



A St. Gregorios Orthodox Syrian Church, Elmhurst Publication

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# GREGORIAN GAZETTE



*“O death, where is your  
sting?*

*O hell, where is your  
victory?*

*Christ is risen and the  
demons are fallen!*

*Christ is risen and life  
is set free!”*

*St. John Chrysostom’s*

*Paschal Homily*



## **H.G. Kuriakose Mar Gregorios (Pampady Thirumeni)**

*On April 5th, 1965 a great father of the Malankara Orthodox Church, H.G. Kuriakose Mar Gregorios (Pampady Thirumeni) passed away at his dayara in Pampady. This weekend, as we commemorate his life, the Gazette team would like to share with you some thoughts on Thirumeni’s life, taken from The Saint of Pampady: An Authoritative Biography of Metropolitan Kuriakose Mar Gregorios (2009). For more information about Thirumeni, the full biography can be found in our parish library.*

*(Continued on page 3)*

**No Pain, No Gain ....**

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)*

We celebrate another season of the passion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The major theme of the Lenten season and passion week was nothing but the Cross- The cross is to be taken up, not simply borne when laid upon the shoulder. This implies willing, cheerful suffering for Christ. Some people endure trials, but always with repining. What does it mean to take up the Cross? It means simply to DENY SELF. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself."

To deny oneself means to turn away from self-centeredness. It means to die to self. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it like this, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." In a real sense, Jesus calls you to a crucifixion. When we follow him, we are to crucify ourselves, our desires, our possessions, our reputations. It means I no longer live. Paul wrote in Galatians 5:24, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its selfish passions and desires."

It is important to understand that Jesus does not mean what we usually think of as "self denial." By this, we usually mean that we are giving up something. It is like how some Christians observe Lent, by giving up something; perhaps it is the giving up of a bad habit in life or giving up something very favorite. That is not what Jesus is talking about. He is not only concerned with what we do, but even more importantly, what we are. Therefore, he is not talking about denying ourselves luxuries or even necessities, but about "denying self" which is entirely different. Denying self means that we renounce our right to ourselves, the right to rule our own lives.

Do you know how a pearl is formed? A beautiful pearl begins as a fragment of broken shell, a sand grain, or even a parasite. Such an object enters an oyster's shell and irritates its soft tissue. The irritant then gets covered and strengthened with layers of mother-of-pearl. Over the course of time, a beautiful pearl develops. Slowly but surely, God also envelops us in Himself and practically transforms us into beautiful followers who reflect His beauty. When tasks are so heavy and your strength is no longer enough to carry them, do not give up, where our strength ends the grace of God begins.

Let us have a new beginning through Self Denial.

*(Pampady Thirumeni, continued from page 1)*

When the Seminary closed for vacation, the Deacon would return to Pampady. He stayed in the church most of the time. Through prayers and regular fasting, he came more and more close to God. He was building a bridge between God and himself.

Summer was unusually hot that year. All wells dried up. Fields parched up. Birds and animals fell down dead in the scorching heat. People wandered far and near for a drop of water.

On Sunday after the Holy [Qurbana], the Deacon made a declaration. "All should fast for three days in order to procure rain." The faithful started fasting then and there. The whole village prayed with tears for rain. But there were doubting Thomases even then and they said with contempt, "Let us see how the Deacon brings rain with fasting." They were not prepared to believe that the prayer of a mere deacon would fetch rain to a village.

People fasted for three days and nights. But even on the third afternoon, there was no sign of a single cloud in the sky. A mass prayer with distribution of [kanji] was arranged in the evening to mark the end of the fasting.

The Deacon went on praying on his knees in the church. All eyes were on the sky for a sign of rain. But there was no change there. They looked at the face of the Deacon. There too was no change. It was calm as ever. In the Chethimattam field near the church, people were boiling [kanji] ready to be served. The Deacon himself supervised the distribution of [kanji]. A few men were standing here and there and making [snide] remarks about the superstition of the people.

The change was sudden and unexpected. The sky darkened with rain clouds. It started as a gentle drizzle and soon, turned out to be torrential downpour.

