

“Let the little children  
come to me...”

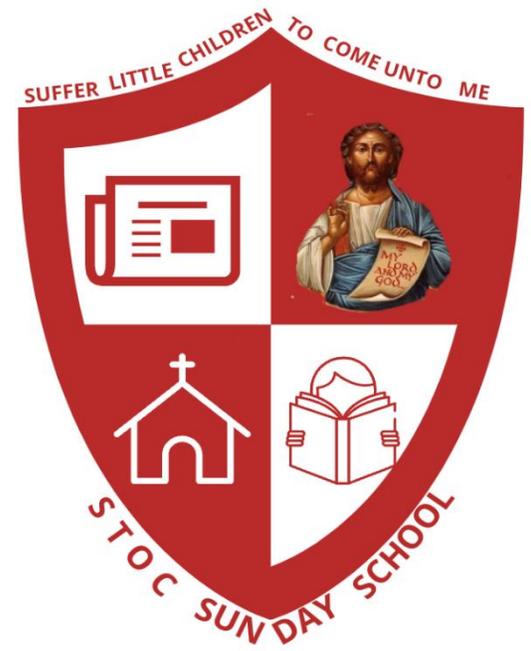
St. Matthew 19:14



SEPTEMBER 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022- ISSUE 4

# STOCSS REFLECTIONS

*A Magazine of the St. Thomas Orthodox  
Church, Toronto, Sunday School*



# REFLECTIONS

## MESSAGE FROM VICAR

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (St. Matthew 19:14)

Greetings in the precious name of our Risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Children are fertile soil in which to plant the seeds of God. They have the amazing capacity to grow spiritually if they receive proper spiritual care and nourishment. Our Lord challenged his adult audience to become like children to inherit the kingdom of God. Children can amaze us one moment and in the next, frustrate us completely. That is why it takes a very special type of person and activity to work successfully with children.

Many times, children’s ministry is not properly valued, but in my opinion, it is one of the most important spiritual ministries of every Parish. If you can confirm a child’s heart for God while they are young and secure it through good teaching and opportunities to explore their talents, you will not lose them when they get older.

I am happy to see that our Sunday School is doing wonderful things such as; the Sunday School forum, OVBS and newsletter (*STOCSS Reflections*) apart from regular classroom activities. May God bless us to continue this.

In the service of our Lord,  
Thomas George Achen

“I WILL BLESS THE LORD AT ALL TIMES: HIS PRAISE SHALL CONTINUALLY  
BE IN MY MOUTH.”  
-PSALMS 34:1

# MESSAGE FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

I hope that you all had a wonderful summer vacation and are excited to begin a new academic year. Our OVBS this year was filled with many blessings and has encouraged our children to participate and grow stronger in their faith. Our theme was "Jesus Heals" taken from Psalms 41:4 which explored the various healings of Christ.

As we learned about the different healing ministries of Jesus, we highlighted the role of faith in drawing each one of us closer to God. The various healings not only highlighted the faith of the individual person who needed healing, but also that of their friends, parents and leaders. Consider following the verses from the prophet Isaiah who spoke about the suffering servant (Jesus Christ) and the pains He would endure for our sake.

***Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.***

**Isaiah 53:4-5**

Jesus has paid the price for our healing through His sacrifice on the Cross, therefore let us put our full trust in Him. Like the faith of the blind men who, when asked by Jesus whether they believe He could heal them, we should put our full trust in Him (Matthew 9:27-28).

As we begin a new academic year with a new curriculum, further resources have been provided for parents, teachers and students to explore. The aim of this new format is to foster spiritual growth in our children beyond the conventional textbook method of learning.

I am looking forward to the new year, as it will open many doors of opportunity for all students. Please be active in your classes and participate in our general Sunday School programs. Have an amazing year ahead, and remember to use what you learn in your classes to impact the world in a positive manner.

With Prayers,

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

## Academic Year 2022-2023

We will begin our new Sunday School Academic year September, 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022. As we have been provided a new curriculum which will be shared amongst both American dioceses, we ask parents and students to review the various resources provided on the following site <http://talmido.org/>. Please ensure your child is registered in the Sunday School to assign them into the appropriate class.

