



Assyrian Church of the East
Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand, and Lebanon

Episcopal Consecration Celebratory Dinner

Greenfield Park, New South Wales, Australia

Guest of Honour

His Holiness Mar Gewargis III Sliwa
Catholicos-Patriarch

of the

Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East

6:30pm, Sunday 26 May 2019

Edessa Reception

7-9 Greenfield Road, Greenfield Park New South Wales 2176

[insert photo]

His Holiness Mar Gewargis III Sliwa
121st Catholicos-Patriarch of the East
Apostolic See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon

Table of Contents

Programme	<i>4</i>
Guests of Honour	<i>6</i>
Abridged Biography	<i>7</i>
Biography of Rabban Abraham The Great	<i>10</i>
A Historical Overview: Assyrian Church of the East	<i>13</i>
Important Church Knowledge – In Brief	<i>19</i>

Programme

6pm

Piano Performance

Rev Dn Ninos Babisha

6:30pm

Processional Entry of Official Party

Australian, Assyrian National Anthems and Church Anthem

Cathedral Choir

Directed by Rabi Alexander (Shoora) Michailian

Welcome – Master of Ceremonies

Rev Dn Michael Rasbo

Invocation

His Holiness Mar Gewargis III Sliva

Catholicos-Patriarch

Felicitation

Mr Wilson Younan

Sydney, Australia

Felicitation

Mr Praidon Darmoo

London, England

Hymn

Cathedral Choir

Directed by Rabi Alexander (Shoora) Michailian

Special Presentation

Dinner

Quartet Performance

Ms Maria Isaac (violin), Mrs Catherine Nona (violin), Mr Ashur Varde (viola), and Mr William Tran (Cello)

Address

*His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM
Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand, and
Lebanon*

Address

*His Grace Mar Avraham Youkhanis
Bishop of the Diocese of Western Europe*

Hymn

*Cathedral Choir
Directed by Rabi Alexander (Shoora) Michailian*

Keynote Address

*His Holiness Mar Gewargis III Sliva
Catholicos-Patriarch*

9pm

Closing Remarks – Master of Ceremonies

Rev Dn Michael Rasbo

Departure of Official Party

Guests of Honour:
Prelates of the Assyrian Church of the East

His Holiness Mar Gewargis III Sliwa
Catholicos-Patriarch

His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM
Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand, and Lebanon

His Grace Mar Awa Royel
Bishop of California and Secretary of the Holy Synod

His Grace Mar Yohanan Yousip
Auxiliary Bishop of India

His Grace Mar Awgin Kuriakose
Auxiliary Bishop of India

His Grace Mar Narsai Benjamin
Bishop of Iran

His Grace Mar Paulus Benjamin
Bishop of Eastern United States of America

His Grace Mar Abris Youkhanan
Bishop of Erbil and its Environs

His Grace Mar Benyamin Elya
Diocese of Victoria and New Zealand

His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis
Diocese of Western Europe

Abridged Biography

His Grace Mar Awraham was born on the Feast of the Epiphany (6 January) in the year of our Lord 1989, in Basra, Iraq; to parents Dr David Youkhanis and Mrs Moren Alexander Youkhanis. His Grace is brother to two siblings, an older brother, Mr Nenos Youkhanis and his wife Mrs Ninorta Youkhanis; and a younger brother, Deacon Ramen Youkhanis. His Grace and his family left Iraq in the year 1993, spending two years in Greece, in hopes of finding a new home. They migrated to Sydney, Australia in the year 1995, where they settled and made their new home.

Clerical Ordinations

- Lector on Feast of Hosannas (9 April 2006)
- Sub-deacon on First Sunday of the Hallowing of the Church (5 November 2006)
- Deacon on Commemoration of Mar Yousip Khnanisho (8 July 2007)
- Priest on Seventh Sunday of Summer (22 August 2010)
- Chorbishop on Sixth Sunday the Great Fast (2 April 2017)
- Archdeacon on Third Sunday of the Resurrection (5 May 2019)
- Bishop on Sixth Sunday of the Resurrection (26 May 2019)

All clerical ordinations noted above were conducted by His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM, Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon.

