



TREE OF LIFE

DECEMBER 2020

دسمبر 2020

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the third volume of our publication, which also happens to be the second Christmas edition!

Even though 2020 has brought with it a fair number of challenges, it has also been a lesson to many in adapting to our new surroundings. It has also taught us patience, and helped bring families closer together in times of lockdown.

Most importantly, it has taught us to remain hopeful and positive even in the most trying times. These are the key themes we would like to share in this edition, as many of the articles will demonstrate. We hope you enjoy all of the new content that we have put together for you and your families.

Wishing you a very Merry and Blessed Christmas, and a
Happy New Year,

Tree of Life Team

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Archdeacon Yonan

Biography

By Belinda Yonan

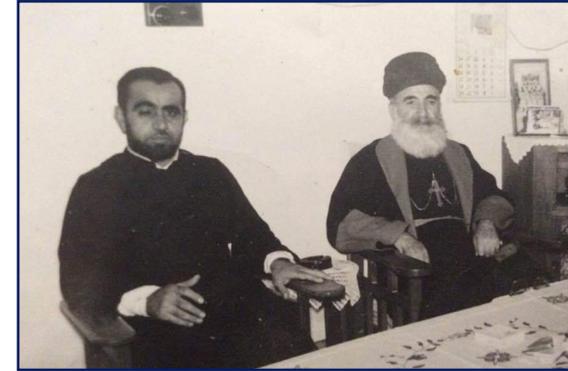


For almost 15 years, the Parish of St. Mary's Church of East had the blessing of being led by Archdeacon Yonan Yowel Yonan; the first priest to lead the Assyrian community here in London. He played a pivotal role in the establishment of a spiritual core in the UK, and set a wonderful example for the Qasheh and deacons who have since followed him. A good friend to H.H. the late Mar Dinka IV, Archdeacon Yonan's kind and gentle spirit inspired respect throughout the ranks of our church. He was very much a part of everyone's family; his involvement meant that many would turn to him for advice and guidance, which he would always have time for, no matter how trivial the problem. His kindness and patience knew no limits, and he would always put other people's needs first. His friendship, while given freely, is one of the things that people would value the most about him.

One of his most admirable qualities was his complete dedication to the church. In over 60 years of service, he gave countless Razeh, Qurbaneh, hundreds of baptisms, several weddings, thousands of stories and jokes, and a lifetime of devotion and friendship. But in over sixty years, what he left us cannot be counted, nor measured, nor valued. For what he left were the beautiful memories and teachings that we will carry with us forever. For that, we are eternally grateful.

Biography

Archdeacon Yonan was born in Simele, Iraq, on 15th of May 1925 to parents Zareh Lachen and Rev. Yowel Yonan. He began his theological studies in Harir, through Mar Yosip Khanisho Metropolitan, and was ordained a deacon on 18th March 1944. Archdeacon Yonan married the late Amina in 1948, and together they made a home in the city of Basrah, where he worked for a British company at the time. They raised 6 wonderful children together during their nearly 70 years of marriage.



Archdeacon Yonan with Mar Yosip Khnanisho in Basrah, Iraq, in the late fifties/early sixties.

He was still working at the British company when he received a note from Mar Yosip, stating: "Shamasha Yonan, I am travelling to Baghdad and would like you to be there as soon as possible in order to ordain you as a priest for Mar Ogin Church in Al-Ma'qal district in Basrah. Rev. Akheqar (of Mar Ogin Parish) will be leaving for Dora, Baghdad, where he will take over as Priest for Mar Gewargis Church." And so, (at the time) Rev. Yonan resigned from his post at the British company. His manager, though sad to see him go, told him "we have good prospects for you here at this company. However, Mar Yosip's position is higher than mine, and I cannot refuse him." His manager wished him all the best, and on the 21st of May 1951, Rev. Yonan was elevated to Priesthood at Mar Qardakh church by Mar Yosip. This story was recounted by Archdeacon Yonan himself.

In 1970, St. Mary's Church (Mat Maryam) was built and consecrated by Mar Yosip in Baghdad; Rev. Yonan was transferred to this Parish, whilst his brother, Rev. Youzadiq took over the Parish of St. Mary in Jamhuriya district, Basrah.

In 1976, H.H. Mar Dinkha IV was consecrated to the level of Patriarch for our holy church. The consecration took place in St. Barnabus Church in London, England. Rev. Yonan was requested to be present at the event, as a representative for Mar Yosip Khnanisho and the church in Iraq. The following Sunday, Rev. Yonan was ordained as Archdeacon by Mar Narsai De Baz Metropolitan, and he was also appointed as secretary of the Holy Synod.



Archdeacon Yonan (centre) with H.H. Mar Dinkha IV, Mar Narsai De Baz Metropolitan and Mar Youala.

Archdeacon Yonan was officially appointed as a priest for our London Parish in 1978; his family moved to England the following year. For a time, services were held at the Assyrian House in South Ealing. Our current church, St. Mary's Church, was purchased in 1989 and consecrated by H.H. Mar Dinkha IV.

Archdeacon Yonan remained the official priest of St. Mary's Parish from 1978 – 1992, and Rev. Stapanos took over in 1993. Archdeacon Yonan continued to carry out his spiritual services where needed, both within London and for other parishes across Europe.

