



Eastern Catholic Churches

Syro-Malabar Catholic Church

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The Syro-Malabar Church (traditionally called Saint Thomas Christians) is the fruit of the apostolic ministry of St. Thomas the Apostle in South India and belongs to the East Syriac tradition.

1. Cultural Background of Adherents

Syro-Malabar Church is 'Indian in Culture, Christian in Religion, and Oriental in Worship'.

The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church is a Major Archiepiscopal Church in full communion with the Apostolic See of Rome. The Church is headed by the Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly, Mar George Cardinal Alencherry. It is one of the 23 sui iuris (autonomous) Eastern Catholic Churches in the Catholic communion. It is the second largest Eastern Catholic Church.

The migration in great numbers of the Syro-Malabar faithful to Australia started mainly in the first decade of the new millennium. Pope Francis established the Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle, Melbourne of the Syro-Malabar (Sancti Thomae Apostoli Melburnen (sis) Syro-Malabarensium) on 23 December 2013. The Pope appointed Bishop Bosco Puthur as the Eparchial Bishop of St. Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne of the Syro-Malabars and Apostolic Visitor of the Syro-Malabar faithful residing in New Zealand. The formal inauguration of the Eparchy and Installation of Bosco Puthur as its first bishop took place in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne on March 25, 2014.

The language used in the Liturgy

The official liturgical language of the Syro-Malabar Church is Syriac. The main language used in the Syro-Malabar Church is Malayalam, but in Australia, liturgical celebrations use both Malayalam and English.

1. Liturgical Seasons

Liturgical Year

Syro-Malabar Church belongs to the East Syrian tradition. The liturgical year in our church is so devised that the liturgical community in different seasons and different places may closely reflect and experience the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Liturgical year celebrates the salvific mysteries of Jesus in its integrity and fullness. Through fasting and abstinence and commemorations of the saints, the liturgical year helps us accomplish our destiny, heaven.

The whole liturgical year and the feasts in it are arranged to focus the attention on the resurrection of Jesus, which is the centre of the mysteries of Christ. Instead of limiting the memorial of this great event, the early church started extending this celebration to every Sunday. Later, all salvific



mysteries from the incarnation to the second coming of our Lord and the church's mysteries are celebrated throughout the year by dividing them into several seasons.

The entire year is divided into nine seasons. This arrangement of the liturgical year, which starts with the season of Annunciation and ends in the season of the Dedication of the Church, is an occasion for catechesis. Patriarch Isoyab III of the 7th century made a final constitution for the liturgical year we use now.

Liturgical Seasons

Season of Annunciation | Suvara | Mangalavarthakalam

Season of Nativity | Yelda | Piravikalam

Season of Epiphany | Denha | Denahakalam

Season of Great Fast | SaumaRamba | Valiya Nombukalam

Season of Resurrection | Qyamtha | Uyarppukalam

Season of Apostles | Sleehe | Sleehakalam Season of Summer | Qaita | Kaithakalam

Season of Elijah – Cross– Moses | Elia – Sleeva – Mushe | Elia–Sleeva - Mooshakalam Season of Dedication of the Church | QudashEdtha | Pallikkoodhasshakalam

Season of Annunciation

The season of Annunciation or Suvara is the first season in the Syro-Malabar liturgical year. The fullness of God's Divine plan, which is to divinise man and make him partake in eternal life, is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Hence, the central theme of the season is the Nativity of Jesus.

Annunciation means message or revelation - it is the divine revelation about the birth of Jesus. While Syriac tradition calls it the season of Annunciation remembering the mighty revelation of God, Latin tradition remembers this time as the season of Advent, and Greek tradition calls it the season of Holy Nativity

As the title 'Annunciation' signifies, the Sundays of this season invite the faithful to meditate on the annunciations unfolding in the history of salvation and reaching its fullness in the Annunciation to the Virgin at Nazareth. This season has four Sundays before the feast of the Nativity of the Lord. As God gave offspring to Abraham to form a people who believe in Him, He gives John to Zachariah as a herald of the new dispensation. Through the chosen persons and their offspring, God reveals His salvific plan and continues to do so. The readings on the first and third weeks in this season give this message.

The birth of Jesus, which is the central theme of this season, is the fulfilment of the expectations and prophecies of the Old Testament. The incarnation by the Son of God from Mary is to cleanse the sin caused by Eve. Jesus' incarnation leads the community to Emmanuel experience and thereby to the experience of Paradise too. Apart from that, Mother Mary is particularly venerated in the season of Annunciation as the divine instrument who submitted herself to the will of God with her Fiat and thus became the mother of Christ.



