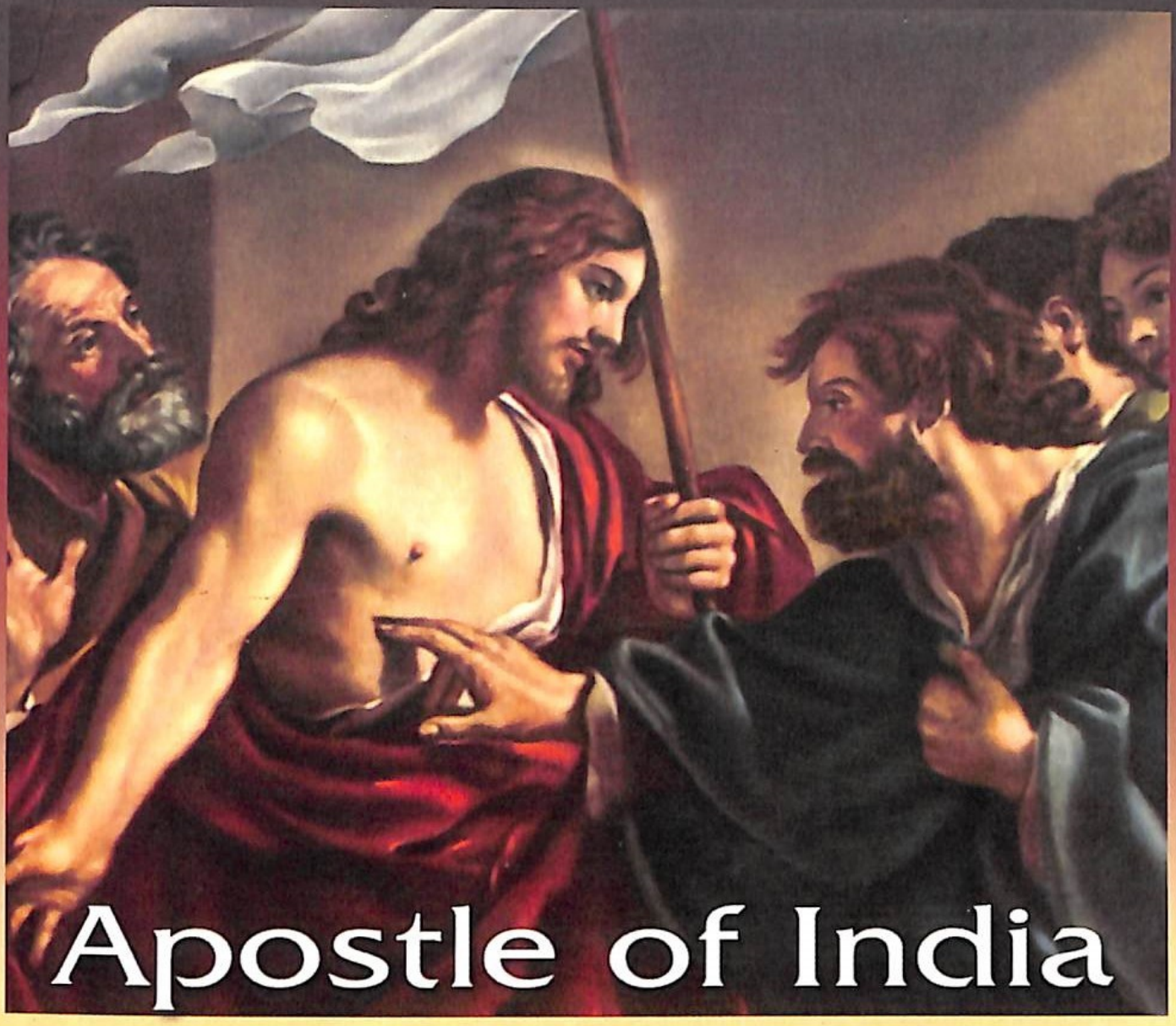
The Legacy of ST THOMAS



Apostle of India

Vijayan P. Bhaskaran

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Dedicated

to

Mom, Dad,

Ralph, Rosita, Alistaire and Jan.

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Last but not the least I would like to thank Ms Priyanka Pawale for suggesting that I search for the deepest inclination of my heart and follow it, failing which I wouldn't have got started in the first place.

Foreword

St Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Apostle of India. The sanctity and zeal with which he carried out his mission was so pure that it transformed the hearts and the lives of the people who came in contact with him.

The transformation was so pervasive that it took roots in the religious, social and cultural conscience of the people. The reality of this experience is captured in the traditions, rituals, shrines and folklore that evolved over the centuries and is one of the principal means by which a person can not only catch a glimpse but also be gripped by the spirit of the Apostle of India.

The life and mission of St Thomas enchant the author, Advocate Vijayan Bhaskaran. He has made a serious study on the popular traditions, rituals, shrines and folklore. He has even visited the shrines and the peoples who still vividly recollect and propagate with apostolic zeal the teachings and mission of the revered Apostle of India.

"The Legacy of St Thomas, Apostle of India" is a very

good starting point for any person to venture into the heart, the mind and the spirit of St Thomas. The Author does this by first establishing the credibility of the Apostle very picturesquely using Sacred Scripture, tradition and archaeological facts. He goes on to authenticate the ministry of the Saint in India. With the help of the various folklore and traditions that have been handed down from one generation to the next he invites the reader to embark on a pilgrimage of faith. He goes on to persuade the reader to undertake this journey by furnishing details about the Churches, Shrines and places of worship that have come up in his honour.

Fr Roque Green
Diocese of Poona

Preface

"India was, it must be remembered, a country of many religions, in spite of the dominance of the Hindu faith in its various shapes and forms. Christianity had reached India probably during the first century after Christ. There were a large numbers of Syrian Christians in South India and they were as much part of the country as anyone else" — so said Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India.

The motive behind doing exhaustive research and study on St Thomas is to make a film (documentary or feature) or publish a book (pictorial). It also aims to contribute towards the struggle for equality of Indian Christians.

It is often found and believed by the modern world in general and the fundamentalists in particular that the Christian religion has come to India along with the European traders/rulers from the 15th century onwards.

However, Christianity in India is almost as old as Christianity itself. It is in no way a western religion but an Asian religion, as are the other major religions of the

world. This is a matter of privilege and pride. The seeds of Christianity were sown in India by none other than St Thomas, one of the 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ. The apocryphal works, from the 2nd century, and the living traditions of South India claim that it was Jesus himself who commissioned St Thomas to go to India and proclaim the Good News to its people.

The Apostle, who came to India in A.D. 52 (*), had his humble beginnings as a fisherman, was influenced by the teachings of Jesus Christ and chosen by the Lord to be one of his twelve Apostles. This simple and humble fisherman always questioned the Lord whenever he didn't understand his teachings; and the answers to these queries are landmarks in the Christian religion. St Thomas was also a courageous man who braved death for the sake of Jesus Christ. He came to India against all odds, climatic, cultural, religious and linguistic, besides hostility from beasts and humans alike. With the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, St Thomas was able to overcome all these barriers and laid the foundation of Christianity in India.

Today how many of us are aware of this rich heritage of ours?

(*) History of Christianity in India by A.M. Mundadan, pg. 29.

1
The True Facts Concerning St Thomas

At the St Thomas Day celebrations in New Delhi on 18 December 1955, Dr Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India, made the following observation in his speech: "Remember, St Thomas came to India when many of the countries of Europe had not yet become Christian, and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and a higher ancestry than that of Christians of many European countries. And it is really a matter of pride to us that it so happened...."[1] This is a popular expression of a very strong view shared by many scholars that Christianity reached India in the first century by one, or even two, of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. It is this claim of apostolic origins, and the Apostle St Thomas, that is being discussed in the following pages.

There are two popular traditions which commemorate the apostolic life in India. Firstly, the apocryphal works the

1. H.C.I. p.9

'Acts of Thomas'. It is also known as the Western tradition. This is not as strong as the other tradition, 'The Indian tradition'. There are also a few similarities between the two. It could be that the one has influenced the other.

The Western Tradition: 'Acts of Thomas'

The Acts describes the Apostle's voyage as St Thomas having arrived in the Parthian (western India or present day Pakistan and Punjab) Kingdom of King Gundaphorus either by sea or road, some time in the middle of the first century, along with the king's merchant, Habban. St Thomas meets the king and the site and the plan for the construction of a palace are agreed upon. St Thomas undertakes to build the palace within six months. The king advances him a large sum of money and proceeds to his other province; but St Thomas, instead of building the palace, goes about distributing the money to the poor and the needy, and when at last the king comes, no palace is to be seen. In answer to the king's queries, St Thomas says that he has indeed built it, but the king will not be able to see it until he has departed from this life. The king is furious and puts both St Thomas and the merchant Habban into prison.

While the king is devising a punishment for the two, his brother Gad falls ill and dies. Being taken away by angels to heaven, he is asked by them which of the mansions he sees there he would like for a dwelling place. He chooses a certain building only to be told that he cannot have it, because it is the palace, which 'That Christian' built for his brother. Gad asks to be allowed to go back and buy the palace from his brother. Permission having been granted,

he returns to life and astonishes king Gundaphorus by his reappearance and his request. As a result St Thomas and Habban are released from prison; both Gundaphorus and Gad are baptized; and St Thomas continues his preaching, making many converts in that kingdom. He died a martyr there and was buried; later his relics were carried over to Edessa (Turkey).

The period when St Thomas landed in western India remains rather buried in obscurity; but it seems that, around the beginning of the Christian era, the North Western parts of India and Pakistan with some countries further west were ruled by the Parthian princes, of whom Gundaphorus was the last. About the middle of the first century his kingdom was invaded by people from Asia known in history as Kushans. The Kushans invaded the Parthian kingdoms and wiped off their traditions and religious beliefs and the Thomas Christians must have also been victims.

There is another interesting fact about Christianity in northwestern India. Reverend R.A. Trotter reports about a community of Fakirs in Sind (Pakistan) who are said to be followers of 'Thuma Bhagat', i.e., St Thomas. Here's what Trotter says, "To support the contention that the Apostle Thomas came to Sind, there is a Fakir community living in Tatta, which has occasionally revealed itself. This Fakir group, to all appearances Hindu, calls its small community by an Aramaic name, something like 'Barthomai', the sons of Thomas, and claims it is descended from Christians baptized by St Thomas himself and that in their secret society they owned books and relics to support their

position. Unfortunately no outsider, whether Indian or European, has had access to the activities of the society and individual members are as hard as the Indian Lion."[2]

This journey of the Apostle according to J.N. Farquhar, must have been connected with the Kushans' invasion of the Indus valley, which occurred about the middle of the first century. It is therefore quite possible that when driven away by the invaders, Habban, the king's merchant and his friend St Thomas, chose as a place of safety one of those harbours of South India, Muziris/Crangannore, for example, where there were many Jewish, Syrian and Greek traders settled there.

2. St Thomas at Nilackal, Past and Present, p. 34

2

Did Saint Thomas Visit India?

There is no concrete historical data to disprove the Apostle's voyage to India, either to the Parthian kingdom in the northwest of India (present day Pakistan) or to the south of India. Not only in India, but even in the Churches outside India, in the early centuries, there are references to the Apostle's missionary endeavours in India, which claim that the Apostle's work was somewhere in the East. Although some confusion does exist as regards the country, towards the end of the 4th century, Fathers like St Ambrose, St Gregory of Nazianzus, St Ephraem the Syrian and St Jerome were of the opinion that it was India.

Some scholars claim that the Apostle's missionary activity was limited to the northwest of India. Others uphold that it was south of India and yet others believe that the Apostle had worked in both the places.

One of the earliest and most notable witnesses is the *'Didascalia Apostolorum'* (teaching of the apostles), a book probably produced in Syria and dated about 250, which contains this statement: "India and all its own

countries, and those bordering it, even to the farther sea, received the apostle's hand of the priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was guide and ruler in the church, which he built and ministered there."[3]

The other early reference to the Apostle's work is the Acts of Judas Thomas, written in Syriac in the Edessan circle about the turn of the third century A.D. Even though this work has been acknowledged as apocryphal, Gnostic in origin, and romantic in style, several scholars find in it a historical nucleus, which represents the second century tradition about the Apostolate of St Thomas in India. Besides, a number of fragmentary passages in other writings of the third, fourth and the following centuries speak in unambiguous terms about the Indian Apostolate of St Thomas. From the fourth century onwards the major Churches are unanimous in their witnessing to the tradition.[4]

Secondly the king Gundaphorus, and his brother Gad, mentioned in the book of Acts, are at any rate historical figures. Since 1834 numerous coins have been found in the Punjab and in Afghanistan bearing his name in Greek on one side and in Pali on the other; they are dated on paleographical grounds to the first half of the first century A.D. There is also a stone inscription (the Takht-I-Bahi stone, now in the Lahore Museum, Pakistan) containing his name and a date which is interpreted as 46 A.D., which is described as the twenty sixth year of his reign. In some of the coins the name of Gad is also found.[5]

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3. H.C.I p. 28
4. H.C.I p. 23
5. I.C. H p.11

The seven churches of St Thomas are to be found in locations where there were Jewish colonies in Kerala in the first century. According to some, these colonies might have induced the visit of St Thomas to India in one way or other.[6]

As a matter of fact, the Romans had as close or even closer trade relations with southern India, as they had with the north, particularly in connection with the pepper trade. The numerous golden coins of the empire, which have been found all over the south, as well as many recent discoveries, offer abundant proof that Roman trade-centres existed along the Southern coasts of India, even on the Eastern shores (Solomon of Basrah).

