

# LITURGICAL YEAR IN THE SYRO MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH

## INTRODUCTION

The liturgical seasons of the Malankara Catholic Church form the core of her spirituality. The seasons of the liturgical year aim at the ‘*anamnesis*’ (ἀνάμνησις) of God’s work of revelation and redemption in a rhythmical sequence. The Church feasts allow the sequence to be kept in sight at all times. In the Malankara tradition, the liturgical year is centered on the feast of the Resurrection (*Qyomto*).<sup>1</sup> Each Sunday is called *Qyomto*, for it is a weekly celebration of the resurrection of Christ. The liturgical year starts with the Feast of sanctification (*Qoodosh Etho*). The Church has decided that the first Sunday which falls between the 30<sup>th</sup> of October and the 5<sup>th</sup> of November, should be celebrated as the Feast of Sanctification. By celebrating this feast, the Church sets in motion the new Liturgical year.

## LITURGICAL YEAR

In and through the liturgical year, the life of Christ has been publicly portrayed before the faithful. It serves as a means to proclaim the reality of the Incarnation and thus unite the people with Him and grow into His stature. The Church relives the whole life of Christ: Nativity, Baptism, Fasting, Passion, Resurrection, Sending of the Holy Spirit, and finally the Triumph of the Cross. Each phase in the earthly life of Christ, whether Nativity, Baptism, Passion, or Resurrection, includes and anticipates the whole economy of salvation. The celebration of a particular event manifests the divine economy of salvation.

## LITURGICAL SEASONS

The liturgical year can be updated by having seven seasons consisting of seven weeks each. the first two Sundays of the liturgical year namely the Feast of Sanctification (*Qoodosh Etho*) and the Feast of Dedication (*Hoodos Etho*). These two Sundays can be considered as a time for preparation for entry into the Liturgical Year. The rest of the liturgical year can be divided into seven cycles of seven weeks each. In the liturgical year, the calculation of seven weeks

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<sup>1</sup>Varghese, *West Syrian*, 135.

for each season could vary due to the occasional blending of fixed feast and moveable feast. ‘The liturgical year can be divided into a cycle of seven periods (each consisting approximately of seven weeks).’ However, the cycles’ length varies except for the Nativity Fast, Great Fast, and Easter cycles. The following are the liturgical cycles as they are found today:

1. Annunciation / *Suboro* cycle (Six Sundays)
2. Nativity-Epiphany cycle (up to Seven Sundays, depending upon the date of Easter).
3. Great Fast cycle (Seven Sundays)
4. Easter cycle (Seven Sundays including Easter).
5. Pentecost cycle (up to Eleven Sundays, depending upon the date of Easter).
6. Transfiguration-Ascension cycle (up to Seven Sundays).
7. Cycle of the feast of the Cross (up to Eight Sundays, depending upon the *Qudosh edto*).<sup>2</sup>

## **1. The Season of Annunciation/ *Suboro***

The Annunciation cycle is preceded by ‘introductory cycles’ consisting of two Sundays each. The first two Sundays of the liturgical year are the Feast of Sanctification (*Qodosh Etho*) and the Feast of Dedication (*Hoodos Etho*). These two Sundays can be considered as a time for preparation for entry into the Liturgical Year.<sup>3</sup> The term *Suboro* means declaration or announcement. The period of Annunciation or the *Suboro* is the preparatory period for the Feast of the nativity. The preparatory period implies spiritual preparedness, which includes repentance and ‘turning to the Lord.’ Thus, in the earlier days, the entire *Suboro* was a season of fasting. Presently, the twenty-five days fast of the nativity is a part of *Suboro* and begins on 1 December. The cycle of *Suboro* is a preparation for the Feast of Nativity, the guarantee of the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, Nativity has an important eschatological significance. Christ is the one who came and is to come.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. The Season of Nativity-Epiphany/ *Yaldo - Denho***

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<sup>2</sup>*The Sacred Lectionary*, The Syro Malankara Catholic Church

<sup>3</sup>Gregorios, “Liturgical Year and Seasons.”

<sup>4</sup>Varghese, *The Syriac Version of Liturgy of St. James*, 25.