Church Service

- Joined St Hurmizd's Cathedral choir at the age of 12
- Student at Rabi Alexander (Shoorā) Michailian's community violin school from the age of 12
- Secretary to the Metropolitan Mar Meelis Zaia AM from 2010-2019
- Youth and Children's Associations Chaplain from 2010-2019
- Chaplain at St Hurmizd's Assyrian Primary School from 2010-2012
- Chaplain at St Narsai Assyrian Christian College from 2012-2013
- Director on The Assyrian Schools Board from 2010-2019
- Secretary to the Family Tribunal from 2018-2019
- Member of the Commission of the Middle East of the New South Wales Ecumenical Council from 2015-2019

Education

- Primary Education, 1995-1996, Fairvale Public School
- Primary Education, 1997-2000, Prairievale Public School
- High School Education, 2001-2006, St Johns Park High School
- Bachelor of Architectural Studies, 2007-2010, University of New South Wales
- Master of Arts in Early Christian and Jewish Studies, 2011, Macquarie University

- Postgraduate Certificate of Arts in Ancient History (Research), 2012, Macquarie University
- Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies, 2012, Australian Catholic University
- Master of Theological Studies, 2013, Australian Catholic University
- Diploma of Language Studies (Classical Syriac and Classical Hebrew), 2012-2013, The University of Sydney
- Doctor of Philosophy in Ancient History (Thesis title: *Critical Edition and Translation of 'Abed-Mšĥā Ĥirtāyā's 'The Book of Admonitions to Hermits and Monks' with Commentary and Analytical Notes*), 2013-current, Macquarie University

Rabban Abraham The Great (491-586 AD)

From 'The Nestorian Fathers' by Mar Aprem (2002)

The Church of The East is known as a church of great martyrs. It is also reputed for producing great many missionaries. The present chapter deals with another once glorious picture of the Church of the East. As we do not have monasteries at present, we do not know, much about the old monks who were mainly responsible for the glory of our church in the past, as a source of spirituality. Here we are going to have a look at one of these great monks.

Rabban Abraham was born in 491 or 492 A.D., in Mesopotamia at Kashkar, south of Seleucia Ctesiphon. He is said to have been baptised in 502 A.D., during the reign of Mar Babai, the Patriarch who died in 502 A.D. He was educated at Nisibis which had already earned high reputation as a great centre of learning under the leadership of Mar Narsai, "the Harp of the Holy Spirit." Abraham was privileged to study at Nisibis under another Abraham, the nephew of Mar Narsai. After his education at Nisibis he went to a place called Herta where he converted some of the idolatrous natives to Christianity. Then he proceeded to the Egyptian desert to learn the rules of monastic life from that great centre, especially at Mount Sinai. After visiting various centres there Abraham returned to Nisibis to begin his monastic career.

At Mount Izla near Nisibis, Abraham began to dwell in secret. But his fame began to spread through his miracles. Thus he got disciples who later became founders of the monasteries in the lands of "the Babylonians, Persians and

Assyrians." Multitudes of monks came to him from every quarter. Thus he restored the famous monastery of Mount Izla which was first established by Mar Augin. The great principles that were to guide all the monks of our church began to spread from here. Mar Abraham invented a distinguishing mark for the monks of our church to "have their heads shaved liked a crown".

It is interesting to note that Mar Ilyas, Bishop of Marga of the 9th Century A.D. begins the history of the monks with Mar Abraham. He does not record the history of Mar Augin who brought monasticism from Egypt to Mesopotamia. He opens his first chapter saying:

Now as God of old brought out the blessed Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and made him, by faith, the father of a multitude of nations, so also, he spread abroad and made to increase this holy habit of the solitary life in all the country of the East, by the hand of the spiritual man, worthy of Abraham in name, and country, and deed whom He established to be the father of the army of the virgins and men of abstinence.¹

If Mar Augin is the first founder of the Monastic life of our Church, Rabban Abraham is considered as the second founder. The later developments of the monastic movement owe its origin to Rabban Abraham of Kashkar. So he is rightly called Abraham the great because he is a great leader and "father of monks." He died at the very old age of 95 in 586 A.D. According to Wallis Budge the translator of the monastic history of Mar Thoma of Marga, the famous Roman Catholic scholar Assemani has confounded this Abraham with another Abraham of Kashkar who lived at

¹ Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, pp. 37, 38.

Hazzah, near Arbil in Adiabene, where he lived until his death which took place thirty years later.