The faithful were overwhelmed with happiness.

It was a rain of faith, showering over the tiny village. Chethimattam soon became a lake. The [kanji] distribution was shifted to the nearby houses. Large copper vessels used for boiling rice were floating on the water. People tied some of them with rope on the coconut trees in the field. For hours, the rain continued to descend on Pampady. At last, when it was all over, all eyes were searching for the Deacon. But he was not to be seen anywhere. He was inside the church, praying with tears, thanking the Almighty for the bounty. Through that rain, he was growing from a mere deacon to a man of God...

*(Continued on page 4)*

Fr. Ninan George

Liju Paul

Liju Varghese

Elizabeth Varghese

Gladstone Mammen

George Panicker

Joe Varghese

Peter Varghese

George Varghese (Publisher)

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

In March 2013, we conducted the inaugural Holy Week services at our new church in Elmhurst. It was a successful fortnight with tremendous participation from our entire church body.

The activities began on Catholicate Day (Sunday, March 17) with morning prayer and Holy Qurbana. We were greatly honored to have Rev. Fr. K.M. George, former principal of the Orthodox seminary in Kottayam, as our Chief Guest. We commemorated 40<sup>th</sup> Friday (40<sup>th</sup> day of the Great Lent) with Holy Qurbana on Thursday evening. To prepare ourselves for the Passion Week, our parish conducted our Lenten Retreat that Saturday.

Holy Week began on Palm Sunday (March 24<sup>th</sup>) with Holy Qurbana celebrated by Fr. Christopher Mathew. In a special blessing for us this year, the Feast of Annunciation (March 25) fell on Monday of Holy Week. Though we do not usually have Holy Qurbana during the weekdays of Holy Lent, because of the importance of this Feast we celebrate it whenever it falls, be it during Lent, Holy Week or even Good Friday. In keeping with this tradition, we offered Holy Qurbana on Monday morning itself. Throughout the week, we had time for confession every afternoon and devotional addresses every evening.

On Wednesday evening, we all came together for our Pesaha supper. On Good Friday, our service began at 9:00 am and continued through the late afternoon. We followed this with kanji and evening prayer. MGOCSM held its Easter Vigil throughout the night at our church, leading us well into our Holy Saturday service the following morning. Finally, our Holy Week services concluded with a joyous Easter service and feast on Sunday, March 31<sup>st</sup>.

Thank you to all of our parishioners for your participation and efforts throughout this special time in the Church's year. Our first Holy Week in Elmhurst was a resounding success thanks to the selfless contributions of all of our members.

*(Pampady Thirumeni continued from page 3)*

*Included in the biography were a number of remembrances of Thirumeni by members of our clergy touched by Thirumeni's life. Among these was one by our former assistant vicar Fr. V.M. Abraham (currently HG Abraham Mar Seraphim, Metropolitan of the Bangalore Diocese).*

Spiritual gurus and hermits are incessant, uncompromising seekers of God. Their love of God is intense and eager. They cannot forget God even for a moment. They spend their entire life in spiritual fervor and ecstasy. Pampady Thirumeni was such a great sage whom Almighty God gifted to the Malankara Church. In him is blended spiritual opulence and worldly humility and that makes His Grace unique from other spiritual leaders of the Church.

The ultimate goal of life can be pointed out to us only by a person who has attained it or reached very close to it. We call him 'Guru'. For us, Pampady Thirumeni was guru as well as spiritual preceptor. The Guru awakens the disciple from his deep sleep and shows him the way to God. We can call him either as Christian High Priest standing between God and his men, or as a great spiritual guide who removed the darkness from the hearts of thousands and brought in clear, spiritual light.

*(Continued on page 5)*

*(Pampady Thirumeni continued from page 4)*

Thirumeni was greatly influenced by his association with two saints of the Church. The divine presence of St. Parumala Thirumeni and the stay with St. Vattasseril Thirumeni moulded Pampady Thirumeni's piety and simplicity. Both the saints had received the light of God abundantly and had kept it in their hearts. They transferred it into their disciples. By God's grace, Pampady Thirumeni could enjoy that spiritual power which was lavished on him by the two Gurus. It enabled His Grace to emit rays of light himself and also to enlighten others.

