

# THE STREAM

NEWSLETTER

An Online Publication of the Diocese of South-West America  
Sunday School Edition

## Creativity from The Creator

REV. FR. DR. JACOB MATHEW

It is with immeasurable joy that I welcome Metropolitan HG Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios to the Diocese of South-West America (DS-WA) Sunday School and its activities. We wish Your Grace well and assure our prayers so that Thirumeni may shepherd us like King David, the servant of God, who led the children of Israel to stability through green pastures and still waters.

Exodus 35:31-34 states, "He has filled him with a divine Spirit of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge in all things to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship."

When the Tabernacle of Testimony was being built everyone, whom the Spirit of God as the Spirit of Wisdom has perched upon, created all kinds of artistic works for the glory of God. They did the work to extol God, their creator. In a similar fashion, children of our Sunday Schools were asked to write creatively and express their heart through art for the glory of God. They fulfilled the task entrusted upon them, which are being showcased in this newsletter. I thank God for these children and their creativity. May God continue to bless them and make them into benevolent adults for the glory of God and growth of the Holy Church. I commend their parents for their unfailing encouragement and abiding support.

I appreciate the Sunday School Stream Team, Ms. Promila Eapen, Mr. Stephen James, Dr. Nebu John, Ms. Diane Mathew, Ms. Jessy Varughese, and Mr. Gladstone Mammen, who worked hard behind this edition. Respected Fr. Johnson Punchakonam publishes this and makes it available to the entire Diocese and beyond. Thank you Achen!



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# Sunday School Administration Team

These faces have seen each other many times through Zoom but spending time together, face to face, was special.

In October, the administration team enjoyed a 3-day meeting in Orlando, Florida and what a memorable time it was. From enjoying meals together, developing a mission and vision for Sunday School, to handing out prizes to the children at St. Paul's Orthodox Church of Greater Orlando, this trip allowed us to build relationships and ignite our love and passion for the Sunday School ministry.

## Merry Christmas



*"Teamwork is the secret that makes common people achieve uncommon results."*

IFEANYI ENOCH ONUOHA

## Meet the Team

(L - R)

- Gladstone Mammen, 12th Grade Diploma & TTC Coordinator
- Mathew Koshy, Southeast Region
- Preethy Eapen, South Region (Houston)
- Dr. Nebu John, West Region
- Rev. Fr. Dr. Jacob Mathew, SS Director
- Diane Mathew, Acting Secretary & Online SS Coordinator
- Jiji Abraham, South Region (Dallas)
- Jessy Varughese, Northwest Region
- John Chacko, Mid- West Region (Detroit)
- Stephen James, Treasurer
- John Simon, Mid-West Region (Chicago) - not pictured

# THE *Word* OF GOD

**THE WORD BECAME  
FLESH AND DWELT  
AMONG US, AND WE  
BEHELD HIS GLORY, THE  
GLORY AS OF THE ONLY  
BEGOTTEN OF THE  
FATHER, FULL OF GRACE  
AND TRUTH.  
ST. JOHN 1:14**



**Natania Varghese**  
St. Mary's Orthodox Church  
Calgary, CANADA

The "Word of God", the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, manifested in the flesh, became man and dwelt among us. His birth, life, death, and resurrection were to save the fallen world and to reestablish our communion with God, which was lost due to the sin of Adam. In the Orthodox Faith, everything we believe, practice, teach and follow, centers around the Living Word of God. So the Church teaches that the "Word of God", first and foremost, refers to a person.

Traditions, as we understand, impart beliefs from generation to generation. From a spiritual basis, it is the understanding of faith, given by Jesus to His apostles, from the apostles to the early churches (1 Corinthians 15:3), and further passed from one generation to the next, without any addition, alteration, or subtraction. In the book of 2 Thessalonians 2:15, St. Paul asks the Thessalonians to stand fast and hold the traditions which they were taught, whether by word or by epistle.

For the Orthodox Christians, tradition includes both the oral traditions, i.e. teaching passed on to us through generations, as well as the written traditions, which is the written word. One does not contradict the other or one is not superior to the other, both together provide a complete understanding of God's divine revelation to us and the fullness of the Christian faith. In fact the teachings illuminate and affirm the scriptures. This is further accentuated with the other practices of the church, like the Holy Sacraments, our worship and prayers, icons, the ecumenical councils, our dogmas and creeds, all lived out in the life of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Many Christians, primarily the doctrine of the Protestant Churches, accept the Holy Scripture or Bible as the final authority. They follow the concept of Sola Scriptura or "Scripture Alone" which states that the Bible alone contains all knowledge and understanding needed for salvation and holiness, i.e. the one and only source of the Christian faith. They think that the scriptures will personally reveal to the reader everything regarding the truth of the Gospel. But we view this concept as not scriptural.

Though a very integral part of our tradition, we do not point to the Holy Scripture alone as the ultimate and only revelation of God. As the New Testament scholar, Theodore Stylianopoulos writes: "The Scriptural books possessed authority because they were part of the tradition, that is because of their acceptance and usage in local churches."

*Continued...*

Holy Scripture contains God's divine revelation, expressed in written form, experienced and recorded by many Holy Spirit-guided writers (2 Timothy 3:16). Every line in the Holy Scriptures, which includes the Old Testament and the New Testament, is about Christ and his work to save humanity. Every word in Scripture is put in context and understanding of the one who believes in Christ and is a member of the Church. Scripture is not self-interpreting, and nowhere in the Bible, it is stated Scripture alone contains the whole truth.

