

**A study on the Symbols and the Liturgy of
the
Mar Thoma Church Holy Communion Service
– a guide for today's youth**



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May I have a word with you?

For a long-time now, I have come across an increasing number of worshippers of the Mar Thoma church, both young & old (mostly young) who are dissatisfied with our pattern or way of worship - some of these folks find this down-right “boring”!! **This book is for all such individuals.**

Many of our church youth (especially those who grow up outside Kerala) are misunderstood as not conforming to Church traditions, etc. *I suspect that the problem lies much deeper than that.* Let me explain myself. I believe that more than disinterestedness, it is a **lack of understanding** of what it means to worship God and more specifically, the meaning of our liturgical form of worship that is at the centre of their apparent “disinterestedness” in our worship.

I freely confess that worshipping God using the liturgy of the Holy Qurbana Service (more so in Malayalam!) is **fascinating**, yes, and even **exciting!** I am convinced that a proper study of the **symbols** and **liturgy** the Holy Qurbana Service with the Word of God will marvelously enrich our worship. A study of this nature will lead the seeking believer to worship our great and awesome God in the way He wanted us to – in Spirit & in truth. I invite you on this adventurous journey of studying what our worship is all about.

I first began studying the Mar Thoma liturgy of the Holy Qurbana service in 1994 when I was studying as a pre-final year MBBS student at Vellore and again now years later, I have revised it and realized that my understanding of worshipping Him has increased in these past years.

As I myself am not a theologian, it is my hope that this will appeal to the *non-theological* worshipper. Also, as one who has had all his childhood outside Kerala, I hope that others like me will benefit from this study. I invite any comments, criticisms and questions the reader may have and pray that we will together continue to learn what it really means to worship our great and Almighty God.

This bible study has also been made available as a *free* online e-book. Check out www.marthomaliturgy.wordpress.com or www.tinyurl.com/marthoma for access and refer to any who may be blessed.

With prayers for you,

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Chapter 1

Introduction to worship in the Mar Thoma Church

We who worship in the Mar Thoma church are sometimes accused by those who have a “free worship” meaning - without using a liturgy that we are not worshipping God the way He is supposed to be. There are those who say that they cannot concentrate and *meaninglessly* say “**Amen**” without knowing what they are saying Amen to. We will deal with liturgy later in this chapter.

I grew up in Calcutta and the church there was small compared to churches in Kerala though much bigger than our church at Vellore. Our church is situated in the middle of a crowded *bustee* (slum) and adjacent to our church are several houses. It is altogether a very congested area. *Let me narrate one incident that took place.* One Sunday, my mother told me of a conversation she had after worship. The auntie who sat next to her in church told her that because of the **incessant** sound of the pressure cooker in the house next door, she could not concentrate on the worship. Amma told me she didn't know what to say because she never even *heard* the pressure cooker! If you know my mother, you'll not doubt the veracity of this story. **A true worshipper is able to worship God even when there are disturbances.**

So, with that example, let me begin with the most obvious question – *what is worship?* What do we actually *intend to do* when we come to church to worship God? There is an old popular English chorus which has the following beautiful words, “.. *the reason I live is to worship you.*” Throughout the Bible, we read of examples of God's people worshipping Him. This purpose of man's creation on the earth is for man and God to have fellowship with each other. Probably the **most important** part of our relationship with God is worship.

Worshipping God was never meant to be a *mere ritual*. It is a *conscious, deliberate* act of **adoration, praise** and **humbling** ourselves before the awesome Creator God, Yahweh. Worshipping God is not to be confined to a Sunday morning service, but rather it is to be a constant, day by day, fellowship with the Lord. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross **DAILY** and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

Let us take a brief look at what it means to worship God. The word 'worship' is derived from an old English word '*weorthscipe*' which is '*worth*' + '*-scipe*' or ship. When we worship God we are acknowledge His *immense* WORTH! *His worth is immeasurable and so must our worship be.* Worshipping God means giving of ourselves entirely to God – **unconditionally, completely & humbly**. Paul tells us that "to make a *decisive dedication* of your bodies, *presenting all of your members and faculties* as a *living sacrifice*, holy and well pleasing to God is your reasonable sacrifice and spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1)

While we are on the topic, let us look at the Biblical use of the word 'worship'. In the Old Testament the word in Hebrew is ***shachah*** which means to be prostrate (in homage) to God. In the New Testament, three Greek words have been used. The most common word used 59 times is ***proskuneo*** which means to kiss (like a dog licking his master's hand) or to fawn or crouch. The idea is that of the worshipper falling down to kiss the ground before the King of kings, or to kiss His feet. The other words are ***sebomai*** meaning "to hold in awe" and ***latreuo*** meaning "to render religious service of homage." Let us keep these in mind when we come together to worship God.

Worshipping God must necessarily involve **praise, thanksgiving** and **prayer**. The word of God is filled with illustrations where people gave praise to God and did many mighty deeds. The word of God says that He is "ENTHRONED upon the praises" of His people. (Psalm 22:3)

Praise and thanksgiving go hand in hand. We are commanded to "give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians: 5:20). At ALL times and for EVERYTHING! Though mentioned in the imperative, thanksgiving should always well up from our *grateful* soul. Prayer must be at *all* times – a *continuous* part of our life style. In praying, we must pray not only for ourselves and for the body of Christ but even for those outside the fold. We will talk more about prayer as we go along.

When we come together on Sunday morning, our worship of God must be INDIVIDUAL - giving our **personal** praise to God; but we must remember that we have come to God as a BODY, as a CONGREGATION, as a people who DELIGHT in God.

The two things that immediately come to mind when we think of *our* worship service are our **liturgy** and the **symbols** in our worship. We will discuss the liturgy in

this chapter and the next chapter we'll study about the Logo of the church and the symbols in our worship.

Why do we have the liturgy?

The first question I am sure that we have asked at least subconsciously is "why do we have a liturgy?" God has given me the privilege of worshipping Him in several denominations that use liturgies and some that do not. I have this thing to say – *our liturgy is really wonderful!*

Which is right – to have the liturgy or not? The correct answer is - *it does NOT matter!* What matters is that we DO worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. The Lord is looking for people who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth. (John 4:24) So the real question is - *am I willing to be a worshipper?* If I am willing to be such a person who is willing to worship God, His word says that the Holy Spirit will help me in my weaknesses – *like when my attention wanders!* He will help us to pray and worship Him. He is looking for WILLING people, **not** perfect people. Perfection will come much later when we meet Him face to face.

God is not looking for 'liturgical' worshippers or 'free' worshippers – He's looking for **true** worshippers! The question before me is can I be one?

Some of those who have "free worship" (i.e. worship without a liturgical order) charge us saying that there is no freedom for spontaneous praise in our worship. **That's just not true!** We are free to praise Him saying "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord" a million times during the worship! *Who's stopping us?* I know aches and bishops whose spontaneous praise and prayer during the worship are slightly audible over the microphone. Also, in some parishes, I have heard members of the congregation freely expressing their praise to God. Church history documents that our former church leaders – the fathers of our reformation and their congregation DANCED in worship. Those were days when they worshipped in sheds, thatched houses and in homes. Now we have the structure of big churches, we are wealthy, *have no sense of our need* and **perhaps our worship has also lost its earlier zeal.** THIS LACK OF A DESPERATE NEED FOR GOD IS AFFECTING OUR WORSHIP. This reminds me of a famous conversation between a pope and the Christian scholar Thomas Aquinas. Looking at all the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church, with a sense of accomplishment and possibly a bit of pride, the Pope said to Thomas Aquinas, "Behold, Master Thomas, the church

can no longer say, as St. Peter, 'Silver and gold have I none!'" Aquinas reply was immediate, "Alas, neither can we say what follows, 'but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'" A very telling point indeed!

The liturgy we use commonly is called the "St James' Liturgy" or the "Liturgy of St. James the Just of Jerusalem". This was James the brother of Jesus who did not believe in Jesus until Jesus appeared to him in person after the resurrection. He later became the leader of the church at Jerusalem (see the book of Acts). He is also the author of the epistle that bears his name, an intensely practical book for is Christian living. This is probably the **oldest** of the liturgies ever made and though has some changes made with time, its basic structure has remained the same. *It is still occasionally used for worship in Jerusalem!* Also, all the churches of the Byzantine tradition use this liturgy on St. James' day. **So, our heritage is truly a regal one and has its roots in the earliest church!**

Now, let us discuss the purpose for which the liturgy was intended. The words of the liturgy are so chosen so as to **focus** our thoughts on God and God alone. The liturgy adds to the "togetherness" and "fellowship" of meeting as we are praying in *unison* as well as in *unity*. The liturgy is **NOT** an end in itself. Our worship need not be restricted to the words in the liturgy. In our mind, we can say countless silent prayers and we can give thanks to God a million times.

If you feel you cannot worship God using our liturgy, let me *plead* with you to attempt this – Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to **concentrate** on God, **mean** the words of the liturgy and somehow to **delight** in the presence of God. Let me ASSURE you that God will listen to you because He himself desires that you worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. *I have friends who worship in the free worship churches who have attended our services and have told me that our liturgy is a wonderful one!*

What are the advantages of having a liturgy?

The liturgy offers many distinct advantages. Let me list a few though the list is not exhaustive.

1. The MOST IMPORTANT advantage is that it keeps us ENTIRELY FOCUSED on the Word of God. The words of the liturgy are almost COMPLETELY made up of scripture! We are praying, singing and praising Him using words of scripture!

This is why I believe that a study of the liturgy with the Word of God (as we are doing now) will be extremely beneficial for our worship.

2. The liturgy **keeps us from heresy or wrong teaching**. There are a group of people even in our churches who say that the Bible is NOT the word of God but merely **contains** God's word. The liturgy (by virtue of its being almost entirely scripture) affirms the timeless truths of God and keeps us from listening to this deception of the evil one. Let me give you an example here from a portion of the liturgy which we will study again when we reach there. There is a portion before the epistle reading which says, "If anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel at variance to the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast." This is an almost verbatim quote from Galatians 1: 8,9. It clearly describes that any person (even if he was the *greatest Biblical scholar*, the *greatest leader*, the *most eloquent preacher*, why even if it was the *apostle Paul* himself) who preaches a "gospel" different from what is proclaimed in the word of God is in **deep trouble** – he is eternally condemned! The liturgy silences such people and we are kept from going astray! Praise God for the liturgy!
3. There is great strength in **united** prayer and worship. The great power of united prayer is known throughout the church age. The word **unity** is mentioned in the liturgy as we will see as we go along. Now you may ask me a legitimate question. *Why are many of our "united" prayers seemingly not answered?* I think the reason is that we are guilty of being very passive in our prayers and are not really praying as we should. **The fault is with us!** I still remember a worship service the Sunday immediately following our wedding. It was a wonderful experience and one that I will not forget in a hurry! What was the difference? **Where the leader and the worshipping community are ONE before the Lord in worship, we have a foretaste of heaven on earth!**

Priests and Congregation

Before proceeding to the next chapter and studying the meaning of our logo and the symbols, I want us to study regarding the concept of **priests** and **congregation** in

our worship. In the reformed church, as the New Testament declares – *all* disciples are **priests**. There are many portions in the word regarding this truth.

“You will be my *kingdom of priests*, my holy nation.” (Exodus 19:6)

“You are a chosen people, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..” (I Peter 2:9)

“(He)...has made us to be a kingdom and **priests** to serve His God and Father.” (Revelation 1:6)

Then the next question comes – “*What is athen doing in front?*” He is *one* among the church of Christ who has the *responsibility* and has been *anointed* to lead God’s people in worship. Unlike the Old Testament, he is not doing every part of the worship. We are all actively involved in the worship and are **not merely spectators!** Therefore the job of the vicar is a really awesome one. By the way, ‘vicar’ comes from the word ‘*vicarious*’ meaning ‘*in place of*’. I used to wonder about this a long time until I came across this verse. “if anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.” (I Peter 4:11) **That is to say, the vicar stands in place of Christ and brings God’s word to us.** This is an *awesome responsibility* and is actually quite *frightening!* The priest who ministers must be *so careful* that he brings *only God’s truth* and not any of man’s ideas. “If any man speak, [let him speak] as the **oracles of God.**” (1 Peter 4:11) He should be speaking *only* the very words that God gives him to speak. The word of God clearly warns against those who adulterate God’s word. What does it mean when the Bible says that we as disciples are priests? This could be studied exhaustively. I want to mention one point only – one of the main responsibilities of the Old Testament priest was to bring people to God. Today, this job has been given to us. It is our call, our responsibility to bring people to the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 2

The Logo of the church and the symbols in our worship

The logo of the Mar Thoma church



I had looked at this familiar symbol of our church for *decades* without realizing its meaning. Let us study that before we go any further. We see three objects and a statement. The three objects are – a cross with a wheel in the centre, a lotus and a lamp.

The *Cross of Jesus Christ* is the centre point of our faith. It is at the pivotal point of our life, activities and mission. We proclaim boldly that we believe in God who for the salvation of mankind came down, died and rose again and freely forgives all who come to Him in true repentance and faith. We will study the cross further when we look at the symbols themselves.

There is a *wheel* in the middle of the cross. The wheel of the “Ashoka Chakra” represents our beloved country India. Our country was in the plan of God and He sent His apostle Thomas to spread the good news of salvation to everyone here. Our motto as believers worshipping in the Mar Thoma Church is to remember that Jesus died for Indians and we must be witnesses to His name *in this country* where He has placed us. The call and mission of the Mar Thoma Church is to evangelize India. “**India for Jesus**” should be our watchword and regular prayer. Similarly, if God has placed us in another country, we need to be witnesses of Christ where we are placed. The “wheel of life” which is a recurrent theme in Indian literature and this finds its true fulfillment **only** in the cross of Jesus Christ.

The *lotus* is a symbol of a holy life – a life set apart for God. Just as a lotus blossoms and rises above the water level, our lives in Christ and that of our church must be of a *far*

higher standard of holiness than the wicked sinful world in which we live. In the midst of the swampy water, the fragrance of the lotus comes forth. Similarly, our calling is, as Jesus said, "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and *praise your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16)

The *lamp* represents the Mar Thomite believer. We are to bear the truth about Jesus in our lives daily and bring the true light of the world Jesus Christ into the lives of people we meet. Our former Metropolitan, the late Abraham Mar Thoma said what has become the watchword of missions of our church – "**Every Mar Thomite is a missionary.**" This was the *passion* and *tradition* of faith that our forefathers had and blessed us with. We must not take this lightly and may we ever seek to follow in the footsteps of our forefathers who have gone ahead of us.

We also notice our motto "*Lighted to lighten*" written on the logo. Again in keeping with what we discussed above, we are confessing that what Jesus said is true about us - "You are the light of the world." (Mathew 5: 14) The believer having received the Light of the world, Jesus Christ is living with this purpose – bring the light of Jesus into every person's life. This is the Mar Thoma Church's mission statement.

The symbols in our worship

Before we look at the symbols themselves, please think with me for a moment. What *is* a symbol? Why have symbols at all? We have election symbols, symbols we write in our reports, traffic signs, etc. A symbol is a quick way of reminding the viewer of what would otherwise take a lot of space and / or time to describe. During driving lessons, we are taught to recognize what road signs mean, especially the ones that are not self-evident. In the same way, we need to find out what the symbols in our worship stand for.

The Bible, especially the Old Testament is full of various memorials, symbols, names etc that would remind the disciple something about Yahweh God. In the New Testament, the apostle John calls Christ's miracles "SIGNS". (John 2:11) We have the greatest symbolism in the Last Supper of our Lord with His apostles. We also have the sacrament of baptism in the New Testament which is again a symbol of the believer's partaking of Christ's death, burial and resurrection from the dead. Perhaps we could study it together sometime.

Before I proceed to the symbols themselves, I want to read a portion of scripture which has the largest amount of symbolism in the New Testament - the book of Revelation. Revelation 1:1 says, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and *signified* [it] by His angel unto His servant John:" The whole book of revelation is full of signs that Christ showed His *bond-servants* or *slaves*. A true child of God who **chooses** to obey His heavenly Father in everything is the *slave* of Christ. The signs used in our worship can only be appreciated properly and used appropriately if we have this humble attitude in us. We are unlikely to really benefit from church and worship unless we are willing to humble ourselves and submit our all to Jesus. As I said He *does not want perfect people* but He wants people who are WILLING to follow Him.

One question is frequently asked "How can a God of love send people to hell?" He is not sending people to hell. All through their lives, those who have rejected Christ and His love finally get what they always wanted – a life devoid of God – an eternity devoid of God. In a very real sense they are getting what they wanted all their life - to live without God. That's why hell is the only truly "God-forsaken place"!

What are the symbols that we have in our Holy Communion service?

The symbols that I would like us to study together are the cross / sign of the cross, the veil / curtain, madhbaha, altar, candles, incense and achen's vestments.

Cross / sign of the cross

The cross of Christ stands as a major roadblock in each person's life forcing them to choose *for* or *against* Christ. The cross occurs between the cradle and the crown. Everybody loves the cradle. Oh, how people gush over baby Jesus, everyone loves the warm fuzzy feeling that Christmas brings. Everybody wants the crown (heaven) if possible. *No one wants to go to hell!* But **very few want the cross**. The cross of Jesus Christ stands in our way and reminds us of the suffering that Jesus endured for us. It is also a call to us in the words of Jesus – "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross DAILY and follow me." (Luke 9:23) *Jesus is not merely interested in getting people to believe in Him, He is looking for us to be disciples.* We see the cross so often we often lose our sensitivity about its true meaning. The cross is in front of us when we worship. The cross is on the pinnacle of our

church building. Some of us wear a cross around our necks. The cross is NOT meant to be ornamental but speaks of **our** own death. We must say with faith "My old self *has been crucified* with Christ. *It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.* So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) We cannot run away from the cross. Again, there is no image or statue depicting Jesus on the cross. This is so for **two** important reasons. When Yahweh gave the ten commandments, He said, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness [of any thing] that [is] in heaven above, or that [is] in the earth beneath, or that [is] in the water under the earth." (Exodus 20:4) *There is something in every one of us that loves to make something else subtly take the place of God.* In King Hezekiah's time, he found that people were worshipping the bronze serpent that God told Moses to make as a remedy for healing! *Even what was a blessing and source of healing long ago became a snare for God's people.* **We must beware lest the cross become an idol in our minds.** We do NOT worship the cross. Only God is worthy of our worship. The second reason is that we want to remember that the cross is EMPTY! *Jesus is not on the cross or in the grave.* **Christ is risen!** Hallelujah! We gather to celebrate His resurrection.

The way we are meant to make the sign of the cross is as follows: We bring our index, middle fingers and thumb together and place them in the following sequence – middle of the forehead, mid-torso, left shoulder, right shoulder and finally in the middle of the chest. The three fingers held together speak of the **TRINITY**. We are publically proclaiming that God sent His Son Jesus **down** to the earth to die and rise again so that He would take me who was on the **left** side [left out!] to the **right** side (see Matthew 25:31-46). It does not stop there. Bringing the fingers back to the centre of the chest means that **now He lives in my heart by the Holy Spirit**. I used to feel very amused as a boy seeing an uncle dropping his fingers as soon as he reached the right shoulder! Let us remember the meaning of this sign next time we go to church and make the sign on ourselves during the service.

There is at least yet another possible meaning. The sign of the cross could also signify that Christ gathered those who were scattered left and right and made them ONE in Himself, in His body, the church. I would recommend everyone to read "The Cross of Christ" by John Stott for an in depth study on what the cross of Christ means. It is a marvelous study on the cross of Christ.

The veil / curtain

Today, it is not obvious to us but the Jews knew what this veil / curtain represented very well. Initially in the tabernacle and then in the temple, there was a HUGE, thick veil separating the worshippers and the priests from the Holy of Holies (or the Most Holy Place) where only once a year the priest could go in with blood as an atonement for his sin and that of the congregation. The Bible says that **God** tore this veil the moment Jesus died on the cross for us. (Matthew 27:51) The curtain was ripped from **TOP** to **BOTTOM** not bottom to top as man would do. The barrier between God and man made at Eden due to sin was finally OVER, the sin of mankind was completely atoned for. Jesus said "IT IS FINISHED!"