Season of Nativity

Nativity is the shortest season in Syro-Malabar liturgical calendar. It is the time between Christmas and the Feast of Denha. The two weeks after the Nativity proclaim the events related to the incarnation and the whole life of Jesus before His public ministry. The Magi remind us that we need to seek Jesus actively to find Him who reveals Himself in our daily life. The young Jesus in the temple teaches us that true worship of God happens only when there is a real relationship with God. Feast of Divine Motherhood of Mary and Feast of Holy Family is also commemorated in this time.

In some traditions, the season of Nativity is considered along with the season of Annunciation. This may be due to the fact that in the early church, the birth of Jesus was commemorated along with His baptism at the Feast of Denha. In the 4th century, during the time of Pope Liberius, Christmas started celebrating on December 25. In AD 274, Roman emperor Aurelian commanded to observe December 25 as the birthday of Sun God throughout the Roman empire. To protect the Christians from persecution for disobeying the emperor's command, Pope advised them to celebrate the birth of Jesus on the same date.

Season of Epiphany

The Syriac word Denha means 'dawn', 'manifestation', 'revelation', etc. The season starts with the feast of Denha, which commemorates the baptism of Jesus Christ. The Father and the Holy Spirit revealed the Son of God at His baptism, and here commences the public ministry of Jesus, the Sun of Justice. This season reminds us that at the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Trinity is revealed. The Feast of Denha that usually comes on January 6 is also known as 'Pindi - Kuthi - Perunnal' in northern parts of Kerala and 'Rakkuli - Perunnal' in the southern parts of Kerala. In Pindi-Kuthi-Perunnal Christ, the Light of the world is commemorated by raising a plantain stem in front of churches and decorating it with lamps pierced onto the stem. 'Rakkuli Perunnal' commemorates the baptism of Jesus in which the faithful take a holy bath in a water body near the church. It is a tradition seen in many eastern churches.

This season, which remembers the public ministry of the Messiah, highlights the personality of Jesus through the readings. As a crucial moment of His public ministry, the call of the Apostles is given much importance in this season.

The mother Church teaches that the Messiah came to earth for the sinners, and He is the Lamb of God, and through Him, man attains remission of sins and salvation. The readings of this season proclaim that Jesus is the fulfilment of Law, He is the Bread of Life, and He is the Good and Merciful Shepherd. He sends His disciples in search of the sheep.

The first Friday of Denha commemorates the feast of John the Baptist, who experienced the glory of Jesus even from his mother's womb and witnessed this glory from heaven at the time of Jesus' baptism. The following Fridays, remember Saint Peter and Paul, Four Evangelists, St Stephen, the first martyr, Greek - Syrian Church Fathers and patron saints of the parish. It is ideal to remember in the season of Denha for saints as they have been witnesses of Christ in the world. Finally, last



Friday is dedicated to all the departed who await in great hope of resurrection.

The three days fast, also known as Nineveh fast, happens during this season. It is attributed to the fasting of Ninevites in the book of Jonah. It is also known as 'Pathinettamida Nombu' as it finishes 18 days before the Great Fast.

Since the season of Great Fast should have seven weeks before the feast of the resurrection, the number of the weeks of Denha may vary. As a preparation for the season of Great Fast, which has the spirit of repentance and penance, there is a three day fast in this season, 18 days before the season of the Great Fast.

Season of Great Fast (Sauma Ramba)

The basis of the Season of the Great Fast is Jesus' 40 days fast. This season assures that through fast and prayer, one can evade evil and overcome temptations. Great fast teaches that one should share the God-given wealth with others and that greed leads to sin. Through the act of contrition, one can experience the joy of salvation. The true disciple recognises God as his wealth after the example of the Apostles who left everything to follow Jesus.

Although Jesus' fast was for forty days, the great fast is generally known as 'Ambathu Nombu' or fifty days fast among St. Thomas Christians as they observed fasting from 'Pethrutha' Sunday to Easter Sunday for 50 days. The Syriac Word 'Pethrutha' means 'finished', reminding that the days of feast and celebration are finished. So 'Sauma Ramba' or the great fast, was a period of fasting and prayer among Mar Thoma Nasranis. They used to have only one meal a day except for Sundays during the great fast. Apart from fasting, they strictly avoided meat, fish, egg, milk, habits of addiction and even marital relationship.

The themes of the readings in this season are repentance, charity, prayer and fast. The purity of the body is essential, and the purity of the heart is even more so. One attains salvation when One confesses his sins and follows Jesus. The church exhorts that God wills our sanctification. Through the unique sacrifice of Jesus' body, our salvation is attained.

It is challenging to live without sin when our body tempts us to do evil. This season encourages us to undergo this pain to practice virtues. All the sufferings and mortifications in our lives lead us to grow in virtues and lead a life united with Jesus Christ. Faithful accompaniment with the sufferings of Jesus helps us to enter into the joy of resurrection.

Season of Resurrection (Qyamtha)

The only feast in the early church was the feast of the resurrection, which is the centre of the Christian faith. From the time of the Nicene Synod, this feast is celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon that follows March 21.