The Old Testament mentions many instances where people are either reading or quoting from the scriptures. Even during the time of Jesus's ministry, he is referencing books of the prophets. Christ himself taught how to read and interpret the Bible, an example of this we read when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-25). Christ is the key to understanding the scripture. The Early Church, that is, the pre-denominational Church did not have notions such as "tradition vs teaching. Scriptures were then not commonly available to everyone and in their homes. People went to the synagogues and temples to listen and learn from the scripture. Thus even in the Holy Eucharist today, when the Holy Evangelion is being read, we don't open our Bibles to follow through but we listen from the scripture reading. The practices and beliefs of the Early Church, when it was undivided, are still the same practices and beliefs of the Church, today even in the year 2021.

There are also some disputes between the churches on the number of accepted Old Testament books. This was mainly due to the language used in writing the Bible and the people who followed it. During the time of Jesus, a number of Jews lived in different parts of the Roman Empire outside of Palestine, and their main mode of communication was Greek. The Holy Scripture used at this time was in the Greek language and this was known as the Septuagint, which means seventy, because of the number of people involved in the formation. This included the 49 books of the Old Testament and was inherited by the early Christian community. Another version of the Bible was followed by the Aramic speaking Jews and this was the Syriac Peshitta version. It is similar in content to the Septuagint, but is with 46 books in the Old Testament. The council of Jamnia closed a canon of the Bible in AD 90 with 39 books, which is followed by the Protestant Churches. Our Church considers the Syriac Peshitta translation with 73 books ( 46 OT and 27 NT) as our Bible.

Unlike the Old Testament, all Christian denominations (including Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox) affirm that there are 27 books in the New Testament. In 367 A.D., St. Athanasius wrote a Paschal Letter where the books were listed in the same order as is seen in today's Holy Bible. He did not choose or dictate that these books be used in this order, but rather he confirmed in his Paschal letter that those were the books used by the Church at that time. We also see writings from a local council held earlier at Carthage in 318AD that made note of these books.

Thus, Holy Tradition is not limited to what is written in the Bible, but instead is the total life and experience of the Church which in turn is guided and directed by the Holy Spirit. The fullness of Christ's revelation lives in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and it is through the Church, with all its traditions, that we know, understand and learn from the Holy Scripture.



**Sarah Varghese**  
St. Thomas  
Orthodox Church  
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**Ethan Alex**  
St. Gregorios Orthodox  
Church  
San Lorenzo, CA

McKenna

thought she would be able to choose the right pathways when tough decisions needed to be made by hard choices in her life. McKenna was a smart teenager who always puts God first in her life followed by her parent's teaching of love, respect and honor. The wrong choices in her life led to dishonor and disrespect toward her parents and close family members. McKenna soon realized choices for humans will be pathways with temptations but the way one chooses these roads will lead people to become better Christians.

McKenna grew up in a spiritual Christian family with loving parents and one sibling. McKenna's parents always preached about the Bible and constantly instilled what the Lord would want from them on how to live out a good Christian based life. She never thought that some situations can implicate consequences that cannot be changed because of the choices made for fame and friendship.

McKenna was 16 and wanted to go out with her friends to a party. Her parents were fine with it because she had always honored and respected the rules set by her parents on these types of events. The limitations and boundaries were set to McKenna as a child so that she could be independent to make the choices when these types of scenarios arose in her life. She went to the party, and temptations followed such as picking up a drink and asking to leave the party to go somewhere else. She was tempted as she did not explore drinking or going out to other places. She initially said no, but her friends peer pressured her into having one drink which led to multiple drinks. She went to other places with her friends while being drunk only to cause heart ache later that night.

McKenna woke up in the ER the next morning. She forgot everything that happened the night before. When she looked around in her room, she could see her loved ones standing bedside her. She immediately retrieved all the images of what she did the night before. She knew lying, dishonoring and disrespect were fine lines she crossed by the choices made the night before. Even though she made wrong choices McKenna's parents were just so happy to see her open her eyes. They weren't angry, or they were excited to see their daughter alive!

The doctor came into the room and didn't look so happy so McKenna knew something was up. The doctor said "McKenna, you were in a brutal car accident last night which caused us to amputate your legs." McKenna thought the doctor was joking but to her shocking surprise she looked down and realized both her legs were gone! McKenna's blood alcohol was three times the normal rate, and she was behind the wheel the night before. Her friends came out of the accident with bruises and scratches, but McKenna lost the ability to ever walk again. Her dreams were shattered because of the choices she made just so her friends would think she was adventurous and courageous.

McKenna realized that choices could have been different at the party. She knew drinking was wrong and even more dangerous driving while under the influence. All of this could have been prevented if she just listened to the Lord's teaching of obeying your father and mother. It was in the Lord's ten commandments that she read over and over as a child. The ten commandments are a baseline to live our life down the righteous path to the Lord's kingdom. If we listen to God's teachings and parables, we can understand the love and compassion He has for us. Therefore, the choices McKenna should have made come with grace and happiness.

If only McKenna honored her father and mother's wishes. If she remembered the lessons the Lord and her parents taught her when she was growing up. If only she asked herself "Would my parents want me to do this? Would the Lord be angry with me if I did this?"