When the curtain opens, we are reminded of the FREE ACCESS we now have into the presence of God and the throne of grace. **We need no priests as mediators, God has torn the veil!** No more are priests needed as mediators, we have access ourselves! Praise God! In our church at Calcutta where I grew up, the curtain used to split in the middle to both sides. I remember as a young boy whenever I saw the curtains part, what happened on the first Good Friday would come to mind!

So, next time we see the curtain open, let us not just sit there long-faced! Let us say "Praise the Lord for access into the Holy of Holies!" *God Himself has made the way.* There is **nothing** that we have or can do to anymore.

Madhbaha / the Holy of Holies

The *madhbaha* represents the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place. It is the throne-room of God where the *shekinah* or glory of God would come and fill (as seen in the tabernacle and temple of God in the Old Testament). **When the curtain opens, we are reminded of the reality that worship causes the Holy of Holies to lose its finite borders and the entire sanctuary becomes holy!** The madhbaha also reminds us that *our hearts are meant to be the thrones of God.* The question to ask ourselves is this - are our hearts flowing with the glory of God? **Who** is on the throne – God or I?

Today as disciples, we are to *live by faith not by sight.* (2 Corinthians 5:7) Though we may not physically experience His visible glory, we KNOW by faith in His word that He **IS** here. Hebrews 10:19-22 says, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with

a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful." The Holy of Holies used to be forbidden territory for sinful men. Praise God for the privilege we enjoy now!

The Altar

The altar or '*thronos*' represents God's throne. Whenever God's people come to worship, He is ALREADY THERE waiting for us! God is more eager for fellowship with us than we can ever be on this side of eternity. The altar is not used for repeated animal sacrifices anymore because the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world has shed His blood once and for all. "... our High Priest offered Himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, *good for all time*. Then He sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand." (Hebrews 10:12) The sacrifices that we now offer of praise we will discuss later.

Candles

What do the candles on the altar remind us about? The candles represent several things in our worship. Firstly, the candles are kept on either side of the cross and represent the *apostles* of Christ. There used to be 12 candles earlier I am told but sometimes, we have only six representative candles. The apostles were given the responsibility of bringing the light of the gospel to us. Our faith is **apostolic** i.e. it came by revelation to the apostles who in turn wrote them down for us. This is how we have the written word of God today. The word 'apostle' means 'one who is sent with a particular purpose.' This is the equivalent of the word **missionary**. In a very real sense, **we** too are missionaries and apostles commissioned to a specific purpose. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21) Let us strive to follow in the footsteps of the apostles who gave up everything for their Lord.

The next thing the candle reminds us of is **light**. Sometimes I hear people complain that it is very difficult to live as a Christian because there is so much evil around us. If we light a candle, even a very small one in a dark room, what happens? **Does the darkness blow out the candle or does the light from the candle dispel the darkness?** In fact, the more intense the darkness, the brighter the light is seen! As the candle gives light, we too must shine for the Lord in this dark world. This world's evil and darkness **cannot** extinguish the light that is in our hearts from the Lord.

A fairly common song goes thus:

*"Jesus bids us shine with a clear pure light
Like a little candle burning in the night.
In this world of darkness, so we must shine
You in your small corner and I in mine!"*

If you have entered a very dark room with only a candle in it, you would have noticed that the flame is visible but the candle itself IS **NOT**. Jesus said, "... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." We must reflect and radiate God's glory in such a way as NOT to attract attention to ourselves but to give glory to God.

The candle burns and melts down teaching us that we have a **limited, finite life-span**. As surely as the candle melts and burns, our life is also slowly coming to its end with each passing day! The candle also *reminds us that our lives are to be spent in the service of God*. Our days are to be lived out for Him. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who *hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life*." (John 12:24,25) What is written about our Lord in the Psalms and quoted in the gospel of John must become true of each of us as well – "Zeal for your house has consumed me." (Psalm 69:9) Our calling in Christ is to allow our days to be spent in Him. Jim Elliot was a missionary to South America and subsequently, a martyr for Christ. Following his death, his wife went there and slowly won the natives to Christ. This man was only **22** years old when he made this immortalized comment "*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose*." The Bible describes the overcomers in Revelation 12:11, "They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; **they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death**." A decision to be obedient to Christ must be made while we are still young. Yes, Christ will receive us even if we repent in our old age but we will have regrets for wasted lives in eternity.

Incense

If you've noticed at some parts of the worship, the deacon goes around and swings the censer spreading the incense all over the sanctuary. The smoke and fragrance remind us of several important things. The incense speaks about our being **accepted in God's presence**. Leviticus 16:13 says, "He (Aaron) is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain.

He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die." 2 Corinthians 2:15 says, "... we are to God the aroma of Christ." *The only life that was acceptable before God the Father was that of Jesus Christ.* When God sees us today, He sees in us the righteous life of Christ that has been imputed into us. **Because of Jesus we have been accepted by God.** Because of Jesus finished work on the cross, we who should have been a stench in the nostrils of God have been transformed into an AROMA. We will learn more about Christ's work for us as we go along.

In the book of Leviticus, the sacrifice of animals was a sweet smelling sacrifice to God. (Leviticus 1:9) This was the sacrifice to cover sin committed daily by the people of God. In Christ, all our sins have been atoned for as 1 John 2:2 says, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world". Today, we do not sacrifice animals. Today we bring different sacrifices. Hebrews 13:15 says. "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of *praise* - the fruit of lips that confess His name." We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of God today and He is pleased with this sacrifice. Another sacrifice we bring today is that of *ourselves*, our bodies. (Romans 12:1) This is our response of love to what He has done on the cross for us.

The fragrance of the incense and the smoke of the sacrifice are meant to signify the worshipper's acceptability before God the Father. The incense should remind us to thank God for Jesus and His life that makes us acceptable today in the Holy of Holies.

The smoke also signifies the *glory of the LORD* that fills the sanctuary. As I said before, we **know** by faith that when true worshippers come to worship the glory of the LORD fills the sanctuary. The smoke serves as a reminder that the glory of the LORD is present though we do not see it with physical eyes. There is a cause for a bit of caution here. *Just because we sing very loudly and clap our hands and make a noise it does **not** guarantee the Holy Spirit's presence or movement if our hearts are not open to Him to use. Just because the deacon fills the sanctuary with smoke it does not guarantee His glory if our hearts are not open for cleansing.* Jesus wrote to the people of the Laodicean **church**, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20) We use this verse on unbelievers when we share the gospel **but this was written to a church of Jesus Christ not to the heathen.** We can dance, sing, clap, shout, have the incense filling not only the sanctuary but the whole church as

well but unless the church is repentant and open to God, all these symbols will remain just that – *merely symbols!*

The third thing that the incense reminds us of is *prayer*. Revelation 8:4 says, “The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.” The smoke's rising is a reminder that our prayers are **always** heard by Him. The word ‘saints’ used in Revelation does not mean those who have been canonized or those whose lives are so ‘holy’ that they are special people before God. The word ‘SAINT’ as used in the epistles means a believer or a disciple of Jesus Christ. *So, if we have begun this journey, we qualify!!!* Praise the Lord! (See I Corinthians 1:2 as an example).

Just as surely as the smoke of the incense goes up, so also, the prayer of the saints rises to the presence of God. We need not doubt whether our prayers reach the presence of Almighty God. In Acts 10:1-4, we read of a centurion named Cornelius who gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. At 3pm one day, an angel appeared to him who said, “**Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.**” His prayers even in his unrepentant state reached the presence of God. BUT, the angel next directs him to call Peter and have him share the gospel with Cornelius' household. Though Cornelius was a good man and his prayers and gifts reached God, generosity by itself was **NOT** good enough! *He had to hear the gospel, repent and enter into a new relationship with Jesus!* **Merely praying the set prayers every Sunday does not make our relationship with God automatic.** The incense reminds us of prayer that reaches God's presence and prayer forms an integral part of this relationship but mere repetition is no substitute.

The fragrance of the incense filling the church also reminds us that this privilege of working is not exclusively for those who are in front but *for all* who worship God in Spirit and in truth.

The Priest's Vestments

The last of the symbols that we will be discussing are the priest's vestments. The vestments worn by Achen during the worship have their roots in the dress of the high priest Aaron and has contemporary applications. If we read the high priest's dress descriptions in Exodus 28 and 39, we find that it was a resplendent one and the descriptions are mind-boggling. There are many aspects that we can focus on but I want to highlight just **two** of them.

The people of God cannot stand in God's presence without the atonement of Jesus covering us. The Bible says in Isaiah 64:6, "...we are all as an unclean thing, and *all our righteousness are as filthy rags*; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." The translation '**filthy rags**' does not bring out the intensely despicable nature of our own righteousness before God. The literal meaning is that our good deeds, however good they may appear, are like discarded menstrual cloths before God! How *appalling!* **And to think that we often become proud of how good we are!** We are like the boy in the nursery rhyme – 'I put in my thumb and pulled out a plum, what a good boy am I! Am I saying that our good behaviour is of no use in earn us anything in God's presence – ABSOLUTELY CORRECT!!! There are two scriptural examples of this that I must talk about before we go ahead. When Adam and Eve sinned and realized that they were naked, they sewed themselves leaves together to cover their nakedness. The problem with leaves is that they dry up and exposed their nakedness. God **Himself** had to provide them garments made of animal skins to cover their nakedness. (The first animal sacrifice was made by God Himself when He killed the animals to make clothing for Adam and Eve.) Do you remember the story of the king who held a wedding banquet for His Son (Matthew 22) and called people who would not come to the banquet and made excuses? Subsequently the servants called all the beggars, the lame and the downtrodden to come to the feast. Now when they came to the feast there was a problem – how could these beggars sit in the main hall? They were not assigned some side-room or the backyard like we would do if we call the BPL (**b**elow the **p**overty **l**ine) people to do charity! The king made them sit as honoured guests in the main reception hall. What would they wear? So the king provided a gown to all – pure resplendent white gowns – imagine that! And they looked so dignified. This was the dignity offered by God to all of us. When achen stands in front, it reminds us that we have come in the *righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself* as a covering and *that is what makes us acceptable* in the presence of a just God whose wrath Jesus appeased on the cross. In that story, there was one fellow who thought he was okay. His dress is not as torn as the next fellow's. His shirt was not so dirty. After all, are you making me EQUAL to all the others who are terrible fellows? So, he decided to wear **his own clothes**. He stood out like a sore thumb in comparison to all the others who were worse than him but now were made **resplendent**. **By his refusal to wear the wedding dress FREELY given by the king, we find him disqualified and thrown out at the end of the parable!** Similarly, while we may think that we are better than others around us - our friends or relatives, our

righteousness will NEVER save us. We need a Saviour, we need Jesus. Without His righteousness, we are nothing. Accepting His righteousness, we are made complete and acceptable in God's sight. Praise the Lord!

The first time I flew was in 2000 when my mother had a stroke. I had to fly from Chennai to Calcutta. These were days when flight travel was not very common and only the elite used to fly. When I saw the clothes that the other passengers wore, I felt completely out of place. These were truly aristocratic people who normally flew whenever they travelled and here was I having to take the flight because of an emergency.

The vicar vestments also remind us that God has made us to be a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD. This is a very unique privilege. A king in the Old Testament who tried to be a priest got leprosy. In the Bible there were only **3** who had the unique privilege of being a king and a priest at the same time - **Melchizedek** (Genesis 14:18), **Jesus Christ** and who do you guess is the *third one*? Here's the big surprise – you and I - **the believer in Christ!** (Revelation 5:10; I Peter 2:9)! *Whether we wear a white cassock or an ordinary dress, if we have put our faith in Jesus, we **are** priests as we have discussed earlier.*

He has also made us **Kings!** What does this mean for us today? What do kings do? They **rule!** *God has made us kings to rule over every passion of our soul and every lust of our flesh.* It is not God's will that some sin has any authority over us **He has made us Kings!** There is one more interesting aspect of being a king according to the word of God. Proverbs 25:2 says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings." *There are many things that God has kept below the surface in His word.* That is why we can never exhaust studying the Bible. He expects us to search out the true riches and learn from them. **This is especially true for us in the Mar Thoma church.** We boast of a tradition of the "OPEN BIBLE" where every believer is expected to open His Bible and study the scriptures for Himself and learn from God. Sadly, in many of our houses, the Bibles are there but they are never opened! This must never be. The people of Berea were called '**noble**' by God "for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day** to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11) **We Marthomites are supposed to be like the Bereans.** Whoever brings the word, however great or learned he might be, it is our responsibility to search the Scriptures and **believe ONLY what the word of God says.** The Lord who called the Bereans noble when they confirmed the preaching of the apostle Paul,

will call *us* noble too if we do the same! This way, we will be full of His Holy word and that will keep us from wrong teaching that can subtly get in unawares into us.

Achen's vestments remind us of those worn by Aaron the High Priest. In Exodus 28; 31-34 God instructed, "Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, with an opening for the head in its center. There shall be a woven edge like a collar around this opening, so that it will not tear. Make **pomegranates** of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe, with **gold bells** between them. **The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe.**" The imagery is so wonderful. The bells speak of the **gifts** of the Holy Spirit - the most *expressive* part of a Christian. The pomegranates speak of the **fruit** of the Holy Spirit - the *character* of Jesus Christ. If we consider the life of Jesus Christ, we find that the Holy Spirit's *manifestations* as well as the *fruit* of the Spirit were perfectly balanced. We tend to be quite unbalanced emphasizing either one or the other but in truth, **both are important**. When we see Achen's vestments, we are to remember that if we are clothed with Christ, we need to have a perfect harmony - a perfect balance of the Holy Spirit's working in our lives - both the supernatural gifts that He gives us as well as the fruit that He develops in us, which is the character of Jesus Himself.

Chapter 3

Preparing for worship

The need for personal preparation to come into the presence of the Holy God and worship Him cannot be over emphasized. When we come to worship, we as the bride of Christ have come to meet the *bridegroom*, our *beloved*, our *King* and our *God*. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall SEE (or PERCEIVE) God." (Matthew 5:8) We are to be PURE before the Lord if we are to meet with Him. How do we do this? Obviously we cannot make ourselves pure. Only God can do this work in us. We need to confess our sins and our unworthiness to come into His presence, and ask Him to make us pure and worthy to worship. We need to invite the Holy Spirit to enable us to really worship God. We must tell the Lord that we want *one* thing – only one thing and this one thing we MUST get from Him i.e. "We must be enabled to worship God in spirit and in truth." He will not deny us this because worship is actually **His** idea in the first place. The prophet Amos exhorted, "**Prepare** to meet your God." (Amos 4:12) Though the context there is one of judgment, the general idea is valid for us today. In example of the bride given above, can you imagine the bride thinking about and telling her friends how beautiful her wedding gown is, what lovely ornaments she is wearing and showing off her new pair of shoes? **At the wedding, the bride is thinking only of her bridegroom!** When we come for worship we must not focus our attention on *ourselves* or our *vain dressing sense* but on the *bridegroom* Jesus Christ!

Before the service begins, we are to maintain prayerful silence within the church and not chat and gossip with our friends. "The Lord IS in His holy temple, let all the earth be silent before Him" (Habakkuk 2:20). We need to be still and KNOW that He is God (Psalm 46:10) before we attempt to worship Him. This is in sharp contrast to the almost *competitive* expressions of "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord" heard in some gatherings. *There is a legitimate place for expressiveness but quiet preparation of our hearts before the worship is necessary.*

When we look at the preparations in the Old Testament for worship especially in the book of Leviticus, we see extra-ordinary lists of ritual cleansing, etc, that were necessary before the Israelites could worship. *Today we often do not appreciate that He is an AWESOME God.* Unfortunately, the **fear of God** that the Bible talks about is

missing in many a believer when he comes for worship. (We'll discuss the fear of God later on in this study.)

In our churches, I have seen four types of people who come to worship - **atheists**, **agnostics**, **deists** and **theists**. (You may be wondering if there are **atheists** in the Mar Thoma church! Believe me, I have seen some! Hopefully, there aren't that many.) The Bible says, "The **fool** says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (Psalm 14:1, 53:1) If God calls the person who says this in his heart a fool then what should He call the one who **shouts it aloud**, who is **proud** about saying it?!! Some people are AGNOSTICS. They are people who say that perhaps there is a God but they do not **know** it to be true. DEISTS are those who think that God has created the world alright but He has left it for us to manage and somehow we have to carry on. They do not believe in His divine intervention in our lives today. Finally there are the THEISTS who believe in a PERSONAL God who CREATED us and the world, Who GUIDES and LEADS us daily and Who is interested in our daily lives and **will come and help us** when we cry out to Him for help. *The biggest danger is in thinking that we are theists but behaving like deists.* Here is where worship has a BIG role to play. Properly preparing for worship and coming before His throne respectfully will help us from slipping into this deception of the devil. Worship with adequate preparation will lead the worshipper away from the snares of atheism, agnosticism and deism to **true** faith in the one true God.

In our Malayalam worship book there is a prayer which every worshipper is supposed to pray before the worship begins. Let me translate the prayer into English since it is not part of the English liturgy.

"Lord, I have come into your house and I stand before your royal throne. Heavenly Father, please forgive my innumerable sins that I have committed against your Holy name. O Lord, you who are so merciful, have mercy on me and accept me even as the prodigal son was accepted when he returned to you. Have mercy on me, I pray. Amen."

One of the reasons why we do not feel fulfilled in church is our lack of preparedness. There was once a tradition in our homes where school books would be shut on Saturday evening and all the focus was on God and preparing oneself by

studying God's word and prayer for the next morning's worship. Let us make a decision today **never** to go to worship God "unprepared". Instead, let us come prepared to meet the Lord face to face and to return renewed. Most aspects of this prayer are covered in the service proper and we will study them there.

Chapter 4

Until the curtain is opened

Opening Song

As mentioned earlier, singing to the Lord is an important part of our worship. For the opening song, usually a song which sings of the majesty and greatness of our God is chosen and sung. One of my favourites is 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty'. The objective is to *mean each word that is sung* and to straight away *focus our attention* on God's greatness and His glory.

Lesson Readings

The song is followed by the reading of 2 portions of God's word - one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. In the Christian faith, we believe that the Bible **IS** the Word of God and that God has revealed Himself through His word to an extent sufficient for all people everywhere to come to know Him personally and intimately.

The Old treatment and New Testament are complimentary to each other. It is said that the New Testament is in the Old Testament *concealed* and the Old Testament is in the New Testament *revealed*. Thus to get a 'whole' picture according to the theme of that particular Sunday, the Old & New Testament readings are selected. As we listen to God's word, our prayer should be "*O Lord, teach us your word and enable us to obey what you teach us today.*"

Before The Curtain Opens

The symbolic meaning of the curtain was discussed earlier. (See chapter called 'The Logo of the church and the symbols in our worship'). When the curtain opens, we are reminded of our **free access** into the presence of God, into the Holy of Holies or Most Holy place. Just before the curtain opens, we rise and sing one or two stanzas of a lyric, during the later part of which, the curtains open. This lyric is a wonderful prayer. Let us go through the last stanza of the lyric, which the congregation also joins in with the priest.

Shobha niranjoralayathil vasikkunna Parisudha...

Our great and Holy God dwells in glory in Heaven. When the people come to worship, as in the days of old, God's glory fills the entire sanctuary. His rightful place is in our hearts and by His presence, He will cause our lives to reflect and to radiate the glory of God. We do not merely **reflect** the glory of God when He shines upon us but far more, we are called to **radiate** His glory as He lives within and manifests His life in our flesh.