This season remembers the events from the Resurrection of Jesus to Pentecost in seven weeks. The first Friday of this season is celebrated as the Memorial of 'all saints and Martyrs'. The Sunday



after the feast of resurrection is known as the New Sunday (Puthunjayar) that commemorates the proclamation of faith in Jesus by St. Thomas, the Apostle.

This season gives the good news that the Risen Lord, who entrusted Simon Peter and other Apostles and their successors with the task of leading the flock, is with them till the end of the world. Moreover, the feast of the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated on the 40th day after the feast of the resurrection. Hence, this season asks the faithful to ponder on heaven, resurrection and eternal life.

It is only through Jesus Christ, the saviour, one can attain eternal life. The church upholds the example of the apostles who spent their whole time in the temple as per the command of Jesus at the time of His Ascension. The church asks us to wait hopefully for the joy of the Pentecost in the church where heaven and earth unite.

Season of Apostles (Sleehe)

The season of Apostles or Sleehe consists of seven weeks, starting from the feast of Pentecost. The season focuses on the themes such as divine call, commissioning to preach the Good News and witnessing to Jesus. Pentecost is the day on which the Apostles received the Holy Spirit. This season emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. The first Friday of this season is known as the Golden Friday, reminding us that if one asks in the name of Jesus, it will be received, just like the crippled beggar who got cured by Peter.

The faithful, filled with the Holy Spirit, are responsible for proclaiming the good news of salvation. This season asks us to be missionaries like the apostles; the church calls upon all to declare, "let us go and die with him" like St Thomas. The God who protects his 'sent ones' is revealed in the prayers and hymns of this season.

Those who are sent to proclaim the good news should lead a life centred on the Word of God. This season emphasises the importance of witnessing to the Word of God without fear. Grain of wheat will bring forth a good harvest only if it falls on the ground and decays. Likewise, Jesus reminds us that we will gain our life by suffering and courageous witnessing to the Word of God. Bearing witness to Jesus is the primary duty of every Christian.

The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, dwells in every baptised and shower all His graces and fruits on them. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, one cannot remember and put into practice all that Jesus taught in this world. This season reminds the worshipping community that we lose the Holy Spirit at our peril. Apart from Pentecost, Feast of Holy Trinity, Feast of Holy Eucharist and Feast of seventy apostles of Christ are commemorated in this season.

Season of Summer (Qaita)

The Syriac word 'Kaitha' means summer. Harvest usually takes place in the summer. The season of kaitha remembers and celebrates the growth of the church and spiritual harvest. There are seven weeks in this season. It reminds of the evangelisation of the apostles and the martyrs. As a result,



the church grew as a big tree and started bearing fruits of sanctity and martyrdom. This season, which unites the season of Sleeha and the season of Elijah-Cross-Moses, deals with the church's missionary activities and exhorts the need for a good preparation for the second coming of the saviour.

The first Sunday of Kaitha commemorates the feast of the twelve apostles, and this day is also known as Nusardel. On the Fridays of this season, we remember the martyrs and saints who witnessed Jesus courageously and thus ensured the church's growth through their martyrdom. The first Friday is dedicated to Mar Jacob of Nisibis who offered his life for the Lord; second Friday to Mar Mari, the founder of the Persian Church who is the disciple of Mar Addai; fifth Friday to Marth Shmoni and her seven children and sixth Friday to Mar Simon Bar Saba and the co-martyrs. By commemorating their feasts, the church invites the faithful to imitate them in bearing witness to Jesus.

The church grows and bears fruits only when it abides in the Messiah. God patiently waits for the children of the church to produce good fruits. The readings of this season remind us of the danger of producing bad fruits.

As the captain of the ship, Jesus protects the church, the arc of salvation, from all the powers of darkness and leads Her to Heavenly Jerusalem. Hence, this season gives us the hope that there is no place for fear for those who trust in the Lord. The world and all that is in it will be destroyed, but the true treasure of the faith in the Lord will be eternal. Therefore, this season exhorts not to linger on worldly things but to have a true treasure in heaven.

Season of Elijah-Sleeva-Moses

The central point of the seasons of Elijah-Cross-Moses is the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14. Elijah and Moses, who were present at the Transfiguration of the Lord, represent the Old Testament and the Sleeve signifies Jesus, who is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. The main themes of these seasons are the victory of the Sleeve, the Second coming of Jesus and the final judgement.

The church invites us to prepare well for the Second Coming of Jesus by producing fruits of contrition and repentance by continuously meditating on the message received from the prophets of the true God. Furthermore, this season urges the faithful to avoid sins from their lives by making them aware that the body's desires are against the spirit.