Archdeacon Yonan has been a mentor to many bishops, priests and deacons, who sought his advice and knowledge on theological matters throughout their studies, as he was well versed in theology and the sacraments of our holy church. He was also a member of the committee that communicated with the Catholic Church. He had also taken part as a representative in many congregations and meetings with other churches in England. Archdeacon Yonan was compassionate, and earned

respect from faithful members of the church and clergies of sister churches in London. He was also a prominent figure throughout his days of priesthood in Basrah, as he maintained a good relationship with leaders of other faiths there.

His home was always open to all by his family, especially his late wife Amina. We pray to almighty God to rest his servant's soul in his heavenly kingdom, together with all clergies and saints. We pray that the Lord will say unto him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Matthew 25:21



(Top) H.H. Mar Dinkha IV with Archdeacon Yonan. (Bottom - Left) Archdeacon Yonan meeting Pope Jean Paul II in the 90's. (Right) With his loving wife, Amina.



1978 1992 1993 2007
 2007

1978 1992 1993 2007
 2007

25.21

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فَعْبَعَا إِذْجِدْنَاهُمْ، نَهَبَ جَذَ فَعْبَعَا مَهْرًا جَذَ فَعْبَعَا نَهَبَ
جَذَ مَدْعُومًا بَدُوهُ جَذَ مَدْعُومًا هَجْرًا جَذَ مَدْعُومًا لِبَهْنِهِ جَذَ
فَعْبَعَا وَرَثَتًا وَجَمْعُوهُ

فَعْلِيَّةٌ بَلَدٌ: مَجْرَمٌ وَهُوَ إِذَا كَرِهَ نَحْرَ فَعْبَعَا مَهْرًا كَمَا فَعَّلَا
وَهَمِيضٌ تَجَنَّدَا 15:05:1925.

لِحَدِيثِ جَذَ مَدْعُومًا إِصْبَانًا، فَعَّلَا فَرَدَّ بِسُجْدَتِهِ، بَمَعْنَى تَنَادَا
مِنْهُ تَدُونًا بِسُبُونًا (بُخَارَى).

عَرَبِيَّةٌ هَلَسَتْ، جَبَلًا كَمَا مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلًا كَمَا دَعَا دَعَا لِبَدْوَةٍ
كَمَا جَذَ مَجْرَمٌ مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا.

مَدْعُومَةٌ: جِدَّةٌ تَنَادَا مَعَهُ جَذَ وَجَبَلًا وَجَبَلَتَا فَعْبَعَا
فَعَّلَا نَهَبَ سَنَعْتَهُدَ مَبْلَغَةً لِيَسْلَمَ وَجَبَلًا فَعْبَعَا كَمَا
فَعَّلَا وَجَبَلَتَا.

فَعْلِيَّةٌ هَبَلًا كَذَّبًا وَهَدَنًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا جَذَ مَدْعُومًا
يَتِيًا وَجَبَلَتَا لِيَسْرَ إِذْجِدْنَاهُمْ.

تَجَنَّدَا 1951 لَفْعٌ، فَعْلِيَّةٌ مَدْعُومًا هَبَلًا مَدْعُومًا جَذَ مَدْعُومًا
وَجَبَلَتَا فَعَّلَا نَهَبَ سَنَعْتَهُدَ كَذَّبًا وَجَبَلَتَا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا
فَعَّلَا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا كَمَا جَبَلَتَا.

لَبَنًا هَبَلًا مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا 19:01:19:01: إِذْجِدْنَاهُمْ، نَهَبَ جَذَ فَعْلِيَّةٌ
كَمَا مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا كَمَا مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا
وَمَدْعُومًا فَعَّلَا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا لِيَسْرَ جَذَ مَدْعُومًا فَعَّلَا
نَهَبَ مَدْعُومًا جَبَلَتَا مَدْعُومًا: جَمْعٌ نَهَبَ لَنَا (فَعَّلَا نَهَبَ)

تَجَنَّدَا مَدْعُومًا لِيَسْرَ، نَهَبَ جَذَ مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا لِيَسْرَ
فَعْبَعَا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا مَدْعُومًا (مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا
لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا كَمَا جَبَلَتَا). نَهَبَ جَذَ مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا
فَعَّلَا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا وَجَبَلَتَا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا
جَمْعٌ نَهَبَ مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا
فَعَّلَا وَجَبَلَتَا لِيَسْرَ: لَبَنًا مَدْعُومًا لَبَنًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا

لَبَنًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا
وَجَبَلَتَا مَدْعُومًا. لَبَنًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا.

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تَجَنَّدَا 1970 فَعْبَعَا نَهَبَ فَعَّلَا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا
مَدْعُومًا كَمَا جَبَلَتَا، نَهَبَ مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا
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كَمَا جَبَلَتَا.

تَجَنَّدَا 1976 فَعْبَعَا نَهَبَ فَعَّلَا لِيَسْرَ مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا
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مَدْعُومًا 1978 إِذْجِدْنَاهُمْ، نَهَبَ، مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا
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تَجَنَّدَا 1987 جَذَ مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا مَدْعُومًا
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An Assyrian Christmas

By Josh Coleman

As Christmas makes its anticipated appearance in 2020 to close off what has been a challenging year for us all, we have the chance to thank God for the blessings we have in our lives. Christmas is, above all, a time to recognise faith, family and community; values that are sometimes taken for granted in this fast-paced world. These important values have remained consistent through time, even if some of our customs from the past are now different. Speaking to a number of people who grew up in Iraq, I wanted to find out what a typical Assyrian Christmas celebration looked like for the generations that came before us and who lived closer to our homeland.

