

# ST. THOMAS INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

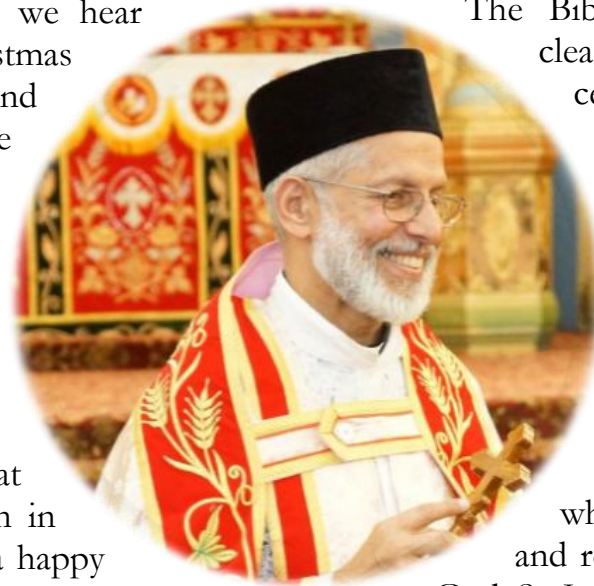
DECEMBER 2024

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### Vicar's Message

#### “We Wish You a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!”

This is a common phrase we hear during this season. In Christmas cards, at the caroling time and personal greetings we use these words of greetings. This has become a universal language. How many people really understand what it means to wish Merry Christmas? For Christians it is the dictum that indicates the great event of God's intervention in history to make the world a happy one. So, we say Happy Christmas! God's intervention in history is seen in other religions as well. Hinduism is an example. The purpose of such incarnation is seen in the verses of Bhagavat Githa, “Parithraanaaya sadhunaam, vinaashaaya cha dushkritam, dharma samstaapanarthayaam, sambhavamee yuge yuge.” The meaning is, “for the deliverance of the devotees, for the annihilation of the



miscreants, to reestablish the principles of religion, I appear millennium after millennium.” Generally, it is believed that God reveals Himself in various forms or persons to establish a sober society and to destroy evil.

The Christian theory of Incarnation taught entirely different concept of incarnation. The Bible and the Church Fathers clearly defined it through the centuries. St. Athanasius of Alexandria (4th century A.D.) said, “Son of God became man so that man might become God.” This is embedded in the word “deification” or “divinization” which in Greek is called “Theosis”. In fact, it was not really known who God is until Jesus was born and revealed in Him the fullness of God. St. John the Apostle (Gospel 1:1-18) says, “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, had revealed Him”. The Apostles continues, “for those who receive him he gave the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name.” In 3:16 St. John says further, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten, that whosoever

believes on him should not perish, but have eternal life”. In short, the incarnation of Jesus is with a clear purpose of redeeming the human beings without punishing them or destroying them.

Evil is darkness; it has no positive existence. Darkness vanishes when light comes in. Light has a positive existence. Darkness cannot invade light. Therefore, Jesus the true revelation of God paved the way for humans to understand who God is and how man can become God. God of everlasting or eternal love calls man into that eternal light of love. Jesus used the divine way of redeeming people by removing the darkness in them. It is the safest way of reforming intelligent humans. Man is created in the image of God with the capability to grasp the divine power of goodness. Therefore, Jesus said, “do not resist the evil person, show the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) thus bringing peace. However evil man whose mind is corrupted with sin, finds the evil way of reestablishing goodness. It is like fighting fire with fire which can only multiply fire. Jesus showed the most peaceful way of life which make ALL happy. That is why wish “peace” during Christmas season. This was the message the angels gave to the shepherds. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He is the true expression of God. It is worth reflecting on if we knew this prince of peace!

It is a great opportunity for us to celebrate Christmas meaningfully to begin a New Year. A new Year can be a new beginning of many things. Many people have New Year resolutions. Even though many resolutions don't last long, it at least gives a hope to man to refine himself/herself. Christmas gives us the new and positive thoughts of accepting Jesus as a model for our life and work. Jesus said, “you cannot do anything apart from me (John 15:5). Hope and pray that this Christmas will give us all a new thinking and new resolution to be with Christ as our guide and help.

