was prevalent in the Judaic community. This found new expression in the New Testament times. As in the early church, so today the centrality of Eucharist (Holy Qurbana) as an act of worship remains firm. Liturgy is filled with theological teaching and scriptural portions. It has a deep biblical emphasis.

#### **Symbols, Vestments, Gestures, Altar**

The worship service includes symbolism, vestments, gestures and the very altar itself which depicts a greater truth.

#### **Symbolism:**

The place of worship is generally built East-West, the altar (Madhaba) to the east, the direction of the rising sun, a symbol of the risen Christ, the sun of righteousness and His second coming. The altar represents the "Throne of God" or the "Table of Life" an each aspect of the altar has biblical significance.

#### **Candles:**

Candles are lighted symbolizing the presence of God who is the source of light and reminding us that we too are called to be the light of the world.

#### **Incense:**

The incense represents the sweet smelling sacrifice rising to God. It also symbolizes the offering of our prayers to God.

#### **Vestments:**

They are based on Ephesians 6:14 and represent the fight against the power of darkness.

#### **Gestures:**

Represent the external expressions of the inner experience of penitence, submission and respect in the presence of God.

#### **Sacraments:**

The church recognizes seven sacraments. They are (1) Baptism, (2) Confirmation, (3) Confession, (4) Holy Qurbana, (5) Marriage, (6) Ordination, and (7) Extreme Unction. These features identify the Eastern orientation of the Mar Thoma Church.

#### **Episcopal Nature:**

1 Peter 2:5 speaks of the priesthood of believers, a holy and royal priesthood. The whole community of Christ is a priestly community. From the community, some are set apart



with a greater functional role in the church. The Mar Thoma Church values its Episcopal tradition and regards Episcopacy as a gift of the Lord to the church. The church values highly the importance of apostolic succession and celibate Episcopacy. Thereby the Church continues in the old beliefs and customs of the ancient church.

The Mar Thoma Church has three forms of ordained ministry - i.e., Deacon, Priest and Bishop. Bishop, Methran and Episcopa are parallel terms. The Metropolitan in the Mar Thoma Church is the Methran (head) of the Church. He is not supreme to other Bishops, but *primus inter pares* (first among equals) and represents the church in ecclesial matters. When a bishop is consecrated, a new name is usually given to him, of a known church father. Before the new name, "Mar" is used as an honorific. Bishops are the spiritual fathers of the church. They are placed at the head of the community to lead, guide and oversee the co-ordination of the kingdom of God experiences of the church. Our Bishops are Monks who have submitted their whole life to the Lord. As a sign of total submission, they wear on their head, a hood (Masnapasa) embroidered with twelve crosses. Now the church has ten bishops, including the Valiya Metropolitan, Metropolitan, Suffragan Metropolitan and seven Episcopas.

#### **Assignments:**

1. "Mar Thoma Church is a bridge church between the Eastern and Western ecclesial traditions". Discuss.
2. What are the Eastern characteristics in our worship service?
3. Who are the bishops in our church today? Write down their names as well as find out the significance of each name.
4. Discuss three forms of ordained ministry in the Mar Thoma Church.

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#### **Lesson 3**

### **DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHURCH**

#### **Aim:**

To show the democratic values held by the church, tempered with Episcopal authority.

**Bible Verse:** Ephesians 4:15, 16.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ.

#### **Main Ideas:**

The Mar Thoma Church is an independent, autonomous and indigenous church. Therefore, all sorts of policy making, operational and administrative functions are governed by the rules and regulations stipulated and adopted by the concerned elected bodies of the church.

There is a constitution emphasizing democratic values for the administrative purpose. All decisions affecting the church are made by Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam (General Assembly) consisting of 65% elected lay members from the parishes and 35% clergy including the bishops. At the same time, Episcopal synod has to approve the decisions of the Mandalam, before

these can be implemented. The Metropolitan has special power to send back the decisions for reconsideration. Thus, there is a combination of democratic values and Episcopal authority.

There is an Executive committee called the Sabha Council, elected by the Mandalam, for a period of 3 years, to assist the Metropolitan in implementing the decisions of the Mandalam and in the general administration of the Church. Mandalam elects one clergy and one laity who with the Metropolitan form the trustees of the church. The Sabha secretary is also elected by the Mandalam.