Nindasaram gnangalude duschinthā durmoham

Shamanam cheyvathinayyo vilikkunnu nin namathe

Every Sunday morning when we sing this we are stating up front our **objective in coming for worship**. We are not coming to enjoy ourselves primarily though there *is* joy in the presence of God. We are not coming to sing songs though we *do* sing songs. We are not coming to listen to sermons though *listening* to God's word being preached is an integral part of our worship. We are not coming to meet friends though fellowship *is* essential. **The main reason for our gathering is that we want our evil desires to be destroyed.** We are fed up of the way we have lived the past weeks, months and years. We are *truly repentant* of the wrong things we have done and we want salvation from these sins and our evil desires. We are asking Him to *purify* us and to *remove* from us our evil thoughts, evil desires and to destroy them **forever**.

Throughout the Old Testament, the awesomeness of God was so evident that men who obeyed God were said to 'fear' Him. All over, we find the command "fear the Lord....." For years I never understood or realized what it means to '*fear the Lord*.' Now, I think I have now slowly begun to understand. After giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, the people became fearful and did not want God to speak to them. Moses then tells them, "*Do not be afraid God has come to test you, so that the **fear of God** will be in you to keep you from sinning.*" (Exodus 20:20) **God puts His fear in our hearts which then keeps us from sinning!!!** Proverbs 8:13 gives the clearest definition for what it means to 'fear the Lord.' "*To fear the Lord is to **hate evil**.*" *Fearing the Lord* will cause us to HATE evil and thus we will be kept from sinning. The evil we hate must **begin** with the evil in our own hearts and this is why at the very beginning of

the worship, we ask for cleansing. How do we know that we should hate the evil in us, hate the selfish nature in us that causes us to fall into sin again and again? **Because the word of God says so!** In John 12:25, Jesus says, **"The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who HATES his life in the world will keep it for eternal life."** This, in turn is based on the extent of our love for God. If we truly love God, we will HATE sin, beginning with the sin in our own hearts.

While praying on this matter one day as a final year medical student, I '*chanced*' upon this scripture - 2 Corinthians 5:11, "Since, then, we **know** what it is to *fear the Lord*, we try to persuade men." *This verse literally shook me!* In one instant I understood that not only must I understand what this means, it is my **responsibility** to tell others! This fear of God is lacking in many of us.

Our prayer is "O Lord, purify us from all that is unclean so that we may be Holy." Hebrews 12:14 says, "Without holiness **no one will see the Lord.**" Unless the Holiness of God is seen in our churches, no one will see Jesus who lives in us. We will discuss holiness a bit later in the study. There is a lovely little English chorus which is a great deal similar to the words we sing,

"I have come for cleansing, Lord for I have let You down,
Betrayed You, denied You, stepped beyond the line, Turned my back on You.
Wash me, cleanse me, Lord, make me clean & set me free
Free to do Your will, O Lord, Yours & Yours alone."

Let this be our prayer as we worship God.

Chapter 5

Ante-Communion

This portion of the service from the time the curtain opens until the public prayer of confession is called *Ante-Communion*, i.e. the part of the worship which takes place before the actual communion part of the service. It includes, as we will see, *adoration, epistle reading, gospel reading, prayers and supplications, the Nicene Creed, preaching of the Word* and finally the *public prayer of confession*.

Adoration

This part of the worship I will call "ADORATION" as this deals with giving praise to God and adoring His holy name.

P. O Lord Jesus Christ, born of Mary, baptized by John, have mercy upon us.

Some key words in this prayer are **Lord, Jesus** and **Christ**. This is the first prayer after the curtain opens and straight away we start by praying, "O Lord Jesus Christ." The words '**Lord Jesus Christ**' means more to the church that we often remember.

At the beginning of the worship itself we are establishing **who** Jesus is. He is no figment of our imagination but a very real person. The gospel accounts are eye-witness' accounts and have high reliability and credibility. Additionally, He is testified about by secular historians like Josephus as well. In his book, he has written about a person called Jesus who many called **Messiah**. Jesus lived such a unique life. Let me quote a poem called "*One solitary life*" by Dr James Allan.

*He was born in an obscure village
The child of a peasant woman
He grew up in another obscure village
Where he worked in a carpenter shop
Until he was thirty.*

*He never wrote a book
He never held an office
He never went to college*

*He never visited a big city
He never travelled more than two hundred miles
From the place where he was born
He did none of the things
Usually associated with greatness
He had no credentials but himself*

*He was only thirty three
His friends ran away
One of them denied him
He was turned over to his enemies
And went through the mockery of a trial
He was nailed to a cross between two thieves
While dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing
The only property he had on earth*

*When he was dead
He was laid in a borrowed grave
Through the pity of a friend*

***Nineteen centuries have come and gone
And today Jesus is the central figure of the human race
And the leader of mankind's progress
All the armies that have ever marched
All the navies that have ever sailed
All the parliaments that have ever sat
All the kings that ever reigned put together
Have not affected the life of mankind on earth
As powerfully as that **one solitary life.*****

Our faith is not a BLIND or UNREASONABLE faith. When we are accused of being blindly believing, we sometimes are at a loss for what to say. We must have some knowledge of the

reasonableness of faith. There are many good books and numerous resources on this topic on the internet. I hope the reader will search and find them. If any help is needed, please do not hesitate to email me.

The word 'Lord' is the word 'KURIOS' from which we get our 'Kuriye-Laison' from. This word means more than we understand easily. It is a word that is used for someone who has **ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY**. So, when we call Jesus "Lord", we must remember that we are publically proclaiming that he has *absolute authority* over us.

The name 'Jesus' means SAVIOUR. The angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "You are to give him the name **Jesus**, because **He will save his people from their sins**." This is the **first** promise in the New Testament. We will come back to this later in the study but just to highlight one point. Jesus came into the world to save us from SIN not just from HELL! Is He saving us from **sin** daily? If not we have not appropriated His promise enough.

The term '**Christ**' means '*anointed one*'. This word is also the same word as **Messiah**. He was the ONE on whom the Holy Spirit came in visible form and remain. (John 1:32) He also was the one on Whom the Spirit was poured *without measure*. (John 3:34) After the church age began, Peter testified, "God **anointed** Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and... He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him." (Acts 10:38) The second promise of the New Testament is "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." We need to remind ourselves that the anointed one has come not just to save us but also to **anoint** and **fill** us with His Holy Spirit. We must obtain these blessings from Him in worship.

The first thing that anyone needs when we approach God is MERCY. The words mercy and grace have been terribly misunderstood. Mercy means that **God does not give us what we deserve**. This is the initial thing that we all need. Mercy deals with forgiveness of our sins and restoring the relationship with God. We ask for God's mercy that we may draw near to worship Him. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us approach the *throne of grace* with confidence, so that we may *receive mercy* and *find grace* to help us in our time of need." We need God's mercy to even to magnify and exalt His name.

As we can see, after receiving mercy we **don't stop**. The throne that we are approaching is the throne of GRACE. What is the difference between these two? *Grace* means **getting what we do not deserve** - what we need for our life each day. After forgiveness of sin and a clean state to begin with, we need grace – divine strength to live an overcoming life. The verse quoted above says, “..GRACE to help us in our time of need.” Both *mercy* and *grace* are found only at the throne of God. Our time of need is when we are out in the world – Monday morning onwards perhaps at work, in class, when we meet other people, etc. We need **HELP** and this **divine help** to overcome *every situation* and *every temptation* is **GRACE**. This is available to us in Jesus Christ. Hallelujah!!

C. We magnify You, O Lord our King, only begotten Son, Word of the Father, Lord Jesus Christ, Immortal in your nature, who was born of the Virgin Mary, for the life and salvation of all mankind. Without change of nature, You became the son of Man and were crucified for us, thus trampling death under foot, and destroying it forever. You are one in the Holy Trinity, and are worshipped and glorified, equally with Your Father and Your living and Holy Spirit. Have mercy upon us.

This is a beautiful treatise on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Somehow there is a tendency to rush by this beautiful prayer, without entirely meaning it. We ‘**magnify**’ does not mean we *enlarge* God or we *make* Him big! The analogy is similar to **looking at a distant star through a powerful telescope**. We see the star much more clearly and much closer than before. When we worship we focus on and see the Lord clearly and He **fills** our ‘field of vision’ as we say in medical terms. *If we see only Christ, when we come to worship, our time on Sunday morning is sure to be blessed.* When we call Jesus our ‘**Lord**’ and our ‘**King**’ let us be careful what we mean. The word “**King**” does not mean much to us in the 21st century. There are very few kings today and many of the ‘kingdoms’ today are not really so either. The word **KINGDOM** means - where the **king** has **dominion** or **rule**. This is similar to what we meant when we called Jesus ‘Lord.’ When we say ‘Our king’, we are saying the church – our worshipping community and the universal church are His kingdom – where *His dominion* extends! Just imagine if this can be said of our parish, our church and the church at large today! Our church can be a place which is an example of **heaven on earth** – where God’s dominion is *actually* experienced. This is the fruit of worship and this is what we confess when we pray “O Lord our King”. Being subject to a Lord or a king means *life long*,

continuous submission and *unquestioning* obedience. We should mean this prayer from our hearts and be ready to obey the Lord completely and in ALL things. When we call Him our King means that we acknowledge His rule over EVERY aspect of our lives.

God did not design democracy for the world! This is something that the Greeks have given us! Churchill said, "*Democracy is the WORST form of government excepting ALL the others!*" God called Himself the King of Israel till they asked for a king like the nations *and they got exactly that!* The best form of government is where there is a loving caring king but there aren't many like that. Most kings are tyrants. *Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely!* The role model of a king we will see only in Jesus when He comes again and rules the earth for a 1000 years upon His second coming.

We are calling Him "OUR" King not just mine or yours! We are worshipping together as His body not just as individuals. The reason for missing out of the corporate part of the worship is the influence of the western individualism on our worship. While there may be a role for television worship services and 'TV churches' these can NEVER substitute for our meeting together for corporate worship. Hebrews 10:25 clearly says, "**Let us not give up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

All of us are members of ONE body – the Body of Christ. I Corinthians 12 clearly describes how each of us, however big or small we may consider ourselves to be, are part of ONE body with others and we need each other.

'*Only Begotten Son*' – we know from the word of God (John 3:16) and are confessing the most famous scripture text here – "For God **so** loved the world, that He **gave** His **only begotten** Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

'*Word of the Father*' – another name for Jesus Christ recorded in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

'*Lord Jesus Christ*' – we have studied this confession of faith above. Paul teaches us in Romans 10:9,10: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Saying this with our mouth

is very important. *Confessing Him before the church on Sundays alone is not enough.* Our worship must enable us to confess His hand in our lives throughout the week.

'Immortal in your nature' reminds us that Jesus IS God. In order that mortal man may attain immortality, the immortal God came as mortal man and died for us.

'For the life and salvation of all mankind': God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. The life mentioned here is ETERNAL LIFE. Eternal life does not *merely* mean 'living forever'. It does not even mean living with God forever! Instead, eternal life is **knowing God intimately**. The high point of our earthly existence is intimacy with the eternal God which *continuous* beyond into eternity.

Salvation is a term used very glibly by believers. We often are guilty of turning away people by asking them, "Are you saved?" Actually salvation is in three tenses - *past, present* and *future*. When we repent of our sins and ask Jesus to take over our lives, and be our Saviour and Lord. We **begin** the Christian life. We are *saved* at that point in time from the PENALTY of sin, our sins are washed away, Christ's life is given to us and heaven's gates are open to us. Throughout our earthly life, we are *being saved* from the POWER of sin by the power of God's Holy Spirit working in us. This is a daily process and highly dependent on our yielding to God. And finally, one day, we will be completely *saved* from the very PRESENCE of sin itself when the Lord Jesus comes again in His glory.

'Without change of nature, You became the Son of man' reminds us that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. How this was done we do not know, but we **do know** that it is true because the word of God says so. He did not stop being God while He came down to the earth.

'Was crucified for us, thus trampling death under foot and destroying it forever' – Fear of death is a very common fear among men. However, as believers we never need fear death. This is because the Lord Jesus has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5) He is also the one who holds in His hand the keys of death and hell. (Revelation 1:17-18) We **cannot** be put to death by the devil or his angels before our time. *Jesus is in control*. Death has no authority over the believer because Jesus has paid the debt of sin – the death on the cross! In the old convention Song, "Yeshu Christu uyarthu jeevikunnu" there is a beautiful and powerful line – "*Inni thellum bhayam enye mrityuvine nammal vellu vilikyukayam.*" O! how

wonderful this is! Now, we are unafraid, without the slightest amount of terror in our hearts, we even challenge death! Jesus has indeed conquered sin and death. Sin and Death have no power over the believers. Hallelujah!!!

'You are one in the Holy Trinity and are worshipped equally with your Father and your living and Holy Spirit' - An adequate discussion on the doctrine of Trinity or the Triune nature of God is beyond the scope of this book. Also, intellectual satisfaction of this truth is not possible because God's ways are much higher than man's! ***This truth is better believed in than explained.***

The word 'worshipped' indicates that Jesus **is** worthy of worship. There are some people (like the Jehovah's Witnesses) who say that **only** Yahweh God is to be worshipped, not Jesus. However, when we study the Word of God, we come across **numerous** examples of Jesus Christ being worshipped and accepting the worship of man. The man who was born blind (John 9:38), disciples after Jesus' resurrection (Mathew 28.9), the twenty-four elders and the angels of the Lord before the throne of God (Revelation 5:8-14) are some noteworthy examples. The Triune God is interested in our worship not just Father God.

The prayer closes with another appeal for mercy because the only thing that can confidently ask for is God's mercy.

P. *Holy art thou O God*

C. *Holy art Thou, Almighty Lord*

P. *Holy art Thou, Immortal Lord*

C. *Oh Thou that wast crucified for us have mercy on us.*

This adoration is prayed thrice and bears resemblance to the angels in heaven. We adore our Lord and say that our God is **Holy**. We use the word so commonly in our worship but what does it mean? **Holy** comes from the word '**hagios**' which is a Greek word meaning 'set apart' or 'consecrated.' In our context of worship, God is 'set apart' from everything that is evil. We too are set apart from sin and the world when we believe on Jesus. We are **in** the world but not **of** the world any longer!

Also, when we say that He is Holy, we are freely confessing that we are not. We are painfully aware of our own sin and evil and ask for His empowerment to be Holy. We will discuss this in greater detail a bit later.

When we consider the three 'Holy are thou' statements, we find that some people are bothered by repetition. If we look at the Old Testament and the New Testament, they are filled with lots of repetition. **Repetition is very useful to drive a point home.** It is very useful to show *intensity* and *intent*. A couple who are in love does not say, "I love you" just once! They probably say it a hundred times a day! The angels before the throne of God never tire of saying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' In fact in Revelation a song they sing in God's presence is called a NEW song. This means that every time we say, 'Holy, Holy, Holy' there must be a freshness about our worship. Let us seek to have this freshness of worship every time we gather.

The word 'Almighty' is a bit different from the way we commonly understand it. It not only means OMNIPOTENT or ALL-POWERFUL but the words 'LORD Almighty' in the Old Testament come from the words 'YAHWEH EL-SHADDAI.' This means Yahweh God the **all-sufficient** or Yahweh Who is **MORE THAN ENOUGH!!!** The God we serve in is MORE THAN ENOUGH for us and our every need! Hallelujah!

Our Holy God is also IMMORTAL. He is the Alpha & the Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8). Now, this immortal God was crucified for us and in His Holy presence we ask for mercy.

The priest and the congregation say '*Kurie Laison*' three times each making a total of six times. '*Kurie Laison*' means 'O Lord have mercy'. One feature of our worship is our constant appeal for mercy. The only stand we can take before the glory of Yahweh God to say, "Lord have mercy on us".

The verse we saw earlier declares that we have **confidence** to boldly approach the throne of Grace to receive **mercy** and **help** from God. (Hebrews 4:16) Let this not be misunderstood though. We CAN **boldly** go into the presence of God with a repentant heart for appealing for His grace and His mercy. *It is vital that we study the word of God properly.* This verse is not to be interpreted that we are **so** confident before God that we have **no need for mercy!**

Epistle Reading

D. *The blessed Apostle Paul says "If any one, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel at variance to the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast. Various kinds of teaching spring up in all quarters, but blessed is he who begins and ends in the teaching of God."*

This is a noteworthy portion of the scripture to pay heed to. It is found in Galatians 1:8,9 where Paul says it *twice* for '**extra-emphasis.**' "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be **accursed!** As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be **accursed!**" Other translations use the term 'eternally condemned' in place of accursed. If a person is accursed or outcast from the church of God, he is eternally condemned. The basic meaning is the same.

In the church unfortunately, a lot of wrong teaching regarding the Word of God is creeping in. *There are people who do not accept the authority of God's word.* There are people who teach the Jesus Christ **may not** be the only way to God. (This is paramount to calling God a **liar!**) To all of them, Paul says TWICE - "If anyone....." ANYONE **including Paul himself!** Such a person will be held outcast or cast off from the church. (By church, God did not mean the Mar Thoma church but the UNIVERSAL church!) This is a very stern warning from God against adulteration of God's word. Let us beware lest *we* too do it somehow.

Before we go any further we need to clarify **what** exactly was the 'GOSPEL' that Jesus and the apostles preached that we should be careful not to deviate from? The word 'gospel' means 'good news.' Before good news comes, there is some bad news too! The **bad news** is that we are ALL sinners (Romans 3:23) and have come short of the standards set for us by God. (One honest look at ourselves and we **know** that we are all guilty!) Unfortunately **the wages of sin is death.** (Romans 6:23) But the **gospel**, the **good news** is that by REPENTING of our sins and ACCEPTING Jesus as Lord and as Saviour into our lives, we have the presence of God in our lives, the person of the Holy Spirit living inside of us to lead us in obedience to Jesus and to walk in the footsteps alone. *How do we know all this is true? **Again, because the Word of God says so.***

Jesus told the Pharisee Nicodemus who visited Him at night, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (John 3:3) This experience of confessing that I am a sinner, **repenting** of my way of sin, deciding to follow Jesus daily and inviting Him into my life to be my Lord and my Saviour is the moment of my **second birth**. Another word employed for this experience is "CONVERSION" of the soul. In the Mar Thoma church, before partaking of the Holy Communion for the first time, we announce before the entire body of disciples that are gathered for worship the following words three times, "***I reject Satan and I accept Jesus as my Saviour and Lord***". The conversion experience must necessarily *precede*, or at best, *coincide* with the public testimony. Otherwise we lie and are guilty of bearing false witness before God!

This experience is NOT the end! It is only the **beginning** of a progressive walk with God Almighty – a thrilling new adventure with the King of Kings Whom we can call 'Abba, Father!' (Romans 8:15) I should NEVER be satisfied with the memory of a date! I should never be satisfied by the initial experience of conversion, however thrilling that might have been! I am meant to progress daily! Ephesians 2:8,9 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." This is the beginning from which comes the next step: "we are to grow up **in all aspects** into Him who is the head, even Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)

'*Various kinds of teachings*' came out in those days and are coming out now. We are shaken by them if we do not have a **comprehensive knowledge** of the Word of God. I will say it again – BEWARE OF FALSE TEACHERS! Search the scriptures EVERYTIME you hear a message, yes, **even as you read this book!** Believe and accept **only** what the Word of God teaches. **Do not be misled by those who manipulate a few verses in order to prove their doctrine.** (You can prove almost anything you want by quoting half a verse out of context!!!) Consider the Bible *en toto* – **not just one or two verses plucked out of nowhere**. Study the word in **context**.

When persecution rose against Paul in Thessalonica, he and Silas go to Berea. The Bible says: 'the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**' (Acts 17:11) God called the Bereans 'noble' who believed what the great apostle Paul himself taught only after searched the scriptures for confirmation! This is

to be our example as people of the 'open Bible'. I will say it again: Search the scriptures EVERYTIME you hear a message and believe **only** what the Word of God teaches.