## McKenna's STORY

**Jiya Jiju Thomas**  
St. Mary's Orthodox Church  
Houston, Texas



**Lian Elsa Linton**  
**St. Gregorios Orthodox Church**  
**San Lorenzo, CA**

# A *Deceptive* WORLD

What a beautiful world we live in!  
Filled to the brim with wondrous sights, A  
coalescence of lights on starry nights, Of such a  
vision, there seems to be no twin.

How I wish to learn more of God's gracious gift!  
Every nook and corner, every tiny little thing,  
Brings joy to me and to which I will cling, For all the  
days of this everlasting shift.

So my studies of the world begin,  
My thirst for knowledge insatiable,  
And while I declare the world sensational, A  
terrible truth settles within.

Behind the mirage of this alluring world,  
Desperation furtively lurks inside,  
Powerful appearances misguide,  
But now, the mask has lifted, its horrors unfurled.

Oh, how I wish for this knowledge to detach!  
Overwhelmed with grief, seeing this brutality, My  
heart is struck with sudden reality, My greed has  
finally met its match.

Knowledge is mesmerizing to those afar, But  
receive it, with prudent attention,  
For reality does not match its intention, And grief  
will join your path as a sidebar.



**Raphael Abraham**  
**St. Thomas Orthodox Church**  
**Chicago, Illinois**



Hanna Abraham

St. Thomas Orthodox Cathedral  
Houston, Texas

Holy Lent



What is Holy Lent? Google definition says “Lent is a solemn religious observance in the Christian liturgical calendar devoted to fasting, abstinence, and penitence commemorating the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert and enduring the temptations of the devil”. But what if a person cannot fast or abstain from food? Does that mean that they can’t observe Lent or the fasts? And that is what the topic of my essay is: “How can we observe Lent even though we may not abstain from food or certain types of food as prescribed by the Church?”. In order to understand what is lent / fast, we have to understand its purpose.

About a year ago we adopted a puppy. Before we walked out of the adoption agency the lady who was helping out gave us a few instructions and guidelines to follow in terms of taking care of the puppy and also the changes we would need to make as he grows, for instance when to feed, brush, give bath, when to give him his heartworm medicine, his flea medication etc. It was all timed, and was in order. My dad told her that he had dogs before and knew what to do. The lady was polite and said the instructions are given to everyone who adopts animals from the agency. They are given in order to help us grow the puppy into a healthy dog. It's up to us how we follow them based on our life circumstances. The purpose of having guidelines was to help us so we can take care of the puppy the right way and the puppy can grow into a healthy dog. In the same way the Church gives us guidelines for a healthy spiritual life which helps us in our salvation. And lent or fast is one tool that is given to us by the church to boost our spiritual life. The purpose of fast is not just abstinence from food but rather abstinence from all our passions.

What are passions? Passion is defined as a strong and barely controllable emotion. That is why the fathers of our church say that passions lead us to sin. St. John Climacus in his book “The Ladder of Divine Ascent” divides the passions into two categories: Spiritual and Physical. The examples of physical passions are: gluttony, lust, greed. Examples of some spiritual passions are: envy, anger, sloth, and pride. In our Holy Qurbana book these 7 are written as “The seven grievous sins”. Hence, we see passions are the emotions that can control us and can lead us to commit sin. Sin doesn't start when a thought comes into our mind. Sin starts when we start acting on that thought. Our challenge is to overcome this thought so we can avoid sin. And one of the ways we can do that is through fasting. Christ fasted for 40 days before His public ministry sets an example for us to reflect upon. St. Athanasius the Great says, “devils take great delight in fullness, and drunkenness and bodily comfort. Fasting possesses great power and it works glorious things: To fast is to banquet with angels.” So in order for us to overcome our passions we have to use the tools that are given to us by the Orthodox Church.

How can fast help us overcome our passions? Observing fast is not just about giving up and overcoming our passions, but also the path we take to overcome it. During the Holy Lent/ fast, we are asked to pray more and practice almsgiving. Prayer is the communication with God that helps us stay in a relationship with him. It helps us stay on our path to our salvation. We were created to be in communion with God but when our passions overtake us we distance ourselves from Him. So, when we are in prayer we are in God's presence and distant from the one that tempts us all the time. When we do almsgiving, we are doing the work of Christ on His behalf. As children we may not have the money to give to charities, but we definitely can give back to our community by helping out at soup kitchens, food banks, packing care packages for the needy etc. Even simple things like helping out my mom in the kitchen without being asked shows my love for her. When we put the needs of others before ours it teaches us generosity, and kindness. These are the virtues that will help us fight our passions.

While abstaining from food to participate in Holy Lent/fast, we pray harder and through God's grace we overcome the temptations of our passions. Fasting is one of the commandments given to us by Christ. “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with the sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face”- St. Matthew 6:16-17. We see Christ didn't say if you fast but when you fast. We are called to fast as best as we can. And when we fast, we are not to show off but be humble about everything that we do. That is the only way we will find grace in the eyes of Christ and transform our lives like he wants us to. What we need to remember is when we are not focusing on Christ, the devil will get our attention and our passions will overtake us, similar to the guidelines we got from the adoption agency to help guide us take care of our Dog. Our church gives us tools that will help us stay on our path to salvation and live in communion with God. Lent/fast is one of the tools given to us by the Church. Lets us remember the real purpose of fasting and participate in it so that by God's grace the tools given by the Church will help us grow closer to God.