The tradition in South India is strong and alive till date; the tradition stands by itself; and it ought not to be discounted lightly. The local tradition with regard to the apostle's visit is very strong and there is no other rival local tradition as to the origin of the Church in South India. This tradition has been held also outside India, both in the West and in the East from very early times. There is nothing improbable in the theory that the apostle should have travelled as far as India to preach the Gospel.[7]

Bishop Brown writes:

"We cannot prove that the Apostle worked in south India any more than we can disprove that fact; but the presence of Christians of undoubtedly ancient origin holding firmly to the tradition, the proof of a very considerable commercial contact between the western world and the Malabar coast in the first century of our era,

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6. K.C.C p.38
7. I.C of St p.59

and the probable presence of Jewish colonies at the same time, may for some incline the balance in favour of the belief that the truth of the tradition is a reasonable probability."[8]

There are innumerable popular songs and stories like Veeredan Patu, Rabban Patu, etc., where reference is made of early Christians as 'Nazarene' (Christians in the earlier times were known as Nazarenes - Acts 24:5). Local legends about the Apostle, the common name of Thomas in most families, the temple like structure of the earliest Christian churches, confirm this tradition.

"Many Christian groups are named 'St Thomas Christians' in all parts of India, and it imparts an antiquity that reaches far beyond the Eutychians or Nestorians or any other sect," says the author of *Christian Researchers in Asia,* 31. He goes on to assert: "I am satisfied that we have as good authority for believing that the Apostle Thomas died in India as that the Apostle Peter in Rome."[9]

Some writers contend that Christianity was introduced into India from Mesopotamia by the East Syrians. But they are unable to assign the work to definite persons or to a definite age. The East Syrians never claimed the honour. There is not the least trace of any tradition either among the Syrians or among the Indians concerning the original introduction of Christianity into south India by the East Syrians. The East Syrian bishops and patriarchs who ruled the Indian church from the earliest times down to the sixteenth century never claimed that their forefathers were the apostles of south India... they even explicitly

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8. Ibid
9. K.C.C p. 38

recognized St Thomas the apostle as the founder of the South Indian Church".[10]

The Christian families of one locality in Malabar, which traditionally trace their origin to the Apostle Thomas, do not contradict the claims of other such families of the same or other localities of Malabar. The tenacity with which these family traditions have been held and the fact that they certainly existed before the coming of the Portuguese, make it difficult to discredit them completely. The Thomas Christians give great honour to these families, and for many centuries the prelacy and priesthood were confined to some of these families.[11]

This unanimity and uniformity of opinion concerning the life of the Apostle in Kerala and the Churches founded by the apostle, beginning with Kodungallur will be found to be more authentic, if we examine the documents, legends, and local traditions connected with the more than hundred churches mentioned by Gouvea (Journado, Coimbra, 1606). For example, the Kayamkulam Church though founded by the saintly Sapor and Proth, and called the Church of "Kandeesangal", is yet given only much less importance, than the seven churches of the apostle Thomas, first of all Kodungallur.[12]

Take one particular instance: the Church at Ollur near Trichur. It used to be one of the wealthiest in the whole of Kerala. This church was founded only in 1718. Before that they used to go to Mass at Pazhuvil Church, which was founded in 960. Before that, the tradition goes, they used to go to Enammavu, founded in 500.

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10. Ibid p. 39
11. K.C.C p. 40
12. Ibid p. 41

The Enammavu Church recognizes the north Pudukad Church as its mother Church (400 A.D.); this Church in its turn originated from the Mattam Church (Ca. 140 A.D.), which traces its origin to the Palayur Church founded by St Thomas. What is important is that the people of all these places unanimously subscribe to the truth of the chronology. The traditions concerning the origin of all the Churches recognize each Church unanimously. Similarly almost all the churches of Kerala trace their beginnings to one or other of the Thomas churches or to churches that are in a sure way connected. Such traditions have no less value than documents written on paper or stone.[13]

The sources of the Malabar, Syrian and Portuguese traditions can be read in detail in the *History of Christianity in India* by A.M. Mundadan, vol 1.

13. K.C.C p. 41

3
Archaeological Vestiges

Not a few of the archaelogical findings corroborate the local traditions. The remains of old temples, etc., found at Palayur and near the other traditional churches are proofs of this. The discovery of old crosses at Alangad, Arthad, etc., is worth mentioning. So too the effigies of a king discovered at Nilamperur and at Kilirur are important pieces of evidence. The findings are cited in support of the tradition that St Thomas converted kings also. The effigy of Nilamperur discovered in 1889 is a bronze statuette of a noble personage represented as wearing a pectoral cross and holding a staff surmounted by a cross.[14] The granite sculptures of the churches, especially the crosses and the baptismal fonts, are probably the oldest extant granite sculptures of Kerala, even older than any Hindu sculptures in Kerala.[15] Such views expressed through different media and in different forums, have not been refuted or contradicted.

In support of the early Christianization of north India we do not possess any actual vestiges as we do for South

14. H.C.I p.34
15. K.C.C p. 41

India. The South Indian claim to the Apostolate of St Thomas is supported by two monuments; the community of St Thomas with their living tradition, and the tomb at Mylapore which is identified very definitely as the burial place of St Thomas, at least from the 14th century onwards. As it has been pointed out, these considerations have compelled a number of scholars to put forward the argument of convergence in favour of the following conclusion: St Thomas the apostle preached the Gospel in South India and the origin of Indian Christians, at least initially, is to be attributed to this preaching.[16]

Various scholars and historians have tried to disprove the theory of the Apostle's work in India and his martyrdom. But as we have seen, none could otherwise explain the origins of the existence of early Christians in India and about the legends, traditions, songs and the presence of the tomb of the Apostle in India. And further, there is no other country or place in the world, which claims the Apostle's place of work or his tomb to be there. Therefore it is conclusive that the Apostle came to India to preach the gospel and met his end here. There could be minor differences or, probably, an afterthought added to the legends and stories attached to the Apostle.

16. H.C.I p. 61

4

The Life of St Thomas in Relation to the Gospel

The scriptures and the tradition woven around St Thomas make him out to be of a character that is courageous and loving with an aura of romanticism around him though with a certain degree of human weakness and above all having utmost faith in the Lord.

Judas Thomas Didymus (the *twin*) is believed to have been from the tribe of Judah and a simple fisherman — as most of the apostles of Jesus Christ were — before being chosen by the Lord as one of His twelve Apostles.

The Coming of Jesus:

As foretold by Prophet Isaiah: Jesus the only Son of God, became man and was born by the power of the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary; He came down on this earth to liberate, and preach the Good News to the poor, heal the sick, free prisoners and release the oppressed and to lead us to the heavenly kingdom.

— Luke 4:18-20
— Isaiah 61:1-2

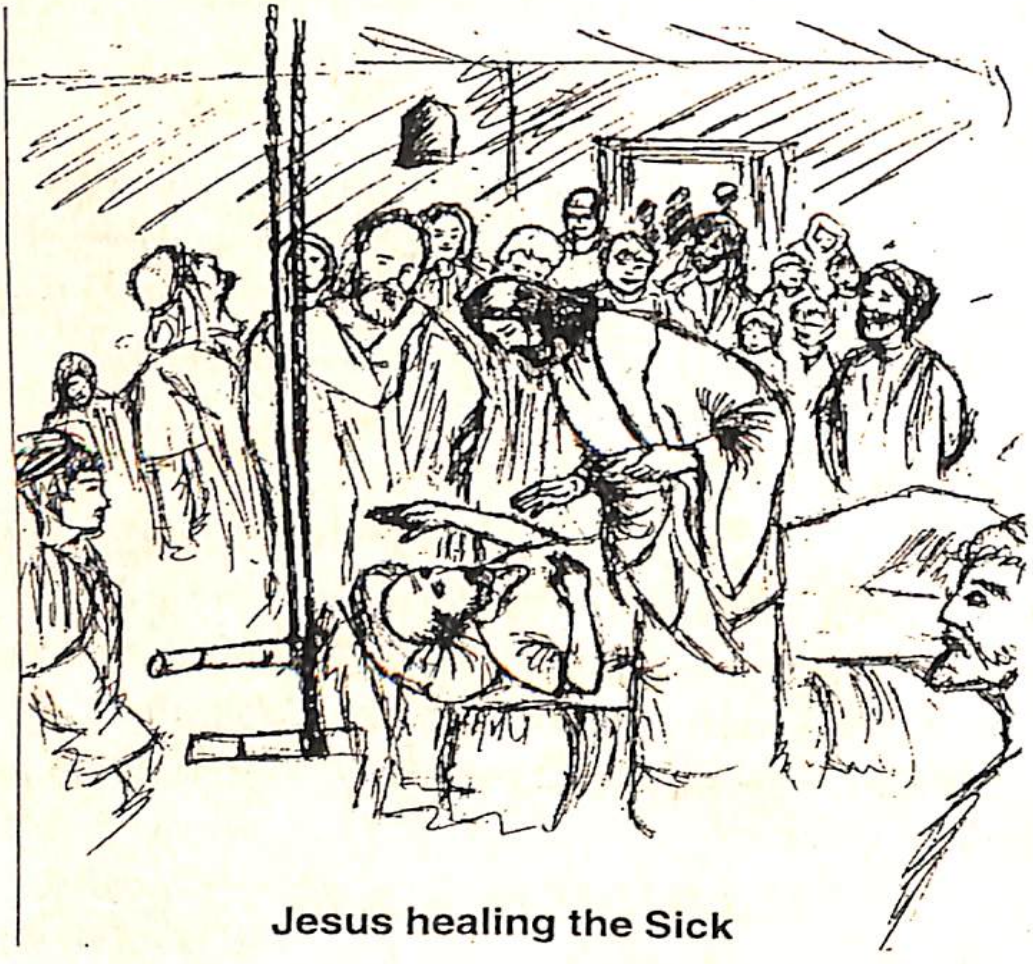
Proclaiming the Good News:

Jesus Christ of Nazareth, after hearing that John had been put in prison, returned to Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of God. "The time has come," He said. "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News."

— Mark 1:14-15

Jesus heals the sick and preaches the Good News:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the Good News of the kingdom, i.e., brotherhood, love, harmony, eternal peace and above all victory over sin. He healed every disease and sickness



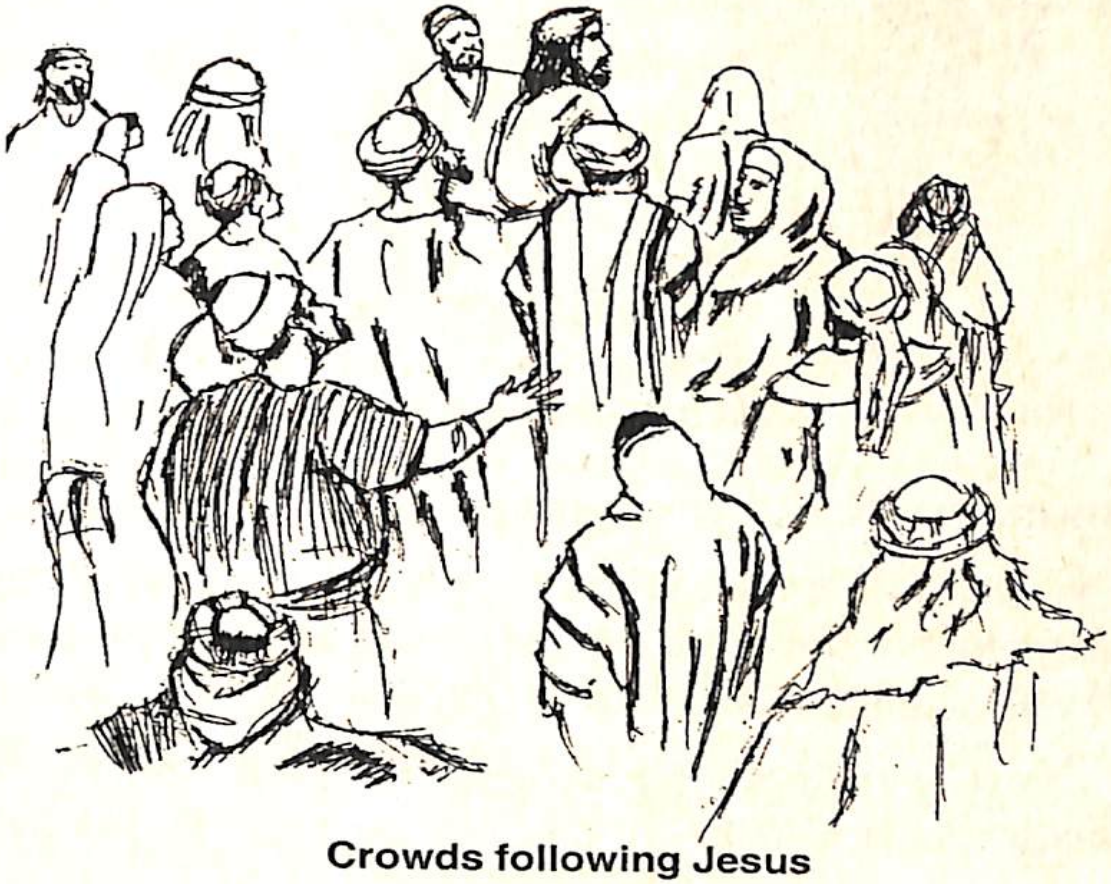
Jesus healing the Sick

among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and He healed them all.

— *Mathew 4:23-25*

Crowds follow Jesus:

Large crowds from Galilee, the Decopolis, Jerusalem, Judaea and the region across the Jordan followed the Messiah with unmatched wisdom and miraculous powers and to be with Him and become His disciples. But Jesus appointed only twelve, four in the beginning; i.e., Simon, called Peter, his brother Andrew, and James and John, both sons of Zebedee. And also Matthew, the tax collector.