P. Accept O Lord, these our prayers and petitions. Make us to observe in purity and goodness of heart Your precepts and those of Your Holy Apostles and of Your Apostle Paul, architect and builder of Your Church.

C. Amen.

The precepts of God and those of the Holy apostles are compiled for us today as the **written** Word of God - The Holy Bible. In the Jerusalem church, we read what the early church practiced. Acts 2:42 describes how the early disciples 'were *continually* devoting themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and to **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread** and to **prayer**.' If we look carefully, we will find that this is precisely what the Holy Qurbana is all about. The apostles' teaching is the Word of God. We have gathered for fellowship, for communion where we worship, pray and break bread. The latter is another expression for participating in the Body and Blood of the Lord.

The congregation says 'Amen' and is agreeing together to this prayer. We are publically saying that we want God to be in us and cause us to observe in purity and goodness of heart, the Lord's precepts that we are going to hear. We are proclaiming our desire to obey God. This is the first of many times in the worship that the word '**Amen**' has been used. Let us spend a few moments discussing this word. The Bible says, "Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) The word '**believed**' in Hebrew is the word 'AMAN' from which we get the word **amen** today. It means 'GOD SAID IT. I BELIEVE IT AND THAT IS **ENOUGH** FOR ME!' That is what we are saying when we say '**Amen**' at the end of every prayer! The literal word meaning in Greek is 'so be it.' We are agreeing with God that whatever He has promised shall be so because we pray to Him!

D. (Faces the congregation and reads out where the text is chosen from).

Facing the altar indicates that the words that are spoken in prayer are addressed to God. In the same way, facing the congregation indicates that the words read are addressed to us.

C. Praise be to you, O Lord of the Apostles.....

Remember, it is the Lord whom we are praising NOT the Apostle who has recorded God's word. It is important that in all things, God alone must get all our worship and adoration *always*. Often, when we hear a wonderful sermon or see or hear about miraculous acts which the Lord has mightily performed through a brother, we tend to praise the brother and **I suspect, don't ascribe as much praise to God.** *This is hazardous both to us and this brother.* In any given situation – whether a miracle or a powerful message, it is the LORD who is important, NOT the messenger. It always amazes me to think of the prophet Daniel. He served before many heathen Babylonian kings beginning with Nebuchadnezzar. Each of these kings saw the glory of God and declared, "Praise be to the God of Daniel!" Note carefully that **none of them gave praise to Daniel** or said that Daniel was great. Yet all acknowledged that the **God of Daniel was great** indeed! To appreciate a brother is not sinful but remember to give God the glory in all things ALWAYS. Similarly, when people appreciate us for some good we have done or said, let us remember **never** to take glory for ourselves.

C. *(contd...) O Lord grant us grace to discern your word...*

We earlier asked that God may help us to *observe* His precepts. Now we are asking for grace to DISCERN (comprehend or realize) His word that we might obey Him 100%. Discerning God's word is a *great need* among believers today.

D. *(After reading the epistle portion) Hallelujah, Hallelujah, offer to the Lord sacrifices of praise. Come and worship in His Holy courts.*

As said earlier, the sacrifices we bring today into God's house are sacrifices of praise.

C. *Hallelujah*

We have heard the word of God and having heard God speak to us from the epistles. We join in praising Him and we are reminded that we must continue to offer our sacrifices of praise to Him. Praising our God must be to his like a sweet smelling sacrifice offered in purity and in love.

Gospel Reading

P. *Give to us knowledge and discernment of Your divine word. Fill us with the truth of Your Holy gospel, the riches of Your wisdom and the gift of Your Spirit. Enable us gladly to obey*

Your commands and perfectly to fulfill Your holy will. Make us worthy to receive Your blessing and mercies at all times, now and forever.

C. Amen.

Let us keep in mind what we are saying "AMEN" to. We are asking God for the following things:

- a. We are asking for **KNOWLEDGE** of the Word of God. God has revealed Himself through scripture and knowing the Word of God will lead us to knowing God better.

Revelation of the Word of God is expressed in the Bible using **two** words – *logos* and *rhema*. LOGOS refers to the WRITTEN word of God that is with us – the Holy Bible and RHEMA is the SPOKEN word of God that comes alive to us. When we hear the scriptures read to us in church, it is expected that the **logos** will become **rhema** to us in our hearts. When the same inspiring message is given in church, there may be two men sitting side by side who are affected differently. One may be overjoyed and really encouraged on hearing the word while the other person just wants the service to get over so he can go home! Both are sitting in the same sanctuary, same row but different responses. It is not difficult to determine for which one Logos had become Rhema! In the room you are in are many voices – speaking, singing, etc and you can hear them if you have a radio tuned to the frequency of transmission. Otherwise we cannot hear. **In the same way, if we don't hear His voice, it is not because God is not speaking.** He is speaking and has been speaking out loud for generations but only those with their hearts willing to hear what God has to say can hear! Only he who has a heart to listen to God will hear the rhema!

There is yet another message here. The Bible is the WRITTEN word of God. But we also have the LIVING word of God – Jesus Himself! We have the life of Jesus detailed in the gospels for us to see how the Word of God was manifested in human flesh. This is a great encouragement for us. If I may make a small aside here. There are **five** gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and **ME!** People who will never read the first four should see the life of Jesus in **me!** This is a great encouragement as well as an awesome responsibility.

- b. We are asking for DISCERNMENT of the divine Word of God. We are publically admitting that much **more than mere knowledge**, we want to *discern* God's word – that He

should enable us to understand and that only He can provide the true and sufficient revelation of His Word.

- c. We are acknowledging before the **assembled saints**, before **God and His angels**, before **Satan and the powers of evil** that the Word of God is DIVINE and not of human origin. We are acknowledging that "*all scripture is God breathed.*" (2 Timothy 3:16).
- d. We are asking God to fill us i) with the '*truth of the Holy gospel*'; (ii) the '*riches of wisdom from above*' and (iii) the '*gift of His Holy Spirit*'.

'truth of the Holy gospel' – There is no truth greater than what was revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the **final** and **ultimate** revelation of Yahweh God. Hebrews 1:1,2 says, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but *in these last days* He has spoken to us by His Son. In the Old Testament, when someone touched a leper, he became unclean. In the New Testament, Jesus touched a leper, the leper became clean! *One is true but the other is truer!* A study on the life and ministry of Jesus recorded by His eyewitnesses will be very rewarding for our spiritual life.

'riches of wisdom' – James 3:17 says, "the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." This is the true wisdom that we need to live Holy lives before men. But how to get this? James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it **will be given** to him." This is a promise for us who think that we are pretty foolish when it comes to things of God. This is what we pray for when we pray, "Give to us... riches of your wisdom." God has said that when we ask in faith, He WILL give. So, let us ask Him in faith! We will receive His divine wisdom to live our lives on earth.

'gift of His Holy Spirit' – We are asking for the gift of His Holy Spirit. Firstly, we must understand that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is God, not some impersonal force. Next, He is Christ's gift to us. Remember the second promise in the New Testament – "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 3:11) Just as the first promise is that of salvation, the second promise is that of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. And that is what we are asking Him for. This is a FREE GIFT not something to *work* for! This is a PROMISE of God Almighty to **anyone who asks and keeps on asking in faith**. "Ask

and *keep on asking* and it shall be given you; seek and *keep on seeking* and you shall find; knock and *keep on knocking* and the door shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks and keeps on asking receives; and he who seeks and keeps on seeking finds; and to him who knocks and keeps on knocking, the door shall be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a loaf of bread, will give him a stone; or if he asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts [gifts that are to their advantage] to your children, *how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask and continue to ask Him!*" (Luke 11:9-13) We ask again and again in order to have more and more of Him, submit ourselves more and more to Him and also to show our earnestness. We need to be **completely enabled** by God's Holy Spirit if we are to live the way He wants us to. He alone must be on the throne of our hearts every moment. At a Bible study we used to have in Pullad in 1997-1998, an ammachi who had been a missionary with ENFI in North India explained this quite nicely and I vividly remember it. She said, "When I accept Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit comes into my heart and lives there – He may be called a RESIDENT. When I ask Jesus to fill me with His Holy Spirit, He becomes my PRESIDENT!!! The Holy Spirit is **with** us, He is **in** us when we start our walk of faith and He comes **upon** us when Jesus fills us with His Holy Spirit continually for His service. When we pray this prayer, we are asking for His infilling that will fill us and will overflow. Jesus said, "He who believes in Me [who cleaves to and trusts in and relies on Me] as the Scripture has said, From his innermost being shall flow [continuously] springs and rivers of living water." (John 7:38) Imagine wherever we go, His life flows out of us to everyone we meet! Let us desire this life very eagerly!

- e. We are asking for God's help to obey the commands and perfectly to fulfill His holy will in our lives. We are saying in effect 'God, I need YOUR help, I need YOUR power to obey you.'
- f. We are desiring to do God's will **gladly**.

Jesus said, "If you [really] love me, you will keep [obey] my commandments." (John 14:15) It is LOVE for God that leads us to obey with gladness and great rejoicing. It is love for the Lord that made Paul and Silas in the prison at Philippi with their legs in stocks, to sing praises to the Lord. *Subjection to God's will must not be a forced decision but rather a joyful choice made to follow God.*

g. Again we are asking God to *"make us worthy to receive His blessings and mercies at all times"*. It reiterates that we need God to make us worthy to receive His blessings and mercy. Praise God for He is doing it – constantly! But for His mercy, we'd have been destroyed long ago. Let me illustrate this point. Every time the people of Israel sinned, Exodus records, the anger of the Lord *burned* against Israel. He led the people for 40 years until all who had sinned by *repeatedly* rebelling against Him had died. (Hebrews 3:7-11, 16-19). Because Moses had struck the rock in anger where he was supposed to speak to it (though he was a great leader), he was not allowed to enter the promised land that he was leading Israel to. Again, to sin was *really expensive* those days. The people of Israel had no food to eat and God sent manna and quail. **Yet when they sinned, they had to sacrifice their bulls, goats and lambs.** If they were poor, they had to sacrifice two doves. **It was really costly to sin.** These days, we tend to take God lightly. *Grace and forgiveness is not cheap.* It cost God His only begotten Son's life! *We sometimes forget that our God is an awesome frightening God.* Except for Jesus at the right hand of God, making intercession for us (1 John 2:1,2) we'd have been dead long ago!

D. *Brethren, let us stand in silence and reverence and listen to the proclamation of the living word of God from the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

P. *Peace be with you all.*

Let me take you to another scene in the Bible when the word of God was read out to the people. After the city of Jerusalem and the temple was rebuilt, Ezra & Nehemiah called all the people together and Ezra was reading from the Book of the Law. (Please read Nehemiah 8: 1-12). The people were standing in silence and reverence before God. When the word of God was read, they **wept** because they *realized how much they had fallen short of what God desired* from them. We find the gospel reading bracketed on both sides by "Peace be with you." Ever wondered why that is so? On the first Pentecost, Peter preached a long sermon ending with the words, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36) Verse 37 continues, "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" We expect that the word of God which is "sharper than any two-edged sword" will *cut our hearts and lead us to repentance.* We should allow the word of God to **cut** us and **expose** our sin so that we may stand naked before God and ask for His mercy and help. Our hearts are troubled by the word

which brings conviction and we need to hear God's voice giving us His peace. Peace is a constant theme in the Bible and Jesus spoke of it frequently. The source of true peace is Jesus, not legislation. His peace is what we need in our hearts today and always.

C. May the Lord make us all worthy to listen to His Word.

We have no right of our own to be in God's presence. We have no worth in ourselves to listen to the precious words of the gospel of Christ so we pray to the Lord to make us worthy.

P. The Holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which proclaims life and salvation to the world as recorded by the Apostle Mathew/John (Or Evangelist mark/ Luke).

I want to emphasize some important words. The gospel is of the Lord Jesus Christ, not St. Matthew's gospel or St. Luke's gospel which is the way we usually say it. This is reinforced by saying that it was **recorded** by the apostles / evangelists. The Word of God is of DIVINE origin. Man **merely recorded** it. Also, let us note that the gospel proclaims life and salvation to the **WORLD**. The gospel is not meant just for you and me or all the Mar Thomites or even all the Christians! NOT AT ALL!!! "God so loved **THE WORLD**.." God gave His only begotten Son for **all mankind** and there is "no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Since this is true and we realize that yes, the gospel proclaims (the word is KERYGMA – proclamation) – **not just whispers**, life and salvation to the world, we need to be BEARERS of this good news! By our **words** and **deeds**, the people around us have to realize that Jesus is the answer – that Jesus is THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE and that there is NO other way to God but through Him. We are witnesses to these things and God has commanded us to "**Go into the world to make all people His disciples**". We need to minister His gospel wherever He has placed us.

C. Blessed is He that has come and will come again. Praise to the Father Who sent Him for our salvation. May His blessings rest upon us.

In old English, "bless" was used instead of praise. We are praising Jesus who has come and we recall His promise to come again soon. Praise to the Father who sent Him for our salvation. There are many scoffers today who laugh when they hear others speak about Christ's return to the earth. Worse than them are **WE who claim to believe in and talk about His**

return but behave as if the world will never end, we will live forever and that our goal is to live happily ever after in THIS world! Every word of God has come true!!! Numerous prophecies are *being* fulfilled. If He said that He is coming, **it is guaranteed** to take place! We may or may not be in earth to see it happen but His coming is assured! Once a vicar in England took a survey before the service and asked each person before the service started, "Do you think that Christ will come **today**?" Each person replied, "I think not!" That morning's sermon text was Luke 12:40, "Be ye therefore ready also for the Son of man cometh at an hour when **ye think not.**" Christ can come at any time. Am I ready now?

P. *In the day of Jesus the Christ, our Lord and Saviour, the Word of life, God incarnate of the Bless Virgin Mary, it happened in this way. (or He taught in this manner).*

Here we recall the person of Jesus and who He **is**. We are eagerly waiting to hear what He has to say to us this Sunday morning.

C. *So we believe and affirm.*

The Malayalam goes thus: *Apragaram njangal vishwasichu kondadunnu*

My wife Reena had a very pertinent doubt - "How can we say that we believe and affirm (especially the way it is written in Malayalam) when we have **no idea** what is the portion that is about to be read to us? It may be something that we are NOT OBEYING!" Very valid, isn't it? I think it is a matter of saying this by **faith**! What we have not yet obeyed, when we come to God in faith and ask for help, He will make it a reality in our lives. On the other hand, it is *dangerous* to say these words without meaning to obey! When we say this we are saying, "We do not know what you are going to show me this morning, but **whatever it may be**, we believe because *You* say it. Not only do we believe it, we are prepared to honour Your word and obey You in what we are now about to hear. To this end, work in us O Lord!"

P. *(Reads the gospel).* Peace be with you all.

His peace is 'not as the world gives'. Jesus said, 'Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' (John 14:27).

C. *We thank you, Lord, that You have given us your gospel which is indeed the light of the world, that we may be drawn closer to You.*

We acknowledge a second time that this gospel reading is the light of the **world** and we have no business to keep it confined to ourselves. We also acknowledge that we are being drawn closer to God by the hearing of this gospel.

C. (contd...) Enable us by Your grace to give praise to You through the living words from Your gospel which have now heard.

Again, we are asking the Lord for His grace to help us to praise His THROUGH the very gospel we heard. When we humble ourselves before God, his grace flows through us to make us more and more like Him.

Again and again, we find a lot of repetition in the words we say. Repetition, as I said earlier, should not make us weary but encourage us. *Jesus* repeated Himself as did the apostle *Paul*. I heard an illustration once. There was a preacher who came newly to a church. His first Sunday service message theme was '*You must be born again.*' The next Sunday too he taught on '*You must be born again.*' This went on for several weeks and the people started getting agitated. They asked him, *why* was he *always* preaching 'You must be born again?' The preacher answered, "*Because you must be born again!*" In Matthew 6:7, Jesus cautions us against *meaningless* repetition. What He wants us to do is to mean what we pray *each* time! We are asking for God's divine help to do this.

Promeon

The word "Promeon" means 'preface' or 'preamble'.

P. O Lord, grant us your grace and your mercy.

C. Merciful Lord, have mercy and help us.

We ask for mercy and help to do what? That's what we pray for next.

P. Help us continually to offer to you our praise and thanksgiving.....

We may be often in doubt as to what to do in a particular situation – which way is the **will of God**. But there are *three* things that the word of God says is *surely* the will of God! "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) When we do these three that we **know are God's will for our lives daily**, God will reveals

His will more clearly. Here we are asking God to help us to praise Him at ALL times. Why? **Because it is the right thing to do!** There is a lovely book called '*Power in praise*' which is a masterpiece by Merlin Carothers which deals with the topic of praise in the disciple's life more elaborately. I would recommend this book very highly to all.

P. *(contd)...* *To Him who absolves us from our debts and pardons our sins, Who receives the penitent and makes him holy, Who yearns for the redemption of sinners and promised....*

God '*absolves us from our debts and pardons our sins.*' There is no way we can pay the debt we owe to God. Therefore God Himself had to absolve us from our debts and pardon our sins. "(Jesus) was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

'Receives the penitent' The imagery is akin to the story of the prodigal son. In the story of the Lost Son (or the Prodigal Son as in the King James Version), God the Father is waiting eagerly, looking out for the return of His son who has gone astray. The Bible says, "*.. while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*" (Luke 15:20) He did not wait for me to come back and kneel before His throne. He did not tell me, "Go have a bath and come, you stink!" He did not wait for the entire repentance speech to be completed. He did not wait for me to grovel on the floor in front of Him saying that I was sorry. He did not very grudgingly say, "Okay for now. Let me see how you behave from now on. You are on probation." No, He RAN when he saw that I had repented. He threw His arms around my stinking body and kissed me! What a wonderful God we have! There is a moving song by Benny Hester called '*When God ran.*' The chorus goes thus: '*..the only time I ever saw Him run was when He ran to me, took me in His arms, held my head to His chest, said "My son's come home again!" Lifted my face, wiped the tears from my eyes, with forgiveness in His voice, He said "Son, do you know I still love you?"*' There are three parables strung together in Luke chapter 15 – the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son. In the end on the first parable, Jesus said, "there is rejoicing in the **presence of the angels of God** over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10) Let us note the words carefully here. Who is rejoicing? Angels? There is no doubt that the angels rejoice but here it says rejoicing in the **presence** of the angels. I think that much more than the angels, **God** rejoices in our repentance and salvation! Zephaniah 3:17 says, "The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take **great delight** in you, He will quiet you with His

love, **He will rejoice over you with singing.**" Our God rejoices over us! What a joyous and blessed thought this is! Awesome to know this God!

There is one more interesting phrase that we should see in this parable before moving on. Luke 15:7 says, "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents **than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.**" What is Jesus saying here? Is it possible to find even one of us who have no need to repent? In the church is it possible that the majority have no need to repent? Is it meaning that 99 of 100 sheep of His flock are SINLESS? We know that this cannot be! **We become perfect only when we see the Lord face to face!** If I tell you now that I have no need of repentance now, it means *only one thing* – **I HAVE REPENTED ALREADY!** Those who have no need of repentance are those who are **constantly repenting** of every small thing that they do wrong as soon as they realize their sin. Let us be like them. Every time we sin – big or small – let us repent **immediately** and have our relationship with the Father restored! No matter how lost I may be, how much I have sinned, there is life and love for a look, a repentant look – at the cross of the Calvary!! Praise the Lord!

God '*makes the sinners HOLY.* "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." (Isaiah 1:18) Hallelujah! Can you believe that? I, who am a sinner, being made Holy – like Jesus! *Praise the Lord!* Let us always bear in mind that God is working out a master plan in us to make us Holy.