*“Fasting gives birth to prophets and strengthens the powerful; fasting makes lawgivers wise. Fasting is a good safeguard for the soul, a steadfast companion for the body, a weapon for the valiant, and a gymnasium for athletes.” - Saint Basil the Great*





**Jerin Mathews**  
St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church  
Chatsworth, CA

The black clouds seemed odd.  
The sea looked unhappy.  
I cried and gathered the people.  
They thought I was going crazy.  
They walked away, calling me names.

I gathered the supplies required to construct a ship.  
Looking at the village made me unhappy.  
When the boat was ready.  
I went back to the village.  
I cried and gathered the people.  
They thought I was going crazy.  
They walked away, calling me names.

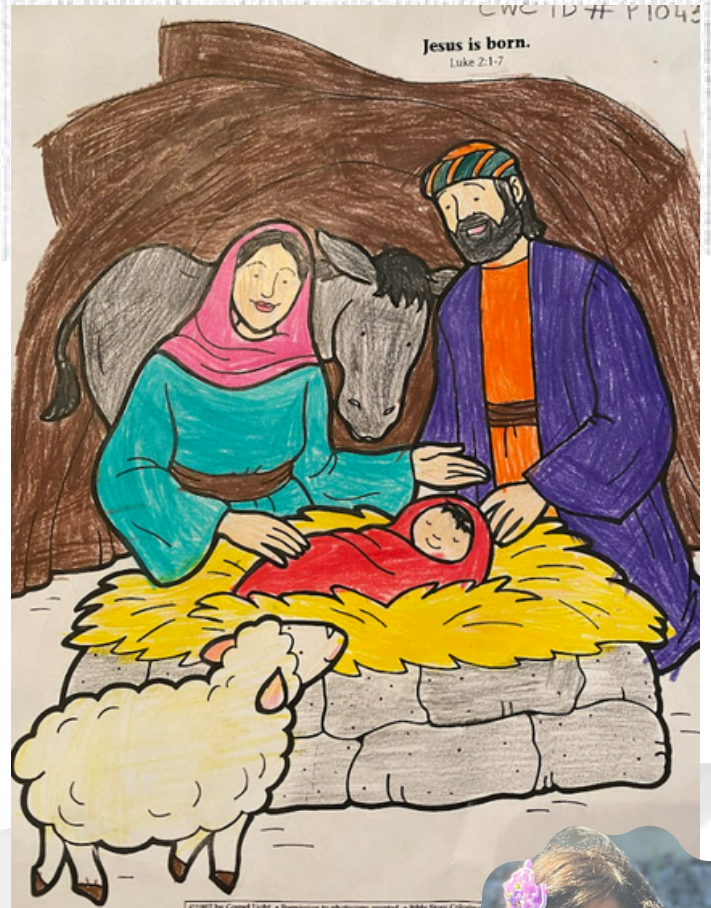
Walking back alone didn't feel wise.  
I gathered animals.  
And directed them to the boat.  
It started to drizzle as I sailed away with the animals.  
It didn't take long as the drizzle changed into a  
thunderstorm.

The storm didn't stop for a while.

When it finally stopped pouring.  
I sailed back to my village.  
The village looked nothing like before.  
Houses had sailed away.  
I walked through the street as I found no one there.  
They thought I was going crazy.  
They walked away, calling me names.



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St. Gregorios Orthodox  
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Edmonton, CANADA



**Evelyn Phylimon**  
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Edmonton, CANADA



# Iconography

## Within

**Julia Elizabeth Varghese**

**St. George Indian Orthodox Church**

**San Antonio, Texas**



the Orthodox church, we have many special and meaningful traditions that impact our daily worshipful lives. Our Qurbana service itself, containing many liturgical hymns and responses created by the fathers, was preserved and written in a way to magnify our Creator in Heaven. The roles of Sacraments, creeds, and songs in our church envelope the Orthodox church's beliefs and love for the Holy Trinity. One of the most important traditions that the Orthodox Church upholds is iconography. Iconography in the Orthodox church is important as it is a "window to heaven" and conveys the symbolic meaning of worship.

We, as Orthodox Christians, use each of our five senses to worship our Lord. Through sound, we partake in the sayings and liturgy of the church. Through smell, we absorb the aroma of the incense. Through taste, we partake in the body and blood of Christ. Through sight, we intake the sight of the mystical icons of our church. As we see through our eyes, iconography is, therefore, a window to heaven. As we look upon the icons of our church fathers, saints, and Christ, we are elevated to a sense greater than ourselves as the icons serve as a "window to heaven". They show us the kindness and love of Christ as they portray each icon with intricacy and majesty. Through the icons of our church, we can see the trueness and humility of Christ.

Iconography in the Orthodox church is important because it conveys the symbolic meaning of worship for us as Christians. A common misconception of others as they look into the Orthodox faith is that we worship our icons. This, however, is far from the truth as we believe that the worship and prayer towards the tangible item itself is a form of idolatry and, therefore, sin. We, instead prayerfully, look to the icons as an aid for us in our lives. Rather than looking upon the icons and worshiping them, we seek to implement their beauty and mysticism into our spiritual lives and seek to become closer to our Father in Heaven. The symbolic meaning of these non-ordinary paintings portrays the beauty of the Orthodox church and the worshipful lives we partake in.

Iconography is one of the most important aspects of the Orthodox church, becoming more and more prevalent in each of our churches. It has and will continue to impart a profound impact on us as Orthodox Christians. The importance of iconography in our church is a valuable understanding to have as it impacts our daily life and our eternal well-being. The role of iconography in our spiritual and prayer lives is important and shows the love of our Father each and every day.