Faith underpins the Assyrian Christmas celebration, as such, Shaharta was the main event of the Christmas period back in Iraq. The vast majority of people in Assyrian villages would attend this church service every year as it was such a key part of the festivities. Shaharta takes place over midnight and Qurbana is given out. The service allowed people to be close to God at Christmas time, as it still does for many people today. Another service on the morning of Christmas day would take place, but many would be resting following the late Shaharta; families with young children would be more likely to attend the morning service.

Children were often treated on Christmas day, despite not having the material wealth we enjoy today. Whether handmade by family or bought, most children woke up to a new set of clothes they could wear to the holy raza on Christmas morning. This was a huge part of Christmas for children and something that would be looked forward to with much anticipation. Some children also received small toys or money but receiving new clothes and dressing smartly on Christmas day was very common.

Community has always been a very strong value for Assyrians. On Christmas day people would go from door to door wishing neighbours and

friends a happy Christmas. Houses back in Iraq tended to be smaller than what we enjoy today, so people would come and go frequently, stopping for a short time and enjoying some kadeh and maybe a glass of arak. Assyrians are very welcoming people, making sure to pay everyone a visit at Christmas and happily welcome them into their homes.

In the UK we celebrate Christmas with a roast dinner with our families and friends. For Assyrians in Iraq, the food was also a key part of the Christmas celebration, but the type of food was different. Traditional food was normally enjoyed at Christmas, like dolma, kipteh and riza shirwa, and for something sweet: kadeh and kilecheh. One person recounted how the local bakery in their village in Iraq allowed them to use their large ovens to cook the trays of kilecheh, that they then shared with those who came to visit on Christmas day.

The one thing that stood out when I spoke to people about their memories of Christmas back in Iraq was that everybody was happy, and they were far less materialistic. People had a similar standard of living and were content with what they had. Despite living in a different place and time, their welcoming Christmas spirit is something we can try to embody this Christmas. After an isolating year, faith, family and community are values we must hold onto tightly as we enter 2021.

Virtual Graduation - 2nd Annual Ceremony

By Sara Odisho-Darmoo



After a successful inaugural Graduation Ceremony last year, we at ACEYA were very sad not to be able to host it again this year (thanks Covid).

But as has been the norm for 2020, modern technology saved the day!

Through our Facebook (ACEYA London) and Instagram page (aceya.london) we celebrated our incredibly talented youth who completed milestones in their education. A video presentation was posted to our pages and we were delighted with the response! 5k views, 93 shares and too many likes and comments to count.

Each Graduate received a certificate of recognition in a presentation folder along with a cross-shaped medal designed by His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis. Packages were posted to each graduate.



Felicitation by our Diocesan Bishop, His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis

We take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to our wonderful community for their support and expression of love and well wishes to our graduates.

Our video opened with a speech from our Diocesan Bishop, His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis, who extended his congratulations and expressed his deep pride for our graduates and wider youth community.

His Grace reminded us of St Paul's words to the Philippians, that all our works are and should be for the glory of God, so that He will be pleased with us. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6

His Grace's felicitation was followed by a slideshow of all our graduates and closed with a heartfelt message from one of our University Graduates and Club Assyria Captain, Edward Simon, who received his Bachelor of Dental Surgery degree this year from the University of Liverpool. Thank you and God bless Ed!

We wish all our graduates all the very best with whatever they go on to do for the future and pray that God shines His abundant blessings on them.

We look forward to hosting our 3rd Annual Ceremony next year and seeing you all... in person!

Our Graduates:

- Georgia Alyakou - GCSE
- Paolo Ramon Butcher - GCSE
- Amilius Lowes - GCSE
- Donna Marwan - GCSE
- Sako Murad - GCSE

Our Graduates:

- Daniela Michael - A Levels
- Sarah Naanouh - A Levels
- Tania Khamo - BSc Psychology
- Dani Mansour - B. Eng Civil Engineering
- Rend Roye - Legal Practice Course (LPC)
- Christina Chloe Simon - BA Hons Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status
- Edward Benjamin Simon - Bachelor of Dental Surgery
- Natalie Simon - MBBS Medicine and MSc Clinical Neuroscience
- Bernadette Youna - BA Hons Media and Communications
- Madeleine Youna - MSc International Management and Marketing



Certificate of recognition in a presentation folder along with a cross-shaped medal designed by His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis



Like and follow ACEYA on Facebook (ACEYA London) and Instagram (aceya.london)

His Grace Mar Yohannan Yoseph - Bishop of India and the UAE

By Diana Hinar



His Grace Mar Yohannan Yoseph, Bishop of India and the UAE, is recovering well after undergoing surgery back in March this year, and we thank the Lord for answering our prayers from all over the world. His Grace was treated by skilled physicians and, by God's grace, is getting stronger day by day. Mar Yohannan has recently started attending Ramsha Prayers (Evening liturgy) at Mart Mariam Cathedral in India.

In January of this year, His Grace Mar Yohannan Yoseph and His Grace Mar Awgin Kuriakose celebrated the 10th anniversary of their consecration as Bishops of the Assyrian Church of the East in India. On behalf of all the faithful at St Mary's Cathedral, we would like to extend our congratulations to them on their consecration anniversary. May the Lord bless, protect and guide them to continue their great work for our beloved church.

In November last year, we were honoured here in London to have met His Grace Mar Yohannan alongside His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM,

Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon. St Mary's Cathedral together with His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis organised a Diocesan Reception in honour of our Venerable Prelates at the Assyrian Hall. His Grace Mar Yohannan visited the UK again in December 2019 and we were blessed to have him conduct Holy Mass and deliver the sermon at our weekly evening bible studies.

