

# THE PILGRIM CHURCH



Israel set out from Egypt. Their minds were filled with the memory of God's wonderful deeds that brought them liberation from slavery in Egypt. They ate the Passover Meal in haste and started off to the Promised Land of Canaan. In the midst of the sea, the Lord prepared a way for them and they walked on the sea as on dry land. God was with them all through, during the day take a pillar of cloud and during the night like a pillar of fire. God looked after them during their journey providing them manna and locusts to eat, and water to drink. Under the able leadership of Moses and Joshua they journeyed like a pilgrim people to the promised land of Canaan.

### **The Land of Canaan is a Symbol of the Kingdom of God**

God had promised that He would give a land flowing with milk and honey to the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:7). It is to this land of Promise that Moses was leading God's people. They reached this land of promise at the end of a very painful Journey. They journeyed through the desert bearing the heat of the day and the biting cold of the night for forty long years. They had to face the attacks of the enemies, hunger, starvation, sickness and death during this long journey. Yet they continued their journey putting all these trust on God. **The land of Canaan or the promised land is a symbol of the kingdom of God.**

## The Pilgrim Nature of the Church

Christian life is a pilgrimage; it is a journey from the slavery of sin leading to the heavenly Canaan, a land of promise. A pilgrimage is a journey towards a holy place or a place of religious significance. It is usually a journey undertaken with many difficulties. But, by the end of the pilgrimage when we reach the holy place, it will be a wonderful experience of joy and delight. In the same way our pilgrimage to heaven involves many difficulties and trials but at the end, when we reach heaven we enjoy eternally the bliss of the Paradise. Heaven is the real and perfect experience of salvation towards which the entire humanity moves with eager longing. This salvation is made possible through Jesus and in Jesus. Jesus revealed to us that there are many rooms in His Father's house and that he would take us there. (John: 14:2-6). Hence, Christians are a people who move forward with eager longing for heaven and the bliss of Paradise. It is this hope of eternal life, which gives meaning to Christian Life.

## Christian Life is a Foretaste of Heaven

Christian Life means our union with Jesus Christ. It is a state in which we are in Christ and He is in us. A complete and final realization of this union with Christ is heaven. We will see God face to face in heaven and we will live in union with Him eternally enjoying beatific vision. As Pascal the apostle says, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Life in heaven as something spiritual, having nothing to do with flesh and blood or other material realities. There will be no desires of the flesh in heaven, as life in heaven is spiritual. While here on earth, in real Christian life, we can have a fore taste



of heaven, provided we live according to the promptings of the Spirit. Peace and happiness are the fruits of the Spirit which the presence of the Holy Spirit ensures in our lives. Enjoying peace and happiness here on earth through the presence of the Holy Spirit, is an experience of heavenly life – only in small measures here, but this is full measure.

## **Death: The Gateway to Eternity**

It is God's will that man must die and after death subject himself / herself to God's judgment. The Old Testament presents death as the natural end of man (Job 5:26). Death is also depicted in the Old Testament as the power that takes away life. It is the time when the soul returns to God, its source (Ecl. 12:7).

The New Testament takes a fresh look at death and gives it a new meaning. It teaches us that we have gained eternal life through Jesus Christ who conquered death. What we are concerned about here is not physical life, but spiritual life. In St. Paul's view, death is a gain as it is a passage from the mortal nature of man to the immortal, eternal glory. It is a Passover from what is corruptible to what is incorruptible, from what is earthly to what is heavenly.

## **Individual Judgment and Final Judgment**

The Church is clear in her teaching about life after death. It contains her views on individual judgment and final judgment. The separation of the soul from the body is death. The body gets decayed in the soil but the soul, at the very moment of death, appears before God, to be judged individually, according to each one's life and conduct. We call this the individual judgment.

The final judgment is the one in which the just and the unjust are going to be separated finally and eternally. St. Mathew the Evangelist gives us a complete and vivid depiction of the final judgment. "Before Him will be gathered all the nations and he will separates them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.... Then the king will say to those at his right hand, come, a blessed of my father, inherits the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then He will say to those at His life hand, depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... (Mt. 25:31-46).

## **The Final Judgment is the Act by which God Glorifies the Just and Punishes the Unjust**

Conversion is impossible after death. If anyone speaks about preaching the Good News to those who are dead, it is a wrong and superstitious teaching. It is wrong to believe that the souls of the dead wander about restlessly or enter into the body of the living hurting them and persecuting them. With death every individual passes into a state of salvation (heaven) or punishment (hell) or purification (purgatory).

### **The Final Judgment and Glorification**

It is the fundamental faith of every Christian that Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of God the Father, will come to judge the living and the dead.