## Children's Forum

We will continue to have our Children's Forum throughout the year. This forum provides an opportunity for our students to share their various musical and creative talents. We plan to host our first forum in November. All students are encouraged to participate in the forum.

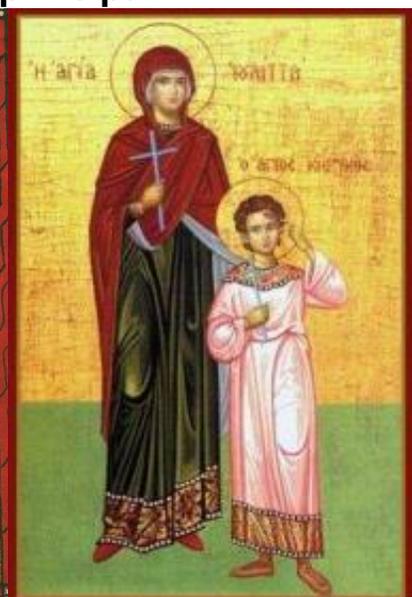
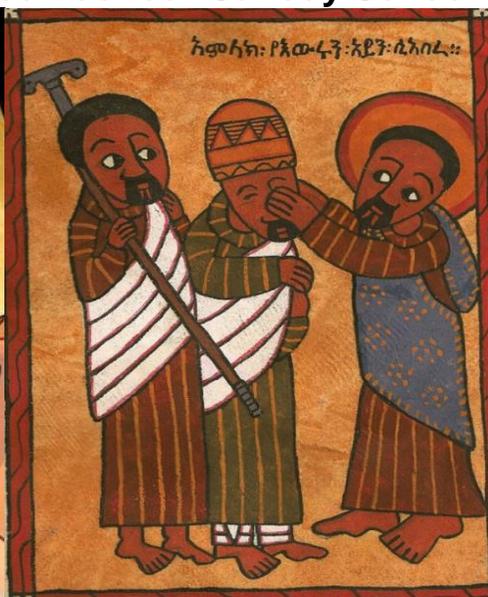
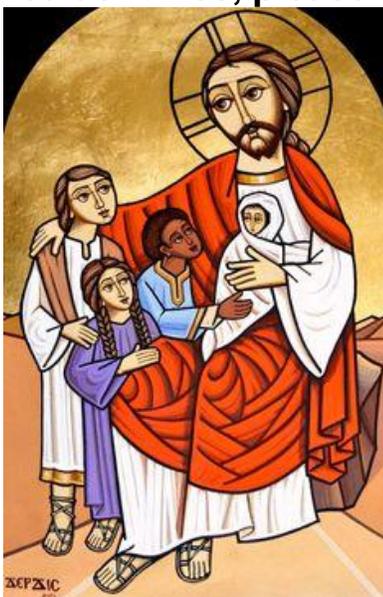
## Liturgical Song Training

We will continue to have our Liturgical Song Training sessions throughout the year. We thank our Choir Director Sujith Abraham and Sneha Varghese for their leadership of during these sessions. All upcoming sessions will be advised via email closer to their planned dates.

## Northeast American Diocese Talent Competition

Our Sunday School will be participating in the Northeast American Diocese Talent Competition in two categories. The Quiz competition will be happening on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, and the Group song on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

**\*We thank our students and parents for their continued support of our various Sunday School Activities. If there are any questions or concerns regarding any of the above-mentioned activities, please contact our Sunday School principal.**



***"THE BEST INHERITANCE PARENTS CAN BESTOW UPON THEIR CHILDREN IS THEIR OWN SPIRITUAL DEVOTION."*** - ST. PAISIOS THE ATHONITE