'He yearns for the redemption of sinners.' Although the justice of God causes God's anger to burn against the sinners, His loving heart is *yearning* for our redemption. Jesus looked at the city of Jerusalem and *grieved.* (Mathew 23:37) This makes Him the God of the *second chance,* the *third chance* and so on! Let me illustrate. **What was the difference between Peter and Judas?** The only difference was that Peter **repented!** If Judas too had repented, the story of Judas' life would have had a different ending! When Jesus predicted that Peter would betray Him, He added these words, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to *sift you as wheat.* **But I have prayed for you,** Simon, that your **faith may not fail.** And when you have turned back (*are converted*), strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31,32) Notice the words that Jesus used. He has prayed that *our faith in His forgiving nature* will not fail!!!! **Even when we sin, we must not forget that God is on OUR side against the devil.** He is always willing to

give us another chance!!! Praise the Lord! After the resurrection, the details in Mark (supposed to have been dictated by Peter) is a bit different from the other narratives. Mark 16:5 says, "As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" ***Did you see that?*** "Go and tell his disciples **and Peter..**" If He had just said 'disciples' (and sure Peter was a disciple, the leader) he may have thought, "He probably meant all the others – at least they *only ran away*, I **denied** Him publicly!" We too may be prone to think that we are the worst of all criminals and do not *deserve* forgiveness. That is true, we can **never** deserve His forgiveness but **He always gives us another chance!!!** Praise the Lord!

'He promised many great promises.' His Word promises us, "no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God." (2 Corinthians 1:20) All the promises of God are '**Yes**' and '**Amen**' in Christ Jesus Here we are recollecting one of them.

P. *(contd.) Call and I will answer. Knock and I will open and stretch forth My hand to pardon your sins.*

The accurate translation of Matthew 7:7,8 is "Ask and *keep on asking* and it will be given you; seek and *keep on seeking* and you will find; knock and *keep on knocking* and [the door] will be opened to you." We must *persist* and *persevere* in prayer. God has promised that He WILL answer – there can be No doubt about it. He will hear our cry for help and pardon our sins.

Also, we must never be satisfied with our spiritual life and the degree of our relationship with Him and *repeatedly* ask Him to make us more and more like Him each day.

P. *(contd.) ..to You belong glory and honour and worship now and forever.*

After we ask God for help to offer Him praise and thanksgiving, recollect the characteristics of God and recall His divine promises, we acknowledge that yes, to Him alone belong All the glory, ALL the honour ALL the worship, now and always. No more will we strive

for personal glory, no more boasting about self. *Boasting is completely forbidden in the word of God.* James 3:5 speaks of how the tongue, despite being a very small organ makes "great boasts". What we are to do *instead* is detailed by God Himself. "This is what the LORD says, 'Let **not** the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but *let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, Justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,*' declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 9: 23, 24)

C. *Amen.*

P. *Let us pray to the Lord for His grace and mercy.*

C. *Merciful Lord, have mercy and help us.*

P. *O Lord God, who alone can make holy.....(Prayer for pardon and mercy)*

This prayer bears resemblance to the Old Testament worship when the priest stands between God and His people, brings the people's sins and his own; and offers sacrifices for all their sins. After this, he leads the people in worship.

P. *(contd...) Who ALONE can make Holy. Who ALONE can pardon and remove my sins – Blot out my many, great and innumerable sins and those of all Your people...*

We learnt earlier that God alone can make us Holy; He alone can pardon us our sins. Here is a great revelation – Not only does He pardon my sins, He will REMOVE my sins, He will BLOT OUT my sins!!! Praise the Lord. **He forgives me and will remember my sins NO more.**

1 John 1:9 says "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and He will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." This is how the Lord make us Holy: He removes our sins, puts Jesus' righteousness in us and calls us 'Holy'. Thus we are indeed **made** holy.

When we pray our prayers are not for ourselves alone, we are not to be selfish. The priest prays for his own sins and also for the people. Please look at Daniel 9:4-19. Daniel himself was right before God but he prays and confesses the sins of his people. He did not say that he was better than them, he instead prayed asking for mercy on them. Ephesians 4:13 says, ".....until we ALL reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and

become nature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ..." There is **no competition** in the kingdom, in the body of Christ. We must pray for His forgiveness and mercy on all believers.

P. (contd...) O Lord, in your goodness, have mercy on us and help us. O Lord, remember us and our families, our bishops and clergy and all faithful members of your holy church.

Here, in God's presence, we make intercession for families – God's chosen vehicle for creation; for church leaders all over the world – so that they can lead us in obedience to God; and for ALL faithful members of the **one** true Church of God – this involves recognition of each other as brothers and constant intercession in prayer. Of these three groups, the most neglected is probably prayer for the leaders in the church. The importance of praying for them cannot be overstated. We cannot even imagine the stresses they go through every day and the temptations that Satan must be throwing at them because they lead the church of God. Often we tend to be critical of our leaders. What we need to remember is how much they are a target of the devil and we must pray for their safety and for God's grace to overcome the devil and for God's grace to lead the children of God in the church.

P. (contd) Strengthen us, we pray, in body and spirit. Ever refresh us with your grace and mercy...

For a sin-burdened soul, God's grace, mercy and forgiveness brings refreshing peace of mind. In the book "Pilgrim's Progress", on reaching the foot of the cross, the burden of SIN which Christian was carrying, fell off and rolled away, **NEVER** to be seen again.

Our God is interested in strengthening us in our **bodies** and our **spirits**. We are sometimes guilty of emphasizing either one or the other. This is an old philosophical problem. In New Testament times, there were the **Epicureans** for whom the body was paramount – they indulged in every pleasure possible, their motto being 'eat, drink and be merry'. The rival group consisted of the **Stoics** for whom the body was unimportant – they were the intellectuals of their day. God brings *perfect balance* by sending Jesus Christ - the **Word** of God become **flesh**. Both the body and the spirit are important in God's sight. He gave dignity to our human flesh without compromising on the spirit's importance.

P. (contd..) save us from all evil...

Why do we pray this prayer? This is prayed remembering God's word that assures us that He is able to keep us from falling (Jude 27).

P. (contd...) *Lead us your children to dwell with you forever....*

This is the **first** time in the worship that we are proclaiming that – yes, we are God's children indeed. How do you know that you are a child of God? It is not dependent on our feelings nor based on our good deeds. We stand on what the Word says. John 1:12 says, "... To ALL who received Him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God." **We are God's children if we have accepted Him as our Savior and Lord and we believe on His name.**

The believer's greatest desire is (or *should be!*) to dwell with the Lord forever. Jesus has promised us, "In my Father's house are many mansions... I go prepare a place for you. ...I will come again and receive you to Myself; **that where I am, there you may be also.**" (John 14:2,3)

P. (contd..) *to You we offer praise and thanksgiving, for ever and ever.*

C. *Amen*

P. (*Sedra*) The word "sedra" means "collection" of prayers, In the Malayalam order of worship, each week, a different prayer is chosen. For simplicity, here only the prayer given in the English order is studied.

O Lord, mighty and glorious, save us by Your power from the viles of the evil one. O Lord, in Your grace and mercy and love for mankind You took flesh of the Blessed virgin Mary and were born as man among men...

This is a prayer asking for the Lord's protection and His continued saving presence with us. It reminds us again that the Lord in His mercy for you and me, took the form of man.

P. (contd..) *Do not banish us, O Lord, from your presence and from the company of the angels and archangels, the Seraphim and Cherubim and all who serve and adore your Holy name.*

In other words, we are saying, "O Lord, keep us forever in your presence that I, along with the angels, archangels, Seraphim, Cherubim and all the saints, may serve and adore your

Holy name O Lord, I want to be forever near you, do not *ever* throw me out." We are reminded of the privilege that mankind lost with the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they disobeyed and sinned against God. We plead with Him to have mercy to keep us near Him always. In Psalm 84:10 the psalmist says, "Better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."

I am reminded of an old hymn with the same theme:

Jesus, keep me near the cross;

There a precious fountain,

Free to all, a healing stream,

Flows from Calvary's mountain.

In the cross, in the cross,

Be my glory ever,

Till my raptured soul shall find

Rest beyond the river.

P. *(contd..)* show to us the way of life and salvation that we may persevere and attain to Your glorious kingdom, ever praising Your goodness and bounty towards us.....

The emphasis here is on "*show to us the way of life and salvation*" and not on "attaining". We are not *earning* eternal life. It is God's free gift to all who repent, believe and obey. This obedience is often pictured as the "way" of the cross or as a "race" in the Bible. Our salvation is a free gift and comes with it the **power** we previously lacked – power to live obedient lives, pleasing to God – every day!

P. *(contd..)* Lord Jesus, look upon us with the eye of Your mercy, and keep us in the shadow of Your cross. Lord Jesus, free us from all evil and defilement and enrich us from the treasury of Your bountiful mercy. Lord Jesus, make us to rejoice with all the children of Your kingdom and to partake in Your glory with all who have served You.

This is fairly self-explanatory but I would like to point out one thing – the repeated use of the word - **all**. He is able to free us from ALL evil and defilement. We want fellowship with ALL God's children everywhere – here on earth and one day in eternity!

P. (contd...) and to You and to the Father and to the Holy spirit we ascribe all praise and thanksgiving. Now and forever.

C. Amen.

There is a prayer which the priest prays immediately after Sedra. It somehow was omitted in the English order. Let me transliterate and translate that prayer into English before we understand the depths of its meaning.

P. Kadangalku pariharvum papangalku vimochanavum ennekum Daivathingalninnu naam prapikkumarake.

C. Amen.

Put very simply, from the *Lord* we obtain pardon for our debts and freedom from the slavery of sin, *forever!!!* Not only can we get our sins forgiven, we can be **set free** from them! Hallelujah! We looked at 1 John 1:9 previously: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and He will forgive our sins **and** purify us from **all** unrighteousness." The work of God does not stop with forgiveness; He wants to go beyond – to PURIFY us from ALL sin. With this assurance of pardon, forgiveness, cleansing and liberty from sin we again enjoy the holiness of God in the prayers that follow.

P. Weak and sinful as we are, let us confess and together say "Holy is the Holy Father".

C. Amen

P. Holy is the Holy Son

C. Amen

P. Holy is the living and Holy Spirit

C. Amen

Remember, *every* part of our order of worship is based on the word of God and not on anyone's imagination or ideas. The word 'confess' comes from the word "homologeō" which means "to agree with". We are not making a new statement here, merely agreeing with what God is saying. We are agreeing that the **only** the triune God is **holy** and set apart from

everything else. Our job is to confess our sin and be willing to be changed into His likeness. God is faithful and just and WILL purify us. That's His promise. As we come closer and closer to God, the more we are made aware of our lack of worth before God. We learn to lean on His grace to lead us on. We must REPENT (*turn around from* or *renounce*) sin and trust God to take us forward.

When we acknowledge that our Holy Father, the Holy son and the Holy Spirit are Holy, we are attributing praise to God and thanking Him for loving us so much. One more point to be noted is that the Holy Spirit is a "Living" person and **not** an *inanimate thing*. He is God and is called by many names in scripture. One of these is that He is the Spirit of Truth. This Holy Spirit, the scripture promises will *guide* us into all truth. (John 16:13) He will bring glory to Jesus' name (John 16:14) by His work in our lives.

The next section is a declaration of faith and is popularly called the "Nicene creed".

D. *Wisdom cries aloud. Let us stand in reverence and affirm together.*

The personification of 'wisdom' here initially puzzled me. Then I realized that the decision to believe on Jesus and to obey Him always is the wisest decision one can ever make in life. Also, we find *wisdom* personified in the book of Proverbs to mean the voice of God or the Spirit of God speaking to man.

The Nicene Creed

The faith declaration most widely used is the Nicene Creed (Latin: *Symbolum Nicaenum*). The first church council met in AD 325 in the city of Nicaea, hence the name. There are some who debate the necessity of having a creed. Every institution has its vision and mission statements. The Nicene Creed is the earliest faith statement we have and in some form, is common to nearly all churches. This acts as a yardstick of correct doctrine and is vital to safeguard against heresy. Every word of the Creed has almost directly been lifted off from the Bible. Every time we worship, our hearts and minds focus on the truth of God's word when we confess the words, "I believe in..."

The main purpose of the Nicene Creed had been to correct a heretical teaching by a Libyan preacher called Arius who wrongly taught that Jesus was a creation of God and therefore, questioned His deity. (We dealt with God's attitude to wrong teaching when we

studied the epistle reading.) Today, perhaps we may not say what Arius said. But a similar heresy arises when we read of Jesus' lifestyle and deem it *impossible* for us to follow because we are 'mere human beings' unlike Jesus who was God. I John 4:2.3 says, "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges *that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh* is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the *antichrist*..." I am so glad that our church leaders had the wisdom to include the Nicene Creed in our order of worship. Let us briefly study what we are proclaiming every Sunday.

P. *We believe in one true God, the Father Almighty.*

C. *Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.*

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all the world. Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made: who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. He was crucified also for us in the day of Pontius Pilate. Suffered and died was buried. The third day He rose again by His Father's holy will, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead and of His kingdom, there will be no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets and apostles.

We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins and look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the new life of the world to come. Amen.

A study of the entire Nicene Creed would be a book by itself and I don't propose to elaborate too much but would like to point out a few things.

It is a *fact* that GOD created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The universe did not come into being by mere chance or by evolution. What is being taught as truth in science classes in school actually is a well-wrought plan of the devil and he has succeeded in sadly persuading many who have not taken the trouble to investigate if what is taught is true. There

are numerous recent evidences pointing to creation defies and more are being described nearly every day. I would recommend the diligent reader to search this out. There are numerous internet resources available. <http://www.reasons.org> is one such website.

Jesus is 100% God and retained His divinity while giving up His privileges. He was a person of history having been born of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit in the days when Pilate was governor of Judea. He died for our sins and rose again affirming the fact that His life was sinless and death had no hold on Him. He ascended into heaven and is coming again in glory (Rev. 22:20). This is the patient expectation of every believer.

There is ONE church that is the bride of Christ though each local church is individually responsible to Him as seen in Revelation chapters 1-3. This church is HOLY (set apart as a pure bride for Him), CATHOLIC (not to be confused with the denomination bearing the same title, but "universal") and APOSTOLIC – meaning that the church is founded upon the teaching of the apostles, who in turn learnt as eye-witnesses of Jesus Himself. The early believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42) and this is our pattern too. The churches everywhere were also founded by the apostles who were sent into the four corners of the earth to preach the word and to make disciples. The apostle Thomas was sent by Him to India where he founded our church.

I must admit that I was confused by the expression "one baptism for the remission of sins". When we read the New Testament, we come across at least **four** different baptisms – the *baptism in water* when the believer joined the church, the *baptism in the Holy Spirit* by Jesus, *baptism of suffering* and *baptism into the body of Christ* by the Holy Spirit. The portion in the word where this statement is found is Ephesians 4:4-6 which says, "There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." After much prayer and asking the Lord, I believe that *in this context*, the ONE BAPTISM that we confess is what is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "...we were all **baptized by one Spirit into one body** - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

As I said, a proper study of this Creed is beyond the scope of this book, but I would encourage each of my readers to study this beautiful creed *with the word of God* by themselves so that you may have a correct idea of our Christian faith.

D. *Barekumar Sthomenkalos*

C. *Kurie Elaison*

“Barekumar” means “O Lord, bless us, we pray” and “Sthomenkalos” means “Let us stand well”. The latter is an exhortation to remind us that we stand and worship in the presence of the King of the universe, in the presence of the Holy of Holies. Again, the congregation with one voice cries out, “Lord have mercy”.

Birthday & Wedding Anniversary Prayers

Thanksgiving is an important portion of our worship and coming forward to kneel for birthday and wedding anniversary prayers signifies our gratitude to God for having kept us and our families under His care and guidance throughout the past year. Coming FORWARD to kneel is acknowledging God’s goodness in the past year before the body of Christ and asking for congregation to pray for them. We, the congregation must pray for these loved ones that God may use them for His glory more this year and thank God for being so very real in their lives in the past years.

The priest lays hands on each of their heads and blesses them. This is a practice found throughout Scripture. **Laying on of hands** indicates *blessing, anointing, imparting* the Holy Spirit and *being set apart* for God. The person who kneels commits his life afresh and receives a fresh anointing for service, being set apart for God. Let us bear these in mind when go forward next time for public prayer and blessing with laying on of hands.

Offertory

Besides the giving of “tithes” or one-tenth of just one’s income, the Israelites used to bring offerings before the Lord. These offerings were a sign of dedication of oneself to the Lord. Nowadays, we pass a bag (or plate) around and each one puts in some money, the amount of which is *not* as important as the **heart** of the person giving the money. Our attitude should be one of complete submission to Jesus, completely surrendering every area of our lives to Him.

The money is **only a token**, a symbol; *the offering is we, ourselves*. Without surrendering ourselves *first*, it is ridiculous to offer our money to God. He wants us first (Romans 12:1), not so much our money.

Under the New Covenant in which we live, we are NOT obligated to tithe as the Israelites were. Actually, what is required of us is a *much tougher task* – GIVING! Giving with a cheerful heart is much more difficult than tithing. When we *give*, we are acknowledging that we are only *stewards* or *custodians* and that everything we have actually **belongs to God!** God's word says that we have to give an explanation for how we spent our time, money and talents. Also, God expects us to give *cheerfully*. Giving is NOT a *physical act* alone – it is a question of **motive** and a **reflection of the condition of our hearts**. 2 Corinthians 9:6,7 says, "Remember this: *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously*. Each man should *give what he has decided in his heart to give*, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a *cheerful* giver."

Sermon

Sharing of the Word has always been an integral part of all the meetings of the Mar Thoma Church. The Holy Qurbana services, cottage prayers and fellowship meetings all have sharing of the word at its centre. I am reminded of Paul's statement to Timothy, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge: **PREACH THE WORD**: be prepared in reason and out of season: CORRECT, REBUKE and ENCOURAGE – with great patience and careful instruction." (2 Timothy 4:2) These days when God's word of stern discipline and correction is preached against our sins, we tend to recoil and rebel. But is here that *preaching* – sound Biblical sharing of God's word plays a vital role. For us to increase in our faith, adequate **teaching** of God's word is absolutely essential in the Church. The preaching of the word must **never** be compromised. Exhortation with the word of God is a very powerful tool to correct the people of God.

The person sharing the word has an **awesome responsibility** to *wait on God* and bring ONLY God's word to His people – nothing *more*, nothing *less*, nothing *else!* **Man's ideas can never be a substitute for what God is saying**. According to the New Testament, sharing God's word in the church is akin to being the mouthpiece of God – equivalent to

PROPHECY! If we are ever given the honour of sharing God's word, let us be careful to *wait upon God* and *speak only His heart*.

There is a very disturbing trend that I have seen in several parishes - worshippers come to church *without* their Bibles! To me, it is like **going to war without a weapon** in hand! As we know, the Word of God is the **sword of the Spirit**. I would encourage everyone reading this to please carry his/her Bible to church for worship. Let me assure you that it is worthwhile. We can read along with the scripture readings, can study the portion preached about *in context*, etc. Dear reader, I *implore* you, please do take your Bible to church when you go for worship. Nowadays, bibles for the mobile phone are available freely on the internet. *If it is "too difficult" to carry a "big Bible", at least download the Bible on your mobile and read it in church.*

Public Prayer of Confession

I wonder if we have noticed the significance of our public prayer of confession coming *immediately after* the sermon and preceding the communion service proper. It is expected that we will allow the word of God that is preached searches our soul and expose our sin. The Holy Spirit convicts us and leads us to repentance and we arise and confess every sin before the Lord. *I found this sequence fascinating!*

This public confession is not meant to replace private confession of sins and repentance. On the other hand, it is an act of publically proclaiming that I am a sinner and I need God's grace. It is a sign also of a renewed commitment to obey God. Before coming to church, we are to 'prepare' to partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord by searching our lives and repenting of any sin that is exposed. We must be careful to allow God to search our hearts **thoroughly** and also not to hide some sins or excuse them away. God wants us to deal with sin sternly. His way of restoration is quite simple – **repent, confess, forsake** and **accept** Christ's forgiveness. Preparation is essential before participating in the Holy Qurbana for Scripture warns us that "...whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Body and Blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the Body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

I will first write down the English version of our confession prayer following which we will proceed to study the prayer in Malayalam which in my opinion is *too marvelous* for words. Some of the words employed in Malayalam have been omitted in the English order. The prayer is an altogether beautiful one.

