

The Fast of Nativity

Meditations for Personal & Family Prayer
During the Fast of Yeldo



Rev. Jeswin John

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A Yarah Project Publication

Introduction

Dearly beloved in Christ, grace and peace to you in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

As we look forward to Christmas, the practice of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church is that we set this time as the *Fast of Yeldo*, or the Nativity Fast. Rev. Dr. George Mathew Kuttiyil wrote that this is the “time when the Church gets ready to receive the Redeemer who has incarnated as a human” (*A Study of the Fasts and Feasts in the Church*). When we turn our attention to the task of fasting and prayer, we go back once again to the stillness of our soul and the quiet presence of our Lord. This will make the celebration of Christmas day both meaningful and valuable for our spiritual life.

This collection of meditations is for the 25 days of this fast, which ends with the celebration of Holy Qurbana on 25th December. This may be used for personal or family prayer. There is a Bible passage, a key verse, and a short meditation, followed by a prayer. The meditation is kept short, in order that each of us meditates on the words of the Bible and understands the depth of its meaning and application for our lives. An image is found on each page related to each topic.

I pray that this devotional book may strengthen your spiritual life during this *Fast of Yeldo*, and all the days to come. Amen.

Feast of St. Andrew
the Apostle, 2023

Rev. Jeswin John
Chicago



I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

Genesis 3:15



The reason for Christmas is Jesus Christ. And the reason that Jesus Christ came into this world goes back to the very beginning. With the sin of Adam and Eve, in which they disobeyed God and broke the relationship with the God, we see the beginning of all humanity's troubles. God created all humans with free will to choose between good and evil. God took the risk because he did not create robots. Yet it was a God's plan that He would be the one who would correct the mistakes of humanity. God alone offered the solution to the problem of sin and evil. God alone overthrew the devil and his forces through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.



Prayer

Lord our Creator, we thank You for our life and the possibilities in it. We thank You for Your Son Jesus Christ through whom we have received the forgiveness of sins. Help us to live a life of repentance and holiness, pleasing to You and beneficial to those around us. Amen.

*I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse,
and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

Genesis 12:3



The Bible teaches that there is only one way to God and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an exclusive statement with an inclusive clause. God welcomes everyone into his presence, but it is only through the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, there was a tendency for the Hebrews to view access to God in exclusive terms. But the call of Abraham shows that God's salvation plan was quite inclusive. Abraham was blessed and it was promised that through him all nations would be blessed. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is for all humanity. The free gift is for all who would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.

Prayer

Lord God, we thank You that You loved each one of us equally. Forgive us for not understanding how all-encompassing your care for us is. Give us the courage to tell others about the great love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide," as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Genesis 22:14



On Mount Moriah, Abraham followed the command of God to sacrifice Isaac. Being from a pagan religion, Abraham may have thought it natural that the God who called him would ask such a thing. Yet the Lord God detests human sacrifice, and even as the prophets discovered later, animal sacrifice does not mean anything to the Lord. The Lord was looking into the heart of Abraham to find someone who would obey. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were enticed by the very thing God prohibited. Abraham, with a heavy heart took his son, but the Lord saw Abraham's faith and obedience. God himself provided the sacrifice, just as He would provide the Son for our salvation.



Prayer

Father God, we often forget to be obedient to Your will. Sometimes we feel Your commands are too difficult for us. Give us an obedient heart and increase our faith. In Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.

Genesis 50:20



Joseph was the beloved son of his father Jacob. We can attribute his life troubles to his arrogance, the envy of his brothers, and so forth. Yet years after when the family is reunited, the brothers are afraid and seek Joseph's forgiveness. They thought that because their father would not be around to protect them, Joseph may harm them. When they approach Joseph, he reminds them of the greater plan of God. They had tried to harm Joseph years ago but God used that situation and turned it around for the salvation of many people. The devil tried to undo God's creation, but God in his wisdom offered the solution through Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord, we often look at the challenges in our life and fail to see where You are leading us. Lord, help us to trust that You are preparing us for something greater than we can imagine.