About his fame and prominence during his life time, Thomas of Marga records:

And as formerly everyone who wished to learn and to become master of the heathen philosophy of the Greeks went to Athens, the famous city of the philosophers, so in this case, everyone who desired to be instructed in spiritual philosophy went to the holy Monastery of Rabban Mar Abraham, and inscribed himself in sonship to him.²

The life of Rabban Abraham the Great will be recorded for ever in the monastic history of our church. But he cannot rest content by seeing his name in the pages of the history. What happened to the monastic life of the Church of the East? Where are the monasteries of Mount Izia and Beth Abhe? The present generation should be challenged by the life of Mar Abraham the Great and other holy monks who strengthened the spiritual life of our church in the past. If Abraham is the second founder of the monastic life of our church, we should ask who is going to be the third founder to restore the monastic life of our church to its ancient glory? Are there potential "Abrahams" among us today?

² Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, pp. 41, 42.

A Historical Overview: Assyrian Church of the East

When did it begin?

The Assyrian Church of the East began during the missionary activity which took place in the Apostolic Age. Written records have been traced to the late second century of the Christian era. The numbers of people who belonged to the Church at that time, and the broad area it covered, would indicate that there had been a long period of development and growth, possibly reaching back into the first century and the time of the Apostles. Tradition in the Assyrian Church of the East dates its founding in the middle of the first century.

How did it begin?

The Assyrian Church of the East developed first in what was known as the Parthian Empire, and when that empire was overthrown by the Persians in the third century it continued its development under the Persian government. This was the region lying to the east of the Roman border, stretching as far as to India. The exact location of the Church's first congregations cannot be established from the historical record, but it is thought that it began its most serious development in the region of Kh'dayab (Adiabene) in northern Mesopotamia, spreading from there in all directions throughout the empire. The Assyrian people of upper Mesopotamia have always been an important part of the Church of the East, though historically they were only

one ethnic group among many others within the Church. However, today they represent the single surviving cultural grouping. Though the Church moved far beyond its beginnings in upper Mesopotamia, the language of that region (Syriac) remained the language of the Church, and its vocabulary, with a certain amount of Greek added in, was the source of its characteristic theological formulations.

How is it organised?

The Assyrian Church of the East is governed according to the Apostolic model of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. At the turn of the fourth century (c. AD 310) Papa bar Gaggai, the bishop of the capital city of the Persian Empire, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, organized the bishops of the Church in a form which resembled the model developed in the West. He centralized the administration of the Church under his own jurisdiction and assumed the title “Catholicos of the East.” From that time on, the bishop of the imperial capital held this office. The Catholicos became the presiding bishop over the entire Church, and his dignity and power were subsequently added to in the fifth century when he received the title “Patriarch”. This was done at a general synod called by the Catholicos, Isaac, at Seleucia-Ctesiphon in AD 410. At this synod Marutha, a representative from the Roman Emperor, brought to the assembled bishops the canons and creed of the Council of Nicaea, and they were officially approved and received by the Church of the East.

Historically, the Catholicos-Patriarch governed the general synod of the bishops. The general synod was made up of all “Metropolitans” (Archbishops) and bishops. The

Metropolitans were in charge of provinces, which each contained four to eight bishops. This historic model no longer exists due to the greatly reduced numbers within the Church and the dislocations of its membership. A bishop is considered legitimate if he has been ordained into the Apostolic succession by at least two (preferably more) other bishops who are themselves properly ordained and in full communion with their fellow bishops. A bishop's legitimacy endures only so long as he himself maintains such full communion.

How does it worship?

The Assyrian Church of the East has a sacramental system which resembles the sacramental systems of the Greek and Latin traditions. The Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist are primary, and the Sacrament of Holy Orders affects the other Sacraments. Confirmation is administered with Baptism, and Absolution is a benefit of the Eucharist, though Absolution is also administered separately during a common service of Absolution, and is also administered to individuals, with penance, in the case of serious sin. The Sign of the Cross, Unction, and "Holy Leaven" are defined as additional Sacraments.

The central feature of the worship life of the Assyrian Church of the East is the Eucharist, known in the Syriac language of the Church as the "Qurbana Qaddisha", or "Holy Offering". The liturgy of the Eucharist is attributed to "the Apostles, Addai and Mari, who discipled the East". The liturgy consists of a service for the catechumens and a service for the faithful. The Host is a leavened loaf, and the cup is an equal mixture of wine and water. The baptized

faithful receive the body and blood of Christ under both species of bread and wine, and the “real presence” of Christ is understood in the elements. A priest ordained by a bishop in the apostolic succession is required for the Consecration, and a deacon is required to assist the celebrant. A community of worshipping believers must be present at the celebration.