# CONSECRATION OF NEW BISHOPS

On Thursday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, seven new bishops were consecrated for the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. The consecration service was conducted at St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral Pazhanji which is under the diocese of Kunnankulam. Our Catholicos, H.H. Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews III celebrated Holy Qurbana and lead the Service of Consecration. In February, 2022 during the Malankara Christian Association held in Kolencherry, India, these seven unmarried priests were elected to the episcopate. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, they were professed as monastics at St. Peter and St. Paul Indian Orthodox Church (Parumala Seminary). Thirty-one bishops now comprise the Holy Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Church. A few distinguishing *signs* of authority given to a bishop are the hand cross and the staff. The hand cross is used to bless the faithful and commonly has a long cloth attached to the bottom symbolizing the loving sacrifice made by Christ for all creation. The staff is a



symbol of the bishop's pastoral responsibility to shepherd the faithful. The serpent highlights a few Old Testament accounts surrounding Moses. Firstly, Moses's staff was turned into a snake as a sign of his God given responsibility to lead the Israelites out of Egypt into the Promised Land (Exodus 4:1-4). Secondly, while Israel was in the wilderness, many died due to the venomous snakes they encountered. Moses was instructed to place a bronze snake on a pole so that anyone who was bitten could look upon it and live (Numbers 21: 4-9).

The names of the newly consecrated bishops as per the first photo below from left to right: H.G. Abraham Mar Stephanos, H.G. Thomas Mar Ivanios, H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theophilos, H.G. Geevarghese Mar Philaxenos, H.G. Geevarghese Mar Pachomios, H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Barnabas, H.G. Zachariah Mar Severios. These seven bishops will soon be assigned a specific diocese to shepherd as they administer to the various parishes, clergy and laity under their spiritual care. Let us continue to pray for the entire Holy Synod as they shepherd the faithful of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.



**"WHERE THE BISHOP IS PRESENT THERE IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH"  
- IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH**

# FEAST OF THE HOLY CROSS

Each year on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, the Church gathers to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Cross. The Feast of the Cross (*Sleeba Peruna*), commemorates the finding of the Cross of Christ by St. Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine.



Constantine the Great (280 AD-337 AD), was a Roman emperor known for his military achievements. During the time of Emperor Diocletian (who ruled during the martyrdom of St. George), the Roman Empire was administratively divided with into East and West. Constantius, the father of Constantine governed the Western side of the empire and was eventually succeeded by his son. During the reign of Constantine a civil war occurred between the Eastern and Western parts of the Empire. Prior to his battle with the Eastern emperor Maxentius, Constantine had a great vision of the Holy Cross and was told by this sign he would gain victory. Adhering to the vision, Constantine placed the sign of the Cross on his army equipment and defeated Maxentius during the famous battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD. Constantine would later write the famous Edict of Milan in 313 AD, allowing Christianity to be openly practiced within the empire without the

threat of persecution. Constantine and his mother queen Helen eventually converted to Christianity, providing a period of peace for the Church.

According to tradition, in 326 AD Queen Helen, per instruction from her son, traveled to Jerusalem in order to restore the Holy City. She began removing pagan temples, rededicated desecrated places and eventually was led to Golgotha where she found three crosses. In order to determine which was the life giving Cross of Christ, the body of a dead man was placed upon them. The dead man was restored to life once he was placed on the true cross and a Church was eventually built upon this site.

The Cross is a symbol of our faith in Jesus Christ. As St. Severus reminds us when we sign ourselves with the cross, we are meditating upon the incarnation, death and resurrection Christ achieved for all mankind. The cross is thus more than a piece of wood, more than a decorative ornament and more than a sign of death. It is a mark of God's salvific work to redeem man as we sing on Good Friday, "***We bow before your Cross which brought us salvation and with the thief we cry out, Christ remember us when you come in Glory.***"

Jesus reminds each one of us (as His disciples), to faithfully take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16: 24-26). Each one of us will endure our own personal pains, struggles and burdens which can at times become overwhelming. We may question God. We may wrestle with God. And, we may ultimately even doubt God. It is in the Cross of Christ we remember that God humbled Himself and endured our human weakness in order to show us the way to salvation. The Cross shows each one of us that God is not indifferent or absent during our times of pain, but rather ever present to help carry our personal cross.