The church exhorts the liturgical community to serve the Lord, grow in fidelity, wisdom, and engage in continuous prayer and vigil to prepare for the Lord's Day. This will help them to be worthy of eternal life as wise virgins. The Sleeve is the symbol of the glorious Lord who was between Elijah and Moses at the the Transfiguration. Hence the season is called Elijah-Cross-Moses.

The bronze serpent raised by Moses in the Old Testament is a prototype of the cross on which Jesus was raised at Calvary. One who is proud of the name of the Lord is also to be proud of His suffering and cross, which is the symbol of salvation. This season reminds us that those who



follow Jesus, who died on the cross and entered into the glory of the resurrection, should also carry the cross. The readings highlight that suffering and death are essential for entry into glory. The Sleave on Calvary revealed the glory of Jesus, who did the will of God by His suffering and death. Jesus, the one who sits at the right side of the glory after his death, resurrection and ascension, comes at the end as the Judge. The faithful are exhorted to embrace the suffering that comes their way to enter the glory of the Lord who humbled Himself on the cross and was raised up by God.

Death and final judgement are the theological themes of the season of Moses. 'Those who endure till the end will attain salvation' is the word of hope that Jesus gives here. The church teaches that even though the barren trees would be thrown away, those who bear fruit, overcoming the hindrances and face the sufferings with faith, will attain solace and joy.

Season of Dedication of the Church

The season of the Dedication of the Church consists of the last four weeks in the liturgical year. These four weeks are arranged based on the dedication of the four holy places in the Old Testament (Ex 40:1-17; Josh 18:1; 1Kgs 8:62-66; Ezra 3:2).

This season signifies the victory of the church in the Eschaton and her entry into the heavenly Jerusalem. All the prayers and hymns in this season reveal the joy of the glory attained by the bride, the church who is adorned by her bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The season of the Dedication of the Church commemorates the face-to-face meeting of the church as a bride with her bridegroom Jesus Christ and her glorious entrance to eternal joy.

The tabernacle in the Old Testament is the type of the church. The Israelites experienced God's presence in this man-made tabernacle. Those who find God in Jesus and those who are vigilant enough as the wise virgins will enter with Jesus into the eternal tabernacle. This heavenly bridal chamber is not man-made. Jesus, the bridegroom, leads His bride, church, not to a temporary tabernacle, but the eternal heavenly bridal chamber. With the awareness of the perishing nature of the cities in this world, the church asks her faithful to live their life in view of heaven and its everlasting joy. She invites them to participate in the worship of truth and spirit in heaven by giving the insight that the Lord and the Lamb is the true temple in heaven. This is how the mother Church catechises her children in this season.

3. Significant Feast Days and Holy Days of Obligation (particular ones to the Syro-Malabar Church)

Major Feasts

Mar Addai and Mar Mari	Second Friday of the Season of Summer
All Saints Day	First Friday of the Season of Resurrection
Remembrance of all Departed Faithful	Last Friday of the Season of Epiphany
Saint Chavara Kuriakose Elias	3 January



Feast of Denha, the Epiphany	6 January
Annunciation	25 March
Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)	Hosana Sunday
Maundy Thursday	
Good Friday	
Easter	
New Sunday	
Mar Geevarghese Sahadha (St. George)	24 April
Mar Addai Sleeha	10 May
Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ	
Pentecost	
Saint Mariam Thresia	8 June
Mar Aprem	9 June
Dukrana of Mar Thoma Sleeha (St. Thomas)	3 July
Mar Quriaqos and mother Yolethe	15 July
70 Disciples	17 July
12 Apostles of our Lord	19 July
Saint Alphonsa	28 July
Transfiguration	6 August
Assumption of Mary	15 August
St. Simoni and her 7 Children	21 August
Mar Bartholomeo Sleeha	24 August
Saint Euphrasia	29 August
Immaculate Conception of Mary	8 December
St. Thomas Cross	18 December
Nativity of our Lord	25 December

2. The Reception of Mysteries (Sacraments)

The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. (CCC 1131)

The Seven Sacraments are grouped into three:

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Holy Eucharist
4. Confession (Penance)
5. Anointing of the Sick
6. Matrimony
7. Holy Orders



1. Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.

Sacraments of Initiation lay the foundations of every Christians life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. They are called sacraments of initiation since they initiate an individual into the life of Christ and through that into the life of the Trinity. They also lead to the life of the Church, the mystical body of Christ.

2. Sacraments of Reconciliation Penance and Anointing of the sick.

Sacraments of Reconciliation helps the faithful to reconcile with God, with others and ourselves. They also re-establish the state of grace. They help a Christian to prepare for the heavenly homeland and to complete the earthly pilgrimage together with Christ.

3. Sacraments of Vocation Holy Orders and Marriage.

Sacraments of Vocation help a Christian person to lead a particular way of life, designated by God. They are directed towards the salvation of others as well to personal salvation, through the service to others that they do. They also confer a particular mission in the church and serve to build up the People of God.