His Grace is an exemplary and visionary church leader, and for more than 30 years has dedicated his life to the church.

We ask all faithful members to continue their prayers for His Grace's full recovery and we pray to see him in London again in the very near future.



In January of this year, His Grace Mar Yohannan Yoseph and His Grace Mar Awgin Kuriakose, Auxiliary Bishops of India celebrated the 10th anniversary of their consecration as Bishops of the Assyrian Church of the East in India

"I will give thanks to You, O Lord, with all my heart, For you hear the words of my mouth; And I shall sing to You in the presence of angels."

Psalms 138:1

Biography

His Grace Mar Yohannan Yoseph was born in Trichur near East Fort on 14th November 1966. He is the seventh child of nine children of Therattil Chirakkekaran Antony and his wife Annah (Cicily teacher). His Grace completed his preliminary school studies from the Chaldean Syrian School, Model High School for Boys and secured a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce (B.Com) from Calicut University in 1989. He studied at Mar Thoma Theological Seminary Kottayam (1990 - 1994) and earned a Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) degree from Serampur University, Kolkatha, India.



In December 2019, His Grace Mar Yohannan Yoseph delivered the sermon at our weekly evening bible studies - St Mary's Cathedral, London, UK

In 1998 he joined St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute Kottayam and secured a Master's degree (M.A.) in Syriac Language and Literature in 2000 from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, India. At the end of the same year, he went to Iraq and continued his Syriac studies until March 2003. From 2004 onwards he was a research student of Mahatma Gandhi University at Kottayam in Syriac Language and Literature. He got his Ph.D in 2017.

On 16th April 1989, the Late Dr. Poulouse Mar Poulouse Episcopa ordained him as a Deacon at Mar Adhai Sleeha Church, Paravattani. On 11th April 1999, His Grace Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan ordained him as a priest at Mar Yohannan Mamdhana Church, East Fort, Thrissur. During the period 1996 - 1998 he worked

as a Secretary to Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan and Bishop Poulouse Mar Poulouse Episcopa.

He was the assistant vicar of Mar Narsai Church Kachery, St. Thomas Church Ernakulam, Mar Qardhakh Sahdha Church Chennai, Mar Sleeva Church Cochin, Mart Mariyam Church Koratty, Mar Timotheus Church Calicut, Mar Beesho Church Puthoor at his Deaconship. He served as an Assistant Vicar at Mar Adhai Sleeha Church, Paravattani and Mar Odisho Church in Baghdad. He formed a Parish at Kottayam and established a church there in the name of Mar Abdisho. He is also the president of Mar Thoma Ashram (Orphanage for Boys) at Mulayam.

His Grace takes care of minor seminary of the Church of the East in India. His Grace also started mission parishes in Oman and in Kuwait.

On 17th January 2010, His Grace received the Episcopal Consecration as the Bishop of the Holy Catholic Assyrian Church of the East for India and the UAE by H.H Maran Mar Dinkha IV.



Dinner in honour of our Venerable Prelates, His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM Archbishop and His Grace Mar Yohannan Yoseph Bishop joined by our beloved Diocesan Bishop His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis, Rev Chorbishop Stapanos Yelda and Rev Fr Tony Malham at the Assyrian House, London, UK

Izzy's Journey

By Melissa Michael Darmoo

For many years Melissa Michael Darmoo and her family have endured pain and grief after the loss of their beloved little daughter Isabella Camilla Darmoo. As a way to tackle their unimaginable pain, Melissa started making silk floral arrangements for Izzy to put at her resting place. What started off as a way to overcome her severe anxiety soon turned into a small business called 'Isabella Blooms'. Through her business, Melissa is able to continue her fundraising for Great Ormond Street hospital (the hospital that cared for Izzy) and donates 10% of all sales to the hospital. This is Melissa's story of hope and faith and an example for us to all to take each day as a blessing.

“On March 6th, 2011 we were given the devastating news that our daughter Isabella (Izzy) had Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia. She was only 18 months old, and about to embark on a petrifying journey with childhood cancer.

Our world changed forever and from that day on we lived in fear, knowing that our daughter could die at any point. She started treatment immediately, and over almost 3 years endured countless doses of chemotherapy, multiple surgeries and radiotherapy before receiving a bone marrow transplant. Being told your child has cancer is soul destroying, being told she had relapsed was debilitating, and being told your child was about to die, well there is no feeling in this world that could describe it.

I knew early on that my faith was the only thing that would get me through. I knew that my anxiety would consume me if I didn't remain positive, and really believed that Izzy



Izzy and her favourite Saint Mar Yosip - “She had so many prayer cards, rosaries, holy ornaments and more ... whilst she would get them out every day and pray to them, she seemed so drawn to Mar Yosip”

would make it. The bible quote “if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can move mountains” resonated with me. I clung onto it and hoped for the best outcome. Izzy picked up on my faith, and although she was very young, she prayed every day and her faith was admirable.

“She often had her bloods taken at home, and she would take the blood bottle from the nurse and rub it on Mar Yosip’s picture, praying quietly. He was her saviour and ours”

We have a picture of Saint Mar Yosip in our home, and without being told, she would always go to it and kiss him, mumbling words as if she was praying. She had so many prayer cards, rosaries, holy ornaments and more that people had sent her, and whilst she would get them out every day and pray to them, she seemed so drawn to Mar Yosip. She often had her bloods taken at home, and she would take the blood bottle from the nurse and rub it on Mar Yosip’s picture, praying quietly. He was her saviour and ours. She had so much faith and belief that her prayers would be answered. She never seemed to be afraid and she never lost hope. She was an example to us all. Whenever we received bad news, which was often, she would smile, and we would pick ourselves back up.