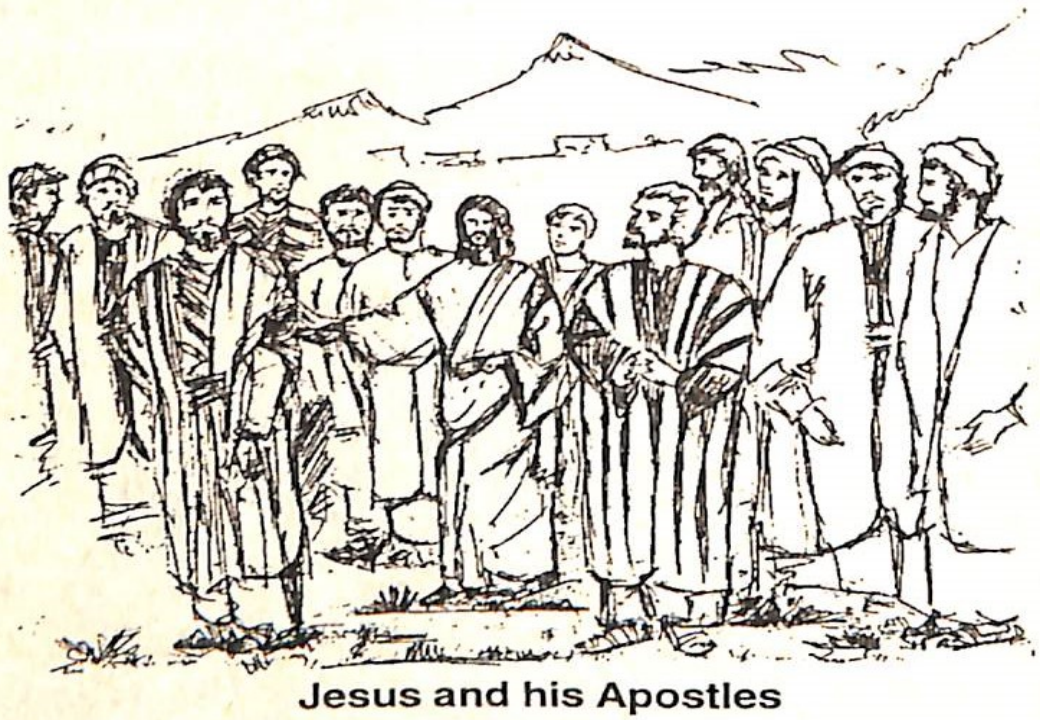


Crowds following Jesus

The Twelve Apostles:

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, He called His disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated Apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew the tax collector, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

— Luke 6:12-16



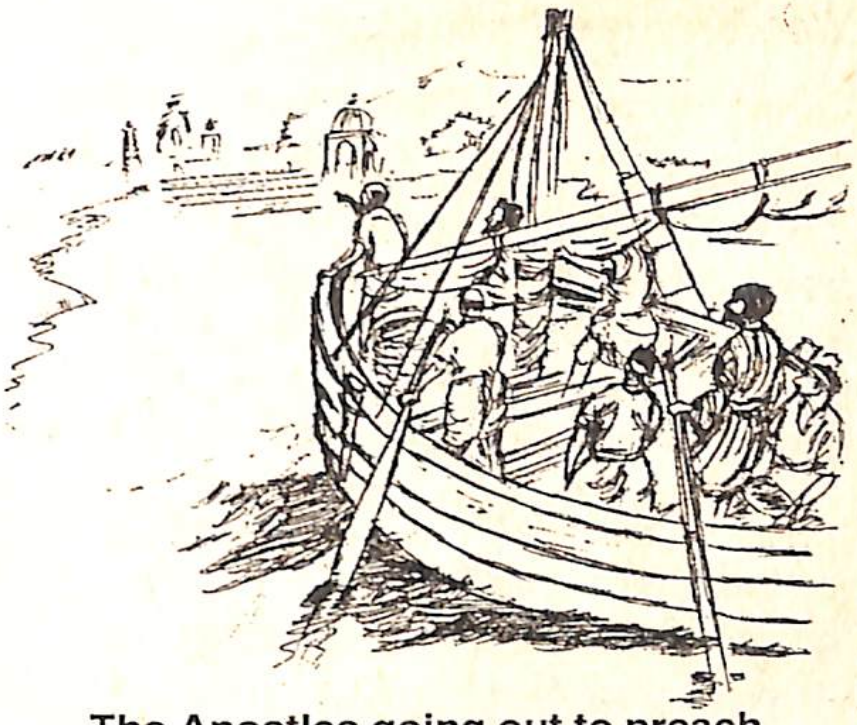
Jesus and his Apostles

Jesus sends out the twelve:

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

These were his instructions. "Take nothing for the journey except a staff — no bread, no bag, no money in

your belts. Wear sandals but do not carry an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."



The Apostles going out to preach

They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

— Mark 6:7-12

The Apostle Thomas:

The Apostle Thomas, out of the twelve, after the crucifixion of Jesus, came to India, to preach the Good News and was a witness to the public life, teachings and miracles performed by the Lord; was willing to endure any amount of risk to pursue the steps of the master. As noted in the scriptures (Jn 11:1-16), the Apostle Thomas urges his fellow disciples to go along with Jesus to see Lazarus of Bethany who had fallen sick, even though it meant facing death. Prior to that, the Jews had stoned Jesus, threatening to kill him. And the other disciples were scared to venture out fearing for their lives.



Thomas urging his fellow disciples to go with Jesus

The Apostle Thomas was also simple and forthright in questioning the Lord, when he had trouble understanding the Lord.

Lazarus of Bethany and brother of Mary and Martha, was sick and word was sent to Jesus. Jesus loved Mary and Lazarus but stayed back for two more days where he was, and said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

Then after two days Jesus tells his disciples, "Let's go back to Judaea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago they tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

Then Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

— John 11:1-16

Jesus stirs controversies and the Pharisees begin to hate him:

Jesus continues teaching the Good News to the people, mostly explaining the message through parables. He also heals the sick and the lame, raises the dead to life, gives sight to the blind, etc., and performs various other miracles. His followers grew everyday and reached peak when Jesus performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 people on a handful of morsels.

But Jesus also stirred up controversies and hatred by healing people on the Sabbath, and by proclaiming Himself equal to God and by being in the company of sinners, tax collectors and lowly women like Mary of Bethany who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.



Pharisees murmuring behind Jesus

Plot to kill Jesus:

Jesus goes to Judaea and raises Lazarus from the dead. Many who had come to see Mary saw what Jesus did and put their faith in Him. But there were some who went to the Pharisees, complaining.



Jesus raises Lazarus from death

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called up a meeting and feared that if everyone would believe in Jesus, the Romans would come and take away both their place and nation. Then the high priest, Caiaphas, spoke,

"It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." From that day on they plotted to take his life. — *John 11*

Jesus predicts his death and betrayal:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of law; that He must be mocked at and killed and on the third day be raised to life; and that he who shares His bread will betray Him.

"I am the Way":

The disciples are troubled and disheartened because the Lord has predicted His death and the denial by Peter; Jesus comforts His disciples by saying, and "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In



I am the way

my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

The Apostles did not understand what Jesus was saying. But the Apostle Thomas was innocently forthright in asking the Lord when he did not understand the parable or saying.

Thomas said to Jesus, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

The answer which Jesus gave has enlightened the people to the fact that it is only through Jesus that we can reach the Father — "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to God the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on you know him and have seen him."

— Jn 14:5-7

His only hope:

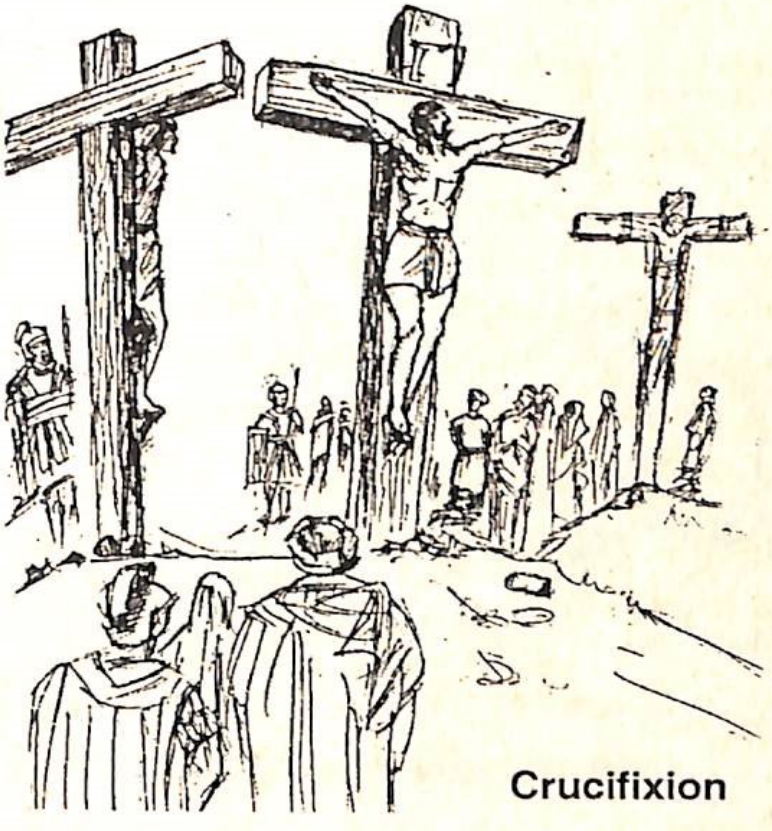
Before the arrest, Jesus warns his disciples that the world would hate and persecute them because it hated and persecuted him first. The disciples do not belong to this world; it is he who has chosen them out of the world. In fact the disciples will be thrown out of the Synagogues and a time will come when anyone who kills the disciple would think he is doing service to God.

Jesus told his disciples this lest they go astray — they were his only hope.

— John 15:18



Judas betrays Jesus



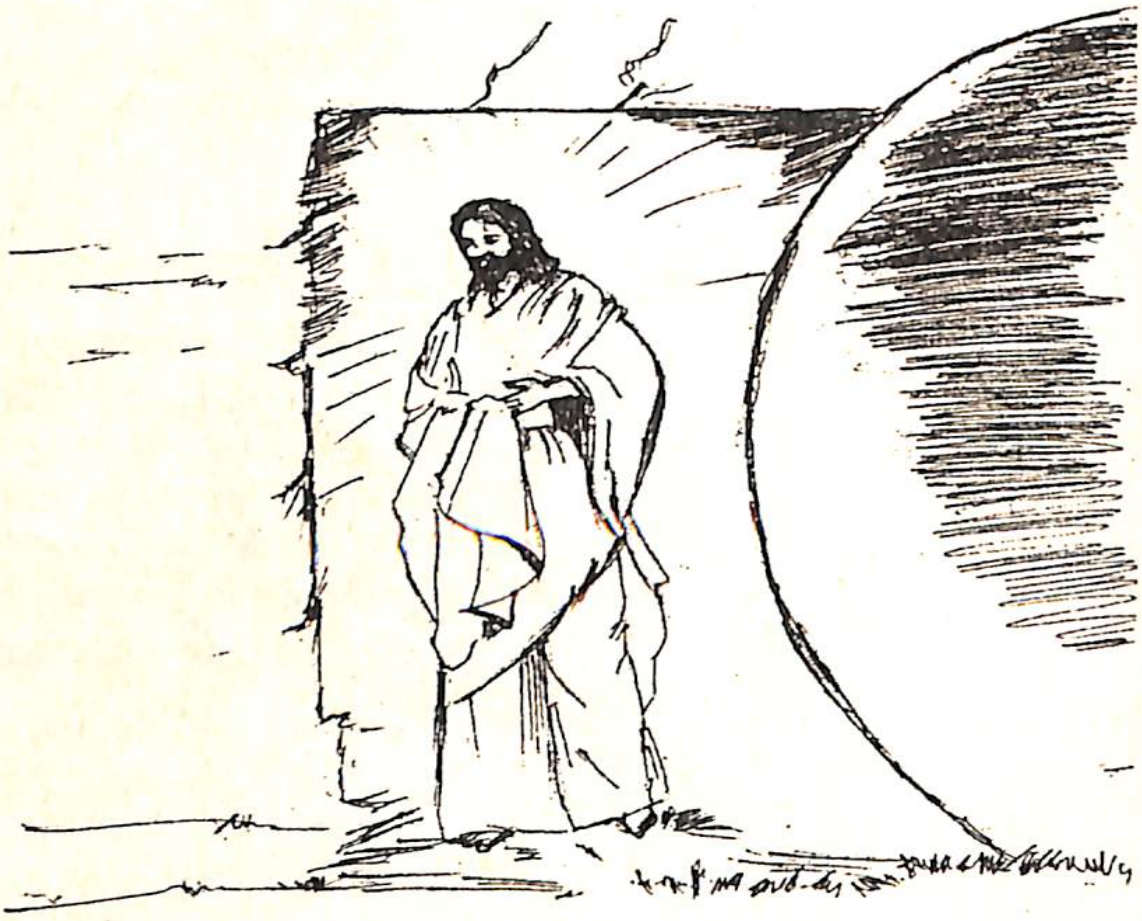
Crucifixion

Arrest and Crucifixion:

As the scriptures foretold, Jesus is betrayed to the Pharisees by Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, for thirty silver coins. The Pharisees arrested Jesus and brought him to Pilate the Roman Governor. Pilate tries thrice to release Jesus because he finds no fault in him, but ultimately succumbs to the pressures of the Pharisees and orders Jesus to be flogged and later crucified.