For efficient functioning the church is divided into dioceses, regions/centers and parishes and each has its functional structure. Each diocese is under the governance of a diocesan bishop. There are Diocesan Assemblies and Diocesan Councils to administer matters at the Diocesan level. All the clergy in the Diocese are the members of the Diocesan Assemblies. Lay members are elected from the parishes, based on the membership of the parishes. All parishes are represented.

Dioceses are divided into regional groups called centers including adjoining parishes. Centers have their committees which plan and execute the work. Each parish is looked after by the Vicar of that parish. For the administrative purpose, there is a general body as well as an Executive committee. The vicar is the president of both the bodies. The financial affair of the parish is handled by two elected representatives. There is also an elected secretary for the parish. Accounts are to be presented to the Executive committee after every three months. Auditors elected by the general body audit the annual accounts. The decisions of the general body can be implemented only after being approved by the Diocesan Episcopa. The parish works through organizations such as Sunday School, youth organizations, women's auxiliary (Sevika Sangham), parish

mission (Edavaka Mission), prayer group, etc. All these factors point to the democratic administration of our church.

#### **Assignment:**

1. Write an essay on the advantages and disadvantages of a democratic approach as existing in our church.
2. Interview the office bearers of the parish and some of its organizations (president, secretary, treasurer, etc.) to find out about their duties.
3. Explain the work of Sunday School and Youth Fellowship by making use of your own experiences in them.



## GRADE NINE UNIQUENESS AND CENTRAL VALUES

### Lesson 4

#### THE PLACE OF LAITY IN THE MAR THOMA CHURCH

##### **Aim:**

To emphasize that the church or the body of Christ comprises the people and it is their responsibility to work for the Kingdom of God.

**Bible Verse:** Matthew 5:13-16.

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. ... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven”.

##### **Main Ideas:**

The term Laity is derived from the Greek word ‘Laos’ meaning people. It has been used in various contexts in the New Testament, with specific reference to “people of God” (Romans 11:1), Holy nation, God’s own people and Royal priesthood in 1 Peter 2:9. It is the people who make up the body of Christ, the church. Each member is important for the functioning of the body, as given in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Just like each part of the body has a role to play in the functioning of the whole body, each member of the church

has his/her responsibilities. They are to offer themselves as spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. The Mar Thoma Church strongly believes in these fundamental principles.

The clergy have been set apart from among the Laity for a greater functional role. The ordination service of clergy indicates this where it says, “...has been set apart from among brethren for being lifted up into ordained ministry.” This emphasizes the equality of all believers as also the responsibility of Laity in the work of the Kingdom of God. Till the beginning of the 20th century, the church was more introverted, maintaining the identity within itself. However, the emphasis has now shifted with the Laity and the clergy participating equally in the work of the Kingdom of God to the outside world. In the democratic administrative set up of the church, clergy and Laity are having equal participation.

As we study the contributions of the Laity, it becomes clear that each person has helped in the progression of the church with the gospel. In addition, Lay persons of the Mar Thoma Church have occupied places of high responsibility in the church and society. Mr. K. K. Kuruvilla was the principal of the Mar Thoma theological Seminary. He was also a member of the State Legislative Assembly. He has served as a missionary in North Canara. Dr. M. M. Thomas was the Moderator of the central committee of World Council of Churches. He was also a world renowned theologian. He gave great leadership in political and educational field. He was the governor of Nagaland, a state in India. The revival movement in Kerala owed much to the Evangelistic zeal of laymen. Sadhu Kochukunju, and Punchamanni Mammen Upadesi through their life and message helped thousands to continue in spiritual joy and sacrificial living. The songs written by Kochukunju Upadesi, still resonates in Malayalam worships through out the



world. These are only a few examples to remember the important role played by Laity in our church.

The situation here in U. S.A. is also not different. For the formation of parishes in this part of the world, the lay initiative was extraordinary. Starting from a humble beginning, now, we have over 80 parishes/congregations and around 5500 families. In 1972, a prayer group was started in New York where there was no Achen in the region. The long struggle of laity resulted in a recognized congregation in 1976. After that, congregations were started in different places like Toronto, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, etc. During this early stage of Parish formation in the 1970s lay initiative was a key factor to all such places. Achens were assigned only to a few places and at that time they were full-time students with minimum time for parish responsibilities. The first full-time Achen (not a student) was assigned only in 1979 and it was for all congregations in New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia.