Amen.



"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Exodus 3:6



Would it ever be possible to see God? Can we approach a God who calls himself “blazing fire and darkness” (Heb 12:18)? When Moses turned aside to investigate the burning bush, the Lord stopped him from coming closer. The Lord came to Moses and called him. Our God is holy but also approachable. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were afraid to approach God. Yet God also heard the cries of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. God revealed something personal to Moses, His Name, “I AM WHO I AM”. When God the Son became incarnate through Mary, it was so that God could be with us in a way that none of us could have ever imagined.



Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for coming into the world to save us. We thank You, O God, for Your continued presence with us. Make us worthy to approach You. Amen.

...command the rock before their eyes to yield its water. Thus you shall bring water out of the rock for them....

Numbers 20:8



At the waters of Meribah, Israel quarreled with Moses because the situation felt hopeless for them. Moses and Aaron, full of pain and frustration, fell before the Lord God and cried out to God for help. God tells Moses to command the rock to yield water. We know that Moses hit the rock instead. The Lord considered that a failure to trust God rather than mere disobedience. That Rock which was with the Israelites in the wilderness was God the Son. The Holy Qurbana proclaims, “You are the flint rock from which flowed living water for the twelve tribes of Israel”. That Living Rock became the Incarnate Son as the priceless cornerstone, struck and beaten, but victorious and resurrected.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the rock on which I stand.
You provide me with living water. Teach me
Your ways that I may live a life of contentment
and free from worry and anxiety. Amen.



The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi."

Ruth 4:17



Ruth was a Moabite, a descendent of Esau, the forsaken brother of Jacob. She married the son of a refugee from Bethlehem. Due to unfortunate circumstances, her husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law passed away. She had no children to bind her to the family of her mother-in-law, who therefore planned to live out the end of her life quietly back in her homeland. Yet Ruth went back with Naomi to a foreign land. Bethlehem would be her home and by the will of God, she remarried. From the town of Bethlehem and from Ruth's family tree, the Lord Jesus Christ was incarnate through Mary. Mysterious are the ways of the Lord, even bringing the forsaken into His salvation plan, for God's glory.



Prayer

Father God, we may feel forsaken by others. Sometimes we are lonely. Bind us to You, and draw us into Your Presence. Use us for your glory. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God."

Genesis 50:20



Hannah spent years crying and praying for a child. Her heart was deeply troubled. When the Lord answered her prayers, she dedicated her firstborn to the Lord. God asked Abraham for Isaac, and Abraham obeyed. Hannah found the same God who answers prayer. She called Him the "Holy One" and the "Rock". She waited on the Lord and He carried out His plan at the chosen time. God spoke to Mary at another chosen time, and though she was scared, she accepted the will of God for her life. Mary's song parallels Hannah's song because both women shared the same experience of the caring and loving God. Both their hearts rejoiced in God their Savior.

Prayer

Lord, my soul magnifies Your name because You have been good to me. When I was afraid of what lay ahead, You strengthened my heart to move forward. Let me always sing of Your love for me. Amen.



“The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell forever.”

1 Kings 8:12-13



The Lord God told King David that his heir would build a temple. King Solomon dedicated a magnificent temple for the Lord. On that day, as they offered sacrifices to the Lord, a thick cloud filled the temple and the priests could not stand inside. Solomon spoke by the Holy Spirit that the Presence of God came and dwelt among the peoples. This Presence was with the Israelites in their wilderness journey to the Promised Land. The presence of the Lord dwells in the midst of the worshiping community. Jesus Christ came down to earth, taking a human body as a Holy Temple, in order that by His sacrifice, every human being may become a temple fit for the glory of God.



Prayer

Father God, through your Son Jesus Christ, make our bodies fit to be Living Temples of Your Holy Spirit. Fill us with Your grace and may our life proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and show others the true way of salvation. Amen.