# THEOTOKOS IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH- BR. SANJAY MATHEW

“Theotokos” or God bearer is another name the Orthodox Church has given to St. Mary. Her role in the history of salvation is undeniable; through her, Christ was born and became man. The Nicene creed states, “And was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God and became man.” Her role highlights that Christ was fully God and fully man. When St. Mary said, “Let it be to me according to your word”, she was cooperating with God so that His salvific will for humankind could be realised. The Scriptures affirm echo that Christ had to become man so that mankind can be saved. In the Gospel according to Luke, we encounter the story of Simeon. In this story, we see that Simeon, a righteous man, was promised by God that he would see Christ prior to his death. When the young Christ-child was brought to the temple by his parents, Simeon declares, “For mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Luke 2:30). Here, salvation can be attributed to God’s plan to heal humankind from the disease of sin. This is an important aspect of our faith that reminds us of the role St. Mary plays in our salvation. It signifies that it was not a celestial creature like a cherub which brought the Son of God into our world as a man; it was the Mother of God.



When St. Mary consented to God’s salvific plan, she was greeted as the ‘favoured one’. In the Gospel according to Matthew, Christ highlights that my mother is the one who hears the word of God and does it. Mary agreed to God’s plan despite the challenges that came along with that consent. Hence, St. Nicholas Cabasilas states, “She has become equally honoured, sharing the same throne and being one with God.”<sup>1</sup> The Mother of God stands as the first created person to fully realize the potential holiness to which we have all been called. This does not mean that the Orthodox Church accepts the teaching that St. Mary was sinless or the free from consequences of ancestral sin. This type of doctrine would place Mary in the divine category, to which Christ uniquely as the God-man belongs. What makes the Theotokos exceptional is her willingness to listen to the Word of God and cooperate with it. God did not force Mary to be the mother of His Son. He respected her freedom to accept or reject the Divine plan with which he had endowed the entire human race. Therefore, it is important to remember the role of humankind in the history of salvation, where humans have to consent to God’s plan for them to be healed.

Due to the role she played in salvation, Orthodox Spirituality venerates her. We celebrate feasts of St. Mary to commemorate different events in her life such as: her birth, annunciation and dormition to name a few. When observing our worship services, it can be misinterpreted that the Orthodox Church prays to Mary. The Orthodox worship is based on scriptures, “Let there be no strange god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god” (Psalm 81:9). Hence, we only offer worship to the Triune God. In our worship, we ask St. Mary to pray for us and with us. To intercede means to act as the go-between. Here, we are asking St. Mary and the other saints of the Church to pray to God on our behalf, in order for that same grace they received from Him to be bestowed upon us. In our worship, we honour St. Mary because of the role she played in the history of salvation. We give the same honour God gave her, when angel Gabriel greeted her saying, “Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28).

**“BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN, AND BLESSED IS THE CHILD YOU WILL BEAR!”  
-LUKE 1:41**

<sup>1</sup> On the Dormition of the Mother of God PO 19, 503.

# ORTHODOX VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL-HANNAH VARGHESE

This year our Orthodox Vacation Bible School (OVBS) was held from August 28<sup>th</sup> to September 4<sup>th</sup>. On August 28<sup>th</sup>, Rev. Fr. John Thomas, Vicar of St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church, Jackson Heights, New York, provided an inaugural address for our OVBS. As many of you know, this year's OVBS was conducted online as well as in person from church. The theme of this year's OVBS was 'Our Lord Heals' taken from Psalms 41:4. The theme reinforced the idea that God is the ultimate healer and through Him all things are possible. The online sessions for the Intermediate Class were led by Biji Aunty, Jasmine Kochamma and Manish Achachen. During our sessions we focused on the various healings of Jesus which highlighted the faith of both the ill person



along with that of their family and friends. I enjoyed the various games we played which made learning more fun. On Saturday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, we had an in-person session from church where Sujith Uncle and Sneha Chechi taught us the songs for our concluding programme. Also, during this session Rev. Dn. Immanuel (Amal) Punnoose led a meditation focusing on the importance of healing and prayer. The meditation taught me that our faith does not promise days without pain but provides us with the hope of healing. Our in-person session concluded with a love feast. On Sunday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, after Holy Qurbana we began the concluding programme which included: our group song, individual class presentations and the distribution of the OVBS certificates for both students and teachers. The programme concluded with a traditional procession around our neighbourhood. Students held the OVBS banner, wore crowns and badges, all while we joyfully shouted, "Jai, Jai OVBS!"