**Sarah Rebecca Chandapillai**  
**St. Gregorios Orthodox Church**  
**San Lorenzo, CA**



# THE PRODIGAL SON

- There would be a father and 2 sons living in a luxurious house, but the younger son would be spoiled and be very sinful
- One day, the younger son demanding his share of the wealth would go on a journey with his friends resulting in him spending all his money
- The son would be so ashamed of his actions, making him scared to go back home.
- Eventually he got the courage and returned home, but surprisingly the father accepted him with open arms and would even hold a feast for his sons return

## How this is important in our lives:

- We are seen as the younger son who is sinful and straying away from God
- God is represented as the father who is waiting for us to return, who will accept us and be filled with gladness that we return.



## PARABLES AND MIRACLES

BY

Jesus



**Jacob Varghese**

St. Thomas Orthodox Church of India  
Phoenix, Arizona

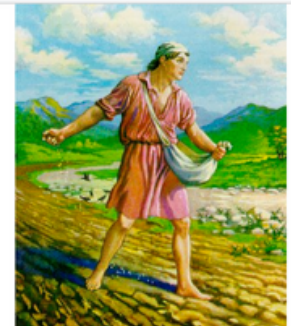


## THE HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN

- During the ministry of Jesus, he would encounter a blind man who would be laying beside a wall begging for money
- The disciples asked if he was blind due to his or his parents' sins, but Jesus said it was so that the works of God should be revealed in him.
- Jesus spit on the ground, so he could make some mud. He applied it on the blind man's face, and told him go to a nearby bath and wash his face
- The blind man would wash his face, and by the work of God he can see again, but other people would be suspicious of what was happening especially the Pharisees
- The pharisees would kick him out from the synagogue, but the blind man knew that this was the work of the Son of God
- **How this is important in our lives:** As we continue to walk with God through meditation, prayer, reading of Scripture, He enlightens us.

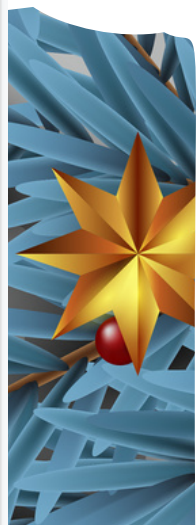
## PARABLE OF THE SOWER

- In this parable, there is a sower(farmer) who is beginning to plant his seeds for the next years harvest
- However, some of the seeds fall onto rocks and its roots can't grow from the rock, so it dies
- Some can grow on the thorns, but after it grows the thorns will choke it causing it to die
- But the rest grows on good soil due to it growing from a good foundation



### How this is important for our daily life:

- The seeds represent the word of God
- The sower is Jesus
- The ground in which the seeds fall, are us, humans
- The seeds on the rocks, are seen as the people who receive the word but endure only for a while.
- The seeds that fall on the thorns are the people who hear the word of God, but don't follow it
- But the seeds that grow on the good soil, are the people who understand and follow the words of God



**AS AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN, WHAT  
IS YOUR RESPONSE TO THE  
QUESTION, "ARE YOU SAVED?"**



**Joel Abraham**

**St. Thomas Orthodox Church of India  
Phoenix, Arizona**

*As an Orthodox Christian, I am saved  
through Christ's death and resurrection.*

We are saved from our bondage to sin and are saved to Sonship, to become the divine children of God. I am being saved daily through theosis, sacraments, and my participation in the life of church. I will be saved at the great and the final judgment at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Salvation plays an important role in knowing whether we are saved. As an Orthodox Christian, I am saved through Christ's death, resurrection, and His salvific works.

We know that Jesus died on the cross to save us. Through his death, he has saved us from sin. In Orthodox belief, we believe that we can get into the kingdom of God because Jesus died on the cross defeating death and resurrection. God wants us to be with Him in His kingdom. Christ's death and resurrection is the reason why we are saved and can be alive even though we may (physically) die.

Salvation is a process of growth of a whole person whereby the sinner is transformed into the likeness of God. It begins with the sacrament of Holy Baptism and Chrismation. Salvation is a life lived in repentance and faith. We are saved by faith through grace. Salvation can occur through baptism, Holy Communion, and confession. For the Orthodox Christians, it is a lifelong process that happens over time. Becoming like Christ is our salvation, our return to Paradise, and communion with him. There is always a struggle against sin and as described by a monk, "we fall down, and we get up, we fall down, and we get up".

Theosis is the understanding that human beings can have real union with God, and so become like God. For Orthodox Christians, salvation is a process and not a once and done event. The Greek word for this process is called Theosis or deification. The end goal of salvation is Theosis.

We want to reach the kingdom of God but sometimes we are confused about how to reach there. We do not begin this once we die, but during our life in this world. In Corinthians 2: 4-16, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." We sin every day and God shows us how we are nothing without Him. If we want to repent and identify our sins, then God will have great pleasure in telling us our sins. If we repent more, God will be more willing to show us our need for repentance. It is hard to do this in life but if one will take on the difficulties, then we will be getting closer to Jesus, one step at a time.

As an Orthodox Christian, I believe that I am saved. Christ's death and resurrection is the reason why we are saved and can be alive after death. We must work hard to attain eternal life so that we can be with him. We must fast, repent, and have faith in order to attain salvation which is a process that is attained over someone's life. In order to be saved, we must attain Theosis. If we want God to be in our lives, we must change ourselves to be closer to him. As an Orthodox Christian, I have been saved, I am being saved, and my hope that I shall be saved.