(To be repeated after the Priest)

I confess that I have sinned against You, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in thought, word and deed. I am sorry with all my heart for these my sins. I believe in your promise that You will receive those who truly repent. O Lord, who are merciful and full of grace, accept me even as You accepted the publican, the woman who was a sinner and the thief on the cross, and comfort me by the consolation of Your Word. O Lord, grant that Your Holy Body and Holy Blood in which I now partake may not bring me to judgement and condemnation, but to life and wholeness. Amen.

In Malayalam, the prayer goes this way:

Sarva shaktiullah Bava Thamburane – Ninaku virodhamayum (I have sinned against You, O Almighty Lord)

Lokathhey rakshipanayi thante krupayal vishudha kanya Mariyaminnu Janichu – Gnangalkuvendi – Kashtatha anubhavichu Gnangalku raksha nalkiya Mashihha Thamburane – Ninaku virodhamayum (I have sinned against you, O Christ, our Lord - who suffered and died for us and saved us, You who was born of the holy virgin Mary to save the world by Your grace)

Sakaltheyum jeevipikkunnavanum, ashwasipichu shudhikarikkunnavanumaya – vishudha Rooha Thamburane – ninaku virodhamayum (I have sinned against you, O Holy Spirit, the source of life and who comforts us and purifies us when we confess our sin)

Njan cheythu poya – sakala papangaleyum – Ettuparanju Sangadaedunnu (I repent and grieve over all the sins that I have done)

Most of the above is self explanatory. I wish to just highlight, a few points before proceeding.

- (i) The Holy son **HAS saved** us by His death. We do not go through life oscillating between Heaven and Hell. If we have asked Jesus to be our Lord, we ARE saved. This is not to

condone living as we desire after once accepting Christ because righteous living is the visible and tangible **proof** that we are indeed saved.

(ii) The **Holy Spirit** imparts life to our weakened lives, so that we may live for God. When we mourn over our sin, He is the *comforter* and proceeds to purify and cleanses us.

(iii) We GRIEVE over our sin because we have hurt our Father and we ask for help that this will not take place again. It is expected that our confession each week will not be the same sin! When we walk closely with God, He gives us light on areas of our life that we did not realize were evil in His sight.

Sathyamayi Anuthapikkunavarey Kaikollumennu – Nee Cheythirikunna Vakthatham njan vishwasichu (I believe in your promise that you will accept those who truly repent)

Sakalathilum pizhachu ennu attuparayunnu – Vicharathilum, Vachanathilum, pravarthiyulum njan pizhachu (I have gone astray from you by sinning in thought, word and deed)

Ninte kalpanakal ellam njan lankhichu – Ninte sikshakku pathramakukayum chethrikunnu (I have broken all your commandments and I deserve your just punishment).

Here we are reminded how as a result of His mercy, we are saved from death which we deserve as a result of sin.

(contd..).... Karunyavanum krupaniranjavanumaya Karthave – chungakaraneyum – aa papiyaya shreeyeyum kurishil vachu kallaneyum kaikondaprakaram – enneyum kaikondu – Ninte Thiruvachanathinte thanupal enne ashwasipikkeneme (O Lord, who are merciful and full of grace, accept me even as you accepted the publican, the woman who was a sinner, and thief on the Cross, and comfort me by the consolation of your Word.)

Occasionally, we may think that our sins are so BIG – can God *ever* forgive us? Praise God that He will forgive us EVERY time that we REPENT!!! There is NO sin too BIG that cannot be cleaned by the Blood of Jesus!! Hallelujah! By recounting examples of people who were forgiven, we are being 100% assured of God's forgiveness when we repent, however great the sin may appear.

Karthave njan anubhavikunna Thiru shariravum Thiru raktavum ennikku sikshavithikkum kuttathinum aayithirarathey – jeevnum rakshakkum aakitheeraknamey – Amen. (O Lord, grant

that Your Holy Body and Holy Blood in which I now partake, may not bring me to judgement and condemnation but to life and wholeness).

P. (Declaration of Absolution)

Following the public prayer of confession, the Priest gives the declaration of absolution. Again, I will write the English statement first before proceeding to take a closer look at the Malayalam one.

May God Almighty be compassionate to you who have truly confessed your sins, and may freely forgive your sins, and make you worthy to partake of this Holy Communion.

In Malayalam, the statement is as follows:

Sathyamayi thangalude papangal ettuparanja ororutharodum Paramakarunyavanaya Karthavu kshamichirikkunnu. Thudarnulla jeevitham avanodu koode naikkuvan Avan thane ningale shaktikarikathey.

(The merciful Lord **has forgiven** all the sins of those who have truly confessed their sins. May He Himself guide you in your continued walk in Him)

Compare this with the English version. The Malayalam version has a much deserved finality about it – **an absolute certainty** – that the Lord HAS forgiven ALL my sins. Praise the Lord. Some people have raised a genuine doubt – how can the *priest* forgive our sins. They are making an error of oversight. It is **not** the *priest* who is forgiving our sins but the LORD! The Priest is merely taking God at His word and declaring it so because **God said that He would** forgive those who repent. He can say this with authority because the Lord will do what He promised.

C. Amen.

Here the ante-communion ends and the communion service proper begins.

Chapter 6

The Communion Service – Proper

(The priest prays in silence as he washes his hands)

Washing of hands here is symbolic of cleansing before he takes the Holy elements in his hands.

P. Beloved brethren, pray with me that this service may be acceptable to the Lord.

The priest needs our prayer because he is a frail man standing before the throne of God on our behalf and he is going to bring the Body and Blood of the Lord to the people.

C. O Lord, we humbly knock at your door. Coming to your house, we pray for your blessing, Sanctify your servants by your truth.

We looked at this promise twice previously. Jesus promised us, "Ask and keep on asking and it will be given you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and [the door] will be opened to you."

Please note that the **blessings** we are asking for is that we say be **sanctified** (or purified) by His truth. We are NOT asking for health, wealth or happiness, though God has promised to give us all we need. We want to be SANCTIFIED by His truth. When we seek Him first and foremost, he freely gives us all that we will ever need.

C. (contd...) O Lord, we call upon You in faith. Remember Your promise that where two or three are met in Your name, You are there in their midst.

This promise of Jesus assures of His presence with us during our worship services, fellowship meetings, family prayers, etc. *A small congregation is in no way inferior to a large congregation* because, even if only two or three are meeting in His name, Jesus is present and it is He who makes the real difference! **Numbers are not as important as hearts devoted to God.** In Matthew 18:19, 20 Jesus promised, "... if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, **I am there** in the midst of them." If we read the passage carefully, Jesus *is already* present when two or three are gathered in His name. And He comes in order that he may see us worshipping in UNITY and He comes to answer our prayers! Hallelujah!

C. (contd..) Impart to Your servants spiritual gifts; send Your Holy Spirit who dwelt in the Apostles to make His dwelling in us Your people.

While in God's presence we are asking Him for spiritual gifts - which the Lord imparts for the building up of the Church. The gifts that God give me are not meant to be for self-glorification: rather, it is for building up fellow believers. We are also asking for the **indwelling** and **anointing** of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit of God in our lives, in order that our lives may bring glory to God.

We must study God's word to know what the gifts He has for us are. Paul begins his class on this topic by saying, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, **I do not want you to be ignorant.**" (1Corinthians 12:1) and he says later on, "Follow the way of love and **eagerly desire spiritual gifts,**..." The great pioneering missionary William Carey said, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." God has sent His Holy Spirit on the earth and is giving His children the gifts of the Spirit in order to do His work on earth, in order to extend His kingdom on earth. **Ignorance is not acceptable in the life of a believer nor is an attitude which says that we don't need His gifts.** But we must never forget that His gifts are not meant to 'show-off' but "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12).

The Kiss of Peace

P. O God and Lord of all, make us worthy to greet one another with the kiss of peace, freed from insincerity and united in love....

Here a new element of the Christian life is introduced - PEACE. Peace is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in every believer. He has promised us His peace **every moment of every day**. In fact, He has promised, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives..." **He has left us His peace**. So, we cannot now complain, "Oh, I have no peace..." He HAS GIVEN us His peace, He IS GIVING and WILL CONTINUE TO GIVE His peace to us, His children!!! He does so because He Himself IS our peace (Ephesians 2:14) and He is ALWAYS WITH US! We lose the peace He gives when we forget this.

The disciples who were in the boat with Jesus when the storm occurred, the winds blew and the boat rocked **forgot that Jesus was there with them!** They also forgot that Jesus

had said, "Let us go over to the other side" long **before** the storm had started! (See Mark 4:35) *If Jesus has commissioned you to go somewhere or do something, NO POWER on earth or in hell can thwart it!!!* So, all our anxieties and worrying is needless!

This wonderful song we sing comes to mind: "Oh what peace we often forfeit,
Oh what needless pain we bear.
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer."

We may think that robbery, adultery and murder are the BIG sins. Yes, they are, but in God's eyes, the greatest sin is UNBELIEF! It is a slur on the very character of God. Having unbelief in our hearts is equal to *questioning God's love* for us. This is also *arguably* the **most common temptation** that a believer's faces today. Remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3? Do you remember the words they spoke to the king when imminently facing the fiery furnace? They said, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and *He will rescue us from your hand*, O king. But *even if He does not*, we want you to know, O king, that **we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold** you have set up." (Daniel 3:17,18) Today, our temptation may not be a physical idol of gold. The most prevalent temptation we face, I believe for us is the temptation to be ANXIOUS in a difficult situation! Anxiety is the same as unbelief and though we may not recognize it as such, is **very dangerous** in a believer's life. We must be able to confront the devil and tell him, "My Lord is able to deliver me from this difficult situation and He WILL. But even if He does not, I want you to know that I am NOT going to bow before this idol of ANXIETY that you have put before me." This should be our stance in the face of every trial. The Lord will NEVER, EVER let us down. Praise the Lord!

Also, we are publically acknowledging that we need to be made worthy by the Prince of peace Himself before we can pass on this peace that we receive from him. Please pay close attention to the words "*freed from insincerity and united in love.*" It is essential, yes, even VITAL that all true worshippers of God be ONE in the Spirit. In addition, we are to be *freed from insincerity*. There is NO POINT in hypocritically, passing the kiss of peace to the one sitting next to you while bearing a grudge against him. We must be in true fellowship with the members of the church. This is easier in a small church. But even in bigger churches, it is possible in our smaller prayer groups. The Lord desires that we become 'one' with each other in

the Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ in His High Priestly prayer prayed this for us, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also *for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one*, Father, *just as You are in Me and I am in You*. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me." (John 17:20,21) This prayer was NOT answered when Jesus was physically on the earth. Only when the Holy Spirit came upon the church could this true fellowship come.

Let me narrate this from the newborn church at Jerusalem. In Acts 1:15, we find it written, "...Peter stood up *among* the believers..." whereas after the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, we find the words "then Peter stood up *with* the Eleven..." (Acts 2:14) Even the *twelve* of them could not be one till the Holy Spirit came. Once He came, the church, small or large, could be truly **one**. Unity of believers, true peace and fellowship is ONLY POSSIBLE by the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. And He WILL do it – if WE are willing!

Next time, we pass the kiss of peace, let us pray for the one who passed it to us and for the ones we pass to and **recognize** them as being one with us. If there is anyone in the church who has a grudge against us, *we* need to take the initiative and repair the relationship. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "...if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23,24) *We are not to wait for someone to come apologize to us*. Instead, He asks US to take the first step and make the way for peace.

P. *(contd...) To You, O Father, and to Your only Son and to Your Holy Spirit, we ascribe praise and glory, one God now and forever.*

C. *Amen*

P. *Peace be with you all.*

C. *And with you also.*

I will say it again: There is *no point* in saying "and with you also", if we are bearing a grudge against each other or against the *priest*.

D. *In the love of the Lord, let us greet one another in Peace.*

I wish to reiterate this point. We do NOT *simply* make peace. It is not like treaties signed by two warring nations who are still armed and suspicious of each other. Passing the kiss of peace means that *we* receive this peace from the **Lord** and that is what we share with the person standing near us. Man-made peace is *not permanent*, and often *not genuine* or *trustworthy* either. **True peace comes only from the Lord's presence and overflows from us to others.** Also, important to note is that we are *moved by the love of the Lord* in this greeting and thus, we share His peace with each other.

ALL: *May the Love and Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ abide with us forever.*

This is said multiple times while everyone receives and shares the kiss of peace. Similarly, let this be a *constant* prayer of our hearts that God will keep us, the worshippers abiding in love and peace at all times.

B. *Brethren, having received this token of peace, Let us bow our heads before the merciful Lord.*

C. *Gracious Lord, we bow before you.*

He who bows his head before God will never bow his head before any human being. Bowing the head is an act of humility as well as acceptance of God's blessing which is prayed for in the next prayer while our heads are bowed.

P. *Merciful Lord, You dwell on high, yet condescend to look upon things that are lowly...*

Let us think for a moment how big God must be. He CREATED the universe which is so, SO BIG and we are so microscopic in comparison. Yet, He came to die for us, rose again and, praise God, lives in our hearts today - such an amazing God we serve!

I remember the old Sunday school song:

He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be.

It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,

The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.

How loving and patient He must be, He's still working on me.

The song is slightly inaccurate in that it took Him only a **DAY** to make the stars and planets! He is so, so big! I am glad that He has not given up working on me! Thank you Jesus!

P. (contd..) Bless now those who have bowed their heads in Your presence and bless them with the grace of Your only Son – with Whom and with the Holy Spirit, You are worthy of all praise and glory, now and forever.

The blessing we ask for is His GRACE. We have studied grace previously. Let us look at one more verse concerning grace. Titus 2:11 says, "For the GRACE of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. *It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in THIS PRESENT AGE.*" God's amazing grace has not only given us *salvation*, it now enables us to say. "NO" to sin and live obedient lives at the moment in this world! Praise God!

C. Amen

D. Brethren, with reverence and purity of heart, with love and true faith and devotion, let us participate in this Holy Qurbana which is now offered....

Here it is reiterated how we must be 'prepared' to participate in the Body and Blood of Christ. If we carefully see the pre-requisites (reverence, purity of heart, love, true faith and devotion) we'll find an obvious truth – WE DON'T QUALIFY! But God Who is at work in us will enable us to have these when we approach God's throne. The life and righteousness of Christ Himself is *imputed* in us by the Holy Spirit when we believe in Jesus. (**Imputed** means deposited in our account.) Philippians 2:13 says, "[Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight."

D. (contd...).....To God the Father, to whom all things belong, is offered this sacrifice of grace, peace and praise in a Spirit of unity and concord.

[While the deacon says these words, the veil covering the Holy elements are removed].

P. (Turning to the Congregation): [FIRST BLESSING] The love of God the Father, the grace of the only begotten Son and the communion and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit be with you all, dearly beloved forever.

We bring to mind again the love God has for us, His grace, the constant relationship with Him and the fact that His Spirit lives in us. For me, one of the things I have understood

least is the communion or fellowship of the Holy Spirit. I have prayed asking Him to be my best friend, do talk with Him but I have not yet grown into this relationship as I should. The Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus that He would be with us forever (John14:16) and be our constant companion. Let us strive to develop this understanding and fellowship with God more with each passing day.

C. And with you also.

Our prayer is that the Priest who is ministering may also partake of these blessings continually, along with us. There are 3 of these 'Blessings' before the distribution of the Holy elements and FINAL BLESSING at the close of the Service. In the Malayalam Order the word employed is the Syriac word "ROOSHMA" meaning, "SEAL". These blessings and what they entail is like a seal of ownership of God i.e., these set us apart for God.

P. (Lifting up his hands) May our hearts be with Christ on high.

C. Our hearts truly are with the Lord.

We have come into God's presence to worship Him and we must focus our thoughts on Him so as to enjoy His presence and to worship Him truly. Here we are reminded turn our hearts on the Lord again.

This is a very meaningful prayer and worthy of more elaborate study than possible here. *Seeing earth's events from God's standpoint changes our perspectives and extinguishes all our sorrows and fears.* The imagery in my mind is the view from a plane as it takes off. The view from the window as the plane is rising is magnificent. The buildings, cars, buses, trains all appear like very small toys! Inside them are real people like us who rush about, fretting and fuming, trying to somehow manage each day's activities!!! The Bible says that we are seated with Christ in heavenly places. (Ephesians 2:6) We must therefore train ourselves to see things as God Himself sees them – very, very small indeed! *Not at all difficult for our God to handle!*

Another imagery here of seeing things from His perspective is like watching a *parade*. If we stand on the ground, we can only see one segment at a time as they pass by before us. If we are standing on a tall building, we can see the whole parade simultaneously!!! God is *outside* of time. He knows the end from before the beginning – **nothing** takes Him by surprise! He acts on our behalf and *loves* to **thwart** the plans of the enemy. The entire Old Testament

is full of events of how the Lord thwarted the enemy's plans. Did you watch the world cup cricket finals where India won? Imagine that your friend missed the match and that you recorded it for him. Not wanting him to miss the excitement of the match, you don't tell him who won but sit to watch the whole match with him again. For him, it is the first time but for you it is a happy replay. You know that India has won so you're not nervous but are happy. Your friend is watching *not knowing how the match will end* so every time the opposing team hits a six or takes one of the Indian wickets, his heart is in his mouth! You, on the other hand, are sitting smugly content in the **knowledge** that India won the match! This is what happens when our hearts are truly with Christ on high. **We KNOW that Jesus has won!** He is the victor and leads us in victory always! Let us never be anxious, KNOWING that Christ has won! Hallelujah!

P. To sing praises and worship the Creator of all things.

C. Assuredly is good and right.

It is both GOOD and RIGHT to worship our Creator God and to sing His praises. As we studied earlier, I Peter 2:9 says, "...you are a **chosen** people, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy nation**, a people *belonging to God*, that you may DECLARE the PRAISES of HIM Who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." Let His praise be ever on our lips.

P. Who is adored by the heavenly host, sun and moon and all the stars, the earth and seas and all that dwell there, angels and archangels, thrones and powers, Cherubim and Seraphim, ever proclaiming:

C. Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty; Heaven and Earth are full of His glory, Hosanna in the highest: Blessed is He who has come and is to come in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

This is the manner in which our God is exalted through all eternity. Let us strive to bring glory to His name by both our lips and our lives. Heaven and earth are indeed full of the glory of the risen Lord. Romans 1:20 says, "...since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-His eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, **so that men are without excuse.**" Also, Psalm 97:6 says, "The heavens declare

His righteousness, and all the people see His glory.” The questions to ask today are ‘Am I shining for Him today?’ and ‘Is God’s glory be apparent in my life?’

As I have said previously, let us mean every word we say in prayer. A large number of people who say this prayer week after week are ignorant of the meaning of the word ‘HOSANNA’. It comes from the words, “HU” and “SHANNAH” meaning “SAVE US **NOW**”. It is both, an expression of praise and a plea for our rescue and salvation.

The Consecration

P. (taking the Bread in his hands) When the sinless one, of His own will, chose to suffer death for us sinners, He took bread in His holy hands.

Jesus was **made like us** in every way, **tempted like us in every way** yet was WITHOUT SIN. He *chose* to suffer death for our salvation. No man had authority over Him.

C. Bless, O Lord

P. He gave thanks, blessed, sanctified, broke it and gave it to His apostles saying, “TAKE EAT. THIS IS MY BODY GIVEN FOR YOU. DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME!”

C. Amen

P. (taking the chalice in his hands) In the same way, He took the cup.

C. Bless, O Lord

P. He gave thanks, blessed, sanctified and gave it to His apostles saying, “DRINK THIS ALL OF YOU. THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT WHICH IS SHED FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS”.

