

11

GRADE SEVEN

WORSHIP: FAITH AND PRACTICES OF AN EASTERN CHURCH

Lesson 1

THE MAR THOMA WORSHIP ORDER

Aim:

1. To recognize the importance of worship.
2. To understand the Worship Order better and to make it more meaningful.

Bible Verse: Romans 12:1.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

Main Ideas:

We adore God as we worship him. There is no higher spiritual activity for humans than worshipping God. The early church thrived in a hostile environment with the spiritual power it gained by worshipping the Lord. The testimony of the early church was so powerful because their worship was very sincere. If it were not a worshipping community, the early Christians would have perished in face of severe persecution. No true

believer, questions the need for corporate worship. So worshipping God is at the very heart of every true Christian. No wonder that the Church gives primary importance to worship. True and full worship is always an act of the whole body of Christ and not limited physically to those present at worship (*Gleanings, p.36*).

As an immigrant people, when we live between two civilizations, it is quite natural to develop identity crisis. But there is good hope. The local church finds its identity and unity in worship. As we participate in the worship, we develop a deeper and meaningful identity as well. Though Orthodox in outlook, we are a reformed church. In fact, the German reformation leader Martin Luther commented once that there is nothing wrong with the orthodox style of worship in general. In addition to that, the cleansing and renewal initiated by Abraham Malpan made worship meaningful. The reformation within our church provided the spiritual energy for the missionary vision of the church.

Structure of worship order:

The Mar Thoma worship is conducted with Holy Communion or without Holy Communion known as public/divine worship (also called ordinary worship).

The public worship consists of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, scripture reading (first and second lessons), and prayer for the Holy Spirit, intercession, Nicene Creed, offertory, sermon, prayer, benediction, and Kiss of Peace. There are hymns (3 to 4) selected for each Sunday. The congregational singing, led by a choir, adds to the beauty of our worship.

Teaching Strategies and Activities:

Note the different headings and sections in the Diocesan Sunday School Worship Order. Help the children to make worship order for special occasions and use it in Sunday School.

Materials:

The book: The Mar Thoma Church: Order of Worship, Prayers and Hymns published by Diocesan Sunday Schools, (2000).

Conclusion:

We truly experience God when we meaningfully participate in worship by praising the almighty and praying to Him.

GRADE SEVEN**WORSHIP: FAITH AND PRACTICES
OF AN EASTERN CHURCH****Lesson 2****THE MAR THOMA LITURGY USED
FOR HOLY COMMUNION****Aim:**

To understand our liturgy and experience the internal working of the Holy Spirit as we participate in the liturgical worship.

Bible Verse: Acts 2: 42

They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers.

Main Ideas:

The Mar Thoma Church's liturgy is characterized by the regular proclamation of the Gospel and the regular administration of the Lord's Supper, within the framework of an orderly, dignified, Scripture-based, and historically informed pattern of worship.

Liturgy is defined as the source and summit of the life of the church and the celebration of the mystery of salvation, through signs and symbols. We are celebrating Christ and His unique role of the Redeemer. This is the central theme of the

Eucharistic liturgy. Eucharist is also the celebration of the relationship between the believer and the almighty. We are also celebrating the relationship among the faithful people through the presence of Christ. This twofold dimensions are realized and experienced in liturgy (Rev.Dr.GeorgeMathew Eucharist (Qurbana) p.25.)

Liturgy: Liturgy means "service" that may be rendered to God and people. The liturgical practices of the Mar Thoma Church basically follow the orthodox pattern.

St. James liturgy (Taksa): The Mar Thoma Church is using the St. James liturgy (Taksa) in Holy Communion. It is largely connected to the gospel of St. John.

Some people negatively view the liturgical aspect of our worship. They complain of "getting nothing out of it". Also there are those who appear to be disappointed because they "do not understand the language." They may be making honest statements. Is this a safe generalization? Let us look at one true story.

Ms. Renuka Narayanan, a non-Christian, was assigned by the *Hindustan Times* newspaper to report on a liturgical service. She flew to Damascus for attending a liturgical worship service there as the Middle Eastern Christians celebrated the 2000th anniversary of Apostle Paul's conversion. Below is a portion of her report that appeared in the newspaper on July 4, 2008:

"A few days in Syria, 'Land of Prophets', for the 2000th anniversary of St Paul's birth made me realize the original eastern character of Christianity. The Eastern Orthodox Church was the main player there, with priests and journalists from Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria and, of course, from all over the Middle East, especially Bilad-al-Sham (Syria-Lebanon-Jordan, which was one country until the British carved it up).