Baptism is administered to infants of Christian families and to new converts. It is not given to those who, for whatever reasons, enter the Church from other Christian bodies and have already been baptized with a Trinitarian formula. Infant baptisms oblige parents and sponsors to rear the child in the Christian faith and to nourish him or her at the altar and within the community of faith. The baptismal liturgy resembles the Eucharistic liturgy in form. Following an anointing with oil there is a triple immersion in consecrated water in the name of the Holy Trinity, and a final “sealing”, which is Confirmation, with the imposition of hands at the door of the altar. Matrimony and funeral services consist largely of Psalms, anthems, and blessings. They are lengthy, colourful, and emotional occasions, and reflect ancient customs and usages.

What does it believe?

The teaching of the Assyrian Church of the East is based on the faith of the universal Church as set forth in the Nicene Creed. The mystery of the Holy Trinity and the mystery of the Incarnation are central to its teaching. The church believes in One Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It also believes and teaches that the Only-begotten Son of God, God the Word, became incarnate for us men and for

our salvation and became man. The same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was begotten of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity, in a body of flesh, with a rational, intelligent, and immortal soul which he took from the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary and united to himself, making it his very own at the moment of conception. The humanity which he took for his own was assumed by God the Word, who was, thenceforth and for ever, the personal subject of the divine and human natures. His divine and human natures retain their own properties, faculties, and operations unconfusedly, immutably, undividedly, and inseparably.

Therefore, because the divinity and humanity are united in the Person of the same and only Son of God and Lord Jesus Christ, the Church of the East rejects any teaching which suggests that Christ is an “ordinary man” whom God the Word inhabited, like the righteous men and the prophets of old. The Church of the East further rejects any teaching that explicitly or implicitly suggests that there are two Sons, or two Lords, or two Christs in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The same, through his passion, death, burial, and resurrection, redeemed humanity from the bondage of sin and death, and secured the hope of resurrection and new life for all who put their faith in him, to whom, with his Father and the Holy Spirit, belongs confession, worship, and adoration unto ages of ages. Amen.

A summary view

The Assyrian Church of the East began in the late Apostolic age, flourished in upper Mesopotamia, and spread quickly throughout the Parthian (later Persian) Empire. Its language is classical Syriac (Aramaic), its government is Episcopal, its worship is sacramental and liturgical, its theology is according to the Nicene Creed and the teaching of the fathers of the Church, its customs are Semitic, and its present attitude toward other Christians is ecumenical. It exists in greatest numbers in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, but also in Europe, North America, Australia, and India.

Important Church Knowledge – In Brief

Church Title

The full title of the Church is the Holy Apostolic Catholic [Assyrian] Church of the East. The definition of the title is as follows:

Holy: Because all her members are sanctified by baptism and the Holy Spirit lives in them.

Apostolic: Because the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Catholic: Meaning general or universal. The Lord Jesus Christ accepted people of all nations into His fold.

Church of the East: Mainly because it emerged from the East (Mesopotamia) or what was known as the east of the Roman Empire.

* * *

Sacraments

The sacraments of the church, according to the Divine Scriptures are 7 in number:

1. The priesthood; which is the ministry of all the other sacraments
2. Holy Baptism
3. The Oil of Unction
4. The Oblation [Qurbana] of the Body and Blood of Christ
5. Absolution
6. The Holy Leaven, namely the 'King' or 'Malka'
7. The sign of the life-giving Cross

Holy Feast Days

The primary Holy Feast Days of the church are 7 in number:

1. Feast of the Blessed Epiphany
2. Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Holy Easter)
3. Feast of the Ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
4. Feast of Pentecost
5. Feast of the Transfiguration of Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
6. Festival of the Cross
7. Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Holy Christmas)

* * *

Clerical Ranks

The clerical ranks of the Assyrian Church of the East, as the ranks of heavenly hosts [angels], are 9 in number:

1. Lector
2. Sub-Deacon
3. Deacon
4. Priest
5. Chorbishop
6. Archdeacon
7. Bishop
8. Metropolitan
9. Catholicos-Patriarch

* * *