C. Amen.

Partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ plays a significant role in the life of every believer. Jesus gives us His Body and Blood freely so that our lives may be renewed. In your personal devotion, I would encourage you to please read John 6:22-50 for further light on the Body and Blood of the Lord. I will quote only a few verses here:

*Jesus said, "I **am** the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will **never** go hungry, and He who **believes** in me will **never** be thirsty. If anyone eats of this Bread he will live forever. This Bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks My Blood **has** eternal life, and I **will raise** him upon the last day. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My Blood, **remains in me and I in him.**" (John 6:35, 51, 53, 54, 56.)*

Jesus invites us to come and once more *partake* of His perfect life. I would recommend to you Dr. Paul Brand's lovely book 'IN HIS IMAGE" which has much more to say about this and is very illuminating. Dr. Brand compares the Holy Communion to a blood transfusion where another's blood flows in our vessels. Similarly, when we receive the Lord's Body and Blood, we receive His life within us! When we partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord, may our bodies become His completely! May our lives become completely like His! This is our prayer and our hope. As the song 'Take my life' goes, may our words be His words, let our hands move at His bidding, let us **do** everything, **be** everything that Jesus would Himself be and do.

There are two important thoughts I want to intersperse here. *Firstly*, we need to get our **order** of activity correct. Acts 1:1 says, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to **do** and to **teach.**" Notice the order Jesus followed. Jesus' order was DO and then TEACH. It is good for us to follow this pattern ourselves. It is good for us to follow His example of DOING and then TEACHING! When Christ's life is in us, let us DO and then TEACH / PREACH. It is NOT '*practice what you preach*' but '*preach what you practice*'!!! Doing things Jesus' way keeps us from becoming hypocrites as other people sometimes (correctly?) call us! *Secondly*, when we want to do or say something, (especially if it disturbs us) let us ask ourselves this one question – **what would Jesus do / say?** In every situation, if we ask ourselves this, seldom will we go wrong! Sometimes, the answer is not obvious and we'll need to pray more but His grace will cause His life to flow out of us to all we meet.

P. As often as you eat this Bread and drink this Cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.

Note that the word is again "proclaim". The fact that the Lord died for the sins **of the whole world** (not just ours) is a PROCLAMATION we make to the world outside the Church.

C. Your death, O Lord, we commemorate, Your resurrection we celebrate. And Your second coming we await; may Your blessing rest upon us all.

Every Lord's Day (i.e. Sunday) we gather together as did the early church. In Acts 20:7, Luke says, "*On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread.*" We do not stop with commemorating the death of our Lord. We meet to CELEBRATE Jesus' resurrection, we meet to REJOICE that our Lord IS RISEN INDEED! Hallelujah! We are also preparing ourselves and waiting patiently for the coming of the Lord. At Patmos, the last words of our Lord to John were, "Behold, I am coming soon." Let us reply with John, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus" (Rev.22:20) which incidentally is the last prayer in the Bible. Let us strive to live our lives ready to meet Him when He comes in His glory.

P. O Lord, we remember Your death, burial and resurrection, Your ascension into heaven and Your presence now with God the Father in glory and in power. We await your coming again to judge the world in righteousness and truth.

Our master is coming soon and He will judge the world. The day will come and is fast approaching when He will separate the people into two groups. He will separate the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares, and the obedient from the disobedient. We have no right of our own to stand before Jesus but because of His mercy, we have been saved. Let us strive to obey Him daily and so to be prepared to welcome Him when he comes again.

Let us bear in mind the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Both groups waited but only the ones who were wise to have the oil in their lamps were accepted. Oil here represents the true life of God – the Holy Spirit's working in the believer. Some may look very good on the outside but the heart may never have surrendered to God. Let us examine ourselves to ensure that we have His life within us and repent if need be.

We looked at the parable of the lost sheep in the previous chapter. Remember Jesus said, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." Why did the ninety-nine not need to repent? Because they were repenting as soon as they were convicted of a sin – **even a small one!**

Can we be counted among the ninety-nine who did not *need* to repent? Can we *constantly* be blameless before God by repenting *constantly*? **Let us not postpone repentance.** Let us always seek to confess the wrong and quickly get our relationship with God back in order.

P. (contd...) Therefore, we Your people offer to you, O Lord, this service and sacrifice entreating You and through You, Your Father not to deal with us according to our sins, but according to your own abundant mercy and saying:

C. Have mercy on us, O Lord our God, We give thanks to You, we praise You, We glorify You, we worship You. Have mercy on us and bless us.

Our stand before the Lord is always one of "*Have mercy on us*" because it is important to realize that though we are saved, we are **saved** SINNERS. This will teach us humility, ward off all manner of pride and will help us to reach out to the people of the earth with humility and love.

P. Answer unto us, O Lord, answer unto us, O Lord, answer unto us, O Lord and by your grace have mercy upon us.

C. Lord have mercy (3 times)

Here, we entreat the Lord to answer unto us, to continually have mercy on us and to comfort us with His word. Saying the prayer thrice signifies that we are in **dire** need of God's mercy and benevolence.

While we show our dependence on God and the seriousness of our prayer, we must remember that we are not trying to *persuade* God to answer us. The Bible says, "O Thou that hearest (or answers) prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come." (Psalm 65:2) He delights in answering prayer. In fact, He goes one step further. In Isaiah 65:24 God says, "I will answer them **before** they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!"

However, we must learn also to pray with patience. Sometimes, God seems to delay the answer. That does not mean that He does not hear. He merely wants us to trust Him and His timing. We want everything **yesterday** or at least **right now!** Prayer is NOT a magic wand to

be waved when we are in trouble. Rather, it is the submission of our will to Almighty God and we are asking for His divine intervention in our troublesome situations.

P. (Blessing the Bread) May the Holy Spirit sanctify this Bread that it may be the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Amen

P. (Blessing the Chalice) May the Holy Spirit sanctify the wine in this chalice that it may be the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Amen

We are praying that to **us who believe** the bread and wine will be the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. This is different from *trans-substitution* believed by some who hold that the bread and wine **actually become** the Body and Blood of Christ. It is NOT AUTOMATIC, but a matter of deliberate faith. In the person who **believes**, may the bread and wine be the Body and Blood of the Lord infusing new life – the life of Christ in place of our selfishness and sinful nature. It is a matter of **exchange** – we give up our terrible flesh life and we get His life in the Spirit instead! *That's a real bargain – a win-win situation!!!*

The Holy Spirit is the One Who sanctifies. He sanctifies these Holy elements and as we partake of them, He begins to sanctify *our lives* that they may be pleasing to our Father God.

P. Sanctify, O Lord, the bodies and souls of those who receive these gifts that they may bear fruit for the stability of your Holy church...

The Holy Spirit sanctifies our bodies and souls so that our entire being is renewed by Him. Our prayer is that we may “bear fruit”. Remember Jesus’ words that it is *by the fruit that one produces*, that the person is recognized for what he truly is. (Matthew 7:20) Our obedient lives are the **proof** of our inward renewed lives. There is a familiar song called “We are one in the Spirit”. The chorus goes thus: “And they’ll **know** we ARE Christians by our Love”.

The *nine – fold* fruit of the Holy Spirit is listed in Galatians 5:22,23: “..love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Notice that is **fruit** - singular *not* fruits, plural. I cannot therefore say, “I have love but no peace!” This fruit is the manifestation of Christ’s life in our **flesh** through the working of the Holy Spirit. Fruit is

produced in us as we mature and grow in the Lord. Let us remember that fruit is the *natural* product of a tree, which means that if we are ROOTED in Christ, the HOLY SPIRIT produces His fruit in us, *naturally*. *It is NOT of our effort, lest we boast*. This list is there for us to check the characteristics that we are lacking, ascertain that we are indeed growing and for us to ask the Lord to *complete* the work that He has begun. The nine characteristics that become part of us as we produce fruit encompass many of the attributes of God Himself. We are being transformed into Christ's likeness. Let us yield ourselves to the Spirit, daily. We are promised in Philippians 1:6 that we can be "confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Hallelujah!

This fruit is called fruit of the **Holy Spirit**, i.e. the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in the believer. This means that we **cannot** boast. Just like the gifts, the fruits are **NOT** for self-glorification but for the 'stability of the church.'

P. *(contd..)* *Establish ever more firmly your church founded on the rock of faith, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail...*

What a promise to hold on to!! The church will NOT be shaken because of her foundation on the rock of faith. Also, the GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PRAVAIL against the church!!! Hallelujah! What then need we fear? ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!!! Amen. When I first read this Bible verse, I could not understand what this meant. Initially I thought that the gates of hell were attacking the church and we were to *somehow* hold on. BUT THAT IS **NOT** WHAT JESUS MEANT! **We** are attacking the devil's domain and the gates of hell will NOT prevail against the army of the Lord, NOT the other way around as I was thinking. One famous evangelist's slogan is "*plundering hell to populate heaven*." Let us remember we are in war against the devil and his armies to overcome them. We overcome **every** lust in our flesh and conquer them in the name of our King! Let us take back **every** area of our lives that belong to God and Satan has wrongfully, illegally occupied. Victory is **ours** in Jesus' name!

P. *(contd..)* *and preserve her to the end from strife and error.*

There are TWO dangers that CAN affect the Church and if look at church history we'll find it has been a major problem. STRIFE and ERROR – two of Satan's schemes that threaten the church from within. We must begin to deal with these at the INDIVIDUAL level, meaning that each individual must BEWARE against these two dangers.

We in the Mar Thoma Syrian church, boldly and correctly declare that our faith is derived from the "OPEN" word of God! At the time of our reformation, our leaders proclaimed that we were people of the "open Bible". (We touched on this briefly earlier). If we are to keep from error, then EACH worshipper must KNOW God's word personally and intimately.

After living in Ephesus for many years and encouraging the disciples there, Paul was leaving. As he left, Paul told the elders, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. *Even from your own number* men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. **So be on your guard!** Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears." (Acts 2:29-31) The elders in Ephesus seem to have been largely careful to heed Paul's advice as we see in Jesus' epistle to them in Revelation, He does not find any error to correct. **Unless we are careful, we will be drawn astray.** This is similar to what we studied at the time of looking at the epistle reading. A solemn warning to watch out for error.

Similarly, STRIFE must be far from us. This is why Paul says, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5) It is often our PRIDE that leads to strife. Colossians 3:12-14 teaches us, "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, *clothe yourselves* with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **Bear with each other and forgive WHATEVER grievance you may have against another. FORGIVE as the LORD forgave YOU. And over all these virtues, put on LOVE,** which binds them all together in perfect unity." This is the perfect recipe to avoid strife among the believers in the church.

P. *(contd...)* *To You, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, we will offer praise and thanksgiving both now and forever.*

C. *Amen*

The Great Intercession

The Deacon prays aloud to which the congregation respond "Kurie Laison" or "Lord have mercy." The priest prays silently.

D. Look with mercy, on all the Bishops who bear the burden of leading and guiding, her especially our father in God, the Metropolitan (name) our Bishops (names), Priests, and Deacons. Give to each one your Holy Spirit that they may diligently work in your vineyard.

Our church leaders are human beings, too! They need our love, respect, comfort and most importantly our prayer. The responsibility of leading God's people is an awesome task for which our Bishops, Priests and Deacons need God's mercy and help. Let us endeavour to pray for our Church leaders regularly that they may be continually led by the Holy Spirit and that they may be diligent workers in God's vineyard, winning souls and encouraging the disciples.

In the Malayalam order, every Bishop is prayed for by name and in addition, we also pray for the moderators of the Church of North India (CNI) and the Church of South India (CSI). In turn, the CSI and the CNI worshipers uphold our Metropolitan in prayer every Sunday.

While *doctrinally* we are closest to the CSI and CNI churches, our prayer is for ALL church leaders. What Christ called us to *unity* of faith, NOT *uniformity* of doctrine! We may all emphasize one doctrine above another and differ from each other on minor issues. **As long as there is no HERESY and we do not compromise on the fundamentals of faith – repentance and salvation in Christ's finished work on the cross ALONE, we CAN and MUST have fellowship with believers of other denominations when we meet them and pray for their leaders too.** *Only in Christ's presence will we know everything completely and accurately and there will be no divisions in eternity!*

D. Remember O Lord, all our loved ones, those here present with us and those who have not been able to join us. Answer their prayers as you know to be best. Remember O Lord, all true and faithful followers and give them the help and support of your grace.

C. Lord have mercy.

D. Remember O Lord, all who exercise authority in our country and society, especially the President and all who hold offices in the State. Help them to put their trust in You, and seek from You wisdom and spiritual strength. Implant in them the will to do good and a spirit of cooperation and guide them in all their deliberations and decisions.

What? Are we to pray for even the CORRUPT politicians? The answer is that we pray ESPECIALLY for the corrupt politicians! We need to pray *constantly* for our country leaders and ask God to have mercy on them as they lead the country.

We prayed "*help them to put their trust in you.....*" **Have we ever considered what this could really imply?** It implies we are praying that each of our country leaders will put their trust and faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ! Let us pray this prayer with faith, knowing that WITH GOD NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE. Even corrupt people in authority have been touched by Jesus, and having accepted Him as Saviour and Lord, their lives have been transformed. A notable example is Charles W. Colson, aide to Richard Nixon, President of the U.S.A. Both Colson and Nixon were implicated in the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s and this led to Colson's imprisonment and Nixon's resignation. In prison, Colson was converted and was used by God to start **Prison Fellowship**, now with international branches and reaching countless prisoners for Jesus Christ. He is the author of many spiritual books like 'Born Again', 'Life Sentence' and 'Who speaks for God?'

We live in a day and age where politics is no longer considered service of the nation or its people. The thinking people are cynical at best when it comes to discussing politicians or politics. Many are openly critical and bitter, vehemently express their (righteous?) anger against corrupt politicians. *However, this does not take away from our duty to pray for the country's leaders.* When we diligently pray, God *will* intervene. **What? Even if they are not believers in Christ?** Yes, even if they are not believers! Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases." **God can touch even tough nuts!** Let us not hesitate to pray for our leaders. God can work miracles. We must pray that they will hear and respond to the gospel. There may be some among us whom God will give the divine opportunity to testify for Him before political leaders and God knows – hearts may be transformed! Saul, the greatest opponent of the gospel became the greatest apostle! Nothing is impossible for God! He **is** GOD!

Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:1-2: 'I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.'

C. Lord have mercy.

D. Lord, we remember the mother of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is worthy to be blessed of all generations of the earth.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, had some lovely qualities. I once did a character study of her as a sermon in a church service. She is a striking example for us to follow. I would encourage the reader to make a careful study of her character. I wish to highlight just one of her character traits. When she was told of the 'blessing' of God – that she was going to become the virgin mother of the Messiah, her **instantaneous** reply was, "I am the Lord's servant, let it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38) Though the events that followed could bring her shame and reproach, maybe even cause her to lose Joseph to whom she was betrothed, or worse, cause her to lose her life even, she had **only** one reply – *I am willing for **whatever** the Lord has for me!* What a wonderful example. It is no wonder that she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus! **If only we also behaved like this in similar situations, life would be so different.** Let us also strive to follow her example and have this same attitude in us. Please note carefully that we are *neither* **worshipping** nor are we **interceding** through Mary. We are *remembering* her as a wonderful example of a faithful blessed disciple. The word of God says that all generations will call her 'blessed'. (Luke 1:48).

D. (contd...) We call to mind the holy prophets, the apostles, the preachers, the evangelists and the martyrs, the confessors and all the saints. Make us worthy, O Lord, to follow in their footsteps.

Again, while we do not pray to the apostles or saints, they have lived lives which serve as examples for us to follow. *Remembering all the warriors in faith who have gone before us strengthens our faith when we see how God led them all.* They are the "unseen cloud of witness that compass us about" that Hebrews 12:1 speaks of. "...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." This is a beautiful analogy. The ones who have gone ahead of us are egging us on! Their lives, *not perfect, but faithful,* serve as examples for us today. We are to follow in their footsteps, taking up our cross daily and following the example, of Jesus as they did being willing to live and if necessary, die for the Lord.

Let us digress a moment here and look at verse 2 as well. *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* Jesus is our PRIME example and FIRST FORE-RUNNER! As we read, Jesus scorned the shame of the cross because He was focused on the glory set before Him and the **glorious** fact that sinners like us would inherit eternal life. We will also do likewise with His divine help. And we reply, *'Lord have mercy, forgive us our weaknesses and sins and help us to walk in obedience to You.'*

C. Lord have mercy

D. Lord, we remember the three councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus, and all the holy fathers who participated in them. Lord, grant us grace that we may obey and follow their true doctrines...

We looked at the Nicene Creed and touched upon the council at Nicaea at that point. The council at Constantinople was called by Theodosius I in AD 381 to deal completely with the Arian controversy (discussed previously) and to affirm the Nicene Creed as did the council at Ephesus in AD 431. These councils helped the early fathers to prayerfully sit and exclude heresies and all kinds of wrong teachings which had crept into the church. (For more details of the Councils and a study of church history in general, I strongly recommend the book "70 great Christians").

C. Lord, have mercy

We are asking for mercy and forgiveness for any error that may have crept in unknowingly into our personal beliefs and has hindered our walk with God. The **only way** to keep from error is to be FULL of TRUTH! And truth is not a doctrinal statement, truth is a **person** – the Lord Jesus Christ!!! When we are full of Christ, we are **automatically** kept from error.

D. Lord, in the last day, when You raise and gather all the faithful who are departed and fallen asleep in the true faith, grant that we also may with them be counted worthy of the remission of our sins, and be gathered into your Heavenly Kingdom.

On the day of the Lord's second coming, He will gather all who fell asleep in in the true faith and us who are alive, who belong to Him. We again realize our unworthiness and ask for

God's provision of mercy to be counted "worthy" before His holy presence. One day Jesus will come and gather us to be with Him. How do we know? Again, because the Word of God says so! "...the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (I Thessalonians 4:16,17) Let us eagerly wait for Him. *Christ is coming soon*. His coming is closer this year than it was last year, closer today than it was yesterday. Let us eagerly await His return.

C. *Lord, have mercy* (3 times)

The *exact* sequence of events pertaining to Christ's second coming has been hotly debated. But that is NOT the most important point at all! The point of the matter is – Christ **is coming in glory** and He **will reign** as King! The question for me today is this - **Am I ready?** Is He already reigning in my heart?

When I was working at Fellowship Mission Hospital, Kumbanad in 1998, we had a 92 year old patient called Mr. I.K. Kurien. He is the composer of the famous old song "Daivathinu sthotram" that is a hot favourite of many believers. He told me that the one thing that we must make sure is this – *when we become **absent** from the earth, we must be **present** in heaven!* Coming from a man who had walked in fellowship with God for so many years, this was really touching and a great encouragement to me.

Second Blessing

P. *The blessing of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ be with you all.*

C. *And with you also.*

At this point, a few lines of the song "Aadramathey vaadhilil muttunnu ..." is sung.

This small song is once again about seeking God's forgiveness and asking for His provision according to His grace and mercy towards us.

In the Malayalam worship, occasionally the Lord's prayer is what is prayed next whereas in the English Order, the *Litany of Intercession* is prayed, which is often omitted in the Malayalam service.

Litany of Intercession

[As most of these are self-explanatory, explanations are provided only occasionally.]

D. *Brethren, with one heart and mind let us pray to the Lord.*

Praying to God with one heart and mind implies **unity** in the Spirit, **unity** of purpose and above all, **unity** of FAITH. Why are many of our communal prayers not answered? We talked about this earlier. Another reason, I believe is that we are **not praying** in *united* faith. Let us strive for true unity as we pray together.

D. *(contd...) for peace and reconciliation, for unity in the Church, and harmony between all peoples and communities.*

We are praying for harmony between ALL peoples and communities. We are NOT to be content with our own cosy little '**holy huddle**'. We are to pray for those outside our Church, even for those who oppose us.

