

The Apostles Feast

St. Thomas

Founder of the Indian Orthodox Church

St. Thomas is the apostle who brought Christianity to India and is known as the founder of the Malankara Syrian (Indian Orthodox) Church.

St. Thomas is listed as one of the 12 disciples in the Gospel according to our teachers St. Matthew (10:3), St. Mark (3:18), and St. Luke (6:15). In the Gospel according to St. John, four mentions of Thomas the Apostle. First, in John 11:16, when Jesus Christ wanted to visit the then-dead Lazarus, St. Thomas encouraged the other disciples to follow Him: “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” When Jesus famously said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” (John 14:6) He was responding to a question from St. Thomas. After His resurrection, Jesus visited the disciples, but St. Thomas was not there. However, when the disciples told Thomas, he did not believe until he put his fingers through Jesus’ wounds. Finally, St. John notes that St. Thomas was with Jesus and St. Peter in John 21. In this story, St. Peter miraculously catches 153 large fish after not seeing anything all night.

After Pentecost, St. Thomas preached the Gospel throughout the Middle East before arriving in India. During this period, it is said that he baptized the Three Magi who visited Jesus when He was born. Additionally, he accompanied St. Thaddeus when he cured King Abgar. Additionally in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, it is noted that he evangelized Parthia, a city in modern-day Iraq.

Once St. Thomas finished preaching throughout the Middle East, he arrived in the city of Kerala in 52 AD. In Coptic and Ethiopian accounts, he was sold as a slave to a friend of the king named Lukios. One day, Lukios brought St. Thomas to the king of the region at that time. The king first asked what St. Thomas did, and he said that he was a builder, carpenter, and physician. When the king asked about his achievements in each of those careers, St. Thomas said that “The palaces that I built were the souls that have become the temples of the King of Glory; the carpentry that I did was the Gospel that removes the thorns of sin; and the medicines I practiced are the Holy Mysteries which heal the poison of the evil one.” The king became angry and tortured him, but St. Thomas endured the pain. During St. Thomas’ torture, Lukios’ wife fell from the window and died. Lukios came to him and said: “If you raise my wife from the dead, I believe in your God.” Thomas went to the room where the dead body was, and said: “Arsabona (Arsonia), rise up in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” She rose instantly and bowed to the Saint. After this miracle, Lukios, the king’s household, and many in the city were baptized.

While St. Thomas was in India, he was shown in a vision the body of St. Mary being lifted up to Heaven. Upon seeing this, St. Thomas went to Jerusalem, visiting each of the churches he helped establish. When in Jerusalem, St. Thomas asked to see the body of St. Mary, arguing that he did not believe she passed away like a normal human. Some people went to uncover the

body, and when they did not find it, they were perplexed and amazed. St. Thomas told them how he saw the pure body ascending to heaven, carried by angels.

After this, St. Thomas continued his ministry in India. Upon his ministry, he built seven different churches in the towns of (1) Cranganore (Kodungallur), (2) Quilon (Kollam), (3) Palur, (4) Parur, (5) South Pallipuram or Kokkamangalam, (6) Neranum, and (7) Nellakul. It is interesting to note that due to difficulties with Syriac to Latin letter translations, it is also written as Mailapo, Corignalore, Parakar, Erapalli, Kokkamangalam, Niranam and Tiribancore. In these churches, he continued to preach the Word of God until 72 AD, when he was stabbed by pagan priests. We remember the martyrdom of St. Thomas on the 26th of Bashans, or June 3rd. May His blessing be with us all.

Sources:

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