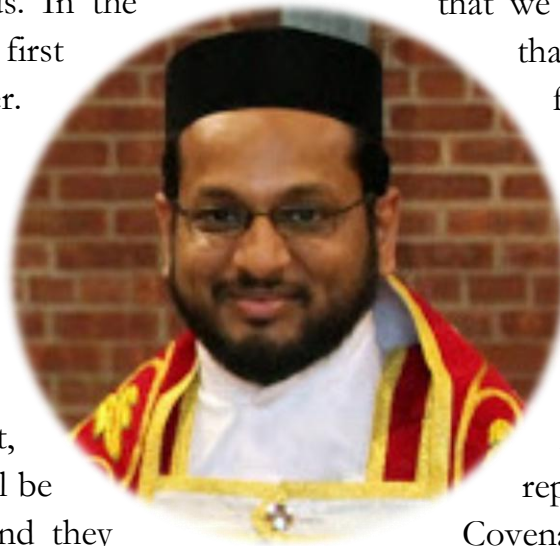
Lovingly,

Rev. Fr. M. K. Kuriakose, Vicar

## Assistant Vicar's Message

During this Christmas season, we will hear Jesus called Immanuel. The Hebrew name Immanuel means God with us. In the New Testament it is one of the first titles of Jesus we encounter. After narrating Joseph's dream in which an angel assures him to take Mary as his wife, St Matthew explains, "So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23). The Gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus' promise that "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The promise of God's presence in Jesus is assured at the beginning and end of the Gospel and forms an *inclusio*.

This Christmas season we should remember that God became man so that God can present to us his abiding presence. "God with us" is an appropriate summary of the gospel. To put it differently, the incarnation has made it possible for us to experience the presence of God through Jesus. In one sense, God is present everywhere and has been felt by all creation since its beginning. However, God's



special and unique presence is something that humans have felt at different times. The Patriarch Jacob's words "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it" reminds us that we can forget His presence and that certain places and times are filled with His presence. The Israelites enjoyed this presence of God in the Tent of the Meeting (Exodus 33:7-9) and the Temple (1 Kings 8:11). Remember that two weeks ago we learned that St Mary represented the Ark of the Covenant. Through Christ there is a New Temple and God's presence is with us through Christ. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" can also be rendered "The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us" (John 1:14). In other words, the Gospel writers are clear that through Jesus the presence of God gifted to the Israelites is now gifted to us also.

We might wonder whether we have lost Christ's presence since he ascended to heaven. Let us recall the last words of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus promises to be with the disciples. So how we experience the presence of Jesus today. The disciples of Jesus experience the presence of Jesus through their practice of discipleship. First, we experience Jesus in prayer. Jesus said, "For where two or three are

gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20). Let us follow the wise men from East, gather together and adore the Lord our God. Second, we experience Jesus when we read the Holy Scriptures. Notice that St Matthew taught us the title Immanuel from the book of Isaiah. Whenever we read the scriptures we are searching in the treasure for Christ. Third, we experience the presence of

God when we spend time in silence. The gospel of Matthew narrates some key incidents in the life of Jesus where Joseph played an important role. Yet we don't hear Joseph speaking. Through his silence Joseph displays to us the courage gained by the presence of God. Finally, we experience the presence of God in service to the poor and afflicted. In the famous passage from St Matthew 25, Jesus says, "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (25:20; see 25:45). God makes his presence known to us

through our compassionate encounters with “the least of these.”

Lovingly,

Rev. Fr. Sujit Thomas, Asst. Vicar

### **COVID-19 and Support System**

#### **Financial Assistance to Members**

If any of our members need any assistance with food, medicine, transportation, shopping, or any other needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they may contact our Achens or the Secretary. They will coordinate help. Our MC members, along with other volunteers will be available to provide any possible help.