The Resurrection:

The Apostle Thomas was a faithful, generous and courageous follower of the master and a man of impetuous temperament. He too succumbed to human weakness, as he also disappeared/ran away from the



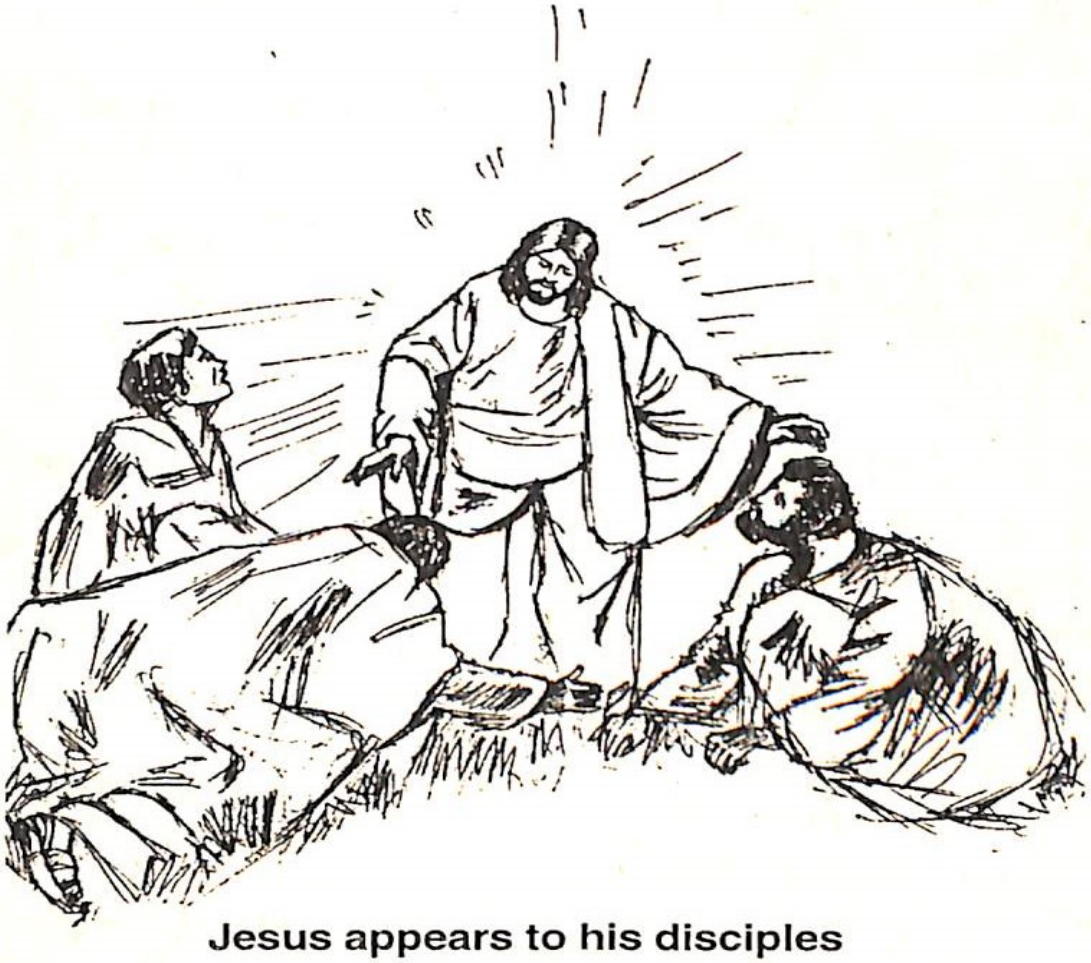
Resurrection

scene, like the other Apostles, when the Lord was arrested, tried and crucified.

One event, however, dramatically altered them — something passed through their lives like a flame of fire: Jesus' resurrection from the dead. After that, Jesus' patient hours of training seemed to bear fruit at last. But still, the Apostle Thomas refuses to believe in it and is yet again instrumental in uttering the timeless Act of faith: "My Lord My God!"

Jesus appears to his disciples:

The resurrected Jesus appears in the evening when the disciples were together in a room, locked in for fear of the Jews. The resurrected Jesus came and stood among



Jesus appears to his disciples

them and said, "Peace be with you" and showed His hands and side; the disciples were overjoyed at seeing the Lord. And before departing the Lord once again said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven."

— John 20:19-23

"My Lord and My God!"

The Apostle Thomas was not present when the Lord had appeared and refused to believe when the other Apostles told him that they had seen the Lord. He said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hand and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it."



Thomas touches the wound of Jesus

A week later the Lord once again appears to His disciples, when Thomas is present, and asks Thomas to put his finger into His side, and asks him to "stop doubting and believe". Thomas replies, "My Lord My God!" then Jesus tells him, "Because you have seen

you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

— John 20:28–29

Casting the net on the right side:

The third time the Lord appears to His disciples (including Thomas) when the disciples are fishing and catch nothing; the Lord appears to them and instructs them to cast the net on the right side of the boat and it results in a rich haul.

— John 21:6



Disciples fishing



Apostles casting lots

Jesus instructs his disciples to go out and preach:

Jesus did many other things as well; and before being taken up into heaven, He said to his disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to the whole creation! Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe. In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will take up snakes in their hands; and when they drink poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people and they will get well."

— *Mark 16:15:18*

The Apostles draw lots:

Accordingly the disciples decided to go around the world and divided the regions of the world so that each one might go to the region which fell to his lot. And India fell to Thomas Didymus; but he did not wish to go, saying that, "Through weakness of flesh I cannot travel, and how can I, who am a Hebrew, go and preach the truth among the Indians?" As he considered and said this, The Saviour appeared to him by night and said to him, "Fear not, Thomas, go to India and preach the word there for my grace is with thee."[17]

And as he thus spoke and thought, it happened that a certain merchant was there who had come from India. His name was Habban and he had been sent by Kandhaphore, the King in south India and had received orders from him to buy a carpenter and bring him back to the king for the construction of a new palace.

On the following morning the Apostle prayed and besought the Lord, and said, "I will go wither thou wilt, Lord Jesus; thy will be done!"[18]

The Apostle Thomas and the other Apostles, filled with the power of the Pentecostal Spirit, left for their respective destinations — and the world was not to be same again!

— *Acts of Judas Thomas 1.2*

The Apostle arrives in India:

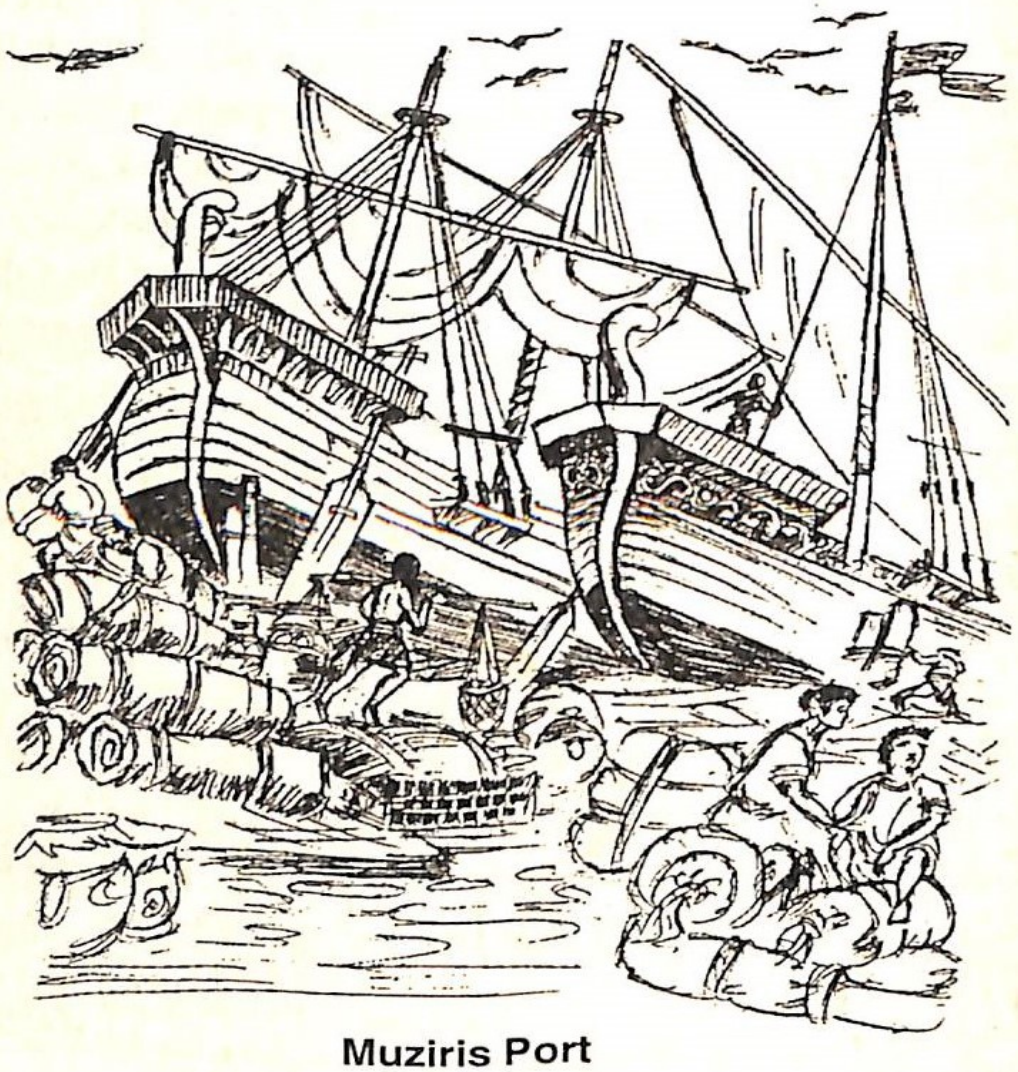
The Jewish communities in Palestine knew where India proper is. They knew silk came from the famous 'Silk Route'. They also knew that, King Solomon's ships sailed

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17. Acts of Judas Thomas
18. Ibid

to South India for cinnamon, ivory, gold, peacock feathers, etc. In the Old Testament, India is called Hoddu (pronounced Hiddu), which is probably the corruption of the name of the River Sindhu. And there is no other Sindhu river in the world. The Sumerians, Babylonians and the Jews called it 'Hendo' in Aramaya. The Persians called it 'Hindu'. The Greeks and the Romans wrote accounts on India with first hand knowledge, and it is to this well-known India that St Thomas, with the Merchant Habban, started with the teachings of Christ.

The Apostle Thomas Didymus (The Twin), came to India braving the rough seas and wild life, and



Muziris Port

encountering the hostility of the people and an unknown culture, successfully preached and introduced Christianity in India in the first century itself. He was martyred at the mount in Mylapore. The Saint has left behind a rich tradition of Thomas Christians in South India.

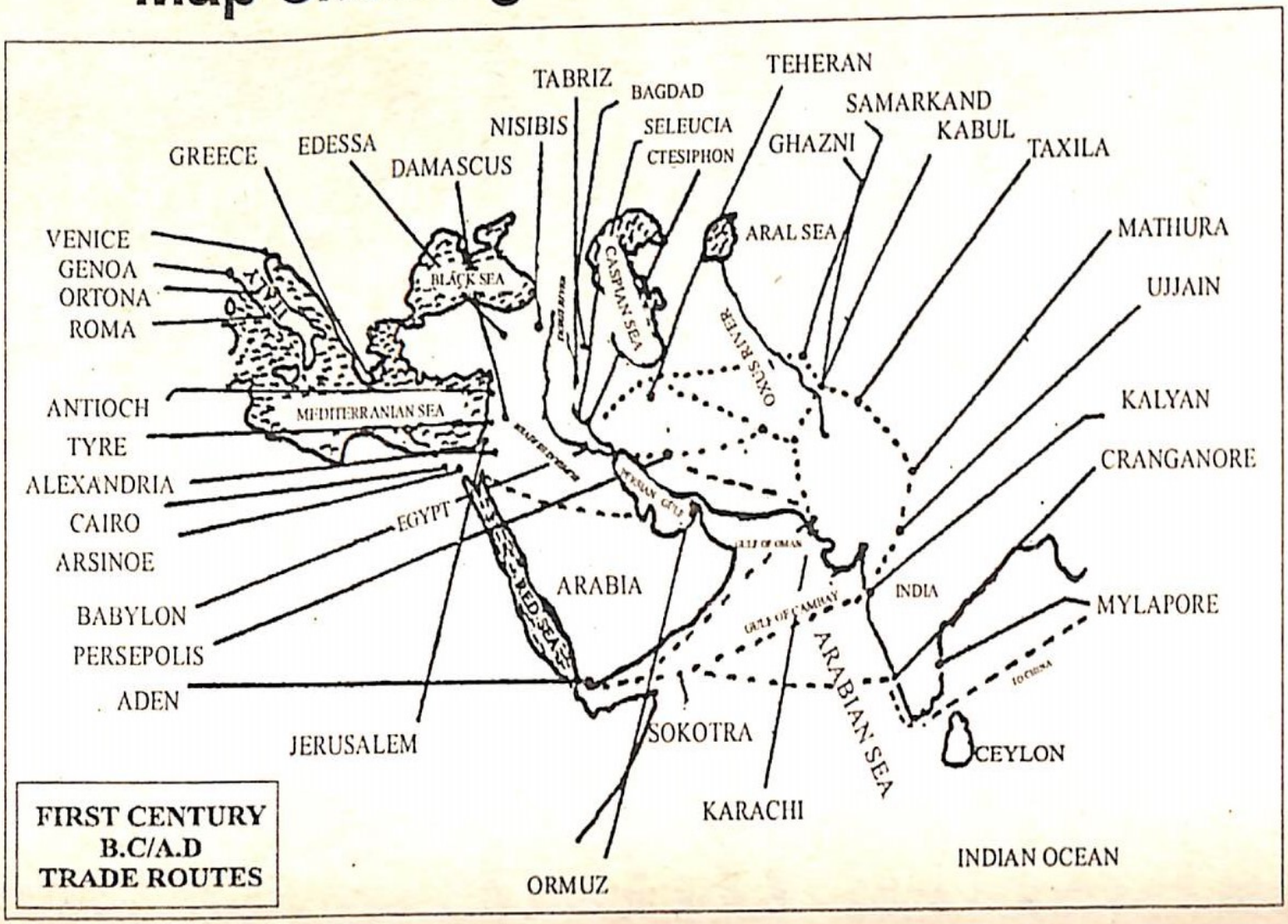
The Apostle arrived in India fallowing the sea route, aided by the Hippalus winds. Thomas and Habban landed in India in A.D. 52 at Maliankara near Muziris or Cranganore (now Kodungallur), a prosperous trading port in spices, mainly in black pepper also known as black gold.[19]

Cranganore was a well-established trade centre. And merchants from far and wide came there to trade in spices like pepper (black gold), ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, etc., and precious wood like teak, rosewood and sandalwood, also peacock feathers, apes, ivory, pearls, etc., besides other important trade-worthy items. The Jews and the Greek merchants who came there looking for spices had established a colony of their own and settled there.