We didn’t know Izzy’s last Christmas would be our last. She had relapsed and the only chance of survival was a bone marrow transplant. We started a Facebook page called Izzy’s Wish and we called on Assyrians around the world to join the register and help save Izzy’s life. Ethnic minorities like Assyrians have less than a 6% chance of finding a match because we don’t have many people registered. We begged and pleaded with people to join in the hope that Izzy would be saved. Sadly, no match was found. Should she have found a match, she may have been here today. Please take a moment to visit the charity ‘delete blood cancer’ and see if you are eligible to join the register. It’s a selfless act and a simple swab of your mouth but it could help save a life. I have donated bone marrow and I would do it over and over again without hesitation.

That Christmas we were split as a family as we spent weeks in isolation, unable to leave as Izzy had no immune system and was at risk. We couldn’t be together

at a time in the year that brings families closer. It was a very emotional and hard time to be sat in a room with a sick child on Christmas morning. All we wanted to do was make her and Daniel happy and keep the magic of Christmas alive. We were fortunate enough to be able to buy them lots of toys to keep them smiling.

A few months after her transplant, Izzy became very sick and ended up in the paediatric intensive care unit at Great Ormond Street hospital (GOSH). On 7th August 2015 Izzy closed her eyes for the final time. She left behind a legacy of faith and hope in us all.



Izzy’s prayer cards - “She was an example to us all. Whenever we received bad news which was often, she would smile, and we would pick ourselves back up”

I spent the first year leaving the house only to take Daniel to school. I couldn’t cope, I didn’t want life anymore. I lost my faith and stopped praying. Each day would bring a new unimaginable pain. It’s a gut-wrenching pain everyday as you are reminded you will never see your child again. I visited the cemetery every day for years, sitting

and talking to Izzy and asking God why? Each day I would take her flowers and watch them die. One day, I started to teach myself the art of floristry and began by making them just for Izzy. I made them with silk flowers so they would never die. Slowly, I made more for friends and family. What started as a way for me to tackle my severe anxiety and depression, soon turned into a small business I named ‘Isabella Blooms’. It was the perfect way to carry on her name, to occupy my mind and to help raise funds for the hospital that cared for Izzy.

Isabella Blooms has blossomed into a Bespoke Florist and Event Design company and more recently we have added personalised gifts to our collection too. I wanted to dedicate something to our faith, which we learnt to regain over the years. I have made ornaments with the Assyrian cross and Mar Yosip. After speaking with his Grace Mar Awraham, I asked if I could help and offered to

donate £3 from each ornament to the Assyrian Church.

Whilst I continue to work full time and run a business, I hope that one day Isabella Blooms will be my only full-time career. I donate 10% of all my profits each year to Great Ormond Street Hospital and it goes directly to the Isabella Darmoo Brighter Future Fund which helps find a cure towards Izzy's type of Leukaemia.

Each year since Izzy has passed, we have held fundraisers and toy drives in her memory, raising almost £50,000 for multiple hospitals and charities. We have also donated thousands of toys every Christmas to children spending their Christmas at Gosh because if anyone needs to smile, it's them. A bereaved parent feels a pain like no other. We helplessly watched our child fight for her life and die. We will do everything we can to change a family's journey and make it a happy one. Have hope, have faith and treat each day as a blessing. God Bless you all."

The team at Tree of Life would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the whole Assyrian Community in London to thank Melissa and her family for the years of fundraising for a very special charity and for their donations to St Mary's Assyrian Church of the East. We would also like to thank the community for coming together in the spirit of Christmas to support Izzy's Christmas Toy Drive and putting a smile on so many children's faces. Melissa and her family, joined by His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis and Rev Fr. Tony Malhem, delivered the hundreds of toys donated to Great Ormond Street Hospital on Saturday 13th December. We pray to Almighty God to heal the children and reunite them with their loved ones very soon.



The first silk flowers made for Izzy at her resting place by her mum Melissa



Isabella Blooms Assyrian Cross bauble - £3 from each sale has been donated to St Mary's Assyrian Church of the East in the UK and 10% of all sales go to GOSH.



(Left) Izzy's Christmas Toy Drive - toys collected and sent to GOSH a few years ago for children spending their Christmas in the hospital. (Right) The delivery of the toys to Great Ormond Street Hospital. In attendance were His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis, Rev Fr. Tony Malham along with Melissa and her family



**In Loving Memory
Isabella Camilla Darmoo
6th March 2011 - 7th August 2015**



Visit Isabella Blooms at www.isabellablooms.co.uk

Interview with HG Mar Awraham Youkhanis & Rev Fr Ramen Youkhanis

By Diana Hinar

Two brothers born in Basra, Iraq set out from a young age with their family in the hope of finding a new home. That new home soon became Sydney, Australia and since 1995 they have dedicated their lives to serving Christ's Holy Church. As active members of the church under the leadership of His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM, their mission was to first serve Christ, and second to bring our community, in particular the youth, to grow spiritually, study the word of our Lord, advance socially and have a special place in our Church for generations to come. Undertaking positions as key members of the Youth and Children's Associations, chaplains at the consortium of Assyrian Schools in Sydney (St Hurmizd's Assyrian Primary School and St Narsai Assyrian Christian College) and later secretaries to His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM, they worked tirelessly to fulfil this mission across all aspects of Church life. In conjunction with their service to the church, they have completed numerous undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Theology, Psychology, Languages, and Ancient History to name a few. The thriving youth movement in the Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand today is a testament to their commitment, faith, dedication and hard work.