"He is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him... If only there were someone to mediate between us... (NIV)

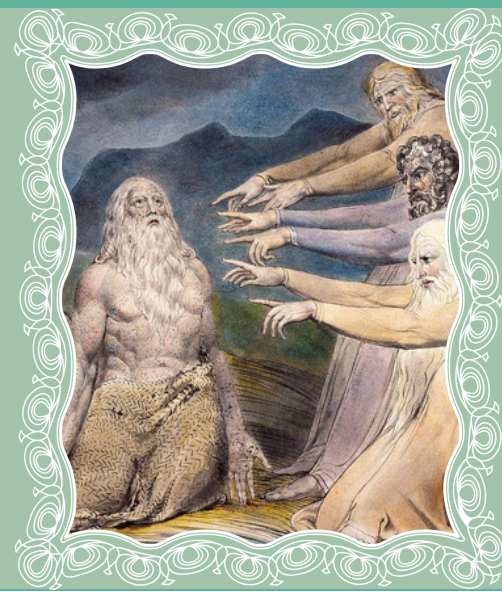
Job 9:32-33



The Prophet Job suffered a multitude of trials but he never rejected God. He questioned the situation and he grieved because of the pain in his life. He was frustrated with God but never denied God. In his conversations with his friends and with the God, we see a man who is trying to make sense of the evil in his life. Discerning centuries into the future, Job declares that someone needs to mediate for humanity. Humans have no chance in the presence of God. They need a mediator. Jesus Christ came to this world to be our mediator, representing our case to God. His blood, shed on the cross, testifies for us in our sinfulness. His blood cries out for us and for our pardon.

Prayer

O Lord, You gave and You have taken away;
blessed be Your Name. Thank You for taking
away my sins by giving us Your Son Jesus
Christ for my pardon. Amen.



*He said to me, "You are my son;
today I have begotten you."*

Psalm 2:7



The 2nd Psalm is a psalm for the crowning of the King of Israel. The kings in the line of David received their authority from God and they exercised their authority in the will of God. The nations, especially the “prince of this world” stand in opposition to God’s plan. The Davidic kings affirmed the Sovereign God who created and arranged the world. The Apostles understood that Jesus Christ was the Davidic king prophesied in the Scriptures. Apostle Peter declared that the prince of this world plotted against the true ruler, Jesus Christ (Acts 4). Satan thought he succeeded when Jesus was crucified. Instead, God exalted the One who hung on the Cross. Christ, victorious in birth, in death, and will come again in glory.



Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Jesus Christ our King. Rule in our hearts and minds.

Make us to be worthy servants of Your Kingdom. Help us to wait for the triumphant Second Coming of our Savior. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us...and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6



The prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming of the Messiah. He comes as a child who will go on to receive titles such as Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God. Jesus of Nazareth was not merely a man nor a charismatic Rabbi. He was God Incarnate, living and ministering in Palestine. He taught and healed and equipped His followers to proclaim the revelation of God's salvation plan. A great light shone in Bethlehem and was carried out to the ends of the earth in order to bring light to a people living in darkness. Jesus Christ was crucified, buried in a tomb, yet rose again and witnessed by many. God the Father exalted Him to the position He had from eternity.

Prayer

Father God, thank You for sending Your Son to us. We trust in Him. We are glad that He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Amen.



But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah...from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Micah 5:2



Micah prophesied about the destruction of Judah and Samaria. The people were overcome by greed and idolatry. Unless they change their ways, destruction would approach their cities. He also prophesied the restoration after exile. From the little town of Bethlehem would arise a savior. Bethlehem is a town of little significance. This Messiah was of “ancient days” and would come to rule in Israel. The Lord Jesus was born in this little town, and overturned the whole world. He was exalted on the cross, even though the spiritually blind could only see his broken body. He rose victorious on the third day and now sits at the right hand of God the Father.



Prayer

Lord Jesus, who came into this world in the small town of Bethlehem, look mercifully on Your weak and humble servants. Teach us to number our days aright, looking to Your cross for our hope and salvation. Amen.

