

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Glory to the God who has guided us until this time. We are entering into the last part of our liturgical year – the period of Cross (*Sleeba Kalam*). The readings from Sleebaperunal to Kodosetho show the importance of preparation for the second coming and Jesus' advise to his disciples about watchfulness. It exhorts us to be prepared to depart for our journey and be ready like the good servant (Mark 13: 28-37) because we do not know the arrival of our Master.

For the Indian Orthodox Church the month of September is very important for two reasons - we celebrate the Exaltation of the Cross (Sep. 14) and remember the birth of Theotokos, the Mother of God, Mary (Sep. 8).

For us, the Cross is the sign of victory. Our Lord defeated death, the enemy, through His vicarious death on the Cross. He gave us the Cross as armor against evil. When His devotee Queen Helene, mother of Constantine, honored the Cross, it brought victory for her army. We celebrate the exaltation of the Cross commemorating this event. We are not worshipping the Cross, or a certain piece of wood or metal, but we are seeing Jesus in that Cross and thus only venerating the Cross. The celebration of the exaltation of the Cross can be found in fourth century writings. The *Travel of Etheria/ Egaria*, a fourth century manuscript, narrates the early practices of the Church in Jerusalem. Etheria (Egaria) spent three years in Jerusalem and its surroundings and wrote about the liturgical practices she found there. In her writings she mentions the **veneration of Cross** during the Good Friday service. From the following passage we can understand that the present tradition we are following has a long history and significance:

“Then a chair is placed for the bishop in Golgotha behind the Cross, which is now standing; the bishop duly takes his seat in the chair, and a table covered with a linen cloth is placed before him; the deacons stand round the table, and a silver-gilt casket is brought in which is the holy wood of the Cross. The casket is opened and (the wood) is taken out, and both the wood of the Cross and the title are placed upon the table. Now, when it has been put upon the table, the bishop, as he sits, holds the extremities of the sacred wood firmly in his hands, while the deacons who stand around guard it. It is guarded thus because the custom is that the people, both faithful and catechumens, come one by one and, bowing down at the table, kiss the sacred wood and pass through. And because, I know not when, someone is said to have bitten off and stolen a portion of the sacred wood, it is thus guarded by the deacons who stand around, lest anyone approaching should venture to do so again. And as all the people pass by one by one, all bowing themselves, they touch the Cross and the title, first with their foreheads and then with their eyes; then they kiss the Cross and pass through, but none lays his hand upon it to touch it. When they have kissed the Cross and have passed through, a deacon stands holding the ring of... “

Secondly, we celebrate the feast of the nativity of Theotokos. The feast of the nativity started in the Roman Church in 710 AD following their belief in the “immaculate Conception”, a belief that

we do not share. Gradually, it became accepted in some of the Eastern Churches. Though it is not considered an obligatory fast and hence it is not in the canonical list of fasts of the Church, it has gained wider acceptance and the members of the Church unofficially celebrate the nativity of St. Mary.

Why we are reluctant to accept the feast? There are several factors behind that. First of all we do not accept the "Immaculate" concept. We believe that Mary was born as an ordinary child and she was chosen to bear our Lord. Secondly, celebrating the feast of the nativity of a saint was unknown to the early Church, but they did celebrate their blessed memory on their day of departing or martyrdom. Epiphany was important to the early church rather than the Christmas. In the early Church most of the saints are martyrs and the Church had a practice of commemorating their martyrdom. That was the beginning of the feast of the saints. So, the Church gives importance to Mother Mary's dormition rather than her nativity. "Hail Mary" was a later addition to the canonical prayers. If we look at the rubrics in our prayer book it, says like this " *daivame nee parisudhanakunnu, swargasthanaya njangalude pithave ennithyathi oru kaumayum krupaniranja mariyame enna prathanayum chollanam*" (holy art thou O God, Our Father who art in heaven etc one kaumo (literally sound) and then recite prayer "Hail Mary" in that order). From this we can understand that Hail Mary was not in the Kaumo even in the last decades of the 19th century. In short, we venerate and honor the blessed memory of St. Mary, but we do not believe that there is any special miracle called Immaculate Conception connected with the origin and birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Building updates.

By the Grace of God we obtained all required permits from the authorities and have started the excavation for the foundation. We hope that the concrete for the basement will be poured by the end of the second week or beginning of the third week of this month and expect by of two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000). I have been amazed by the fact that from fifty families we collected over five hundred thousand dollars during the last five years for the building construction. It is really a great achievement for the Church. I am expecting an especially intensified effort on your part to accomplish our long cherished dream - a permanent place of worship for all of us.

Events

Prayer Meeting

This month's prayer meeting will be held at the residence of Thomas Varghese and Nirmala on 29th Saturday at 7 PM. I am encouraging everybody to bring Bible for active participation in bible reading. H.G. Zachariah Mar Theophilos of Malabar diocese will lead the prayer meeting.

Baptism

We are happy announce the baptism and chrismation of Luke Job, son of Benny Job and Reena on Sunday the 23rd, this month.

Wedding

We are happy to announce the wedding of our children Pradish Soman and Lincy Yohannan on 16th of September at St. Peter and Paul Antiochene Orthodox Church.

Birthday

Melvin Lukose.	Hope James
Elizabeth Mathew	Anju Johnson
Avishai Jacob	Reena Thomas
Rohan George	Roshni Thomas
Shiny Mathew	Anish John
Anad Abraham	Denny Varghese
Amy Abraham	Preetha Anna Varghese
Yohannan K.	Thomas Varghese (Junil)
Sini Varghese	Alex Johnson
Faith James	Deena Jacob

Wedding Anniversary

Shine Jacob & Neena	James John & Shiji
Thomas Varghese & Nirmala	Thomas Varghese & Saramma
Eapen Varghese & Jemini	Benny Job & Reena