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19. H.C.I p. 29, K.C.C p. 37

Map Showing the Ancient Trade Routes



6
The Indian Tradition/ Rabban Patu

The Apostle leaves for Mylapore:

Having arrived in India, St Thomas leaves along with Habban for Mylapore. He meets King Kandaphores there,

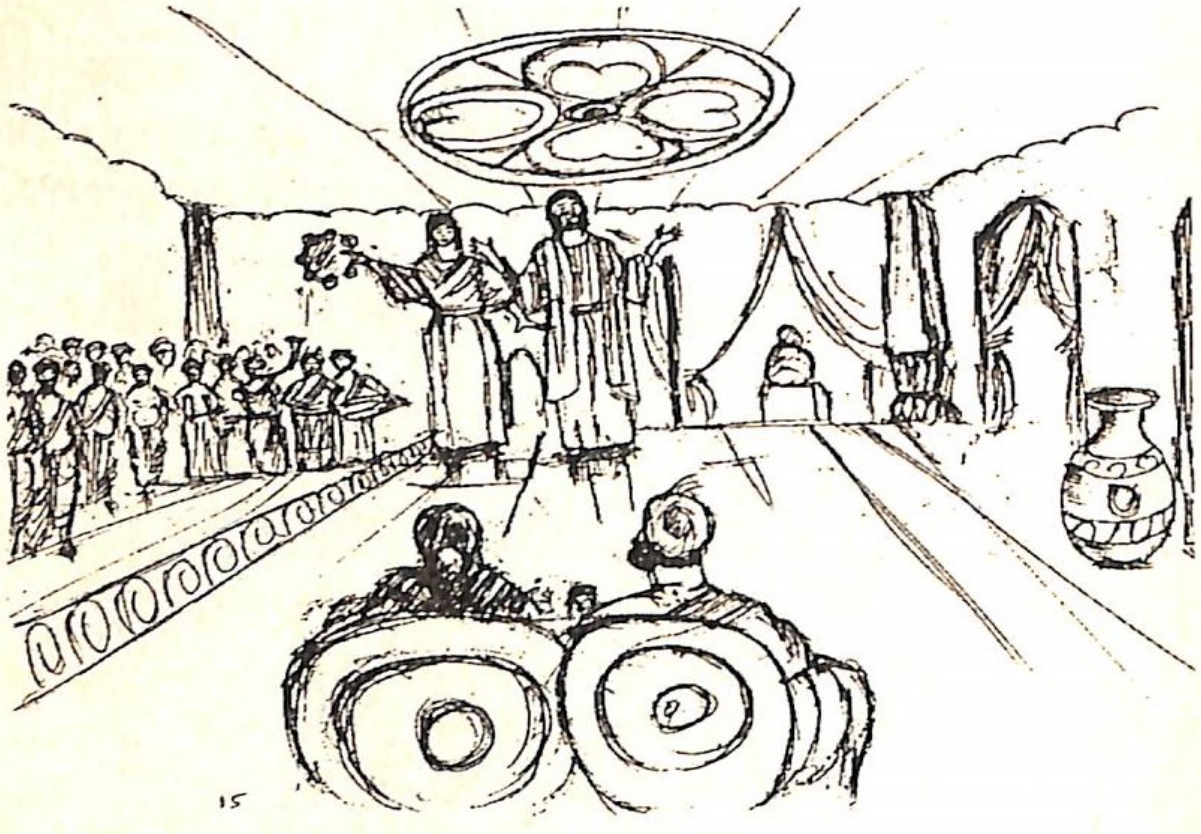


Apostle receives money from the king

and agrees to construct a palace for the king. The site and the plan for the construction of the palace having been agreed upon, St Thomas assures the king of its completion in six months' time. The king, for his part, advances a large sum of money to St Thomas before going away to a different province of his.[20]

St Thomas distributes the money to the poor:

St Thomas, instead of building the palace, goes about distributing the money to the poor; he goes about preaching and even travels to China to preach the Good News. And on his return to Mylapore, St Thomas travels back to the western coast.[21]



Apostle Thomas singing with the Hebrew flute girl

20. H.C.I p. 25, I.C.H p. 10
21. I.C.H p. 10

Marriage Feast:

Back at Cranganore, perhaps due to the influence of the merchant Habban at the Royal Court, both were invited to the marriage feast at the court of Perumal, the Chera King, whose daughter was getting married that day.

At the marriage feast the Apostle made use of the sandal paste to make a sign of the cross on his forehead and chest. The guests but naturally became interested in this stranger in strange attire.

A Hebrew flute girl, entertaining the guests with her music, came near the Apostle, remained near him for some time and sang a Hebrew song. The Apostle thereupon intoned a song in the same language praising the divine spouse, the Church founded by Christ. The song was understood and appreciated by the flute girl, who became one of the early converts to the Faith.[22]

The cup-bearer:

Enraged by the Apostle's peculiar attitude at the feast a cup-bearer gave the messenger of God a hard blow with his hand. Without losing his temper St Thomas spoke in Chaldean, that God would forgive the cup-bearer's guilt in the next world, though the hand that was raised against him would be seen, ere long, dragged along the ground by a dog.

The cup-bearer, going to a spring to draw water was attacked by a wild beast, which tore off his limbs. Shortly afterwards a black dog brought to the scene of the marriage feast a human hand in its mouth, and soon the hand was recognized as that of the cup-bearer.[23]

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22. H.C.I p. 19
23. I.C.H p. 10



The cup-bearer's hand dragged by a dog

The young royal couple accepts the new religion:

The flute-girl, declaring that the stranger's prediction about the cup-bearer's hand had come true, cried aloud that he was either God or God's prophet. The Apostle then asked for the other parts of the body to be brought to him and when it was done he placed the torn limbs in their original places after blessing them with the sign of the cross and the cup-bearer instantly became hale and hearty.

The king on witnessing this miracle came to the Apostle and said, "Rise up and go with me and pray for my daughter, for she is my only child and today I gave her away." The Apostle went with the king and having laid his hands on the couple said, "The Lord will be with you." And he left them and went away. The blessing imparted by the Apostle on the royal couple had a result quite unexpected

by the King for the Princess and her husband expressed their readiness to accept the new religion.

At Palayur:

After baptizing the King and several pagans and the Jews, Thomas along with Kepa, the brother of the king, and Habban travelled to the other parts of the country to preach. While doing so one day he came across a few high caste people praying near a tank at Palayur. These Brahmins were throwing water up from a tank and praying.

St Thomas asked the Brahmins as to whether their God to whom they were praying, could hold the water up when they threw it. The Brahmins scoffed and laughed at him, and challenged him to do so. The Apostle with a



Droplets suspended in the sky

prayer on his lips threw the water up from the tank. And to everybody's surprise the droplets of water thrown up by the Apostle remained suspended in the sky.

After witnessing this miracle some of the Brahmins were impressed and accepted the new religion and were baptized. But the others ran away to a nearby place called Vemanat. It is believed that after this incident, the Brahmins cursed and called it Chapakad (anglicized as Chawghat), which means an accursed place. And the Brahmins in neighbouring Palayur neither ate nor drank anything, nor did they bathe in the Palayur locality.

At Kottakav / Paravur:



The Great Festival

St Thomas who preached the Gospel in every nook and corner of Kerala reached Kottakav at a time when the

great festival was going on in its temple. The participants in the temple looked curiously at the Apostle who was clad in strange attire and who spoke in a different tongue. St Thomas started speaking about Jesus Christ to the people who were gathered there for worship. On hearing his speech, the devotees began to laugh at the Apostle and asked him to flee from there.

Heavenly succour:

The saint helplessly extended his hands to heaven for succour. All of a sudden a tempest blew over the place; at that very moment, the elephants kept in a row for the



Elephants and on lookers falling on ground

festival as well as the onlookers started falling to the ground, a few of them losing consciousness, too. The devotees became perplexed and were overwhelmed with fear, realizing that the man they had poked fun at was actually a holy man and pleaded with St Thomas (Muthappan) to rescue them from the mishap.

Installation of the Cross:

The Apostle asked them to bring some water. He then blessed the water in the name of the Holy Trinity and sprinkled it over them. And all of a sudden they all regained consciousness. According to legend, when the saint sprinkled the water a third time, some drops remained in the air and some got transformed into blood drops and flames. The people who witnessed this spectacle started listening to the words of the Apostle and then whole-heartedly accepted the faith.

Next, they thought of erecting a cross as a sign of embracing the new faith. It was decided that the cross should be erected on the spot where the elephant would place a log. The tusker carried the log to the sanctuary of the temple and left it there. The people who received the faith from the

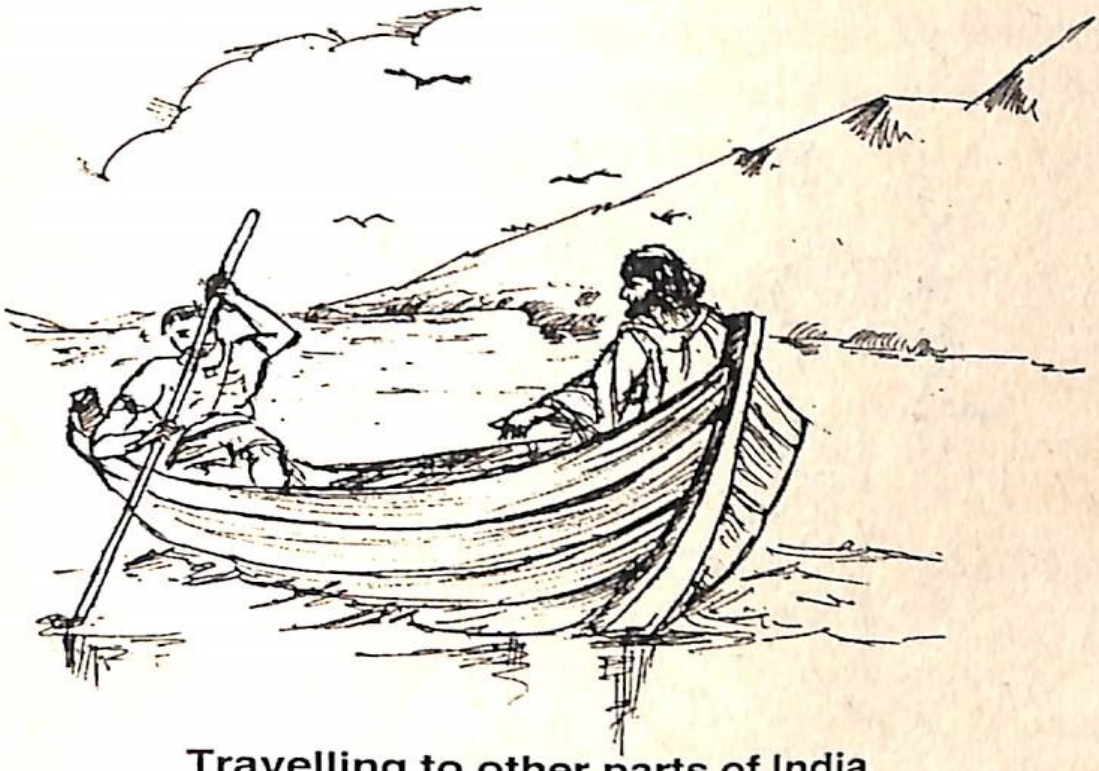


Elephant placing the log

Apostle included the temple priest and his family. Though it is not known how long the saint lived there, it is believed that 1,770 people got baptized, and were known as Nazarenes.