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

Malachi 3:1



Malachi's name means "my messenger". He also prophesied about the Lord's messenger. Malachi described a society that had drifted away from God. The priesthood became corrupt, the temple was neglected by the people, and many followed foreign idols. A messenger would come in the spirit of Elijah, to refine the people and make them ready for the day of coming of the Lord. This messenger would be John the Baptist, who preached repentance of sins and prepared the people to receive the Messiah. Not everyone can see the Lord, except those who realize their sinfulness and seek the mercy of God. Jesus Christ came for each one of us but will we turn our eyes from wickedness and focus on God?

Prayer

Father God, we have neglected to turn our eyes to You and followed our own desires. Help us to discern the truth of the Gospel. Refine and purify us as pure gold. Amen.



An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew 1:1



The Gospel According to Matthew begins with genealogy. We often skip this because of the long list of names. We must go through each name because it will connect the Old Testament with the New Testament; God's plan for our salvation started even before Creation. Many have stood in that family tree leading up to Mary and Joseph, whose lineage extends to Abraham and even Adam (refer to Luke 3:23 - 38). Many have stood along the path of God's salvation plan. Through them, God brought forth the pinnacle of His salvation plan, which was to save us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Now each follower of Christ also stands in that path showing others God's salvation.



Prayer

Lord God, we thank You for our forefathers and foremothers who stood along the path of Your salvation, who through their life and witness passed that testimony on to us. Help us to also be witnesses of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark 1:1

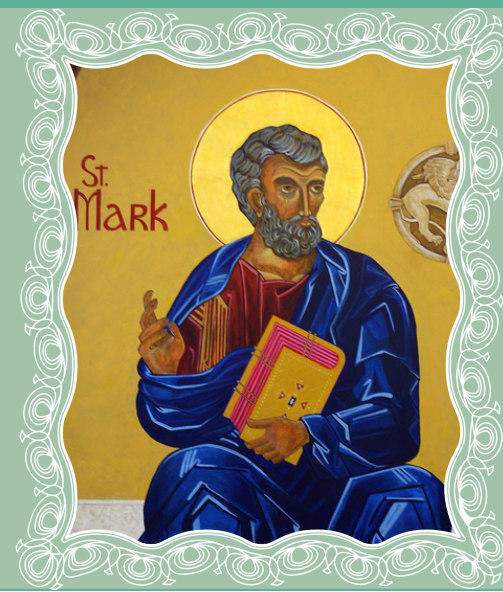


In the account of the Evangelist Mark, we don't find a birth narrative. Yet he begins by explaining what the gospel is: the Good News of Jesus Christ, our God and our Savior. God the Son is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He is of one divine essence with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God the Son. He took flesh through the Virgin Mary. He became human in order to share in the essence of humanity. Being God, He could perfectly save us. Being perfect human, he could perfectly represent us. The Good News is that God chose to become human through the mystery of the Incarnation and save us.

Prayer

God, we thank you for the mysterious ways by which you work the salvation plan. Help us to understand the teachings of the Bible and the doctrines that were handed down to us. Help us to guard it faithfully and share it freely.

Amen.



"You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that testify on my behalf."

John 5:39



Why did Jesus Christ come into our world? Couldn't the religious leaders of Jesus' day identify the prophecies? Jesus himself pointed out that the Scriptures, spoke of Him. The Old Testament is full of writings that point to Jesus Christ and His Incarnation. John the Baptist came first to proclaim that the Messiah was coming quickly. The identity of Jesus was confirmed by the prophets and holy men and women of the Old Testament. God the Father testified of him. The first disciples searched the Scriptures to see whether it was all true. They found the truth hidden in plain sight in the Old Testament. They believed the words of those who shared the good news.



Prayer

Lord God, send us the Holy Spirit that we may understand Your Word and give us the wisdom to be able to testify about You whenever we get the chance. Amen.

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:14



The Apostle John described the Incarnation with beautiful language. He wrote that God took on human nature and lived with humanity. He describes it as God pitching a tent among His creation. He points back to how the Lord God descended into the midst of the Israelites, at the Tabernacle. We often want to run away from God. God does not want to be away from us. Over and over, we see God reaching out and trying to be with His people. Humans often try to limit God to temples of stone. Yet God loved His creation so much, that He chose to reside in a Temple of Flesh. He chose this way because He loved humanity.