I found myself having strange, intense and wonderful conversations with many men in black. At first they thought I was a Syrian Christian from India and when they discovered I was Hindu, a hail of questions flew at me about the philosophy, customs, manners and ceremonies. My point, made first at the Maloula Church, where Aramaic, the language of Jesus, is spoken, and thereafter wherever I could, was this: "In an increasingly mutual world, please let us re-nuance correctly and politely. Let's not use words like 'pagan', 'heathen', 'idol-worshipper' and 'unbeliever'. Instead, why not say 'non-Abrahamic religions' until we think of a better term to describe Hinduism, Buddhism and the rest of us?" Interestingly, several 'Abrahamic' people there seemed open to the idea.

The language of Christian prayer in Syria at the various services I attended was Syriac (Arabic and Aramaic). They were so deeply musical and prayerful that I was moved to tears. Hearing Arabic words like mahabbat (love) and rahman (merciful) made you recall that Christianity was the big religion of that region first.

Back home in Delhi on Friday, I heard the fascinating history of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala from Father Sam Koshy of Kottayam, a Mar Thoma (Reformist) priest. It's the tale of 'direct' Christianity in India from its land of origin, the Middle East, different from the blonde, blue-eyed colonial English/American version of recent centuries."

Teaching Strategies and Activities:

Read and discuss the Holy Communion liturgy of the Mar Thoma Church. What is included in the Mar Thoma Church liturgy will be studied next year in Grade Eight, Lesson 3. Ask the students to read the *Hindustan Times* article and highlight and read their highlighted portions in the class.

Materials:

1. Worship Order of our Church
2. Print out of Renuka Narayanan's complete report from the July 4, 2008 edition of Hindustan Times from the archives.

Study questions:

1. Why did the Lord command to observe the Holy Communion?
2. What effect is the elements (sanctified bread and wine) expected to produce in the participants?
3. Would you invite a non-Christian school friend or family friend to our worship service? Why or Why not?

Conclusion:

Liturgy is a vital part of the worship because every worshiper needs thoughtful prayers. From next Sunday on, attend the Holy Communion service with full focus and immerse yourselves in earnest prayers and petitions to the Lord who is present in the worship.

GRADE SEVEN

WORSHIP: FAITH AND PRACTICES OF AN EASTERN CHURCH

Lesson 3

THE MAR THOMA WORSHIP ORDER: SYMBOLS

Aim:

To understand the symbolic expressions and the significance of symbols.

Bible Verse: Revelation 8:4

The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.

Main Ideas:

Symbols are integral part of any faith community. According to theologian Thomas Aquinas, 'symbols are directed toward human beings, who use them to proceed from what is known to what is unknown'. From this definition, we can conclude that symbols have significant influence in believers who search God in their time and space. Also the traditional symbols and ceremonies, which often accompany the historic Liturgy, help to harmonize the outward appearance of the sanctuary and the outward actions of the congregation and Achen with the words that are being spoken and sung.

1. **Madbaha:**

As an eastern practice we worship standing facing towards the *Madbaha* in the east. The word *Madbaha* is an Aramaic word - an altar to celebrate the Qurbana. On the altar we offer our Qurbana (offering), which includes the elements in the Holy Eucharist and the offertory. Above all we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to the Lord, a response to the greatest offering that God in Christ has made to mankind. In the *Madbaha* we have a table that serves as an altar. This is called the *thronos*. This is a symbol of divine presence of the Lord. The table is made of stone. A portable table- "Tabaleetha"- specially consecrated is placed on the table. This is a reminder for holiness and purity. We are not repeating the sacrifice with blood in the *Qurbana*, but *Qurbana* is a sacrifice without blood. The worshippers are standing in *Haikala*, which is separated from the *madbaha* by a curtain.