***We are all in this together.***

#### **Contact:**

- Rev. Fr. M. K. Kuriakose: 201.681.1078
- Rev. Fr. Sujit Thomas: 516.754.0743
- Jobin Regi: 267.226.6366





## Parish Highlights from November 2024

**November 3<sup>rd</sup>:** Rev. Fr. K. K. John celebrated holy Qurbana with us.

**November 9<sup>th</sup>:** Philadelphia Area MGOCSM hosted an area Bible Study at St. Mary's Cathedral. Our beloved Sdn. Pradeep Chacko was the main speaker.

**November 10<sup>th</sup>:** Very Rev. Fr. A. J. Samuel Ramban and Rev. Fr. K. P. Varghese celebrated Holy Qurbana with us. Collections were held to help support the disabled children charity of the Ramban.





**November 16<sup>th</sup>:** Sunday School Iconography Workshop was held, participants were able to take home 1 of 3 icons. Talmedo Men's Fellowship held a Nature Hike with Dn. Roby Antony at Tyle State Park.



**November 17<sup>th</sup>:** The 2025 Family and Youth Conference Committee made their inaugural Parish Visit at our Church. The General Secretary, Mr. Jaison Thomas, as well as many active Committee Members from our Parish presented the conference details and invited all to attend. They then inaugurated the conference ticket sales, raffle ticket sales, and souvenir compliment sales. The Conference will take place July 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at the Hilton Stamford Hotel under the theme of the "The Way of the Pilgram."

**November 23<sup>rd</sup>:** Sunday School, Middle School Fellowship held their annual Christmas Craft fair.







Over 40 children participated in the annual tradition. Sunday School also donated 29 boxes to Operation Christmas Child, which were sent overseas to underprivileged children. A special thanks to all Sunday school teachers and volunteers for providing such thoughtful memories to our children in this Christmas season!







**November 28<sup>th</sup>:** Philadelphia Area MOCF Thanksgiving Day Holy Qurbana was held here at our church. MOCF also conducted a food drive, in this holiday season.





# Upcoming Events and General Announcements

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## Save the Date

- **Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup>** – Christmas Caroling
- **Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup>**- Holy Qurbana in memory of St. Thomas
- **Tuesday, December 24<sup>th</sup>**- Christmas Eve Evening Prayer will begin at 7PM
- **Wednesday, December 25<sup>th</sup>**- Christmas Day Holy Qurbana will begin with Morning Prayer at 8AM
- **Saturday, December 28<sup>th</sup>** - Annual Christmas and New Year's Social Program, beginning at 3PM.
- **Wednesday, January 1<sup>st</sup>** – New Year's Day Holy Qurbana will begin with Morning Prayer at 8:30AM
- **Wednesday, January 8<sup>th</sup> – Saturday, January 11<sup>th</sup>** – MGOCSM of the Northeast American Diocese is hosting Winter Summit 2025 at Holy Transfiguration Retreat Center
- **Sunday, January 19<sup>th</sup>**- Ecumenical Bible Quiz at Christos Marthoma Church from 2PM to 5PM.
- **Wednesday, July 9<sup>th</sup> – Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup>** – Northeast American Diocesan Family and Youth Conference

## Spiritual Organization Updates

**OCYM, MMVS, and Men's Forum Meetings** will be held weekly after Refreshments.

### Sunday School

- Sunday School is initiating classes for students with alternative learning abilities. For more information, please contact the Achens, Steven Kurian, or Mily Philip.

### OCYM

- OCYM will be leading Christmas Caroling on Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup> and Saturday December 21<sup>st</sup>

### Men's Forum

- The Men's Forum has weekly meetings after the Holy Qurbana every Sunday.

### MMVS

- MMVS has weekly meetings after the Holy Qurbana every Sunday.

**MGOCSM**

- Winter Summit will be January 8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at HTRC. Please register! The last day to register is Sunday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**FOCUS**

- FOCUS meets monthly, please contact Danny George for more information and to host a FOCUS meeting.

### **Church Reminders**

**Dip Jar:** Those who are interested in submitting their offertory or any other small donation may do so in the Church dip jar located by the Meditation Room Shrine.

**Digital Payment:** All donations may be made by Apple Pay / Google Pay / Venmo/ Paypal - members can scan QR codes affixed on the glass wall outside the Church office. Please remember, whenever using ACH or an electronic payment to include full name, member ID and purpose of payment. If you have any questions, please contact our Treasurer, Ajin Abraham.