Thirumeni believed that every devotee had to work as a tool of God for God. When the deadly plague spread in Kunnankulam, His Grace reached there without fear and worked for the people. Through that, he was acting as the true representative of Jesus Christ. Thirumeni's words, "I have come to live and die with you" are still famous in Kunnankulam. The shepherd's place is among the sheep. Thirumeni was a great shepherd who always kept a tear drop of love in his eyes. He always took care to give food to all the visitors to the Dayara. Thirumeni was ready to help all who deserved help, encouraged students in their studies and gave fees to those who could not afford it. He saved orphans and gave them a sense of belonging. Whoever came to him with a heavy heart, left with relief and joy. Hundreds realized the power of his prayer. Even today, his tomb is a haven for the suffering.

Even though the faction feuds in the Church caused heavy losses, it is an irony that Pothampuram Dayara is one of its gains. As a Ramban, he was staying in Pampady church and the troubles in the Church prompted Thirumeni to seek for a calm and quiet place for his meditation and prayers. The Dayara is the result of that search. He shifted his residence to the Dayara and spent his days there in prayer and meditation. Attracted by his spiritual glow, many began to flow to Pothampuram and he took special care to advise them and to pray for them. Vattasseril Thirumeni who was impressed by the quietness and beauty of the hill named it 'Tabore Mount.'

Thirumeni always looked at life with hope. He approached death with indifference. He built his own tomb in his lifetime and prayed in that room. He believed that there was no room for the weak in spiritual life. The weak could never live up to the lofty ascetic principles and pay the price for it. Thirumeni was gifted with real spiritual strength.

That life was simple, beautiful and full of charity. Such a style of life is a real challenge in the modern world. Thirumeni's memory becomes meaningful when we take up this challenge.

As we remember Pampady Thirumeni, let us ask him to pray for us, especially as we begin the next phase of the life of our parish here in Elmhurst. May the Triune God have mercy on us all.



## PHAT Men's Ministry

During the Lenten season, the PHAT Men's Ministry started a new study initiative. We have watched four sessions and had discussions on the "Fan or Follower" series of video messages by Father Anthony Messeh. Fr. Messeh is a prominent speaker from the Coptic Orthodox Church and serves at St. Timothy & St. Athanasius Orthodox Church in Ar-

lington, Virginia. We had the sessions after church every week leading up to Easter. It has been a true blessing to participate in this study with over 25 of our brothers in Christ. We thank the parents for taking the effort to wait for their children after church every Sunday. We also thank Alex Geevarghese for taking a lead in guiding this new initiative forward.

We will have two more sessions to finish out the series, as detailed in the schedule below. So make sure you make it out to Sessions 5 and 6 for the conclusion to Fr. Messeh's Fan or Follower Series!

Fr. Messeh's blog can be found at the [www.franthony.com](http://www.franthony.com). If anyone has missed any of the sessions, they can follow along at [www.orthodoxsermons.org](http://www.orthodoxsermons.org). Twitter users can also follow him @FrAnthony for his daily tweets. We hope that this series has been a beacon of light bringing the young men of our church closer to Christ.



### Fan or Follower Series Schedule:

Session 1: Defining the Relationship – Sunday, March 3

Session 2: Belief or Commitment? – Sunday, March 10

Session 3: Knowledge or Intimacy? – Sunday, March 17

Session 4: One of Many or One & Only? – Saturday, March 30

Session 5: Self-empowered or Spirit-filled? – Sunday, April 14

Session 6: The Relationship Defined – Sunday, April 21



## Divyabodhanam

Classes are conducted in our parish at two levels led by our vicar Ninan Achen. The first level, comprised of 10 books, is Proficiency in Orthodox Christian Education (POCE). Achen is the Director of DB at the Diocese level and plans to start the POCE classes by teleconference for the entire Diocese from April onwards.

