

THE LITURGICAL YEAR AND CHRISTIAN LIFE



The Lord spoke to Moses: “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: these are appointed festivals of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations. Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a Passover offering to the Lord, and on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread. Similarly, the Lord commanded Moses to celebrate the festival of the first fruits, festivals of weeks, the New Year day and the festival of the tabernacle. (Lev. 23:1-44).

The aim of all these festivals was to recall all the majestic things in the history of Israel performed by our Lord and pay thanks to Him. God wished that their lives should have an inseparable link with Him. Recalling all the significant events in the salvific scheme

of God consummated in Jesus, the Church offers thanks to God through the liturgical year. The liturgical year is designed in such a way as to concentrate on the significant mysteries of the salvation-event extending from the birth of Jesus up to his glorious second coming. Our liturgical calendar is arranged, as we use it now, by Isoyab III (647-657), the then patriarch of the East Syrian Church.

The Importance of Different Seasons

Christians are called for living with a messianic experience partaking in the mysteries of Jesus' life so that they may secure the consequent heavenly bliss. The time-bound commemoration and observance of all these salvific events consummated in Jesus and a life suiting to their spirit, no doubt, would transform us to true Christians. On the basis of the importance of the events in the history of salvation, the liturgical year is divided into nine seasons:

ACTIVITY - 1

Write down in order the names of the liturgical seasons of the Syro-Malabar church. Mention also the salvific events that are remembered in these seasons.

Liturgical Seasons of the Syro Malabar Church

1. **Anciation:** The season of preparation for the birth of Jesus.
2. **Nativity:** The season commemorating the birth of Jesus.
3. **Epiphany:** The season focusing on His baptism.
4. **Lent:** The season of the forty-day fasting, passion and death of Jesus.
5. **Easter:** The season recalling the resurrection and ascension.
6. **Apostles:** The descent of the Holy Spirit and the activities of the Church.
7. **Summer:** The period of the growth of the Church.
8. **Elijah-Cross-Moses:** To recall the Transfiguration and the Second Coming.
9. **Dedication of the Church:** The period to consecrate the Church, Jesus' bride to his Father.

In order to impart the spirit of each season to the faithful, the prayers (propria) of the holy Qurbana and the divine office are arranged accordingly. To grow in the messianic experience, we must live according to the spirit of the different periods of the liturgical year. That is the reason why the Church teaches us to resort to spiritual exercises either emanating from the liturgical practices or agreeable to them.

Annunciation

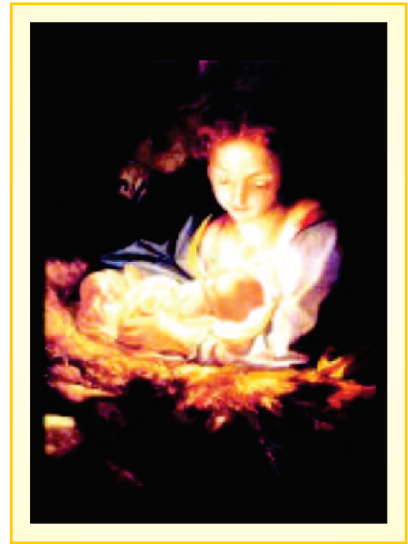
The liturgical year starts with Annunciation. This period is planned to prepare for the birth of Christ falling on 25th December. This period is so arranged that there are four Sundays before Christmas; and the 25-day fasting prior to Christmas is from 1st to 25th December. In Syriac, this period is known as 'Subbara', meaning the 'period of announcements'. The announcement by angel Gabriel to Blessed Virgin Mary was a welcome one to the people awaiting their redeemer. The unconditional love of God for us, despite our sinfulness, is revealed through Christmas. We must repay this love of God by loving God and man unconditionally.



The main topics we meditate upon during this period are the announcement about the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, the birth of John, the creation of man, the disobedience of our forefathers and the consequences, the deplorable state of the fallen man, the promise of redemption by God, the covenant of God with man, and the prophecies about the redeemer. The Church specially reminds us of the negative aspects of sin. To receive the redeemer, repentance and penance are essential. During this period, we remember, in a special way, Blessed Virgin Mary who cooperated wholeheartedly with the mystery of salvation; prayers and hymns in honour of Virgin Mary are special features of the period.