**Lost and Found:** Many small items such as jewelry and watches have been submitted to the office “Lost and Found.” Please see the Secretary if you believe you may be missing one of these items.

**Annual Subscription:** A reminder, please pay all remaining dues prior to the end of the year. You can make payments in the office via cash, check, ACH, or electronic methods. Please remember to include full name, membership ID number, purpose of payment for proper record keeping. For more information, please contact our Treasurer, Ajin Abraham.



## Member Announcements

### November Memorials

- ❖ **Mrs. Saramma Mathai**, Mother of Rev. Fr. Shibu Mathai and Grandmother of Irine Abraham (#304)
- ❖ **Mr. Babu John**, Brother of Jothi Philip (#136)
- ❖ **Mr. O. P. Mathai**, Brother of Philipose Cherian (Babu) (#133)

*On behalf of the parish, we express our deepest condolences to the bereaving families. Let us pray for the departed souls and for the bereaving families. May our heavenly Father grant peace and comfort that surpasses human wisdom and understanding.*

#### Memorial Prayer List

As you know, members can submit names of departed loved ones that need to be included on the Memorial Prayer List. You probably have given the names of your departed ones in the past. However, please note that our church doesn't have a system to save such names with dates or automatically track and decide on which Sunday the name should be included on the prayer list. You need to enter the name on the Memorial Prayer list kept in the church office. Note: We do have a master list of departed faithful that we keep for remembering them on the Sunday of the departed faithful, which is a week before the Holy Lent begins. This list has names only no dates.

#### Life Events Announcements

Do you have a special day that you would like to announce, like a milestone wedding anniversary (25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> etc.) or a birthday (50<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 70<sup>th</sup>, 80<sup>th</sup> etc.)? If you would like to, please inform the Secretary in advance. Please remember that even though our parish database includes birthdays and wedding anniversaries, it doesn't include the year of birth or marriage. Unless you notify the Secretary or Clergy, they wouldn't know milestone events.

### Weddings

**Mr. Kevin Mammen Varghese**, son of our members Mr. Varghese Mammen and Mrs. Rachel Varghese (#324), wed **Ms. Riya Alex**, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Alex P. Abraham, on November 24<sup>th</sup> at St. Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church, Bensalem, PA.

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## DECEMBER WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Mr. & Mrs. Roy Philip Chacko	Dec 7	Mr. & Mrs. Biju Mathews	Dec 28
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas P Oommen	Dec 8	Mr. & Mrs. Paul John	Dec 29
Mr. & Mrs. Shibu M Baby	Dec 11	Mr. & Mrs. Ashok Paulose	Dec 30
Mr. & Mrs. Saji George	Dec 12	Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Daniel	Dec 31
Mr. & Mrs. Philip T Varghese	Dec 25		
Mr. & Mrs. Sajan Thomas	Dec 26		
Mr. & Mrs. John Panicker	Dec 27		
Mr. & Mrs. Regi Mathai	Dec 27		