Our people work sincerely and honestly in their professions and remain faithful witnesses to the Lord through their jobs, while devoting much time for arranging prayer meetings and worship services. This is a positive sign of the grace of God as experienced by them. All of this depicts a holistic involvement of the Laity both within the church and the outside world.

#### **Assignments:**

1. Write a two page essay on "As the member of the universal church i.e. the body of Christ, what are my responsibilities? How do I perform them in my life?"
2. Interview a couple of members in your parish (Members from 1970s) in order to gather information regarding the early struggles for parish formation. Discuss the role played by laity and clergy.

## **GRADE NINE**

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#### **Lesson 5**

### **OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH AND ITS FOUNDATION**

#### **Aim:**

To build knowledge on the foundations of our faith, the Triune existence of God, the authority to the Word of God (The Bible) and its integrated statement.

#### **Bible Verse:**

We accept Bible as the final authority because of the following verses that authenticate its origin and power.

"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:20-21)

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

#### **Main Ideas:**

Mar Thoma Church, joins the majority of the Christian churches of the world in the Triune existence of God, The



Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and accept the final authority of Bible.

### Trinity

The Mar Thoma worship contains frequent references to the Trinity, described as THREE IN ONE or Triune God. Following are selected references that provide the Biblical bases on the concept of the Trinity.

Plural Personality of God “*Let us* make man in *our* image...”

Genesis 1:23

“The man has now become like one of *us*...” Genesis 3:22

God, the Father  
“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our **God**, The Lord is one.” Deuteronomy 6:4.

“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.’” Isaiah 44:6.

“*My, Father* is always at His work ...But he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” John 5:17-18.

Jesus Christ,  
“For God so loved the world that He

The Son  
gave His *one and only Son* that whoever believes in Him...” John 3:16.

“*My, Father* is always at His work. ...But he (Jesus - the Son)

was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” John 5:17-18.

“Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father...” John 14:9.

“...the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Genesis 1:2.

“The Spirit of God has made me...” Job 33:4.

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:26.

“Ananias, how is that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the *Holy Spirit*?... You have not lied to men, *but to God*!” Acts 5:3-4.

The three in one concept could be compared with a natural phenomenon that we all have witnessed. Lightning, is an electrical action that involves clouds that acquired high voltage, arcing to the ground that remains at zero voltage. The arcing produces a very bright light, loud sound, and heat in the form of dissipated energy. It is essentially one action, but it is experienced as three functional effects. Similarly, we experience the work of the Triune God in different functions but it is in essence one and sovereign will of God is executed without any conflicts or contradictions.

### Nicene Creed

The concise statement of our faith is proclaimed in the Nicene Creed. In A.D 325, the first ecumenical council was



called by the Roman Emperor: Constantine the Great. The early church fathers joined in the development of an authoritative and true expression of faith known as "The Nicene Creed". This creed is used in our worship services. During the Intercessory Prayers in the Holy Qurbana we refer to the councils of Nicaea in A. D. 325, Constantinople in A. D. 381, and Ephesus in A. D. 431, and we pray for heavenly grace to follow their true doctrines. The later councils in Southern India that apply specifically to us are the councils of Udayampoor in 1599, Mavelikara in 1836 and Mulathuruthy in 1876.

### Our Worship

The St. Thomas Christians of Kerala kept close association with the Eastern churches and conducted worship in the Syriac language. It was obligatory for the priests to have knowledge of the Syriac language to serve in the ministry. The Malayalam New Testament was published in 1829 and the Malayalam Holy Bible was published in 1841. The intimate knowledge of the Bible and a better understanding of the worship resulted in further growth of the St. Thomas Church. The reformation influence reached Kerala coast through the Anglican Church missionaries. Abraham Malpan Achen was fascinated by the reformation ideas that brought the Word of God closer to the people. He was faced with three options in response to the reformed thinking. One was to join the Anglican Church, second to avoid confrontation and go along with the present practices that lacked biblical foundation, and the third was to stay within the church and reform it and face the problems. In 1837, Malpan Achen revised the Thaksa (the Communion service book with all the prayers - the expanded version used by the celebrant) and removed the prayers and practices that did not carry Scriptural bases. A few of such changes are listed below:

Removed the petitions addressed through the departed saints.

Removed prayers for the dead.

Decided to serve bread and wine separately.