The Season of *suboro* reaches its climax in the birth of Jesus. The *Suboro* cycle is followed by the *Yaldo-Denho* cycle. This cycle begins with the Feast of Nativity. This entire cycle helps the faithful to relive the mystery of the Incarnation in a series of celebrations. The celestial joy pervades the whole season.<sup>5</sup> After the Nativity of Lord Jesus, the main festival is Epiphany. The Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on this day. *Denho* is not only the manifestation of His person, but also it commemorates the revelation of the Trinity.<sup>6</sup> It was at the baptism of Christ that the three persons of the Trinity revealed themselves to the world.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. **The Season of Great Fast** (*Sowmo Rabbo*)

*Sowmo Rabbo* / Great Fast comprises seven weeks including the Holy Week. This Great Fast can be said to be an imitation of the forty days fast of our Lord immediately after His Baptism. This liturgical season puts forward this fasting of our Lord.<sup>8</sup> During this period, Christ is presented as the central point of the fulfillment of the prophecies and the realization of the Old Testament types. The Holy Week re-enacts especially His glorious passion and His passage from death to life at His resurrection. Through baptism, the faithful are grafted into the paschal mystery of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

### 4. **The Season of Easter** / *Qymtho*

This cycle comprises of seven weeks starting from the feast of Resurrection or Easter and extending to the feast of Pentecost. This is a period of joy and exaltation, for Christ is risen from the dead. He conquered death and Satan. He gave life to man through His life.<sup>10</sup> The period of Resurrection demonstrates the glorification of Christ attained through resurrection. This period also focuses on the beginnings of the Messianic community.

### 5. **The Season of Pentecost**

This cycle starts with the feast of Pentecost. The Church is the continuation of Jesus Christ. The Mystery of the Church is manifested in the Cycle of Pentecost, the great theophany of

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<sup>5</sup>Kalluveetil, "Liturgical Seasons," 36.

<sup>6</sup>Aerthayil, *The Spiritual Heritage*, 180.

<sup>7</sup>Moolan, *The Period of Annunciation*, 23.

<sup>8</sup>Pathikulangara, "The Liturgical Year," 180.

<sup>9</sup>Rose, *Church as Mystery and Communion*, 56.

<sup>10</sup>Aerthayil, *The Spiritual Heritage*, 184.

the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> The descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, the preaching of the gospel by them, the hardships they had encountered, and the establishment and spreading of the Church despite all the obstacles are recalled in this period. The Sundays in this season may vary depending upon the date of Easter.

## 6. The Season of Transfiguration

The season begins with the Transfiguration of our Lord, commemorated on August 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>12</sup> Feast of *Shunoyo*, Dormition of the Mother of God (August 15), and Nativity of the Mother of God (September 8) are commemorated in this season.

## 7. The Season of the feast of the Cross / *Sleebo*

The faithful enter into the last cycle of the liturgical year- the period of Cross or *Sleeba kalam* through the feast of the Holy Cross (*sleebo*) is celebrated on the 14th of September, commemorating the discovery of the Holy Cross by Helen, mother of Emperor Constantine. This last cycle has eschatological significance. The Period of Epiphany beginning with the Feast of *Yeldo* and the cycle of the feast of the Cross are inseparable, as both anticipate the Parousia.

## CONCLUSION

One who lives the spirit of the Liturgical Seasons will be provided an in-depth inner experience of the mysteries of Christ, His incarnation, birth, public ministry, death, resurrection, and the Pentecost. Further the faithful will be blessed with an experiential intuition of the mystery of the Church: her birth, growth, fructification, and triumphant transformation into the bride of Christ and the mother of the faithful. The beauty of our Liturgical Seasons is that the whole year can be viewed from the perspective of a single season.<sup>13</sup> the Liturgical seasons take us into the mystical world of the mysteries of Christ and the Kingdom of God. They initiate us into the celestial life already on earth. May the Holy

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<sup>11</sup>Rose, *Church as Mystery and Communion*, 58.

<sup>12</sup>*The Sacred Lectionary*, The Syro Malankara Catholic Church

<sup>13</sup>Kalluveetil, "Liturgical Seasons," 34.

Spirit help us to imbibe the spirit of the liturgical seasons, and appropriate it to our personal life, so that we may become children of the Church.

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