Other parts of Kerala:

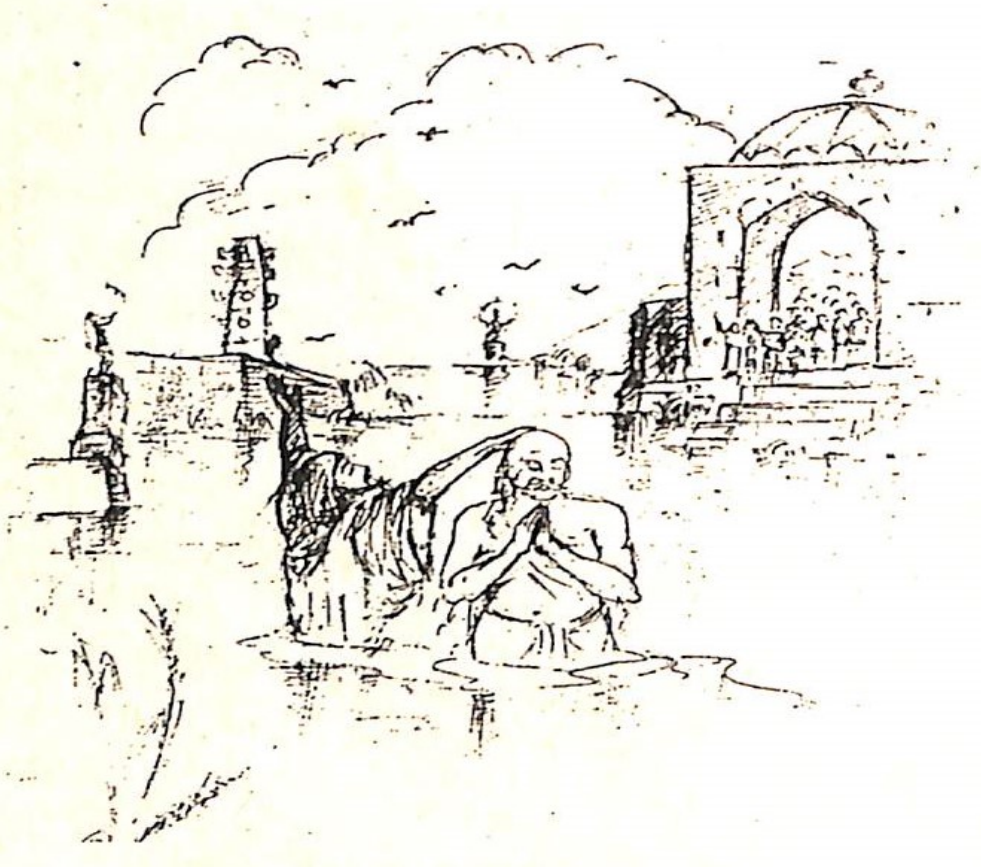
The Apostle travelled through Kokkamangalam, Quilon, Niranam, Nilackal and Thiruvamcode; preaching the Gospel, healing the sick, raising the dead in the name of Jesus Christ and built churches before returning to Palayur.



Travelling to other parts of India

In Kokkamangalam the Apostle stayed about a year and preached the Gospel, whereby, eventually, some 1,600 belonging to the elite class of people, embraced the Christian Faith through the Apostle. They also organized a Christian community at Kokkamangalam where he enshrined a cross and ordained a priest for the believers.

At Quilon, Nilackal and Niranam, the Apostle stayed for some time preaching the Good News and baptizing the locals and showing them the way of truth. He placed in these places crosses for veneration. He then travelled back to Palayur where he saw the people showing disrespect to the cross there. In his anger, the Apostle cursed the village. He also appointed a priest with authority to take care of the community. He then departed for Mylapore at the invitation of the king.



Apostle baptizing the locals

The king is furious:

When asked by the king for the reason for not having constructed the palace, the Apostle replies in the affirmative, saying, "Indeed! The palace has been built for the king, but the king cannot see it because it is in the

other world." The king does not understand a word of what the Apostle is saying and is furious. He imprisons both the Apostle and Habban for not building the palace. The King is believed to have put the Apostle in a vessel of hot boiling oil, the Apostle however remaining unscathed.

St Thomas freed:

Meanwhile the brother of the Chola king dies and is taken up to heaven and there he is asked by the angel to select a palace for his abode. The king's brother likes a certain palace but is refused by the angel, the reason given being, "It has been built by a saintly person for the King". The brother of the king seeks permission to be sent back to earth and save the saint's life.



Apostles being put in a vessel of hot boiling oil

The brother of the king miraculously comes back to life. St Thomas and Habban are freed after the brother narrates the story about the palace in heaven. Listening to this miracle the king is impressed and he and his brother accept the new religion and are baptized and the king is made the high priest. St Thomas then leaves for the west coast.

Mother Mary consoles the Apostle:

From Mylapore an angel guided the Apostle to Maliankara via Malayattur and Palayur through the mountainous path, which was known as the 'Caravan Path' and one of the main routes to the Chola country.



The locals showing their hatred

At Malayattur, the local people could not accept St Thomas' message and showed their hatred for him by throwing soil and mud at him. The Apostle, distraught,



Apostle praying on mountain top

went up to the mountain and spent a few days in prayer and fasting. He prayed kneeling on the rock and making the sign of the cross on the rock. It is believed that Mother Mary appeared to him and consoled him, assuring him of the perseverance of the Church in India. At Malayattur the Apostle preached the new way for two months and baptized some 220 people.

Appoints Kepa as the spiritual leader:

On his return the Apostle visited all the villages he had been to earlier and was happy at some places like Niranam and Chayal (Nilackal) where the people were doing well in their new faith, busying themselves with good deeds; in all the places he appointed Acharins (caretakers) and ordained priests and blessed them with the power of the holy Spirit to continue the missionary work of spreading the good news and serving the people in the name of Jesus Christ.

One of the disciples, Kepa, who belonged to the royal family of Cranganore, was always with the Apostle. The

Apostle gave him his shawl and blessed and appointed Kepa as the spiritual leader of the newly formed Christian communities. He gave authority to his disciples to preach the Gospel. Then in the year 69 A.D. he departed from Chayal (Nilackal) for Mylapore once again. The disciples of the Apostle and the newly formed Christian communities were all saddened, because the Apostle had hinted that he would never come again.

Before leaving for Mylapore, the Apostle brought back to life 19 dead, drove the devil out of 260 persons, cured 230 lepers, gave sight to 250 blind persons, restored to 220 paralytics the use of their limbs, speech to 20 dumb and brought back to health 250 persons given up as hopeless by physicians. In all, the Saint converted no less than 17,650 persons of whom 6,850 were *Brahmins*, 2,800 *kshatriyas*, 3,750 *vaisyas*, and 4,250 *sudras*, in the

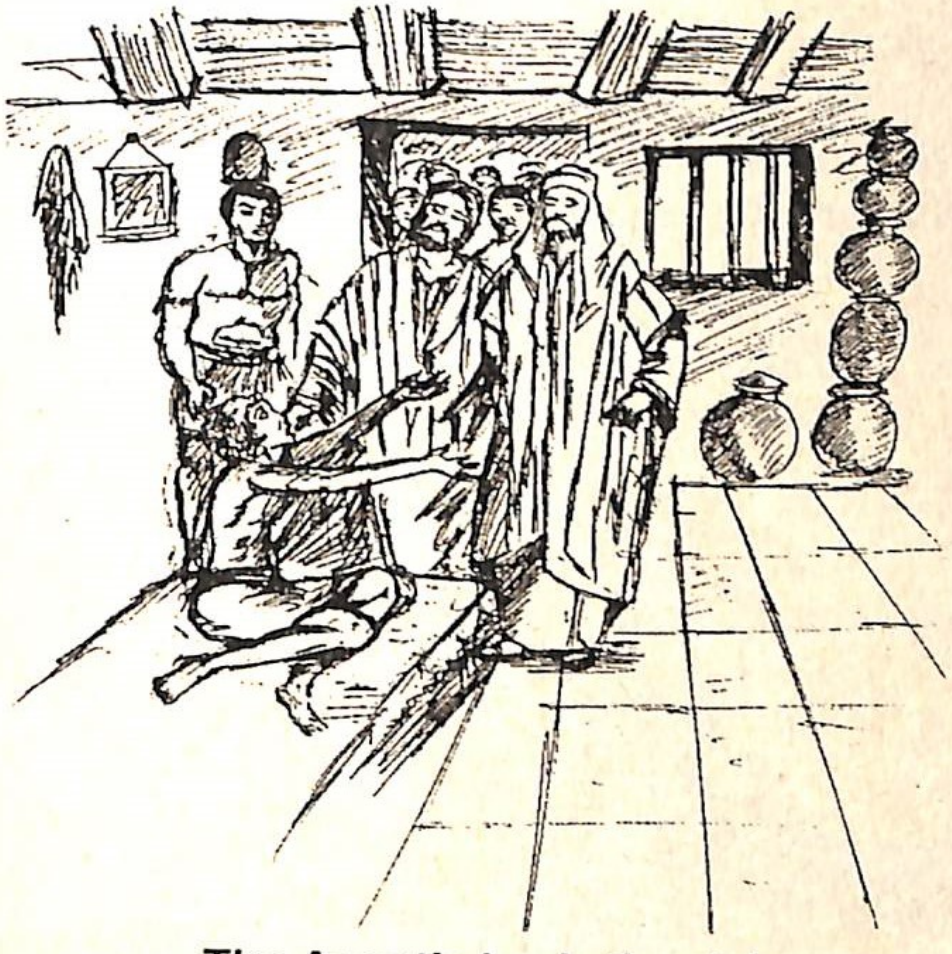


The Apostle puts his shawl around Kepa

process winning for them the true way of life and salvation.

Organizes the community:

Before bidding adieu the Apostle had made all the necessary arrangements for the material and spiritual welfare of his people. St Thomas selected a few people in authoritative positions in society as the 'Mahatran' or present day Bishops, and people well known in the villages were selected as 'Rabban' or priests, and some 21 people of noble descent were selected as 'Prabhu' or the parish council, for the protection and administration of the common wealth. For the purpose of general administration the Apostle introduced certain rules and regulations.



The Apostle heals the sick

It is said that the rulers of neighbouring kingdoms who heard about these rules and regulations were so impressed as to introduce the same in their own kingdoms.

Meets his end:

In Mylapore (present Santhome, Chennai) St Thomas continued with his missionary work, spreading the Good News, healing the sick and baptizing many. The heads and believers of various local religions had by then started nursing a grudge against the popularity of this foreigner who was going about preaching a new religion. This went against their thinking and they decided to eliminate the



The Apostle pierced by a lance

Apostle. They tried attacking and killing him but the Apostle hid in a cave (little Mount) and prayed. He used to also retire to a hill nearby (presently St Thomas Mount) to pray in silence in front of the cross, which he himself had carved on the rock.

On 3 July 72 A.D., a dark rainy day, the Apostle on way to the Mount, encountered some Chennambranmar Brahmins proceeding to the temple for a sacrifice. They wanted St Thomas to take part in the worship; he of course refused to oblige and, on the contrary, destroyed the place of worship with a sign of the Cross. The Brahmins in their fury pierced St Thomas with a lance. With a prayer on his lips the Apostle gave up his spirit on a rock in the forest and his soul rose up to heaven in the form of a white dove accompanied by angels.

Later when the Perumal, Acharans, Rabbans, Nobles and people in general were mourning his death, tradition says, the Apostle appeared in a vision and promised to help all those who prayed at his tomb in the name of Jesus.



7

"The Seven Churches" Founded by St Thomas:

Since Muziris (the present day Kodungallur) was a harbour well known all over the ancient world, there is every possibility that St Thomas should have decided to visit the Malabar Coast. There was regular traffic between those countries and Muziris, especially after a Roman merchant called Hippalus discovered in A.D. 47 the sailing monsoon winds, which have ever since come to be known as the Hippalus winds, by which the sailors could cross over the Arabian sea to the Malabar coast in a matter of weeks, instead of months, along the coastal line.

The Disciples of Christ knew at least three languages of the civilized world: Their mother tongue Aramaya was used as an international language for many centuries, Greek (the language of the civilized people) and Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament). Besides, they were also familiar with Latin, the language of their rulers, the Romans. The Jews *per se* were truly an international race in every aspect, residing as they did in every nation on earth.



Kodungallur—Pilgrim Centre,
Azhicode



Archdiocesan St Thomas Church
Palayur



ST Thomas Forane Church,
Kottakav (Parur)



The pond where St Thomas performed
miracles and baptized people



Kokkamangalam — Cross Menhir



Our Lady of Purification Church
Kollam



St Thomas and St Francis Xavier
Kollam



St Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church
Niranam



Little Mount (Chinnamalai)



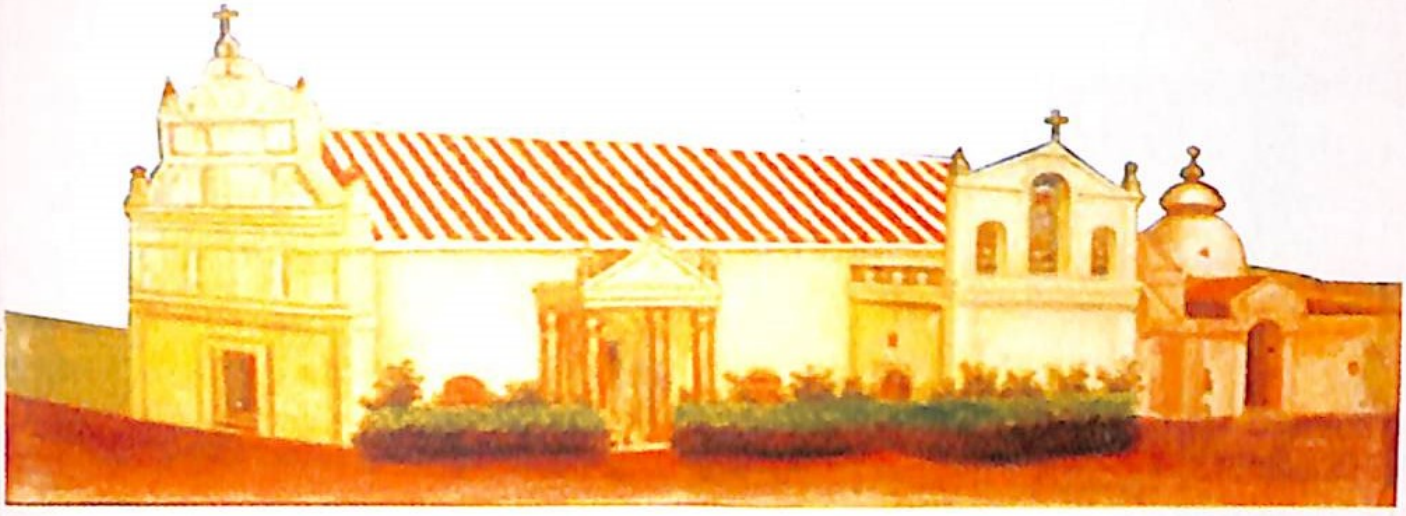
St Thomas International Pilgrim Centre
Malayattur



St Thomas Mount, Chennai



St Thomas Church, Nilackal



Santhome Old Cathedral



Santhome Cathedral Basilica, Chennai


KERALA
Calicut
Palayur
Thrichur
Kodungallur
Malayattoor
Cochin Nedumbassery
Kottakkavu (Parur)
Ernakulam
Kokkamangalam
Kottayam
Alleppey
Niranam
Chayal
Quilon
Trivandrum

In all narratives concerning the apostolate of St Thomas in Kerala, Kodungallur is mentioned as the first of the seven and half Churches (Christian Communities), founded by the Apostle. Kodungallur, Palayur, Kottakav (Paravur), Kokkamangalam (near Cherthala), Niranam, Quilon and Nilakal (Chayal) are the seven churches reckoned to be founded by St Thomas. Thiruvithamcodu, Aruvithura and Malayattoor claim the position of "half church".