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## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Santhamma Mathew	Dec 1	Reeba Geevarghese	Dec 14	Riya Dony	Dec 22
Noel Cherian	Dec 1	Matt P. Geevarghese	Dec 14	Samantha Philip	Dec 22
Annamma Jacob	Dec 1	Rosamma George	Dec 14	Thomas Varghese	Dec 22
Ann Raj Jacob	Dec 1	N K Thomas	Dec 15	Litty John	Dec 23
Simy Lynnon	Dec 2	Jovan P Shinu	Dec 16	Aleyamma Chacko	Dec 23
Ruby Geroqe	Dec 2	Hannah Mary Varghese	Dec 16	Joel Jins	Dec 24
Evana Susan Joseph	Dec 3	Lins John	Dec 17	Allie Samuel	Dec 25
Josiah Thomas	Dec 4	Geena Regi Jacob	Dec 17	Shiji Daji	Dec 25
Diya Mariam Saji	Dec 5			Annamma Samuel	Dec 26
Praveen P. Geevarghese	Dec 6			Deanah Jubee	Dec 27
Saramma Jacob	Dec 7	Abram Alexander	Dec 19	Neha Ann Koshy	Dec 27
Philip T Varghese	Dec 8	Noel Mathew	Dec 19	Lesley T Reji	Dec 27
Mini Philip	Dec 8	Shaji Abraham	Dec 19	Jose K John	Dec 28
Thomas Zachariah	Dec 8	Joanna Ajish	Dec 19	Noah Philip Cherian	Dec 28
Santhra Eliza Suresh	Dec 9	Jolly Varughese	Dec 19	Hannah Anto Panicker	Dec 29
Elizabeth Chacko	Dec 10	Susan Chacko	Dec 20	Anaya Anna Bivin	Dec 30
Susan Paulose	Dec 10	Joe Zachariah	Dec 20	Mathew Jacob	Dec 30
Sosamma Cherian	Dec 11	Merin Rajan	Dec 20	Luke Matthew Cherian	Dec 31
Ryan Tony	Dec 12	Omana Varghese	Dec 20	Jobin Regi	Dec 31
Saju Paul	Dec 12	Saly Joseph	Dec 20	Sam Jacob Kurisinmoottil	Dec 31
Richa Tony	Dec 12	Merlin Rajan	Dec 21	Rajesh Geevarghese	Dec 31
Sheeba P Anooj	Dec 12	Hannah Varghese	Dec 22		
Jacob T. Mathai	Dec 14				

# Sunday School News

*Submitted by Steven Kurian, Principal  
(Tel.: 267.450.6815, Email: [stevekurian@yahoo.com](mailto:stevekurian@yahoo.com))*

## One Year Bible Reading Schedule - December

<i>Date</i>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
<i>December 1</i>	Esther 9-10	Jonah 1	Hebrews 6-7
<i>December 2</i>	Job 1-2	Jonah 2-3	Hebrews 8-9
<i>December 3</i>	Job 3-4	Jonah 4	Hebrews 10
<i>December 4</i>	Job 5	Micah 1	Hebrews 11
<i>December 5</i>	Job 6-7	Micah 2	Hebrews 12
<i>December 6</i>	Job 8	Micah 3-4	Hebrews 13
<i>December 7</i>	Job 9	Micah 5	James 1
<i>December 8</i>	Job 10	Micah 6	James 2
<i>December 9</i>	Job 11	Micah 7	James 3-4
<i>December 10</i>	Job 12	Nahum 1-2	James 5
<i>December 11</i>	Job 13	Nahum 3	1 Peter 1
<i>December 12</i>	Job 14	Hab. 1	1 Peter 2
<i>December 13</i>	Job 15	Hab. 2	1 Peter 3-5
<i>December 14</i>	Job 16-17	Hab. 3	2 Peter 1-2
<i>December 15</i>	Job 18-19	Zeph. 1	2 Peter 3
<i>December 16</i>	Job 20	Zeph. 2	1 John 1-2
<i>December 17</i>	Job 21	Zeph. 3	1 John 3-4
<i>December 18</i>	Job 22	Haggai 1-2	1 John 5
<i>December 19</i>	Job 23-24	Zeph. 1	2 John-3 John
<i>December 20</i>	Job 25-27	Zeph. 2-3	Jude
<i>December 21</i>	Job 28	Zeph. 4-5	Rev. 1-2
<i>December 22</i>	Job 29-30	Zeph. 6-7	Rev. 3-4
<i>December 23</i>	Job 31-32	Zeph. 8	Rev. 5-6
<i>December 24</i>	Job 33	Zeph. 9	Rev. 7-9
<i>December 25</i>	Job 34	Zeph. 10	Rev. 10-11
<i>December 26</i>	Job 35-36	Zeph. 11	Rev. 12-13
<i>December 27</i>	Job 37	Zeph. 12	Rev. 14
<i>December 28</i>	Job 38	Zeph. 13	Rev. 15-16
<i>December 29</i>	Job 39	Mal. 1	Rev. 17-18
<i>December 30</i>	Job 40	Mal. 2	Rev. 19-20
<i>December 31</i>	Job 41-42	Mal. 3-4	Rev. 21-22

**Please remember to pray for the Sunday school Children and Staff in your daily prayer.**