2. **Light:**

In our worship we use candles. This is in continuation of an ancient practice. In the Apostolic times, early Christians met for worship in caves and catacombs, fearing repression. They depended on lamps for light. The churches still continue that practice, reminding the worshippers the hardships and persecutions our forefathers had to endure for the faith and calling us to shine like the light in a world of darkness. The light is lighted on the altar when the priest begins the Holy Communion singing "Velin Niranya Rakshakane" or *Sobha Niranjoralayathil*".

3. **Incense and Censer:**

Incense was used in ancient days to pay honor and respect. Frankincense was taken from a tree. It was regarded as the life sap of the tree. It may also be regarded an offering. The smoke that comes from out of the incense is a symbol of the divine

presence. The cloud and the incense stand for the invisible presence of the Lord. Censer is a vessel for burning incense. The censer will usually have three chains (for the Holy Trinity), and in the Greek Orthodox tradition practice bells will be attached to the chains (their ringing symbolizes the teaching of the twelve Apostles).

4. **Cross:**

The central place of the cross in Christianity is deeply rooted in our tradition because the cross symbolizes eternal life granted to humanity through Christ's sacrificial act. That is why our Church uses the cross without the crucifix and the cross we use is known as the Easter Cross. The cross symbolizes light, peace and the new life received through Christ.

5. **Kappa:**

The vestment that the priest wears during the Holy *Qurbana* and other sacraments is commonly known as *Kappa*. However, *Kappa* is only part of the several vestments. They are made like those which Aaron and the priests of the Old Testament wore "for glory and beauty" and have a symbolic meaning.

Teaching Strategies and Activities:

Show and explain the symbols to the children. Draw or make different symbols. Seek the help of an Achen to teach-the lesson.

Have the students copy the following new words on one side of an index card and write their meaning. They enjoy writing in colors.

1. *Madbaha* is an Aramaic word - an altar to celebrate the *Qurbana*.
2. *Qurbana* (offering), which includes the elements in the Holy Eucharist and the offertory.

3. *Thronos* - the table that serve as an altar in the *Madbaba*
4. "Tableetha" - A portable table where specially consecrated elements are placed on the table.

Materials:

Models of different Symbols mentioned above, index cards, map colors or crayons.

Review Question:

Select two or three symbols used in worship and explain each of them in 2 or 3 sentences.

Conclusion:

Symbols are not idols, but are means for concentrating our minds. They also help us to understand things more clearly. So symbols have their own importance in worship. Some people in the Protestant countries are very likely to mistake that we are worshipping idols. They may take the cross and the candles as idols. However, learning the historical developments of the symbols help understand the relevance of symbols in worship.

GRADE SEVEN**WORSHIP: FAITH AND PRACTICES
OF AN EASTERN CHURCH****Lesson 4****SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS AND FESTIVALS:
A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY (LENT)****Aim:**

To study the importance of fasting and festivals in the Church.

Bible Verse: Hebrews 10:24.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Main Ideas:

The Mar Thoma Church is an ancient indigenous Christian Church from India. It is believed to be there since A.D. 52. The Mar Thoma Church belongs to the "Lesser Eastern Churches" as evinced by its liturgy, mode of worship, ceremonies, rituals, and traditions. Also the Church underwent a reformation on scriptural principles as a result of its contacts with Anglican Church in the 19th century. Also, we do not pray for the souls of the deceased (dead) or say any prayers in the name of any saints. Our Church constitution dictates that the celebration of festivals, the practice of fasting and the observation of lent are **not to be altered** or removed. These are related to the life of our Lord.

1. Sunday: The day of the celebration of the resurrection

Christians take it as a day of active service for and with God. Sunday is the first day of the week when our Lord was raised from the dead. It is also considered as Sabbath day for majority of Christians. To meet as a fellowship for worship and for the breaking of the bread on that day became a regular practice in the Church right from its beginnings (Mk.16:2, 1 Cor.16:2, Acts 20:7, Rev.1:10).

2. The Annunciation Period (Arityippu Kalam)

Period before Christmas; during this time Church remembers various announcements to different people about the plan of salvation through Christ (Annunciation to Zechariah, Annunciation to Virgin Mary, Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, Birth of John the Baptist, Annunciation to Joseph).

3. The Nativity – Baptism Period (Yaldo – Danaha period)

This period includes the Birth of our Lord (Yaldo), Circumcision of our Lord (1st January), Presentation of our Lord in the Temple, and Baptism of our Lord in River Jordan (Danaha).