# God Resists The Proud

**Nikhita Roshan Thomas**

**St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church  
Calgary, CANADA**

*As a child on the threshold of teens,  
My mind is filled with dreams.  
Always busy planning what's next,  
Never allowing a moment's rest.*

*Many a feat I have achieved,  
Be it in studies or ideas I have conceived.  
Isn't this true happiness?  
But then, why this shadow of emptiness?*

*And then I met another teen,  
Who said "yes" to our God unseen.  
Yes to bring His child to this world  
At the risk of stones being hurled.*

*When the angel said to Mary:  
The Son of God thou shall carry,  
She did not let pride take its wings  
But praised God who does mighty things.*

*When shepherds thronged,  
And wise men came from beyond,  
Upon God, her thoughts she centered,  
Everything in her heart she pondered.*

*Like Mary, let my thoughts be made one  
With the words of our God's only Son-  
'I am meek and humble of heart,  
Learn from me and your soul shall rest.'*

*Let humility be my garment  
Lest arrogance mislead my judgment,  
For not by pride do we mount to God on high.  
But it is the humble that He draws nigh.*



**Naomi Mariam Nohin**  
**St. Gregorios Orthodox  
Church of India  
SanLorenzo, CA**





## Why do we baptize infants in Orthodox Church?

Orthodoxy is based on Tradition, a combination of oral tradition and written tradition. Orthodoxy also relies on Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church into all truth. I would like to see infant baptism on the basis of Orthodox tradition. Infant baptism is the practice of baptizing infants or young children. Infant baptism is also called Christening by some faith traditions. There are different groups in Christianity that practice infant baptism. They are Catholics, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, and some Protestants.

First of all, we should see whether infant baptism is Biblical. The Bible tells us about five separate household baptisms: Baptisms at The Household of Cornelius, The Household of Lydia, The Philippian Jailor's Household, The Household of Crispus, The Household of Stephanas. The first four are mentioned in Acts chapter 11 through 16 and the last is mentioned in 1st Corinthians chapter 1. The word 'household' for any Israelite includes everybody in the household which means children are also included. We must remember that a household always included children throughout Scripture.

The Bible teaches us that under the Old Covenant, every male child was circumcised on the eighth day after birth. With his circumcision, the child became a full and complete member of the covenant. He could eat of the Passover sacrifice. Jesus did not have a problem with children gaining full inclusion to the covenant: He Himself was circumcised as an infant (Luke 2:21), like John the Forerunner (Luke 1:59). In Luke 18, some children are brought to Jesus to receive a blessing. His disciples try to interfere. But Jesus said to his disciples, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God". Jesus is in fact including children in His Kingdom. Baptism helps children fulfill this rite.

Jesus was once an infant Himself. And Jesus was God, even in His mother's womb. Orthodox Church has always declared that in Him, human joined together with God from the moment of His conception, and the Orthodox believe that His Kingdom belongs to children.

Baptism is not magic. It is an act of submission to God. It is a promise to live in relationship with God. The larger body of baptized believers is the Church. The earthly family is an image of the heavenly family, the family of the Kingdom of God. Children born to a Christian family are born again into the heavenly family through baptism. A child baptized in the Orthodox Church belongs to the spiritual family. This family bridges both heaven and earth. It includes the saints and angels too. The Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation is told by Christ Himself, when He commanded His Apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (St. Matthew 28:19)



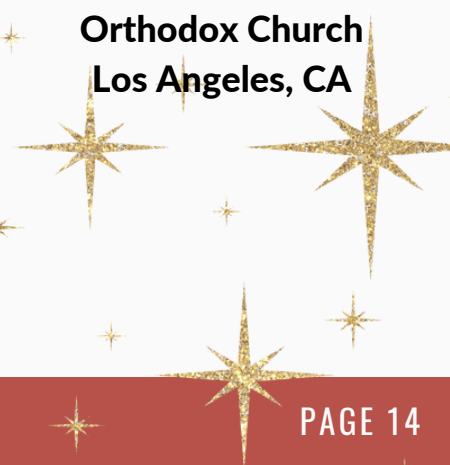
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**Hannah Kurian**  
**St. Thomas Malankara**  
**Orthodox Church**  
**Los Angeles, CA**



Hannah Kurian


St. Thomas Malankara

Orthodox Church

Los Angeles, CA



Continued...



What happens to a child when he or she is baptized? Each action in the Sacrament of Baptism expresses what Christ is actually doing for us through this Sacrament. To start with, the priest calls upon the Godparent to renounce the devil and all his works for the child. The Godparent faces the West during the renunciation of Satan, while the priest faces the East. The Godparent speaks on behalf of the child and forcefully rejects Satan. The priest then faces West and asks the Godparent to accept God on behalf of the Child and this is done while the Godparent faces the east. After this, the priest makes the sign of the cross on the child's body. Then the Godparent is asked to proclaim his/her faith in Christ on behalf of the infant. The Godparent will recite the Nicene Creed. The infant will be given a Biblical name and is accepted as a member of the church. The child is taken to the Baptismal font. The Baptismal Font represents the Divine Womb where we receive the second birth as children of God. Water is used for cleansing. So through Baptism, Christ cleanses us from sin. The priest blesses the water in the baptismal font, adding a small amount of Holy Chrism (Holy Myron). The immersion in water symbolizes death, since a person cannot live long under, we share in Christ's death. The infant is baptized in the Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The infant is taken out of the font promising to surrender their life to Christ, the Savior. The person who has been baptized comes out of the baptismal font without sin, as a new person.