His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis was born on 6th January 1989 and Rev Fr. Ramen Youkhanis was born on 20th December 1989 to parents Dr David Youkhanis and Mrs Moren Alexander Youkhanis. They have an older brother, Mr Nenos Youkhanis and his wife Mrs Ninorta Youkhanis; who are also active members of the church.

His Grace began his spiritual journey in 2006 when he was ordained a lector on 9th April 2006, elevating to the priesthood 4 years later. On the Sixth Sunday of Resurrection 26th of May 2019, His Grace was ordained the Bishop of Western Europe, with their Episcopal See based in London, UK where they have been residing since June 2019. Rev Fr. Ramen began his spiritual journey in 2007 when he was ordained a lector on 8th July 2007 and then a deacon 2 years later. On

6th September of this year, Rev Fr. Ramen was ordained to the priesthood and appointed parish priest of St Hurmizd's Cathedral, Sydney.

In an exclusive interview with Tree of Life, His Grace and Rev Fr. Ramen give us an insight into this incredible journey, how it began, their current ministry and their hopes for the future.

Barikh Mar, Rabi, you were both born in Basrah, Iraq. Can you tell us a little about your childhood and any early memories of Basrah?

HG Mar Awraham: We were quite young when our family left Basrah. I was only 3 years old and my brother was 2. Nevertheless, my parents do tell us many stories of our community in Basrah. My late grandfather, Alexander Esho was the church committee and Assyrian Community Centre chairman for a time, and my grandmother volunteered in the hospitality committee. They have many fond memories of the late Archdeacon Yonan who served as our parish priest for many years after which his brother, the late Fr Youzadiq, became his successor when Archdeacon Yonan was sent to Baghdad. The late Fr Youzadiq baptised my brothers and I. Our memories live in the photographs my family has kept of our life in Basrah.

Rev Fr Ramen: Unfortunately I have no memories of the Homeland, Basrah, as I was only 2 years of age when we fled and resided as refugees in Jordan and Turkey for a few brief months, then in Athens for almost two years. My earliest childhood memories were in Athens. Though memories are as if it were a dream, but the one clear memory was mum taking us out of the home for several hours of the day so dad would see Assyrian refugees who were ill and needed medical attention. Dad has always gone out of his way in his medical field - something we've always admired of him. This was one of my earliest childhood memories.

As we prepare for the birth of our Lord, can you share any early memories of Christmas spent back home?

HG Mar Awraham: Memories likened to a dream exist of our life in Athens, as we were migrating to Sydney. Our family spent 3 Christmases in Athens before leaving for Australia. The community there was like one big family. We would have visiting priests from various countries celebrate the Holy Raza for us every so often.

Rev Fr Ramen: Again, my earliest memories were in Athens, where I remember we'd put up (what I thought then) was a massive Christmas tree, however looking at pictures now; I see it wasn't massive at all. Because of our refugee status, our living arrangements were very limited, but those were some beautiful memories. Goes to show the simplicity of life and family truly mean everything, over any extravagance.

As a family, you have always been active members of the church. Was there a member in your family that inspired you in your childhood to take this spiritual path?

HG Mar Awraham: Our mother, Moren encouraged us to be committed members of the church and community. She taught us how to pray and worship God in spirit. Our mother gave us the free will to choose what we desired, and her encouragement showed us the joy and blessings one can receive when committing your life to our Lord and God.

Rev Fr Ramen: I would say our parents really contributed to certain aspects of our lives today, each in their own way. My father's energy and eagerness to help anyone in the medical field and refusing to admit something is impossible played a role in our minds to think really nothing is impossible. Having this idea mingled with mum's faith and love for Christ and the Church amalgamated the service we have been and continue to provide for the Holy Church. That nothing is really impossible if man has the will power and the faith to see it through.

Kassi, did you envisage from a young age that you would receive a high ranking in the Assyrian Church of the East?

HG Mar Awraham: When I was 12 years old, HB Mar Meelis, then Bishop, called me to him when I was at Edessa Hall (as my mother would volunteer with the hospitality group), and said, 'When you turn 21, I will ordain you a priest'. Many years passed, and God's will was fulfilled, and when I was 21, I was ordained into the priesthood. I truly believe God spoke through His Beatitude in revealing to me His will.

Rabi, congratulations on your recent ordination to the priesthood. How would you describe the change in responsibility from deacon to priest

and the importance of the role of a parish priest in the community?

Rev Fr Ramen: I thank you dearly for your warm wishes, may the Lord bless you and your service to the Holy Church.

I praise God every day for the spiritual journey I experienced from Deaconhood to Priesthood and the transition has been quite smooth with a few added responsibilities. I believe my service as a deacon in the church really prepared me for what was to come, and I believe this was a gift from God. Though the responsibilities are vast and many, but I cannot say I have felt tired or exhausted at all, not even for a minute since the ordination. I believe this is the Lord's guidance and assistance in every step.



Rev Fr Ramen's ordination to priesthood by HB Mar Meelis AM on Sunday 6th September 2020

A parish priest, as I've seen throughout my years of being a deacon and the last few months as a priest, really becomes a member of the family. Aside from the Sunday services, youth and children's bible studies, the priest shares in all the occasions of the family. From weddings, to baptisms, to the passing of dear ones in the family. Naturally the priest rejoices with the family in good moments, and again sympathises with the family in bitter moments. The parish priest becomes a member of the family.