The Holy Scriptures teaches us about the glorious second coming of Jesus and the sole subsequent final judgment. Questioned by the high priest, Jesus told him, "For now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26:64). On the question of the rising of the dead, St. Paul tells us: "For the Lord Himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thes. 4:16). In the Gospel of Mathew, we read again: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of his glory." (Mt. 25:31).



### **Hell**

The Church teaches that those who deliberately continue to live in mortal sin and opt against God even at the last moment of their earthly life will be rejected. Those

who die in the state of serious sin will be subjected to eternal punishment. The word 'hell' means eternal punishment. Living away from God is hell. Heaven and hell are eternal. There are many references about hell in the scriptures. Jesus tells us not to fear those who can kill the body but can not kill the soul. He warns us to fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Mt. 3:12; 5:22, 29; 10:28).

## **Purgatory**

Those who get converted to God at the last moment, but do not attain to the completion of divine love at the time of their death, are given an opportunity to purify themselves and achieve perfection. This is what we call purgatory. In Syrian language it is called "Bess Purkana", meaning 'a house of salvation.' The souls in purgatory are in the hope of experiencing the complete salvation and the fullness of divine love. This is a time of purification for them before they are admitted to a face to face vision of God. It is not to be regarded as a place, rather a state in which the souls are on their way towards the beatific vision. When they complete their purification they will be in heaven along with the just. The faithful who are on earth can assist the souls in purgatory, through their prayers, particularly the Eucharist, alms giving and sacrifices.

The Holy Scripture gives us some indications about the purgatory. In the Book of Maccabees we read that nothing unholy will enter the presence of God. It also exhorts us to pray for the dead (2 Macc. 12:44-45). Mar Aprem, the Syrian Church Father says, "My brothers, observe my memory thirty days after my death, for the dead are helped through the sacrifices offered by the living."

## **Heaven**

Heaven is the final goal of every believer. It is the hope of heaven that gives meaning to human sorrows and sufferings. Heaven is life with God in the house of God. Jesus opened for us the doors of heaven and He will take us to heaven.

There are many indications about heaven in the New Testament. "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of man" (Jn. 3:13). "We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens..." (Heb. 8:1). Jesus is the way that leads us to the inheritance of His heavenly reward, prepared for us from the foundation of the

world. Jesus said, "...no one comes to the Father, except through me." (Jn. 14:6). Anyone who lives in love can get a foretaste of heaven while here on earth. **We can reach heaven by doing good works moved by faith and love.**

As members of the pilgrim Church, let us continue our pilgrimage and reach our destination, heaven, by doing good to others moved by love.

**Word of God  
to Read and  
Meditate**

Lk. 16:19-31.

**Word of God to Remember**

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also (Jn. 14:3).

**Let us Pray**

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Eternal Father, for the sake of the precious blood of your Son Jesus have mercy on the departed souls.

**My Resolution**

I will pray for the departed souls every day.

**To Think with the Church**

Sitting at the right hand of the Father he is continually active in the world in order to lead men to the Church and, through it, join them more closely to himself; and, by nourishing them with his own Body and Blood, make them partakers of his glorious life. The promise and hope for restoration, therefore, has already begun in Christ. It is carried forward in the sending of the Holy Spirit and through him continues in the Church in which, through our faith, we learn the meaning of our earthly life, while we bring to term, with hope of future good, the task allotted to us in the world by the Father, and so work out our salvation.

(Vat. II, The Church, No. 48).

## To Know the Mother Church

The Bishops who administered the Archdiocese of Angamaly wanted to put into practice the canons of the Synod of Diamper (Udayamperur). This paved the way towards division in the Church. In the mean time Bishop Athanasius from Syria sent a letter to the Archdeacon through some pilgrims. The letter contained the message that he was being sent by the Pope with the power of shepherding the Malabar Church and that the Archdeacon should make arrangements for him to take over the administration of the Church. The Jesuits who were against this movement put him in the ship for Portugal. Hearing this, the Archdeacon and thousands of faithful rushed to the Cochin Port. They were not permitted to see the Bishop. Moreover they sailed the Bishop off without touching the Cochin Port. Greatly disappointed at the conduct of the Jesuits, the Archdeacon and his followers rushed to the church at Mattancherry and tied a tug to the cross in front of the church and holding the tug took an oath that they would not any longer remain under the Jesuit administration. This is the well known 'Koonan Cross Oath' (Koonan Kurisu Sathayam). This took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1653..

## Questions

1. What is the hope that gives meaning to Christian life?
2. How does the Christian life become a foretaste of life in heaven?
3. How can we help our departed faithful?
4. Explain, individual judgment and final judgment.
5. Write notes on : Heaven, Hell.