Stopped the practice of private confession with the priest and receiving absolution before communion. (A sincere confession directly brings reconciliation with God and the priest serves as the facilitator)

Holy Communion will not be celebrated when there is no one to receive communion.

Holy Communion is for participation and not for worship. Subsequent revisions continued under a Thaksa committee and the Malayalam version of the Holy Communion, still in use, was published by Titus II Mar Thoma Metropolitan in 1942. The faith of the Church is preserved through the experience of worship, with its content in full compliance to the Word of God.

We continue to keep a liturgy in our worship. The Lectionary readings, selected excerpts of the worship, and a sermon are organized based on a Christian calendar to commemorate the Life of Christ and the precepts that are contained in the Old Testament teaching. A liturgical worship has the significant advantage of preserving theological accuracy, a planned and structured progression of meditation, and for building a clear focus on the Christian theme of the day. The worship that are based purely on spontaneity could deviate to personal and biased interpretations, when repeated often would lead to inappropriate understanding of the Bible.

### The Church - Preservation of our Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) Chapter 25 contains a statement about the church which may be accepted by most all denominations of the Christendom.

*"The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof, and is the spouse,*



*the body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law) consists of all those, throughout the world, that profess the true religion, and of their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."*

Related passages are the following: "Now, if we are children, then we are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory" Romans 8:17. Jesus answered, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" John 14:6.

A certain religious group claims to be the best religion in this world because they have integrated the goodness of every religion. It is a different way of reasoning that praying to every known Gods would be the sure way to salvation. How does this thinking relate with Exodus 20: 3 "You shall have no other gods before me."

There are new and evolving cultural and religious movements give rise to new thinking and new churches that appear very appealing. A liberal thinking, that has gained wide popularity, is the concept that if you once became a child of God, you are guaranteed to enter heaven irrespective of your behavior. Let us examine this Biblical verse: "... If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they were worse off at the end than they were at the beginning" 2 Peter 2:20. See also Hebrews 6:4-6. We should not get trapped by such groups and their popularity gained through the distorted message of the Bible portraying a comfortable Christianity.

The preservation of our faith with strict adherence to the Word of God is a continuing challenge. In the United States

and in many parts of the world new denominations are forming. God's salvation plan was completed in Jesus Christ. There are no other short cuts to Christian living besides what Jesus told us to follow. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6, see also Acts 4:12) Any other teaching, that conflicts the Word of God, even in part, are not accepting the authority of the scriptures. The Scripture offers guidelines in addressing its own content:

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophesy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this book." Revelation 22: 18-19. The same central message is also stated in Deuteronomy 4:2.

We are expected to obey the Word of God in its entirety. Accepting Jesus as the Son of God, authority of the Scripture, and salvation by faith and through grace are the non-negotiable doctrines of the church. When these doctrines are not fully accepted it ceases to be a Church that is to be honored as the Body of Christ.

While the educational and career challenges may take us to various parts of the world that may not have a Mar Thoma Church, we are required to be apart of the worshipping Christian community. Jesus set an example of corporate worship through his regular participation at the synagogue (Luke 2:48-50; 4:16; 21:1). In Hebrews 10:25, the command for worship is given. Therefore, participation in regular worship is mandatory for the child of God and it is essential for sustaining our faith. It is also important to uphold the authority of the Scripture, preserve and promote the message of the scripture in our sphere of influence in the community where God placed us.



**Assignment / Review Questions**

1. What status does the Mar Thoma Church give for the Bible?
2. How do we explain the Trinitarian understanding of God?
3. What prayers and practices were changed by Abraham Malpan in the liturgy modified in 1837? What was the basis of his modifications?
4. Examine the scriptural bases of the Mar Thoma Church faith?
5. Evaluate the specific items of Mar Thoma Church practices studied in this lesson by examining them as unique features of our church.
6. What would you do if you are given a job appointment in a community/city where there is no Mar Thoma Church?

ചിതാവിൻറയും ഏതെൻറയും ജീ  
 വനം വിശുദ്ധിയുള്ള റോയുടെയും ക്രിസ്താ  
 ത്തിൻ തന്നെ. ജനം. ആമ്മീൻ.

.ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ  
 ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

An excerpt of the liturgy published in 1947  
 at the CMS Press, Kottayam, Kerala,  
 with Malayalam and Syriac Text.  
 Syriac or the former Aramaic was interchangeably  
 used during the worship.

The Aramaic text is written from right to left.