Prayer

Father God, thank You for creating us in Your Image. Thank You for coming into our world and understanding our life situation. Help us to find peace and comfort in You. Amen.



With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1:17



As the prophecies proclaimed, a messenger would come in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for the Messiah. This is John the Baptist, whose birth was unexpected for his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth. They were God-fearing, yet they did not have children. In their society, that was a shameful situation. These things happened because the Lord needed a righteous family who would raise a son as a Nazirite. He would live a life in communion with God, free from worldly distractions. At God's time, he would boldly proclaim the Word of God. Zachariah didn't know what to do when he heard the angel's message. Yet he later believed and raised the son to be a strong witness for God.



Prayer

Lord God, circumstances in our life may break us down. Sometimes we feel hurt by our community. Help us to wait patiently for the fulfillment of your will. Prepare us to carry out whatever responsibility you entrust to us.

Amen.

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Luke 1:45



After Mary received the news from the angel, she hurried to visit her relative Elizabeth. The two women rejoiced when they saw each other. By the Holy Spirit, the child in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy. By the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth discerned the true nature of the child in Mary’s womb. The older Elizabeth gave Mary utmost honor because the child of Mary was from on high. What was it like for Mary as she spent three months with Elizabeth? Surely they were in prayer and rejoicing with one another. They shared their fears and comforted each other. Mary praised God and offered a song honoring His goodness and blessing His Name.

Prayer

Almighty God, as we think about the life of Elizabeth and Mary, whom You chose for your purposes, help us also to sing Your praises and bless Your Name. Give us good friends and relationships, and to be faithful to You at all times. Amen.

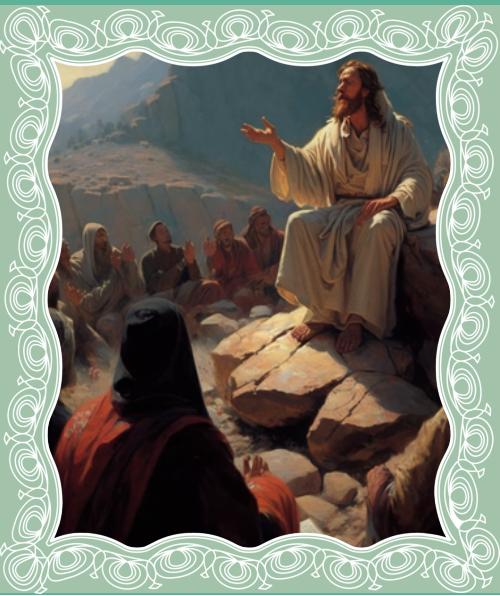


...the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God...

Romans 1:3-4



As we approach Christmas and as we enter into a new year, we must remember the calling of each Christian. The Apostle Paul begins his Letter to the Romans with the importance of the Gospel: as a Creed for our lives and as the mission to proclaim it to those who have not heard the Good News. The Gospel may be a stumbling block for some, but for every Christian it is the source of our hope. Jesus Christ came into this world to give us the Good News. Through Him, we receive the grace and courage to share this message. Our good deeds during this season can only come out of our deep trust in the words of the Gospel.



Prayer

Lord Jesus, strengthen the depth of our faith in You, give us the courage to proclaim with our mouths Your Gospel, and guide our hands to care for the less fortunate, even as You care for us. Amen.

She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21



Joseph, betrothed to Mary, was a good man. He found himself in a difficult situation because Mary was with child. As he lay tossing and turning one night, after wrestling with the idea of not going ahead with the marriage, the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Gabriel told him that Mary belonged to the purposes of God. The child in her was no ordinary child, but the one who will bring forgiveness of sins. The child, in his nature, is Emmanuel, or “God with us”. Joseph would name the child ‘Yeshua’, meaning “God saves”. Joseph’s fear is common to any person. But because God’s purposes are greater, God gave him the grace to understand the situation.