4. Epiphany (January 6):

This is the day on which the gentiles saw the glory of the Lord, i.e., the day of the visitation of the wise men from the east.

5. The Great Lent Period (Valia-Nombu -50 days)

This period is divided into 7 weeks. Lent is a period of the manifestation of the Kingdom of the God. The first Wednesday of the lent is known as Ash Wednesday (according to the Western Calendar). In the early church, Wednesdays and Fridays were observed as fasting days. In the Mar Thoma Church, we do not observe the Ash Wednesday because we begin the lent on the previous Sunday. We include the forty days in which our Lord fasted and 10 days to commemorate the passion of Christ and together observe 50 days as the lent period. The faithful

are urged to fast and observe restrictions in eating and drinking and in their lifestyles during this period. Usually people forgo meat, fish, butter and other enriching foods.

6. 40th Friday: Jesus overcomes the temptations.

7. Great Week (Holy Week/ Passion Week)

Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter (These fall on the last week of lent).

a. Palm (Hosanna) Sunday: On Palm Sunday, the church celebrates Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem when the people acclaimed Him as King, hailing and carrying palm leaves in their hands.

b. Passover (Maunday) Thursday: It is the observance of the Last Supper of our Lord with the disciples. The Holy Qurbana was established on that day.

c. Good (Sad) Friday: On Good Friday, the worship continues until 3 p.m. in several churches, the hour when the Lord died on the cross. Worshipers during prayers prostrate themselves repeatedly, reminding themselves of the agony and pain of our Lord.

d. Easter (Feast of Resurrection): The Easter day celebration usually begins very early in the morning, proclaiming, "Jesus is risen, Yes, He is risen indeed." The lent comes to an end with Easter celebrations and all people rejoice that day with feasting and greetings.

8. The Day of Ascension

Observed on the 40th day after Easter, always a Thursday, the Ascension commemorates Jesus' final appearance to his disciples before ascending to the Father (Acts 1:1-11).

9. The Day of Pentecost

The Holy Spirit poured on the Church (Acts 2) marks the beginning of Christianity.

10. The Day of Transfiguration

To commemorate Jesus' transfiguration before the three disciples on a mountain.

11. Fasts

This is the season in which the Church calls every member to set apart time for serious reflection, prayer, and self-examination concerning faith and practices. Many believers observe this season with fasting. The Mar Thoma Church gives much importance to the feast and fasts commemorating the events in the life of our Lord (*Maranaya Purnakaly*).

12. 25-Day Fast

25 days of fast, four Sundays before Christmas. This is the season of waiting for the birth of Christ (December 1-25).

In addition to these, there are days to commemorate Apostles Thomas and Matthew and St. Stephen and John the Baptist and all the saints known as Apostles (Sleecha Nombu). Fast of Nineveh is a 3-day fast for repentance.

Teaching Strategies and Activities:

Make a calendar and mark the important dates of fasts and festivals. Remind the children the main fasts and festival days and encourage them to celebrate them. Ask them to write a worship service for any particular feast in the Church calendar. Have you ever fasted for any length of time? Do you know any friends who have fasted during Lent?

Materials:

1. A Lectionary
2. A Church calendar showing the fast and festival days

Conclusion:

Fast and festival days are an important part of the Church; it is centered on the salvific work of God in Christ. These festivals and fast seasons are meant for the inner renewal of the people and their spiritual growth.

GRADE SEVEN WORSHIP: FAITH AND PRACTICES OF AN EASTERN CHURCH

Lesson 5

THE NICENE CREED

Aim:

1. To understand and proclaim our faith.
2. To study the meaning and significance of historical Nicene Creed as we use it every Sunday in worship.

Bible Verse: 1 Peter 2: 9.

But 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.

Main Ideas:

1. Background of the Nicene Creed

In our time there is a renewed controversy about the formulation of the Nicene Creed. A lot of readers who read the fictional work *Da Vinci Code* of Dan Brown took it for a factual work. The readers were easily misled due to their unfamiliarity with the historical background of it. Dan's argument in his novel is that Emperor Constantine was suppressing the faith of some groups he did not like. Nothing

could be far from the truth. He was a converted Christian person who had mysteriously experienced the presence of Christ in his life. If he wanted, he could persecute them. In fact Constantine was the Emperor who declared it illegal to persecute Christians in 313 A.D through the Edict of Milan.