Who was your teacher during your early church life?

HG Mar Awraham: Rev Chorbishop Fr Ashur Lazar, our parish priest in my years as deacon with all the Sydney clergymen. Then when I was ordained a priest, HB Mar Meelis Zaia, who in my years as a priest was my mentor, father, and spiritual guide.

Rev Fr Ramen: Just before the Lector Ordination in 2007 while I was still in High School, Rev Chorbishop Fr Ashur Lazar took us under his wing and really showed us what church service is. He involved us in every service (when I say

“us”, I mean a group of young clergymen). We got a real feel for what it means to serve the people. At the same time, our service and assistance to His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM moulded our understanding and love for service ten-fold. They became the father figures whilst at church and in church services.

Kassi, since the age of 12 you have been involved in the church choir and a student of Rabi Alexander Shoorah Michailian’s community violin school in Sydney. Can you tell us of your memories of those early years in the church and how important they were?

HG Mar Awraham: My early years in the church in Sydney showed me how important it is for a community to be built upon love, unity, and faith. From my childhood in Sunday School, choir, violin school, and then as a deacon and priest, I saw the church as my place of refuge. And not only that, everything we did, religiously and socially, our church was the hub. Truly the church becomes your first home, for that is where we received the gift of life through baptism.

Rabi, your childhood was spent within the church programs and ministries. What drew you to take part in these ministries regularly from a young age?

Rev Fr Ramen: Since mum was a child she loved church services and helping out where she could. Naturally when we arrived to Australia she did the same. During school holidays, mum and a few of her friends would clean the church and we would tag along and do minor tasks. Though they thought they did this just to side-track us from videogames and holiday boredom, but in hindsight this grew the love and zeal within us to always see the church clean and beautiful, both physically and spiritually through its services.

You have been widely credited as architects and key figures within the Youth and Children’s Associations in Australia. How important is the involvement of youth in the church and what advice can you give to current and future youth thinking of taking a spiritual journey?

HG Mar Awraham: Children’s and youth ministries are vital to any parish and community. Children need to be sown from a young age in the garden of faith,

learning about the love of God and His mercies unto us. From infancy, they are taught everything they need to build their lives. Those children then transition into the youth association. These two ministries are interconnected and need to be viewed with equal importance. Anyone who wishes to commence a spiritual journey should start with their relationship with Christ. Our Lord needs to be accepted as our everything, from the bread that sustains us to the house that keeps us warm. Then the love of evangelism will grow, and the youth can commit to running bible studies at the church, leading committees, and helping edify the community. The community is made up of living stones that build the church. The church without her members is idle. Our members give it life, and I pray our youth grow in faith and love, with an increased desire to serve God and His beloved church.

Rev Fr Ramen:

Needless to say, the youth are the “it” of our church and community now. They are needed now. Their way of thinking and processes are in high demand within the church. And praise God the youth are also seeing this within themselves and taking on roles and responsibilities within the church. For example, this week is the Holy Feast of the Birth of Christ and due to Covid, we couldn’t have the usual midnight Holy Raza as we always do. Alternative arrangements had to be made, and with the help of the youth, we are all planned and ready to go. More than 10,000 faithful will attend one of the services, all managed, ushered and cared for by a large group of youth volunteers. This is where they need to be, because here they help their community, they serve Christ and ultimately they serve their conscience and build treasures in heaven. It’s a one stop shop. And this shop offers abundant blessings in all aspects of their lives, spiritually, emotionally, socially, you name it.

“Needless to say, the youth are the “it” of our church and community now. They are needed now. Their way of thinking and processes are in high demand within the church. And praise God the youth are also seeing this within themselves and taking on roles and responsibilities within the church” - Rev Fr Ramen

Kassi, for 14 years you served the Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand under the leadership of His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM. How would you describe your relationship with His Beatitude and what have you learnt most from him?

HG Mar Awraham: HB Mar Meelis is a great prelate and friend to all. From a young age, I have seen His Beatitude as a father and mentor. I am a personal witness to his love and dedication to his community and church. I have learned from him selfless leadership and sacrifice.

Rabi, as the current secretary to His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia AM, how has His Beatitude helped you through your journey and what have you learnt the most from him?

Rev Fr Ramen: His Beatitude has many gifts from our Lord which I, alongside all those who know him personally, greatly admire. One of many gifts I admire is the way HB deals with people. The number of cases I have seen first-hand dealt by HB in diffusing situations or addressing certain problems is truly remarkable. Through my exposure as HB's secretary, I have taken a number of pointers for myself to ensure the best possible outcome is met, for the greater good of our church and community. HB is a wonderful people person and truly a unique figure in our church and community.

Kassi, from 2010 to 2019 your Grace undertook multiple roles within the Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand whilst studying for a variety and postgraduate studies and you also began writing your doctoral thesis. How did you manage it all?

HG Mar Awraham: From my ordination into the priesthood, I became HB



**HG Mar Awraham Youkhanis -
official Episcopal Consecration
photograph**

Mar Meelis' secretary, an assistant priest to the Sydney parishes, the children and youth associations' chaplain in Sydney, including the youth associations in Melbourne (Victoria) and Auckland (New Zealand). I then became the secretary to the newly established Family Tribunal in Sydney. I was also involved with the NSW Ecumenical Council representing the church and various other community initiatives, and of course my postgraduate studies (and hoping to finish my doctoral thesis sometime next year). I give glory to God for He is our strength in all that we do. We do all things through Him and in His name. Though the commitments were great, the joy that came from serving, helped us forget the energy we invested in these ministries. As our Lord says in Matthew 11:30, "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Rabi, alongside your service as the parish priest at St Hurmizd Cathedral, you are involved in the youth and children's ministries as well as wider Archdiocese commitments whilst undertaking multiple postgraduate studies. How do you manage to make time for all the above?