Prayer

Lord, as we think about the struggle that Joseph had, we pray that You help us to truly discern Your will. Speak to our hearts, comfort our minds, and strengthen us for all that lays ahead. Amen.



“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage.”

Matthew 2:2



By the time the Wise Men from the East arrived in Bethlehem, the child Jesus had grown. They saw His star on the night of His birth and they began their long journey to Jerusalem. Misunderstanding what kind of king Jesus was, they arrived at the royal palace. Jesus Christ was not like a human king. He was the “cosmic king”. He was from all eternity. So why did he choose lowly Bethlehem? The “prince of the world” lives in palaces of marble and gold. The ruler of all creation dwells with His people, and often that essence of humanity is found among the most humble and lowly. When they saw him, the Magi worshiped him because he was God, and not just a man.



Prayer

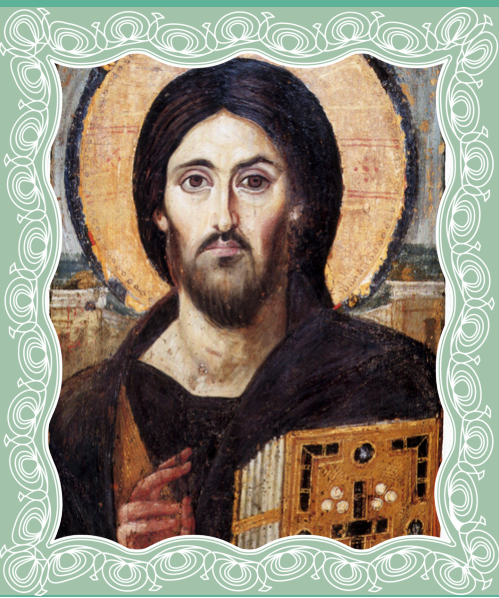
God, we thank You for the gift of Your Son who made his dwelling in the most humble circumstances. As the Wise Men discerned that Jesus was God, help us to discern that also and offer our worship to You. Amen.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us...according to his mercy....

Titus 3:4-5



Paul's pastoral letter to Titus reminds him of the incarnation of Lord Jesus in terms of the characteristics of goodness and lovingkindness. The Lord's appearance in this world brought with it these characteristics of God. God's characteristics are such that his salvation is a free gift, and nothing is expected of us. We did not ask for Jesus Christ, but God sent Him because He knew we needed Him. God does not ask anything from us except to trust him. Abraham trusted God. David trusted God; Ruth and Hannah trusted God. When the Lord Jesus came, we received access to the Holy Spirit. He dwells in us, and fills us with the richness of God's goodness and lovingkindness.



Prayer

Lord, Your gift to us is too wonderful for us to understand. You desire nothing from us but You have given us more than we could ever imagine. We pray that Your Spirit lead us and guide us. Amen.

*...to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,
the Lord....*

Luke 2:11



Christmas Day is the most joyous day of the year for us. Easter Sunday is also a day of great joy. They are two sides of the same coin. Only with His birth do we receive the eternal life given through His death and resurrection. On the night of His birth, the angels appeared to shepherds. These simple men got up, and took their flock with them to visit the Great Shepherd. They found it just as the angels had proclaimed to them. They saw something magnificent that night. The next day, they told of this wonderful news to anyone they saw. Mary kept these memories in her heart. On the first Christmas Day, the birth of Jesus was the greatest miracle God gave us.

Prayer

Almighty God, we marvel at your mysteries.

We rejoice and celebrate the day of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Help us to ponder these in our hearts and rejoice in the greatest miracle. Amen.



About

The Rev. Jeswin John is an ordained clergy of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Originally with a background in Biochemistry, he is interested in topics of science & religion, ethics, ecumenism, liturgical theology and worship.



The Yarah Project endeavors to bring together and disciple a generation of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church faithful to a recovery of the timeless treasures and truths, the reliable and unfailing true faith revealed by Jesus Christ to the Prophets and Apostles, through the One, Holy, Universal, and Apostolic Church.

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