After this Chrismation is done. It is considered as the fulfillment of baptism. The priest will anoint the newly baptized with Holy Myron all over the body with the words: "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit". The infant is now a temple of God. Immediately following baptism, the newly baptized receives the precious Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The greatest benefit of being Orthodox is participation in the sacramental life, the greatest manifestation of which is to receive Holy Communion. After Baptism the child is invited to be a frequent participant in the Holy Eucharist. Then the infant is taken to the Holy altar and kisses the altar.

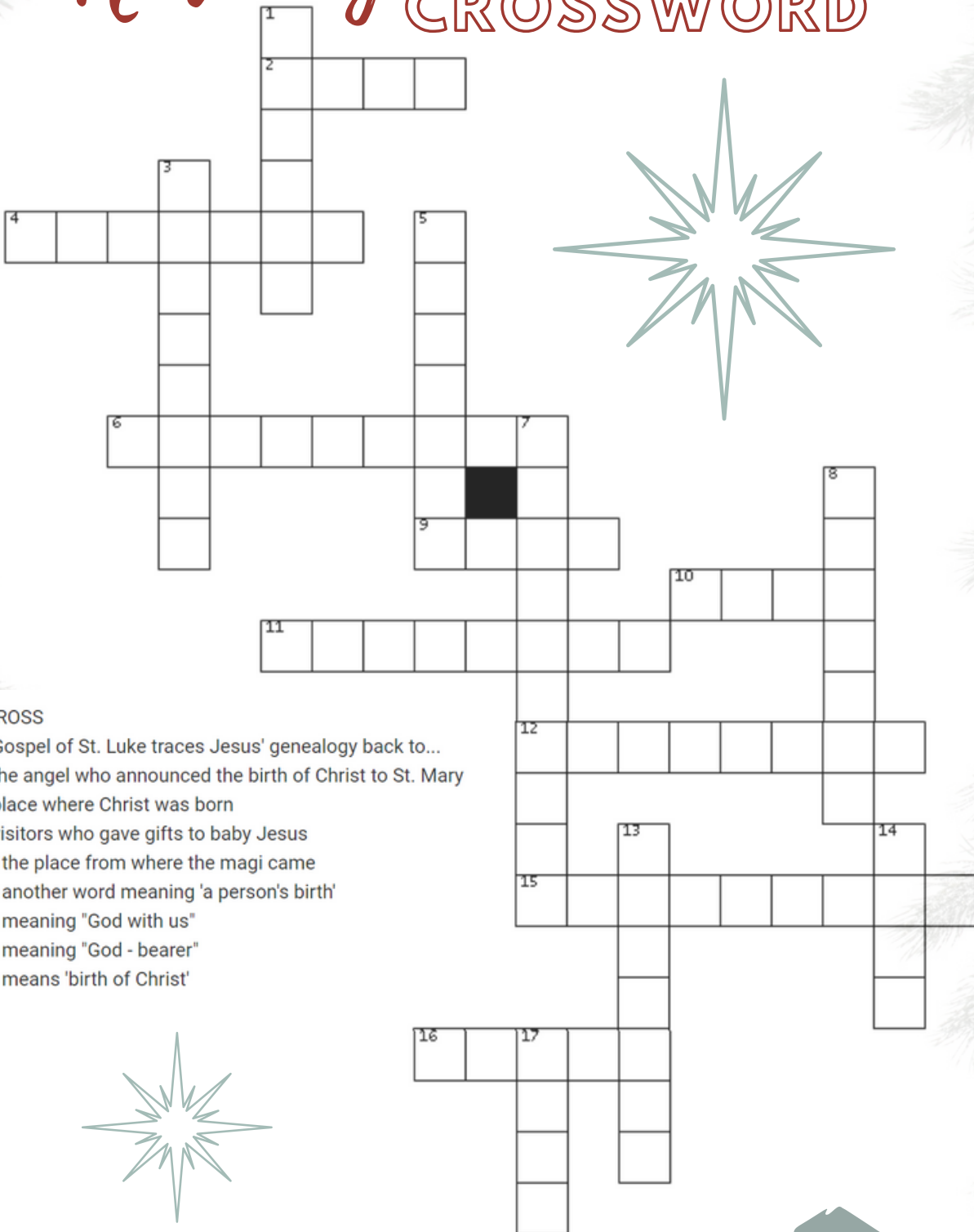
There are also concerns related to infant baptism. One among them is what if the child rejects Christ in later life. This is a real concern but not a reason for denying them baptism and communion. Baptism should be accepted as the Lord commanded us to do. When it is decided to baptize an infant, it is the responsibility of the spiritual family to do everything to bring up that child in Christ through their words and deeds. Raising children up in the life in Christ will give them a much better chance of carrying this life beyond parental guardianship.

Another thought is that unbaptized children will go to hell when they die. It is not true. The Orthodox Church does not believe that children are born guilty, nor do we believe that unless freed of that guilt through baptism and communion, they will die without God's mercy. The child entering the Church through baptism becomes a new person in Christ and is cleansed of all the sins.

Baptism is more than just an outward expression of an inward acceptance of Christ. Baptism effects a change in one's status with God. It is more than a mere sign. The rite of baptism has always been understood as an entrance into the saving covenant, an enrollment in the Lamb's book of life, a union with the whole people of God, and the giving of a new citizenship in the heavenly Kingdom. It enables us to partake of the Holy Eucharist.