The second level, known as Diploma in Orthodox Christian Education (DOCE), is for those who have completed POCE. DOCE classes are conducted twice a month. We have already completed the first book (of 10) of the DOCE program – Apostola Prabodhngal (A Study on the New Testament Epistles) by Rev. Fr. TJ Joshua. At present we are studying the second book – Daivathejasileku (A New Testament Understanding of Christian Life) by HG Gabriel Mar Gregorios. We were blessed to have Rev. Fr. KM George, former Principal of Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, with us during our class held on March 17



**MGOCSM**

The Annual Lenten Retreat on Saturday, March 16th at St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Chicago from 10 AM to 3 PM. The area's youth minister, Rev. Fr. Christopher Mathew continued developing the theme of "Chosen Generation" by discussing in the first session what it meant to be authentically repentant. He compared and contrasted the lives of kings David and Saul in the Old Testament as examples of authentic and unauthentic repentance. Rev. Fr. Dr. KM George, retired principal of Old Theological Seminary in Kottayam, India, discussed the qualities of a Christian leader using the newly elected Pope Francis I of the Catholic Church as an example. The upcoming MGOCSM Missions Trip was announced in detail as a couple former Missions attendees spoke briefly about their experience in efforts to gain interest from the Chicagoland area. An opportunity to partake in the sacrament of Holy Confession was offered before and after the retreat for all participants as well. Approximately 35 MGOCSM members from the four area parishes attended this blessed retreat.



On March 29th, MGOCSM Chicago held the area's annual Good Friday Night Vigil at St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, Elmhurst from 7PM to 12AM. The night began with evening prayer, followed by music ministry, a message from Chicago's youth minister, Rev. Fr. Christopher Mathew, meditation, devotional reflections, Psalm readings and an opportunity to partake in the Sacrament of Holy Confession. Rev. Fr. Christopher Mathew discussed 1 Corinthians 1:18 - "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." He emphasized the importance of knowing the power of the Cross and how it calls us all to be set apart from the world that is perishing.



## Nuhro Sunday School Camp

Nuhro will be held from **June 27th - 30th** and this year's theme will be "Imitators of Christ", taught by Fr. Christopher Mathew and Dn. Saju Varghese.

Registration is open for 2nd through 8th Grade boys and girls. Please contact your Sunday School teacher or the camp coordinators, Mr. Chris Mathew (847-989-5027) or Mr. Roshen Samuel (847-505-9029) for more information. An early-bird discount of \$25 is given for those who register before April 14th.

This camp is an important part of our Sunday School program for the formation of our Youth in the Church. If there are any issues or concerns, please consult the Sunday School principal or your student's Sunday School teacher as soon as possible.

Please keep the speakers, leaders and campers in your prayers as we continue to prepare for a wonderful experience for our children to grow in the love of God.

**Q: Why does the Greek Orthodox Church celebrate Easter on a different day than our Church?**

**A:** There are two calendars that are followed in Christianity - the more ancient Julian Calendar (or "old" calendar) is the one used by the Eastern Orthodox Churches (including Greece and Russia) and several Oriental Orthodox Churches including the Coptic. The Gregorian calendar, also called the Western calendar is more widely used and was introduced in 1582 as a reform to the Julian calendar. The calendar is named after Pope Gregory XII who commissioned the change with the aid of a Jesuit priest and astronomer. The Syriac Orthodox calendar was at one point entirely on the "old" calendar even though the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch Mor Ignatius Ni`matallah was a learned mathematician and astronomer, and a member of Pope Gregory XIII's commission on the reform of the calendar. The Syrian Church in Malankara switched entirely to the Gregorian calendar in 1953, and with the peace between the Indian and Syriac Orthodox Churches in India during this time, it is assumed that the Indian Orthodox Church also switched to the Gregorian calendar around this time. One motivation for the switch in India was to help the faithful celebrate Holy Week, as Good Friday is a national holiday in India (unlike America!) but was given dated based on the Western or Gregorian calendar.

## Chicago Youth Minister

A little over a year ago, Fr. Christopher Mathew was appointed Youth Minister of the Chicago area in order to primarily serve the youth of our region and to be an aid to our local vicars.