This past week of OVBS turned into one of the best weeks of the summer. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Rev. Fr. Dr. Thomas George, our Sunday School Principal Justin uncle and all the Sunday School and OVBS teachers for making this a blessed and memorable experience for everyone. Thank you.

**Lord, look upon my weakness  
For I have sinned greatly and have angered You  
And find no refuge  
I approached the physicians  
Who tried medicines on me but the abscess  
Remains infected  
Good Physician, I have heard  
That he who approaches You receives Your help  
With Your medicine  
By the love of Your Father  
And the pray'rs of Your mother-Halleluiah  
Forgive all my sins.**

**-Monday Compline (Qolo)**

**CLICK THE BELOW IMAGE  
TO HEAR THE AUDIO**



# CHURCH PILGRIMAGE- MR. DIGNO JUSTIN

On August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022, our church conducted the first pilgrimage of the year to two Churches



which are famous in Ontario. The first location we visited was Sacred heart of Jesus Church and the second was Our Lady Of Marmora - Greensides Farm. We also made a quick stop to the Peterborough Liftlocks. The pilgrimage was attended by around 30 people, which started at 8:00am and concluded by 7:30pm.

**Sacred Heart of Jesus** - Father Thomas Davis was the first priest who was born and ordained in Kingston. He laboured and was loved in this district for 30 years. In 1875-76 Fr. Thomas Davis built a wonderful red brick church in Marmora. In 1903 the beautiful brick

church in Marmora was hit by lightning and burned down with all its contents. In 1904 Father Murtagh directed his courageous flock in building the stone church that now stands.

## **Our Lady Of Marmora - Greensides Farm -**

One of the main missions to do while visiting the Greenside Farms is to walk around the Stations of the Cross. They consist of fourteen different pictures. At each station, you stop to reflect on the agony that Jesus took upon Himself to save us from our sins. It helps us to realize the true pain and suffering that Jesus underwent for us that we might otherwise take for granted. These Stations take us back in time to when Jesus was condemned to death through His Crucifixion. Processing around the Stations of the Cross serves as a remembrance and a true offering that we can give back to God.



Ann-Marie Greensides said, “Many tell us how wonderful they feel after they have prayed at the Stations of the Cross. They tell us of the personal experiences that they have had. But what we mainly feel about our farm is that it is a place of prayer, peace and love, and that all who visit it have come to be spiritually enriched by our Blessed Mother.”

***“LET NOTHING BE TAUGHT TO CHILDREN EXCEPT THOSE WHICH NOURISH THE SOUL AND MAKE ONE A BETTER PERSON.”*** — ST. CYPRIAN

**MEDIA GALLERY-CLICK [HERE](#) TO VIEW THE PHOTOS/VIDEO**



# ACTIVITIES

Each number stands for a letter of the alphabet. Write the correct letter in the blank to find the coded words and phrase.

**BELOW ACTIVITIES TAKEN FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL ZONE:**

<https://sundayschoolzone.com>

## Code key

A 1	J 10	S 19
B 2	K 11	T 20
C 3	L 12	U 21
D 4	M 13	V 22
E 5	N 14	W 23
F 6	O 15	X 24
G 7	P 16	Y 25
H 8	Q 17	Z 26
I 9	R 18	

13 21 4

16 15 15 12

19 9 12 15 1 13

19 9 7 8 20

23 1 19 8

9 23 1 19 2 12 9 14 4 1 14 4

14 15 23 9 3 1 14 19 5 5

## Spot the Differences in The Story of the Lost Sheep

Compare the picture on the left with the picture on right. Circle the 13 things that are different.



## Important Links:

Indian Orthodox Sunday School Northeast American Diocese - <https://nesundayschool.org/>

IOSS NE American Diocese Facebook Page - <https://www.facebook.com/IOSS.NEAMERICANDIOCESE/>

Ministry of Liturgical Resource Development - <https://www.youtube.com/c/LiturgicalResourceDevelopment/videos>

Orthodox Terminology - <https://stgregorioscathedral.com/orthodox-terminology>

Project Graphē (Fr. Rijo Geevarghese) - <https://projectgraphe.wordpress.com/>

## Priest, an Icon of Christ