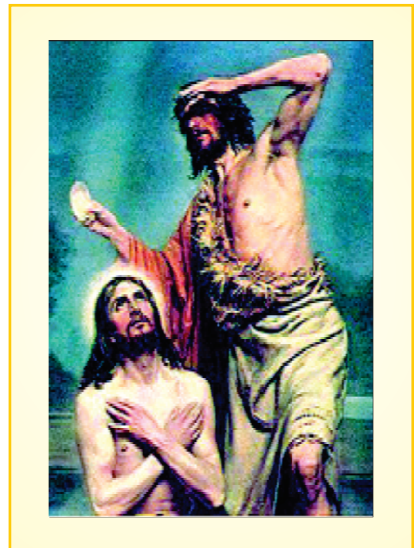
Nativity

The duration between the day of Christmas and the feast of Epiphany is the period of Nativity. The important thoughts for meditation offered for the period are the birth of Jesus, his presentation in the Temple, the visit by the wise men and the escape to Egypt. We must remember, at this juncture, the affection and love of God who sent His Son to redeem mankind despite our worthlessness. The inordinate happiness at the birth of the redeemer, praise and gratitude to God for having sent the redeemer, and our respect for Blessed Virgin Mary are the different sentiments we must give vent during this period.



Epiphany (Denha)

In this period, we specially remember the baptism and the public life of Jesus. This period starts with the feast of Epiphany celebrated on 6th January. The Church has celebrated the feast of Epiphany, since the second century. In Syriac, the word 'Denha' means the sun-rise/ manifestation. During the baptism of Jesus, the sonship of Jesus as well as the revelation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit was revealed to man; we remember these events at this feast. Jesus revealed himself during the public life that followed his baptism. The spirit of this period exhorts us to bear witness to Christ, who revealed God's love wandering all over and doing good to others, and to repay His love. On all the Fridays of this season, we commemorate all those apostles and saints who revealed Jesus to the world. We pray for the dead on the last Friday of this period.



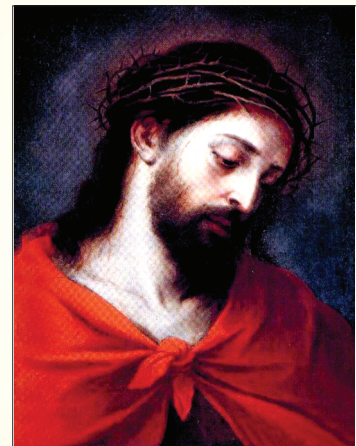
Lent

The season of Lent consists of seven weeks, the days to prepare for Easter, the central event of the liturgical year. This season starts remembering Jesus who frustrated the temptations of Satan. This season is specially allotted to meditate on the mysteries of Jesus' passion and death, besides engaging in doing penance for our sins. The 40-day fasting by Jesus mentioned in the Holy Scripture is the basis for this season of Lent. The first Sunday of this season is known as 'Pethurtha' which means, in Syriac, 'look back'. Our Church observes 50-day fasting from midnight of Pethurtha Sunday until Easter Sunday.

We remember, during this season, events such as the sin of man and its after-effects, the need for repentance and change of mind, the inestimable love and mercy of God to the repentant sinner, and the mysteries of the passion and death of Jesus. This season exhorts us to resort to fasting, prayer and generosity and thus restore power to outlive the ways of evil following the footsteps of Jesus who outlived the temptations and offered himself to God.

Easter

Easter, the most important feast of this season, is the central event of the liturgical year. This season persuades us to participate in the new life secured by Jesus with his resurrection, and to enjoy it. This season has seven weeks extending from the feast of Easter



up to the Pentecost. Heaven was opened by the resurrection of Jesus and consequently the saints entered heaven; and so, the Feast of All Saints is celebrated on the first Friday after Easter. The second Sunday after Easter is known as the New Sunday or the Sunday of St. Thomas. We commemorate on this Sunday the proclamation of faith by apostle Thomas when he saw the resurrected Jesus. The first week of this season is called the 'Week of Weeks'.

The resurrection of Jesus assures our resurrection. "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain" (1Cor.15:14). "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). The season of Easter exhorts us to cherish every moment of our life incorporating the death and resurrection of Jesus, and transform ourselves into the realm of those who are dead to sin and live in Jesus.

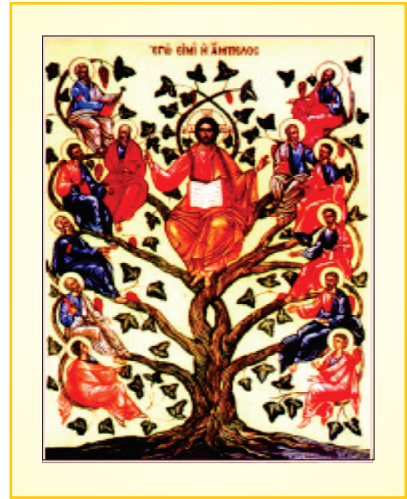
Apostles

This season starts with the feast of Pentecost. We are expected to meditate during this season on the descent of the Holy Spirit, the relation between the apostles and the Church, the spirit of the ancient Church, the missionary nature of the Church etc. The official inauguration of the Church was on the day of the Pentecost. Only after the Pentecost the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, went all over the world with the message of the gospel and laid the foundation for the different communities of the Church. The meaning of the word 'sliha' in Syriac is 'one who is sent'. We who received baptism and chrismation are also sent just like the apostles. This season reminds us that we must be witnesses to Christ by engaging in the apostolic mission of the Church.