In all these places there were Jews, Romans, Aramayans (Babylonians) and Chinese. There was the presence of Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Taoism, and the vedic religion in these cities. Many languages like Greek, Latin, Aramaya, Pali and Sanskrit were spoken in these centres. Aramaya was the language of commerce.

In all probability the Apostle must have preached to the people settled in these international trade centres, who understood his language, and also to the Indians who learnt the foreign language for the purpose of trade and commerce. He also could have used the services of interpreters to get the 'Good News' across to the other locals.

8

The Position of the Seven Churches Now:

Of the seven churches founded by St Thomas in Kerala, 2000 years ago, Kodungallur and Kollam Churches in the Sea Port cities, were destroyed when the Sea Erosion and inundation destroyed the ports. New churches were established on the beaches subsequently. The churches of Niranam, Palayur and Kottakavu/Paravur still exist at the same sites after renovation. The Nilackal Church has now come up at an alternate location. The church here was destroyed in the civil war of 1314 A.D.

1) *Kodungallur: (cradle of Christianity in India).*

Muziris was a very prominent and important trading centre in the east, known all over the ancient world, for the availability of spices like pepper (black gold), ginger cinnamon, cardamom, etc., and precious wood like rose wood, sandal wood and teak wood and other important items like peacock feathers, pearls and ivory, etc. There was regular traffic flow between those countries and

Muziris. There were a good number of Jews and Greeks staying here and they had their own colony here, too. Tradition says that St Thomas landed here in Kodungallur/ Muziris in the year 52 A.D. along with the merchant Habban. And it is to these Jews, in the first place, that he must have preached the Gospel.

Muziris slowly lost its charm and glory as it ceased to be a harbour for natural reasons, the attention and importance shifting to the nearby new harbour at Cochin.

Mylapore – Edessa – Ortona – Kodungallur (Cranganore / Maliankara / Muziris) — Tradition says that the sacred bones of St Thomas were carried to Edessa (present Turkey) from Mylapore in the third century. In the seventh century the Middle East fell to the Muslim powers and the position of the Christians became insecure. Thus according to reliable sources, the bones of the Apostle are said to have been taken by Christians to Chios and from there on 17 June 1258 to Ortona in Italy, where they are kept to this day.

On the auspicious occasion of the 19th century celebrations of the Great Entry of St Thomas into India, the late cardinal Tisserant, then Prefect of the Oriental Congregation, on his historic visit to Kerala, brought with him the bone of the right arm of the Apostle (from Italy) and deposited it in the shrine built for that purpose at the present site in Marthoma Nagar, Azhicode on 6 December 1953. Thus the place where St Thomas landed in India has become the most sacred spot where stands the shrine of St Thomas (Marthoma) in Kerala, which thousands throng to receive the blessings of that hand which touched the marks of the wounds of Jesus Christ.

The shrine was entrusted by the Holy See to the Devamatha province of the CMI fathers, who have an ashram here and attend to the needs of the pilgrims and also run a hospital, which has become a specialized medical centre for mental patients.

Special features:

The holy relic is exposed daily from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. for veneration.

Special mediator prayer services (novena prayers) for particular intentions are conducted on request every Sunday and other days of obligation at 'Marthoma Sannidhi'.

Week long celebrations under the title 'Marthoma's Entry to Bharata' are held every year culminating on 21 November or the Sunday after at the 'Marthoma Nagar'.

Boating facilities are available for the pilgrims at a reasonable cost.

Moderate facilities, meeting the basic needs of the pilgrims, are available at the pilgrim centre.

2) Palayur:

In Palayur there exists a rich tradition related to many of the old churches/communities. This, in certain respects, corroborates family traditions. To quote Placid Podipara, the veteran historian of St Thomas Christians: "The Christian church at Palayur stands in a compound where there are remnants seen of Hindu worship such as a tank, a well for drawing water for sacrifice (pooja kinar), the round stone with which the well was covered, etc. Even today, the Brahmins in the neighbourhood of Palayur

neither eat nor drink anything, nor ever bathe in the Palayur locality which their ancestors cursed and called *Chapakad* (anglicized as Chawghat), which means an accursed place.

Both Hindu and Christian traditions say that when St Thomas converted some Brahmins of the place, the rest ran away to a nearby locality called Vemmanat saying *Iniyathe kuli Vemmanat,* i.e., "the next bath at Vemmanat" which expression has become even a proverb in the language of Malabar. In 1949 the present writer was at Vemmanat and two elderly and high caste Hindu gentlemen, one a Brahmin and the other who was in the service of the temple of Vemmanat, recounted to him this tradition as current among them. In Palayur there is the compound called Kallath; in Vemmanat there is the Brahmin family of Kallath, which according to tradition, is one of the families that ran away from Palayur to Vemmanat.

Distinctive features:

At the St Thomas Church at Palayur, the tank, where the Apostle performed the divine miracle of throwing the water up and making it stay suspended in the air is well maintained and the well once used for the pooja is also there. On one side of the tank the little mount of Mylapore is recreated, portraying the saint while praying, sleeping and hiding.

It has also got a well maintained museum, with ancient artefacts, tools, dresses worn by the Nazarenes (early Christians), etc. Outside the museum there is a beautiful visual of the Saint sailing in a life-sized boat, to remind the pilgrims that St Thomas during his Apostolic mission in

India travelled mostly by boat and had, as such, arrived at Palayur sailing.

At the entrance of the church, there are beautiful stone carvings lined on both sides, showing several incidents from the Gospel, and also scenes from the Apostolate of St Thomas in India.

3) Kottakav (Paravur):

Kottakav has a history behind its name. At the commencement of the Christian era the western boundary of Paravur was Vembanadu Lake. Muziris (Kodungallur), Maliankara and Paravur are located on the banks of the same lake. Kottakav was a Kavu adjacent to this lake. As it was near the lake, it was also known as Kottakayal (fort by the lake). Those days most of the inhabitants of Paravur were Brahmins; Pattamana Paravur was one of the earliest settlements of the Brahmin migrants who came to Kerala. Politically a local ruler by name Pindinivattah Swaroopan, of a Brahmin family ruled this place.

St Thomas who preached in every nook and cranny of Kerala reached Kottakav at a time when a festival was going on in its temple. The Apostle performed divine wonders there. The people who witnessed this miracle started listening to the words of the Apostle and they whole-heartedly embraced the faith.

The people who received the faith from the Apostle also included the priest of the temple and his family; it is believed that 1770 people got baptized and it is the descendants of these people that ruled over the Nazarenes.

In 880 A.D. Mar Sabor and Mar Proth, both brothers and bishops came to Kerala. This duo constructed many churches using durable materials like stone and wood, with which began the phase of building permanent church structures. The Paravur Kottakav church was permanently built during this period. The Persian cross, which is preserved in the chapel in front of the church, might have been engraved in rock in those days. After their demise both these Bishops were revered as saints and churches were named after them. Later as per the decision taken in the Synod of Diamper the Church was renamed as St Garvasis and Prothasis.

The wooden cross, which the saint had planted in this place, was kept in Kottakav church. But during the siege of Tipu Sultan, the churches in the region of Kodungallur, Alangad, Paravur, Chennamangalam and Varapuzha were subjected to demolition. The cross was also destroyed at that time.

In ancient days, the regions of Kaitharam, Ezhikkara, Kacheypaddy, Pallamthuruth, Neendor, Parranam, and Thuruthipuram fell under this parish, i.e., the Parish of Kottakav. Believers from these remote areas found it difficult to attend the Holy Mass and other functions due to lack of space in the church. So it was decided to construct a new church. Bishop Louis Pazhayaparambil laid the foundation stone for the new church on 21 June 1911. Fr Paulose Elamkunnapuzhla was the Vicar of the church. His successor, Fr Parackal Zacharius, continued the construction work.

Archbishop Augustine Kandathil blessed the new church, 'St Thomas Kottakkav Forane Church' in 1938,

when Fr Paulose Elamkunnapuzhla once again became the vicar. In 1955 when Fr Joseph Valamangalam became the Vicar the construction of the two elegant towers were completed. The old church is behind the new church, the elephantine wall on the adjacent western side and the pilgrim pond where the Apostle baptized the devotees are all preserved and well maintained.

4) Kokkamangalam:

The *'Apostle St Thomas Pilgrim Centre'* at Kokkamangalam, is central to all the seven churches/ communities founded by St Thomas. This enchanting church is situated on the banks of Vembanadu Lake. The Apostle stayed here for about one year and preached the Gospel. Eventually some 1600 of the elite embraced the Faith through the Apostle. He organized a Christian community at Kokkamangalam where he enshrined a cross and ordained a priest for the believers. Vibrant as ever, this community continues to flourish in Kokkamangalam.

Distinctive features:

The Miraculous Portrait: The miraculous portrait of St Thomas venerated here was brought from the Carmelite Monastery, Mannanam, in 1897 by one 'Albutha Mathai' pursuant to a certain revelation. This portrait is now enshrined in an artistic model of a waft.

The Holy Relic: Pope John Paul II brought the holy relic of the Apostle, St Thomas, ensconced here from Ortono in Italy to India in November 1999. The special Novena prayer every Friday evening is an occasion to venerate the holy relic. Devotees who aspire to

employment, especially abroad, seek the intercession of the Apostle. And St Thomas, who himself made an adventurous voyage, has been ever known to be generous to them!

Sacred Oil: The seven tiered Kerala lamp glowing in front of the holy relic denotes the integration of the seven Christian communities founded by the Apostle. Pouring coconut oil in these lamps is a devout practice here. Devotees collect this oil as sacred remnant to alleviate both spiritual and physical misery — "Mens Sana in Corpore Sana" (A healthy mind in a healthy body)

Holy Mattom: Carrying the 'evenness scale' of St Thomas in the procession of 'Holy Mattom' is another pious custom, which assures the carrier of the fulfilment of certain favours prayed for. Evidently, the faithful carrier does attain the evenness he/she seeks in life.

Lourdes Grotto: The Lourdes Marian Grotto commemorates the Silver Jubilee of the Papacy of Pope John Paul II and the Rosary year. This grotto enriches the pilgrim face of the church complex.

Marthoma Margam: A number of Biblical scenes where Jesus appears with his beloved disciple Thomas constitute this marvellous sculpture complex. Nowhere else in the world can we find such fantastic Thomic manifestation!

5) Niranam:

This is one of the most ancient churches in the whole of Christendom; St Thomas the Apostle established this parish in 54 A.D. in the name of St Mary Mother of God. The church has been renovated for the fourth time; and is known as the *'St Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church'*.

Distinctive features:

The Ferry of St Thomas (Thomathu Kadavu):

This was a major shore in ancient times. Kottachal could be reached from the Middle East regions for trade. St Thomas reached Niranam by sailing to this shore. Thus the ferry, situated barely a kilometre away from the church, is still known as the 'Ferry of St Thomas'.

The Church Ferry (Pallikadavu).

The ferry is situated in the western part of the church. It is traditionally believed that St Thomas baptized the natives here. And the people used to cleanse themselves before attending the worship.

Well of Thoma:

It is believed that St Thomas used to quench his thirst here. Situated in the north-west side of the church, it is a perennial spring.

The Granary:

Situated in the south-west part of the church is the administrative centre of the early church fathers of St Thomas Christians. Various significant decisions of the past were taken inside the granary. The granary complex is constituted of the granary, the place where paddy was preserved, the mess hall, vestry room for the priests, and the inner room where the holy oil was kept. St Gregorius of Perumala resided here and gave administrative leadership in the earlier periods. The bed, which the saint used, is preserved in this granary.

The Golden Cross:

The golden cross weighing 10 kgs was made as the first golden cross was lost. It is used only during major feasts.

The Stone Cross:

The stone cross was erected towards the end of the 12th century A.D. It has the facility for lighting 101 wicks simultaneously.

The Stone Jar:

The stone cross jar is preserved in the ancient granary; the holy oil inside the jar is used for healing the sick. The status of the antiquity of this jar is not known.