Chris Achen has devoted his time to the next generation of our church by joining each parish in the region monthly for Holy Qurbana, helping to regularize the celebration of the Holy Qurbana in English at each parish and building relationships with the youth during his visits. He has developed especially strong bonds with the youth of our church and has made an effort to be involved and lead monthly meetings of our parish ministries such as PHAT, WOW, and KFC. Achen also meets with our parish leaders to organize the ongoing Worship, Study, Service youth projects.

He has led the MGOCSM of the area by participating in the Annual Summer Conference, annual retreats (Winter 2-day, Lenten, Good Friday Vigil, etc), and Friday Night Sings. Achen has also worked with Campus Ministry leaders to organize and hold meetings at U of I (averaging every 2 months), Loyola/Depaul and UIC (averaging monthly). Another regional ministry, FOCUS, has had a recent rejuvenation with the start-up of The Way which was headed by many of our own older youth, along with Chris Achen.

Looking forward, we hope to continue to see more of Chris Achen's efforts, leadership, and guidance molding our youth on the regional and parish level.



*The Gregorian Gazette wishes you and  
your family a blessed*

*Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord and  
Savior Jesus Christ!*

### The Rev. Fr. M.K. Thomas Library is now open!

In addition to borrowing books, movies and music, the Orthodox Study Bible and a number of devotional items will be available for purchase.

The library will be open for one hour after every Holy Qurbana or by appointment. For more information, please contact Mr. Liju Varghese at 847-331-6308 or send an email to [library@sgc.org](mailto:library@sgc.org).

Also...if you have borrowed materials from the library in the past, please remember to return them at the earliest!

**Don't be sad!**

**Kids Korner will be back next month!**



### APRIL BIRTHDAYS

04/03 Abraham, Justin

04/04 Verghese, Jiyana

04/05 Panicker, Jeslin George

04/08 Mathew, Steve

04/08 Vargese, Lilia J.

04/10 George, Riya Sarah

04/11 Kurian, Shantra

04/11 Mulanthara, Melvin Jay

04/12 George, Gregory

04/12 Jacob, Krista

04/12 Joseph, Mathew

04/17 Panicker, Robin A

04/18 Kurian, Shawn

04/19 Stephen, Robin George

04/20 Markose, Nevin

04/26 George, Justin

04/29 Geevarghese, Gloria Susan

04/29 Varghese, Payton Alphonse

**Happy Birthday To You!**

**Challenge to Orthodox Parents: Start Reading the Bible with your Kids**

*"Let each one of you, on some day of the week, even on the Sabbath (Sunday) itself, take in his hands the selection of the Gospels that is going to be read to you. Read it frequently as you sit at home in the time intervening, and often ponder with care the thoughts stored up in it and examine them well. Note what is clear and what obscure, and which thoughts seem to be contradictory, though they really are not." (St. John Chrysostom)*

St. John Chrysostom encourages us to regularly take read Sunday's Scripture verse again to prepare our minds and hearts for Holy Qurbana ... but parents, why read only to ourselves when we can also read aloud to our children as well?

We are the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church ... but many of our kids are unable to apply the stories of the early Christians who went before them. Their lives aren't being touched by the daily reminders and wisdom of Proverbs and comfort of the Psalms. Instead of using their Orthodox Study Bible they prefer to play video games and watch TV.

We are busy and it's easy to forget to set aside a few minutes in silence in our own day for scripture and prayer. Unfortunately, this also hurts children as well when they are deprived of the healing medicine of Christ. We are spiritually starved. Our souls need nourishment, and our children need something to grab onto to keep them anchored. It's not easy growing up in today's world, but when your daughters remember how Esther risked her life to save her people, they can be inspired to stand up for their Christian values. When your sons struggle with doubt, they can remember the Apostle Thomas and that he doubted too.

What are we learning growing up as Orthodox? We are taught about the Sacraments, but we need to live the Sacramental life. We encourage all parents to use their Orthodox Study Bible and follow the Church lectionary. Simply reading Sunday's Gospel re-reading alone is enough to fill our minds and hearts with joy for our Lord Jesus Christ. And in turn, we will be able to change not only ourselves but our children. Make God's Word an everyday part of the whole family's life.

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