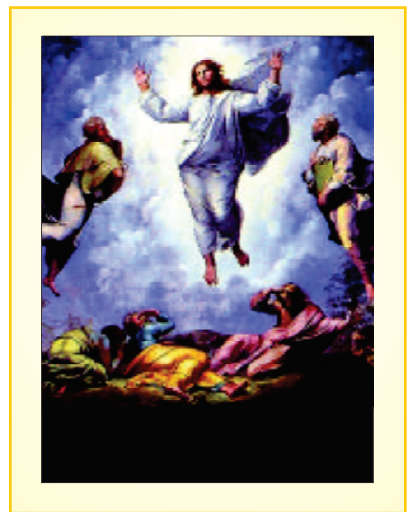
Summer (Kaitha)

The seven weeks after the season of Apostles is known as the season of summer. 'Kaitha' in Syriac language means the summer, the season of harvest.; it is also known as the season of fruits. Here, we recall how the tree of the Church being rooted with the hard work of the apostles and spreading itself far and wide in the world, begot many saints and martyrs, and flourishes . The season starts with the feast of the twelve apostles who were the foundation for the growth of the Church. All those saints who suffered martyrdom for the growth of the Church are commemorated on the Fridays of this season. All the children of the Church should try to attain an interest and vigour to work for the growth of the Church.



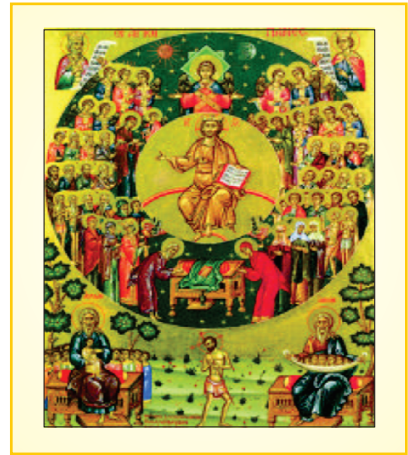
Elijah - Cross - Moses

The feast of the Exaltation of the Cross celebrated on 14th September is the central event of this season .We meditate on the glorious second coming of Jesus with the sign of the cross and escorted by the angels, the end of the world and the Last Judgement. The Church, now, prays for the blessing to welcome Jesus joining with the saints. This season exhorts us to be vigilant against the temptations of the devil and wait for the second coming of Jesus, setting ourselves free of sins. Moses and Elijah who appeared with Jesus at his Transfiguration are also commemorated during this season. The Transfiguration of Jesus is actually the symbol of his second coming. Moses is the symbol of the law and Elijah of the prophets. The ancient Church believed that Elijah would come before the second coming of Jesus (Mal. 4:5) and after an argument with the son of ruination would reveal his mistake to the world.



Dedication of the Church

The last four weeks of the liturgical year constitute this season. This is the season when we recall Jesus dedicating the Church, his bride, to God on doomsday. The feast of the first week of this season is known as the feast of the Dedication of the Church. This season helps us to meditate more on the Church and to configure ourselves with the Church moving heavenward.



Liturgical Year and the Liturgy of Hours

The mystery of Christ, his Incarnation and Passover, which we celebrate in the Eucharist, especially at the Sunday assembly, permeates and transfigures the time of each day through the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, 'the divine praises'. This celebration, faithful to the apostolic exhortations to pray constantly, is so planned that the whole course of day and night is made holy by the praise of God. In this public prayer of the Church, the faithful (clergy, religious, and lay people) exercise the royal priesthood of the baptized. As it is celebrated in the form approved by the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours is truly the voice of a bride conversing with her bridegroom. It is the very prayer of Jesus together with his body to his Father. (Catechism of the Catholic Church. 1174).

**LET US
READ AND
MEDITATE THE
WORD OF GOD**

(1 Pet. 1 : 3 - 12)

A Verse to Remember

“ Grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ”.

(2 Pet. 3:18)

Let us Pray

O Jesus, who offer us the excellent fruits of the redemptive scheme, bless us to live on according to the true spirit of the liturgical year.

My Resolution

I will try to understand the spirit of the different seasons of the liturgical year and live accordingly.

Teachings of the Fathers of the Church

The cycle of the liturgical year and its great feasts are basic rhythms of a Christian's life of prayer.
(Catechism of the Catholic Church 2698)

QUESTIONS

1. List out the different seasons of the liturgical year; also mention the redemptive events signified through them.
2. What are the divine mysteries commemorated in the season of Annunciation?
3. What does the spirit of the season of Epiphany remind us?
4. With which feast does the season of Summer start?
5. What are the mysteries recommended by the Church for meditation during the season of Elijah-Cross-Moses?