6) Quilon / Kollam:

Better known as Kollam port church or *'Church of Our Lady of Purification'*, Port Quilon, this beautiful church, built on the coast of Quilon, has been reconstructed thrice. The foundation stone was blessed by His Holiness Pope John Paul II at Trivandrum on 8 February 1986, during his pastoral visit to India, and laid by the Rt Rev Dr Joseph G. Fernandez, Bishop of Quilon on 9 March 1986.

The construction work was completed and blessed by the same Bishop on 23 January 1993. Towards the western gate/entrance of the church compound two statues were installed facing the sea on 21 December 1972, in commemoration of the 19th Centenary of the Death of the Apostle and the 4th centenary of the death of the other Apostle of India St Francis Xavier.

Kollam holds the privilege of being declared the first Latin Rite Diocese of India by the Vatican in 1329, with Jordanos Cathalani consecrated as its first Bishop. There

was a church then, known as the Kollam Church. Later, when several other churches were constructed in the vicinity of the church by the Portuguese, the church came to be called the 'Port Kollam Church'.

7) Nilackal:

Nilackal, which means nilam stone, was a prominent merchant town in ancient Kerala. The whole district was an industrial belt in which silk and gold manufacture flourished. The mountain route of trade between Kerala and Tamil Nadu passed through Nilackal. St Thomas and Habban took the same trade route. The prosperous town of Nilackal had to bear the brunt of the internal politics of the Cheras and the Pandyas and the 100 years of war between the Cheras and the Cholas in the 10th century A.D. left the eastern and central part of Kerala the worse off for it.

The civil war from 1311-1315 led to the destruction of Nilackal and St Thomas Church and of the merchant Christians. The fleeing Christians migrated to Ranni, Ayiroor, Kanjirappally, Chenganoor, Venmany, Thumpamon, Kadampanadu, Kayamkulam and Travancore. Many of the churches in central Travancore claim their origin from the Christians who had migrated from Nilackal.

The present day *'Nilackal St Thomas Church and the Ecumenical Centre Trust'* was shifted from its original place to a site fixed with the consent and concurrence of the Hindus of the land, and also houses an ecumenical centre. Nilackal church is a great historical monument of the peace mission of the Bishops. The Nilackal

ecumenical centre is working towards reuniting the Christians the way they were united in 1314 when Nilackal was destroyed.

Post 1314, the Indian Christian Church has undergone several divisions due to the 1495 Wuttenberg thesis and Protestantism. The arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498 and the Portuguese separated the Latins and the Syrians. The Christian Church in India underwent further division due to the enactment of the 1599 Synod of Diamper, and the pledge of Coonon Cross in 1653. The arrival of Bishop Mar Gregorious in 1665 divided them further. The reform movement of Abraham Malpan and the 1886 Royal court judgement divided the Indian Church further, and over the years a thousand other divisions have taken place.

The Nilackal Ecumenical Centre has unified the divisions, which happened in the Church, post destruction of Nilackal. Today the St Thomas Churches are in the hands of individual churches — the Palayur church with Syro Malabar, the Kottakav with the Latin Catholics, Niranam with the Orthodox Church, and Kodungallur with the Carmalite order. Hopefully the churches in the future will overcome their differences, whereby seven ecumenical centres are built in all the seven St Thomas churches, with the church of Nilackal being looked upon as a role model.

Malayattoor (Pontifical Shrine, International Pilgrim Centre)

Malayattoor 'Kurismudi' (Mount of the Cross) is at a height of 1269 feet. It is the place where travelling from Mylapore to Palayur, St Thomas retired for prayers and to seek

solace, whenever faced by hostile aboriginals of Malayattoor, as he tried to preach to them about Jesus and the one God. The 'kurismudi' is sanctified by the footprint of the saint. It is believed that a golden cross was found in the place where St Thomas had made the sign of the cross.

Centuries later the hill tribes known as Nayadikal, Malankudikal and Malavedar used to go hunting in the Malayattoor hills where they spotted the golden cross on the rock. They tried to remove it with some weapon. To their astonishment they found the golden cross sweating blood. They also noticed footprints and knee mark. Wonderstruck they reported the matter to the Christians in the valley. The believers went up and venerated the cross. That was the start of the pilgrimage to the mountain.

A church was constructed in 900 A.D. on the banks of the river 'Periyar' for the pilgrims, who came sailing by the river. And a shrine was built atop the mountain where the cross was found. The wall of the Shrine bears the marks of attack by wild animals. The present shrine was built in 1893.

The place where the golden cross was found is now covered to preserve it. There is a statue on the way to the mountain placed on a rock inaccessible to wild elephants. From there the believers begin their upward journey of 2.5 kms. There is a 10 ft deep well near the shrine. It is widely believed that St Thomas used the water from this well to quench his thirst during his stay on the mount. Today, the well water is used by pilgrims as medicine.

The pilgrims go up to the cross meditating on the sufferings of Christ. Aiding this meditation is the

representation of the 14 stations of the Way of the Cross across the span of about a mile. Large numbers of people come in the Lenten season, especially on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter and on the First and Second Sundays after Easter.

Ascending the mountain, is no easy task. Yet thousands of pilgrims, young and old, including men and women and the sick trudge their way up the mountain to seek spiritual solace. They make their way up reciting the invocation "Ponninkurisumala muthappaa ponmala kayattam!" (O! Saint of the holy Cross! Help us to ascend the holy mountain); and as they descend, they exclaim "Ponninkurisu Muthappaa Ponmalayirakkam!" (O! Saint of the holy Cross, help us descend the holy mountain). They come fasting and praying as an act of penitence in order to plead for favours, or as an act of thanksgiving for favours received as the case may be.

The mountain is very attractive. Its natural beauty is inexpressibly appealing. No wonder, St Thomas chose this place, there to raise his heart up to God! It is a place of peace, solitude and beauty.

9

St Thomas Mount:

After establishing seven churches/communities in Kerala under the benign patronage of the Kings of the time, St Thomas crossed over to the Coromandel Coast of India's Eastern seaboard. Chennai and its suburbs are closely connected with St Thomas, he had his ministry centred around Mylapore (present San Thome). According to tradition the Apostle moved to the Little Mount to pray and hide in a cave. This cave can still be seen. St Thomas also used to retire to a nearby hill (present St Thomas Mount) to pray in silence in front of the cross, which he himself had carved on the rock. It was here that he was pierced by a lance in the back, thus dying a martyr for Jesus Christ, shedding his blood as he fell on the cross.

The same cross, which was later in the 4th century touched up by a certain devotee and artist from Syria, was discovered while digging the foundation for the present church in 1547. A Portuguese priest, Fr Casper Coelho who was buried there on 23 March 1547, built the present church. Dedicated to "Our Lady of Expectation", the

church had suffered much damage during the invasion by Hyder Ali, but Fr Casper Coelho had it repaired.

The cross, carved by St Thomas, is presently seen in the middle of the altar of the Shrine of St Thomas. This cross, which, according to historical records, has sweated blood and water on the 18th day of December every year from 1558 A.D. to 1704 A.D., is believed to be the first St Thomas cross.

Prior to the construction of the "Church of Our lady of Expectation", one Mr Diego Fernandez built a small oratory on the top of the hill in 1523. The side walls of the church have beautiful paintings of the twelve Apostles by Petrus Uscan. The altar also has a painting of Mother Mary, believed to have been painted by one of the Apostles and carried along by St Thomas himself.

San Thome:

St Thomas died a Martyr for Jesus Christ, on a hill (St Thomas Mount) on 3 July 72 A.D. The body of the saint was taken to Mylapore, the area of his ministry, by the order of the local Brigadier Mahadevan and his son Vijayan and buried there. The San Thome Cathedral Basilica stands over his tomb.

The Tomb: The tomb itself was officially opened four times, according to written records:

(1) St Gregory of Tours mentions in his book, *De Miraculis Sanctae Thomae*, it was opened the first time to cure the son of a king, Raja Mahadevan.

(2) The second opening took place between 1222 and 1225, when most of the saint's relics were removed

from Madras (Chennai) to Ortona in Italy, where they are preserved even today.

(3) It was opened a third time in 1523 by the Portuguese, when they rebuilt the ruined church.

(4) The fourth time was in 1729 when Dom Jose Pinharno, then Bishop of Mylapore, opened the tomb to distribute to pilgrims the earth from the tomb — on that occasion a bright light is said to have emanated from the tomb.

History of the San Thome church:

Theodare, a sixth century visitor from Europe, spoke of the San Thome church as "a church of striking dimensions, elaborately adorned and designed".

Pilgrims from England, sent by King Alfred, seem to have visited it in the year 883. The world-renowned traveller from Italy, Marco Polo, travelled here in 1292 A.D. and speaks of it in his journals.

There are reports on this church by Oderic of Pordenone (Papal legate) in 1325, by John de Marignolli in 1349, Nicolo de Conti, another Italian visitor, between 1425 and 1430.

A certain Joseph, from Cranganore, went to Italy and Portugal in 1501. After seeing the splendid churches of Venice, he said that the San Thome Church was comparable in splendour to the church of St John and St Paul in Venice.

However, when the Portuguese arrived in Mylapore, they found the San Thome church in ruins, except for the

small chapel, which contained the tomb of St Thomas. They rebuilt the church in 1523.

In 1893, under Bishop Henrique Jose Read De Silva of Mylapore, this structure was demolished and the magnificent 'Gothic' church was built. The tomb of St Thomas is at the heart of the structure.

The blessing of the church took place on 1 April 1896 and Bishop A.S. Valente, Patriarch of the East Indies consecrated the main altar. In 1956 the church was declared a Minor Basilica. In the Basilica stands an ancient statue of Our Blessed Mother, Mary. The three-foot high statue is also called 'Mylai Matha' in Tamil or Our Lady of Mylapore in English. It was before this statue that the world famous missionary, St Francis Xavier, whose body is exposed for veneration in Goa, used to pray, during his four months' stay in Mylapore in 1545.

The Basilica consists of two structures, the tomb chapel below the Basilica and the Museum-cum-theatre. The new underground chapel, with a separate access outside the church structure, allows pilgrims to pray at the tomb and tourists to visit it without disturbing the functions of the church.

The museum exhibits artefacts connected with St Thomas and the Basilica, and the theatre screens a short video on the life of the Apostle.

Accessibility:

Kodungallur:

From the north: you arrive at Trichur, from where there are buses running every 5 minutes to Kodungallur (running time 1 1/2 hours, distance 40 kms). From Kodungallur 6 K.M. to Azhicode jetty, buses every 5 minutes.

From the South: buses from Cochin to Kodungallur (distance 25 Kms), buses arrive at Munambam across the river. Ferryboats ply every 20 minutes taking you to the shrine side. There are regular buses from Alwaye also.

Note: always ask for *'Marthoma Shrine'*, Azhicode and not St Thomas Church.

Palayur:

From Trichur, board the local town bus for 'Chawakad' and alight at the 'St Thomas Archdiocesan Shrine', Palayur. The shrine is 1 km before 'Chawakad'.

From Cochin/Ernakulam, board K.S.R.T.C. buses

plying on N.H. 17, for Calicut or Guruvayoor and alight at 'Chawakad'; from 'Chawakad' the shrine is 1 km away.

Kottakav/ Paravur:

There are regular buses from Trichur, Ernakulam/Cochin and Alwaye to Paravur.

At Paravur always ask for the 'St Thomas Kottakkavu Forane Church'.

Kokkamangalam:

You reach Cherthala i.e., between Ernakulam (Cochin) from the north and Alaphuzha (Allepey) from the south. From Cherthala you get buses every 15 minutes to the St Thomas pilgrim centre, Kokkamangalam.

Niranam:

One can reach the St Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church, via Thiruvalla or Edathua. After reaching Thiruvalla board a K.S.R.T.C. bus for Niranam via Kadapara, the distance from Kadapara to the church is just 1 km. From Thiruvalla to Kadapara the travel time is 15-20 minutes.]

Quilon/Kollam:

After reaching Kollam bus stand (K.S.R.T.C.) or the railway station, hire an auto asking for the 'Kollam Port Church' or 'Church of Our Lady of Purification' next to St Joseph's school. The travel time shouldn't be more than 7 to 10 minutes. At the K.S.R.T.C. bus stand there is a boat service to other parts of Kerala, organized by the K.T.D.C. which the pilgrim would probably like to avail of.

Nilackal/Chayal:

The new Ecumenical Nilackal Church is near the famous Hindu pilgrim centre, Sabarimala. To reach there you can go either via Kottayam or Kollam. From Kottayam or Kollam board a bus for Pamba which goes via Pattanamthitta. From Pamba the Nilackal Ecumenical Church is about 5 km away.

Malayattoor:

You can reach from Trichur, Cochin or Alwaye via Angamally to Malayattoor. Then walk up the 2 - 3 km mountain stretch to reach the shrine.

Travel time: 40 – 45 minutes.

St Thomas Mount:

From Chennai central railway station reach Parry's bus stand and from Parry's board bus going towards Tambaram and get down at St Thomas Mount. Or you can travel by local train. Board the train from the Park or Beach railway station for Tambaram and alight at St Thomas Mount Railway station and hire an auto for the Mount.

Santhome:

From Chennai central railway station, take any bus to Parry's bus stand and from Parry's take bus No. 21E, 21D and 21N and get down at Santhome stop.

A Happy Pilgrimage
To
All My Readers!

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Rabban Song

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Brochures:

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ii) Kokkamangalam, Apostle St Thomas Pilgrim Centre.

iii) Santhome Cathedral Basilica.

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Adv. Vijayan Bhaskaran is actively involved with Christian Workers Movement, India since 1992. And through this movement he has been working for the empowerment of unorganized labourers and women focusing specially on child labour.

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