Clearly, Baptism is more than just a formality. Each child is a full human being. A child of any age is capable of experiencing the grace of God. Christ Himself sanctified every age as God-bearing, since He was as much the perfect Word of God as an infant as when He was a grown man. Even if babies don't understand what that baptism means, they are certainly capable of intuitively understanding it. Our children are adopted by God and blessed by the water and the Spirit. It helps children to lead a life of piety and partake of the Holy Sacrament from their earliest days, which is undoubtedly going to help them in the future. With that said, we have to remember that the Church lets children to be baptized under the condition that they shall be brought up in the faith and piety by their faithful parents and godparents, so that they would try to grow become a perfect human being, in the measure of the stature of the fullness of

# Nativity CROSSWORD



## ACROSS

2. Gospel of St. Luke traces Jesus' genealogy back to...
4. the angel who announced the birth of Christ to St. Mary
6. place where Christ was born
9. visitors who gave gifts to baby Jesus
10. the place from where the magi came
11. another word meaning 'a person's birth'
12. meaning "God with us"
15. meaning "God - bearer"
16. means 'birth of Christ'

## DOWN

1. the nativity fast gives praise to which person of the Trinity?
3. the message of Christ's birth was divinely given through...
5. Gospel of St. Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy back to...
7. St. Mary's song of praise is also called The...
8. this gospel traces Jesus' genealogy through Joseph, the Betrothed
13. fasting and prayer are both spiritual...that the Lord gave us
14. he leaped in Elizabeth's tummy when St. Mary came to visit
17. this gospel traces Jesus' genealogy through St. Mary







# *Linus Project*

**ST. GREGORIOS ORTHODOX CHURCH  
ELMHURST, ILLINOIS**

On Sunday, May 15, 2022, the 9th Grade Sunday School class organized an in-person service project open to all students of our Sunday School from Pre-KG to 12th Grade. Over 30 students stayed into the afternoon making 25 tie blankets that were successfully delivered to Project Linus (<https://www.projectlinus.org>). Project Linus will distribute these blankets to hospitals, shelters, social service agencies, and other places where children are in need.





## ST. THOMAS ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL HOUSTON, TEXAS

Project Linus was born out of the love and the willingness to care for and help children going through cancer. Through the years the project has been expanded and extended to all kids going through difficult circumstances. It provides security and comfort during tough times.

As part of our Orthodox faith, we are called to live a life of Christian stewardship. The 10th grade kids learned about giving and service as part of the lesson on "stewardship". The kids understand that the one key element to stewardship is service, which means offering our best to Christ by helping those around us. On May 21, 2022, the kids put into practice the lessons learned by bringing the St. Thomas church family together to make blankets for the Linus Project. They set a goal to donate 50 blankets, which was approximately \$1000.00.

There were two parts to the project: raising the money to buy materials for the blanket and signing up volunteers to make the blanket. To achieve these goals the kids reached out for support to the church community by making announcements at church on Sundays, sending weekly reminders to all the church organizations on WhatsApp, posting flyers around the Church and on social media.

By the Grace of God and the support of the Church families the kids were able to make 81 blankets to donate to the Linus project.

## Linus Project



# In other NEWS

## Online Sunday School

The second year of the Online Sunday School is even more exciting than the first. We have **108 children registered from across 13 parishes in US and Canada**. There are classes every Sunday for Pre-KG to Grade 12, led by a team of 14 teachers, substitute teachers, technical support and an intern. The Online Sunday School caters to parishes that have less than 25 children in their Sunday school. If your current Sunday school meets this criteria, please reach out to -

[onlinesundayschool.dswa@gmail.com](mailto:onlinesundayschool.dswa@gmail.com)

## SUNDAY SCHOOL DAY

This year our annual Sunday School Day was celebrated in all parishes on Sunday, December 4, 2022. A special monetary collection of \$10 per child should be collected to support the diocese Sunday School programs and activities. We encourage all parents and well-wishers to participate. The total collected amount from each parish shall be sent to the Diocesan center latest by December 31, 2022.

## College Internship Program

The Sunday school team of the Diocese of South-West America launched another venture- The College Internship program. We invited applications from undergraduate students to participate in this program from across the Diocese. **We received 9 applications and have selected all of them this year as our Interns** to work with the Sunday school administration team in different capacities. This includes Curriculum, Portal, Newsletter, Diploma Analytical Study of the feedback and follow up, Online Sunday School, CWC, TTC and Diploma. The program starts on December 01, 2022.

## Parent Voices

Save the Date:  
**Saturday**  
**January 21, 2023**

Save the Time:  
3pm CST

A zoom link will be sent closer to the date.

Behold, Children are the Lord's inheritance; The fruit of the womb His reward" Psalm 126:3 (OSB). Every home is a miniature church and the children learn to worship and get familiarized with the faith in this micro ecclesia. Parents, Grandparents and other family members are therefore, the primary teachers of faith and worship to the children. The Sunday School of the Diocese of South-West America appreciates and count-on the efforts the parents are putting in. This is the foundation of the formal Sunday school and thank you for all your commitments there in the Diocesan Sunday School is scheduling a meeting for the parents to get even more involved in the activities. Therefore **all parents are invited to the town hall meeting** where questions can be asked, concerns brought up and suggestions given. Let us work together as a team to make the faith of our children stronger in the years to come. All are welcome. God bless!