C. *We pray to the Lord.*

Each time "we pray to the Lord" is said, our faith is multiplied. The key word here is **Lord**. We are praying to **our God**, whom we know **personally** and **intimately** on whom our faith is based.

D. *For peace in our families and grace in our hearts, that we may be strengthened in faith is based.*

C. *We pray to the Lord.*

D. *For recovery of health for the sick, comfort for the distressed, deliverance for prisoners, safety for those who travel, unity and love for those who are estranged.*

C. *We pray to the Lord.*

D. *For consolation for the bereaved, relief for the poor and needy, shelter for the homeless, joy for the broken hearted.*

C. *We pray to the Lord.*

Let us bear in mind that we are placed on the earth as Christ's ambassadors. When we pray to God for anything, we must be willing to become part of the **solution**. May the Holy Spirit lead us in helping others in their difficult times so that they can experience God's love through us.

D. Let us give glory to God the Father, Lord of all, and worship His only begotten Son and praise His Holy and life giving Spirit.

Our Triune God is worthy of ALL glory, worship and praise – ALWAYS !

C. O Lord, of all blessings, we commit our lives into Your keeping and pray for Your blessing. O God, good and gracious, have mercy on us and bless us.

When we pray this prayer, we are committing our lives into God's hands for Him to use **as HE wills**. We are bringing our entire being under obedience to Him for Him to take over. We are expressing our willingness to obey Him always.

Silent Intercessory Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

(A moment of silence is maintained in which we make our requests known before God. We pray both for ourselves and for those who have requested that we pray for them).

P. O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, glorified by the Cherubim, extolled by the Seraphim and exalted by all the heavenly hosts, Who make holy the offerings and oblations presented before You; sanctify our bodies, souls and spirits.....

In the Old Testament, we see examples where men encountered God and became *immediately* aware of their own depravity and that their lips were unclean. For example, Isaiah says, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Isaiah 6:5) In the previous **five** chapters, he had been prophesying as a mouth-piece (prophet) of God. However, as soon as he comes into God's holy presence, he realizes that the mouth that He used to prophesy was **actually unclean!!!** Jeremiah too had a similar experience and in both instances, God had to cleanse their mouths before they could do the work He had for them. God has to cleanse our bodies, especially our hearts and mouths / tongues. Jesus said, "...out of the abundance of the

heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34) Our hearts need cleansing as do our mouths if we are to pray to Him in sincerity.

P. *(contd...)* that with pure and confident hearts, we may address You as God and Father and pray, "Our Father in heaven."

C. *Hallowed be your Name. May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day the bread we need and forgive us our sins and offences, as we have forgiven those who have offended us. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

I would encourage each of you to study this prayer, which the Lord taught His disciples. The prayer amazingly includes ALL things that can be prayed about! It is a marvelous prayer indeed. This prayer called "The Lord's Prayer" or "The Disciple's Prayer" has been extensively studied and many books on it are available. I would recommend the reader to study the prayer in great detail. I do not wish to elaborate a great deal on this prayer but would like to highlight just a few points.

- i. God is now intimate with me being my Father.
- ii. He is OUR Father, not *yours* or *mine* alone.
- iii. He is our Father but He is "*in heaven*" meaning that we must never be so familiar with Him that we lose our awe and respect of Him.
- iv. The first prayer we pray is that His name will be ***hallowed***. This must happen in my life as well as the world in which I live. My words and life must never bring dishonour to His name.
- v. The prayer '*Thy Kingdom come*' refers to the time when Christ will reign as King. It also implies surrender of our personal lives, our families and our church to be places where His dominion/rule can be displayed. Our families and our churches must be examples of ***heaven on earth***.
- vi. We want His will to be done in our lives *just as it is in heaven*. When God commands an angel to go on an assignment, can we even imagine the angel hesitating, thinking about it, sleeping over it, etc – things that we often do when God tells us to do something!!! Let us obey like the angels – ***immediately!*** We are telling God that we are available for

God to perform His will through us. May His will be done in and through us and may His kingdom come **in** us and spread **through** us to everyone we meet.

- vii. The first prayer is not for forgiveness but for the food we need! God is intensely practical! *Sometimes, we try to be more spiritual than God!* He puts our daily needs as a high priority and we are supposed to pray for our day to day needs. I like the expression "**Give us this day the bread we need.**" This is a translation from Malayalam and clarifies that God has **not** promised us luxury but that our every need will be met by His divine provision. In the wilderness, Moses and the Israelites were provided with manna and quail *not the tasty food they left behind* in Egypt. In fact, this was a constant source of discontentment and grumbling among them. We find that God was extremely angry with them for their **ingratitude** and **lack of faith**. *God has promised that He will provide our every need, not our every greed!* When we are trusting God for "the bread we need" we do NOT need to worry about the various necessities of life. He is Jehovah Jireh and He WILL provide!!!
- viii. We cannot pray this prayer asking for forgiveness without having forgiven **all** those who have slighted us and wronged us.
- ix. He can be trusted to keep us from falling into sin when we are tempted. Let us trust in Him. God is always on **our side** against the devil!

P. *Peace be with you all*

C. *And with you also. O Lord and God of every blessing, we bow our heads in Your presence before we receive your Holy Body and Blood.*

Third Blessing

P. *May the grace and mercy of the Holy and glorious Trinity, uncreated, self-existent, eternal, adorable and One in essence, be with you all forever.*

C. *And with you also. O Holy and glorious Trinity have mercy on us.*

In the **original** Malayalam Order, the prayer does **not** stop so abruptly. It is a beautiful prayer and let us take a look at the rest of it.

C. Parishudhanum, Athyunathanum, Vishudhiyil Nivasikunnavanum, Njan vishudhanakakondu ningalum vishudharakuvin ennu kalpichavanaya Karthave, ninte Krupayude Vachanathalum, ninte maha Parishudha Roohayude agamanathalum njangale shudhi karikaneme.

(Translated as)

O Holy God, Who commanded us "Be ye holy, as I AM Holy", We ask You to make us holy by Your grace and by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit in us.

God's grace and the indwelling of the person of the Holy Spirit of God can make us holy and worthy to stand before God. It is my **personal contention** and **conviction** that it was not a good idea to abbreviate this prayer as it brought out the **need for holy living** like nowhere else in the entire worship. We confess our unworthiness to be holy on our own and trust in Christ's finished work on the cross and the Holy Spirit to make us righteous.

P. (Taking the Bread and Wine in his hands) Holy things for Holy people.

The Malayalam renders this thus:

Ee vishudhathagal vishdhiyum vedipum ullavarku **mathram** malkapedunnu.

Exactly translated this reads: **The Body and Blood of Jesus are ONLY for HOLY people.**

I don't know if you've felt EXCITED at this point of the worship! My hair often stands on end when it reaches this part. I really feel overjoyed at this moment of our worship when I reflect on what this means to me. I, who am UNHOLY are being given what is **only** for **holy people** and I certainly do NOT qualify!

C. Holy is the One Father, Holy is the one son, Holy is the one Spirit.

ONLY the TRIUNE GOD is HOLY. If only the Triune God is Holy, then how can I take communion? What does it **mean** when we say that we are MADE holy?

P. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and the Holy Spirit.

C. One from the beginning and forever and ever. Amen.

[Please pay careful attention to the following lines.]

P. The one Holy Father, who created the World in His mercy, is with us.

C. Amen

P. The one Holy Son, who saved it by His precious passion, is with us.

C. Amen

P. The one living Holy Spirit, who perfects and fulfils all that is and that has been, is with us. May the name of the Lord, be blessed as in the beginning, both now and forever.

C. Amen

How lovely and beautiful are these words. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are WITH US and that is **how** we are MADE HOLY!!! That is the only righteousness we have, our only confidence. After we *proclaim* with faith that **YES, the Triune God is with us and we have been made Holy**, we go forward to receive the body and Blood of the Lord! We have, now, no fear in God's presence because **He** has *accepted* us as we are, *forgiven* our sins and *made* us *clean* and *holy* like Jesus!

(The above part of the Service thrills my heart EVERY time I go for Qurbana.)

The worshippers now go forward and kneel. In Malayalam, the song "Daiva suthar naam..." is sung as the people go forward. In our church at Calcutta, the usual choice for the English worship was the first stanza of "Just as I am..." What an amazing God we serve Who for us sinners, sent His Son to die so that we may have life and life in **abundance!!!** Praise the Lord!

All: *Kurie liaison (3 times)*

[This plea for mercy is only found in the Malayalam Order.]

P. (Turning to the congregation) Beloved brethren, pray for me...

The Priest who stands before us, leading us is also in need of prayer during the breaking of Bread. We need to pray that the Lord's mercy will rest on him and that he will be made worthy to distribute the Holy elements.

C. As a father has compassion on his sons, the Lord has pity on those who fear Him.

(This statement is part of what the Priest says, in the Malayalam order). We have discussed what it means to fear God in some detail in the early portion of this book.

C. (contd...) As for men, his days are like grass, he flowers like the flowers of the field.

In the eyes of God, our entire life time is only a fleeting moment for He transcends time. We, who are so, so insignificant were sought for and saved by God! He is indeed worthy of all our praise and our worship.

P. (Turning to the altar) Glory be to the Father and to the Son and the Holy Spirit.

C. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.

This adoration is termed "GLORIA" and is said or sung in most churches and chapels all over the world.

(After this, the Priest kneels on the steps of the altar and prays).

D. When Your living voice rouses from the grave Your servants who have departed this life in trust and hope in You, then O Lord, remember us.

C. Lord have mercy.

D. O Lord, grant that we may rejoice with all those who have done Your will and hear Your gracious words, "Come and inherit the kingdom with the saints"

This is our hope that one day the Lord will say these words to us. This is similar to what the Master told the first two servants in the 'Parable of the Talents': **Well done, good and faithful servant: You have been faithful with a few things I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness.** (Matthew 25:21) The servant was faithful with the *few things* that were entrusted to him. In the same way, let us be faithful in our own small areas, doing the work God has told us to do.

P. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

C. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

D. O Lord, at Your command death held its sway. You rose from death and death was abolished; Therefore, O Lord, we praise and exult.

It is important to bear in mind that even when death reigned on the earth because of man's disobedience and sin, God **was always in control**. We need to remember that God is in control of history. *Not everything that man does is His will* but He is in ultimate control and is able to make **even** evil things in our lives work for the ultimate good. When Jesus rose again, death lost its sting. Death was abolished – spiritually we will NOT die if we believe in Jesus. Jesus said in Revelation 2:11, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.**"

D. *(contd...) You gather your children from every quarter; Bless us and help us, we pray You, O Lord.*

C. *O Son of God, by Your death, You have turned our death into life. Raise us from the dust that we may ever proclaim Your praise. May God the Father, the Son and the Spirit, who is worthy of glory and worship forever, be praised from generation, to generation. Hallelujah!!*

P. *(Facing the altar) O Son of God, Who came for our salvation and will come again for the renewal of our race, grant, we pray, forgiveness of sins to Your servants through Your own stoning sacrifice.*

C. *Amen.*

P. *(Turning west) O Lord God, graciously bless these Your children who partake of Your most precious Body and Blood which was given on Calvary for the forgiveness of sins, that they may abide in Your presence for ever.*

C. *Amen.*

P. *(Descending from the steps) The blessing of Jesus Christ, our great God and Saviour, be on those who bear these sacred mysteries, on those who dispense them, on those who receive them and on all who have participated and who shall participate in them. The grace of God be on us all, both now and forever.*

These prayers are self-explanatory. When the Priest prays for God's blessing on 'those who bear those sacred mysteries, on those who dispense them, on those who receive them and on all who have participated and who shall participate in them' we remember all who have participated in the Body and Blood of the Lord from the apostles in the upper room on the day

of the last supper-communion to all those who will participate until the Lord comes again. We are proclaiming that we all are **one** body in Christ.

C. Amen, Lord be gracious and have mercy on us. Glory and praise be to You, O Lord, Praise be to You, Our everlasting refuge.

P. The Holy Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, broken on the Cross for the forgiveness of sins, is given to you for the health of body and soul.

C. Amen.

P. The Holy Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed on the Cross for the forgiveness of sins, is given to you for the health of body and soul.

C. Amen.

Here, let us bear in mind that the words 'is given' suggests to us that the Priest only distributes the elements and that it is the **Lord** Who is giving us His Body and His Blood for our wholeness. (As the worshippers partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord, a hymn is sung which focuses on the redemptive work of our Lord.)

(After all have received the Holy elements)

*P. Praise be to You, O Lord, our God, forever. Praise be to You, O Lord Jesus Christ. May Your Holy Body and Blood of which we have partaken be **not** for our condemnation but for life and salvation to us all. O God, grant us your blessing.*

We continue to praise God and pray that the fellowship of the Body and Blood of the Lord will lead us to a renewed life in the Lord. *What God means for good can end up causing destruction if we are not careful to repent and explicitly confess our wrongdoing.* Every time we partake of the Lord's Body and Blood it is expected that we become more and more transformed into His likeness and His character.

C. All the earth shall bow down before You and every tongue shall praise Your Holy name, for You give life to the dead and You are the hope of all who lie in the grave.

The day is coming when, "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that **every tongue should**

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:11) We are indeed fortunate to have this great God as **our** "Abba Father".

C. (contd...) We praise you, O Lord, and give You thanks for your mercy toward us.

P. We praise You, Lord, because in Your abundant mercy You have fed and strengthened us with the precious Body and Blood of Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and You have thereby made us one with Him and with all the members of His mystical Body.

We are acknowledging two important facts once again. *Firstly*, it is the **Lord** Who had fed and strengthened us with the Holy elements and *secondly*, we are hereby ONE with Jesus and with all the members of His body. If we say 'Amen' to this prayer, we have **no right** whatsoever to dislike a fellow-believer, no reason, at all to refuse to have fellowship with another Christian, whatever our 'excuse' might be. Let us not fool ourselves. We cannot afford to behave 'as we feel like' after offering ourselves to God. ***God takes our words seriously.*** We need God's grace to live the way He wants us to. That is why we pray the next part of the prayer...

P. (contd...) We pray You to give us grace to continue in that Holy fellowship and ever to offer glory and to You and to Your only begotten Son and to Your Holy Spirit.

C. Amen

P. Peace be with you all.

C. And with You also. O Lord our God, source of all blessings, we bow our heads before You, having received Your Holy body and Blood.

P. O Great and wonderful God, who for the salvation of mankind, stooped down and descended from heaven, have mercy on us, so that we may continually praise You and the Father and the Holy Spirit.

God's mercy helps us to live rightly, having correct relationship with God and with other people, always praising God with our lips and with our lives.

C. Amen

(In the Malayalam order, a small song is sung by the priest, praying to God for His blessing and guidance. In English, the following brief prayer is prayed or sung.)

P. O Lord, bless us all.
O Creator, keep us all.
Show us ever the way of Salvation.
O Lord and helper of all.

This prayer reminds me to God's promise of guidance recorded in Isaiah 48:17: "This is what the LORD says - your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the LORD Your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who *directs you in the way you should go.*'" God has *promised* to lead us. He will show us the way we should walk and provide us with the strength we need. Isaiah 30:21 says, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" God has promised to direct my paths if I acknowledge him in all my ways. (Proverbs 3:6). Romans 8:14 says, "... **all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**" As a child of God it is my RIGHT and PRIVILEGE to be led by God's Holy Spirit. Let us pray for His direction in our lives at all times. This will keep us from making blunders and doing and saying foolish things that we will regret forever.

C. *O Lord, bless this Your servant who has ministered in Your holy presence. Accept the praises and petitions of us Your people and pardon our offences. Enable us to receive your gifts and blessings and dismiss us with Your peace.*

We must constantly pray for our vicar and other elders. They are human like us and are constant targets of the enemy. Let us decide today that **every day we will spend two minutes** praying for Achen and his family. We must never harshly criticize them but instead pray for them. When we disagree with them, we must do so with humility, gentleness and with love.

Final Blessing

P. *My beloved brethren, I commend You to the grace and blessings of the Holy and glorious Trinity. Depart in peace, with the gifts and blessings that You have received from the stoning sacrifice of the Lord.*

This is the last blessing imparted before the church disperses for the week. We make the sign of the Cross once with each of the three parts of the final blessing.

When we worship God in Spirit and in truth, He blesses us and sends us out into the world with His peace so that we can shine for His glory in the world outside the church. Someone once said, "*Church is the ONLY club that exists for its non-members!*" We should not take offence at the word "club" rather, we must realize the truth of the matter that indeed, our job is to GO OUT, not to remain within. The world outside **needs** Jesus **desperately**. ***Let us go forth and shine for God.*** It is expected that we are blessed by worshipping God and that we receive spiritual gifts from His throne. *If we have come prepared and expectantly, we WILL be blessed, filled and overflowing.* If someone comes with only a sense of **obligation** or **habit** and not really expecting anything from God, he will receive NOTHING! Of course, even this person may, in God's sovereignty, be touched and blessed! God works in spite of us sometimes!

C. Amen

P. *You, both near and far, who are saved by the victorious Cross of the Lord and sealed with the seal of the Holy Baptism, this Holy Trinity will forgive you your sins and comfort your souls.*

This is further reassurance to us that we ARE SAVED and that our sins are forgiven. God has His seal of ownership on us. We belong to Him. Ephesians 4:30 says that we were sealed **with the Holy Spirit** for the day of redemption – the day of the coming King of glory! But while we are on this verse, let us look at the first part of it as well – "...do not grieve the Holy Spirit with Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Now that we have worshipped God, received His life by partaking of the Body and Blood and have received spiritual gifts, we must be careful not to grieve Him by the way we live the rest of the week!

C. Amen

P. *Pray for me, my brethren, weak and sinful that I am, that I may obtain mercy and help.*

This is a further reminder for us to uphold our church leaders in prayer, throughout the week, not just on Sundays.

P. *(contd...) Depart in peace, filled with gladness and rejoicing.*

Jesus puts his JOY into our hearts which NO ONE and NO CIRCUMSTANCE can EVER take away!
Praise the Lord:

C. Thanks be to God. May the Lord accept your ministration and help us by your prayers.

Here, we ask the priest to pray for us and thus, the worshippers and the priest agree to mutually uphold each other in prayer.

At this point the curtain closes. The service ends by singing a benediction song seeking God's guidance as we go out into the world. After this, the announcements are made and then, the congregation disperses usually following a closing prayer.

Chapter 7

One final word before we close

My dear brothers and sisters,

Thank you for your patience in going through this study. We in the Mar Thoma Church, have a great heritage. Part of our wonderful heritage is this "Order of Worship for the Holy Qurbana." Let us praise God for it. It would plead with you to earnestly seek to worship God. God delights in our worship. He loves to hear us call on His name.

I have attempted a study of our liturgy to show how our liturgical worship is fantastic and helps us as Christ's disciples to worship God in Spirit and truth. **This study is by no means complete or exhaustive.** I have no doubt that God will teach you **far greater** and **more numerous truths** than what I have written, as you yourself study it with the word of God.

"Give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; make known among the nations what He has done, and proclaim that His name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for He has glorious things; let this be known to ALL the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy one of Israel among you." (Isaiah 12: 4-6)

Worshipping God is extremely enjoyable and must follow through into our everyday lives the whole week. When we go home, we do not go home **from** church and worship; rather we take the atmosphere of church and the presence of God **into** the world we live in and transform it for Jesus Christ. Worship is serious business and is like equipping the believer for war. We are in a war, make no mistake about that. By default, our flesh gives its allegiance to the enemy of our souls. But we have made the **choice** - to align ourselves with the Saviour and ruler of the universe and enjoy the victory that He brings.

I hope that you have enjoyed doing this Bible study as much as I have. Doing this study has **revolutionized** my worship. May God richly bless all of us and make us mature disciples. I do hope that you will be in touch. Praise the Lord for this privilege and honour!

Yours in Him,

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