In the first three centuries, the church found itself in a hostile environment. On the one hand, it grappled with the challenge of relating the language of the gospel, developed in a Hebraic and Jewish-Christian context, to a Greco-Roman world. On the other hand, it was threatened not only by persecution but also by ideas that were in conflict with the biblical witness. In A.D. 312, Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in the battle of Milvian Bridge. Attributing his victory to the intervention of Jesus Christ, he elevated Christianity to favored status in the empire. "One God, one Lord, one faith, one church, one empire, one emperor" became his motto. The new emperor soon discovered that "one faith and one church" were fractured by theological disputes, especially conflicting understandings of the nature of Christ called Arianism, which denied divinity of Christ, long a point of controversy. Historical reference reminds us that 318 bishops from various parts of the world signed and participated in this first ecumenical council. Also Historians tell us that of the 318 Church Fathers who participated in the council only a dozen did not have bodily wounds from the Great Persecution. Constantine presided over the meetings only as a figurehead.

It is believed that Archbishop John of Persia and Great India participated and represented Christians from India at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea. This is the only creed that is truly ecumenical and universal. In liturgical churches, it is said every Sunday as part of the Liturgy. The Mar Thoma Church joins with Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinist, Roman Catholic and many other Christian Churches all over the world in affirming the Nicene Creed.



Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the well-known church historian, wrote the draft of the Creed that was adopted by the Church Fathers.

2. The Nicene Creed analyzed

a. We believe in God...

In the first clause of the creed, we find faith in the one God, the creator of all visible and invisible things. The Christian faith affirms that God was prior to all created order and all that is in creation is created by God, who was before all creation and who reveals the divine will to those who listen to Him. The prophets, the sages, and the apostles are humans who received the knowledge of God.

b. We believe in Jesus Christ...

The corner stone of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ in whom and through whom faith in God as Father, Creator, and Redeemer is revealed and confirmed. No one has seen God, but those who have witnessed the ministry of Christ witnessed and testified that God has been manifested in Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Lord. Jesus Christ is an event in history. God in history is Jesus Christ. This is the Christian confession. He was born of Virgin Mary, from whom he took the human form. See that the part a woman plays for the redemption of humanity is recognized. The faith in the resurrection and ascension of Christ provides an impetus for Christian service, witness, and ministry in the world.

c. We believe in the Holy Spirit...

If Christ is the image of the invisible God, Holy Spirit is the dynamic living present reality of God-in-Christ. He stands

for the invisible living divine reality, just as the wind. There is no distinction between God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and Holy Spirit the dynamic present reality. They are not three different realities, but modes of one divine reality, having the same essence equally at work in time and through experiences of human beings.

d. We acknowledge the Church...

We acknowledge only one church, which is holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic. Because the whole Gospel of Christ is for the entire world, the Church is catholic (meaning all). 1 Peter 2:9.

e. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins...

What is needed most in one's life is the assurance of forgiveness and thereby peace and joy of mind. The believers in Christ affirm that the baptism in Christ, i.e., washing of one's guilt through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice is the only way to have that peace of mind. By Baptism people are fully initiated by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body, the church. God establishes an indissoluble bond with each person in baptism. God adopts us, making us members of the church and inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

Teaching Strategies and Activities:

Ask the children to memorize the Nicene Creed. Each segment beginning "We believe in..." should be studied separately to get a full grasp of its meaning. It is a good strategy to have one student recite it from memory for a few Sundays if time permits. Another popular creed is the "Apostles Creed". Ask whether they have used it or heard about it.

Materials:

1. Copies of Nicene Creed from the *Order of Worship Book*.
2. World map to locate present Nicea in modern day Turkey

(Turkish town currently called **Iznik**, to the South-East of Istanbul).

3. Highlighters of different colors.

Conclusion:

Nicene Creed is a statement (doctrine) of the basic faith of the Christian Church. We affirm our faith in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as we recite the Nicene Creed. It also says that we are looking for the second coming of Christ. That is the consummation of human history. There are many churches (denominations) that affirm the Nicene Creed.