Rev Fr Ramen: This is definitely a frequently asked question, but the problem is I don't have an answer. I know on paper it all sounds very intense, but come to look at the day to day commitments; things just fall into place at the right time and the right spot.

Yes of course the days are very full and demanding, but it really is self-managed. Again, I believe God's hand is in the work, because it is His work and He wishes to see it through. We are only the tools to do His work. As in with carpentry, we don't ask the saw or hammer if they're tired, rather the carpenter is the one with the heavy load. God is the carpenter and we are the tools. Everything comes together wonderfully as is determined by the carpenter – God.

Higher education within the clergy was very important to the late His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV. How have your further studies in theology, languages, psychology and history helped in your service and what are your memories of the Late Patriarch?

HG Mar Awraham: Education is vital in the modern age. It truly becomes the key that opens many opportunities. Education helps in the way we think, process

information, and communicate. This of course helps at many levels, from office management to presenting a sermon. The late Mar Dinkha was a visionary for our church and community. He placed great emphasis on education, especially for clergymen and prelates. I had the pleasure and blessing of meeting HH Mar Dinkha various times in my priesthood. He had great joy in seeing youth come to church. He gave me a cross in January 2011 when I visited him in Chicago. Until this day I have this cross as a blessing from him.

Rev Fr Ramen: Education is key to everything and anything. Of course the theological studies built much understanding when it comes to Christian faith, but more so understanding other churches, their traditions, etc. which is vital in ecumenism and having conversations outside our church. Similarly, my background in psychology has definitely assisted me since my instalment as parish priest, in helping parishioners come forward for some spiritual counselling and therapy. Even though this was always the case, *“The late Mar Dinkha was a visionary for our church and community. He placed great emphasis on education, especially for clergymen and prelates. I had the pleasure and blessing of meeting HH Mar Dinkha various times in my priesthood” - HG Mar Awraham*

even as a deacon in the church for youth members and even adults. However, now I feel there’s more of an official invitation for parishioners to come forward and seek this spiritual therapy which comes from God and my experience in the psychological field. My memories of the Late Patriarch are also foundational to the love and zeal I have for our Holy Church. The image I had in my mind and will continue to have of the Late Patriarch is him as the head of our Church but also a king (in loose terms) of our nation. His love and passion for the Assyrian Nation elevated him to a king-like status in my mind, and of course the leadership of the Church. As in one of his talks he says we have 2 gifts, one is being Assyrian and the other the children of the Assyrian Church of the East.

Kassi, you have been the Bishop of Western Europe for over a year now. How has your life changed since then and how are you finding the journey?

HG Mar Awraham: In the past year and a half, my life has changed noticeably. I have been blessed with a new family, a new community, and a new life. Change doesn’t always necessarily mean something negative. Of course, when one is preparing for a change - doubt, anxiety, over-thinking are very natural for one to experience. However, when the change takes place, we experience a new reality that does not compare to anything we have felt before. I thank the Lord daily for giving me this Diocese. I am truly unworthy of this ministry and pray to Almighty God to help me serve the communities, so that they grow and prosper in His name and for His glory.

Life has changed dramatically in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, with the church particularly having to adapt to and implement a whole new way of operating. How has this been for you as leaders of the church and is there anything you would like to say to your parishioners?

HG Mar Awraham: I don’t think anyone would have anticipated what was coming in 2020. Though it has been a tough year for all, I truly believe it has given us time to reflect, grow, and meditate on God and His presence in our lives. 2020 has shown us that nothing can stand in the way between us and God. Our ministries continued, and grew, thanks to modern-day technology. It has been extremely hard to close our churches to the public. But I pray that our Lord cleanses the world from the virus, so that we can worship freely again as one family in His church.

Rev Fr Ramen: The pandemic that started earlier this year really shocked the church, as it was forced to close its doors for the first time. In that shock, the church attempted to fill the missing hole and gaps in the spiritual journey of its faithful. This was accomplished through online services of Holy Raza, Bible Studies for adults, youth and children and ultimately the delivery of bookhra for main feasts. I thank God for the timing of the ordination and easing of restrictions. As just after the ordination, we could reopen church doors. We have seen such an influx and increase in the faithful’s zeal and love for the church, and the strengthening of their faith. To the community we say, we admire your support and love for your church. Your faith has truly shone bright and we as the church look forward to continually serve you and support you in your spiritual and social advancement as we enter 2021. We pray next year brings blessings to cover the

shortfall of 2020.

What are you hoping to achieve through your mission?

HG Mar Awraham: We hope to achieve many things in our ministries. The first priority is to provide the correct spiritual nourishment through Holy Raza, bible studies, charity, and community work. The first priority of every church should be to provide the members with everything they need to feed their souls. The saving of lives should be at the centre of any church.

Rev Fr Ramen: The mission really is simple. That every church member feels connected to the church. And the church as a special place in their families and homes. Even though Sydney is a major city of church members, nevertheless there is no such thing as impossible, and we know through God's guidance and blessings, the church can continue to grow and reach places where it needs to reach.

What is your favourite place to visit in London?

HG Mar Awraham: St Barnabas Church in Ealing, where the late Mar Dinkha IV was consecrated Patriarch.

Rev Fr Ramen: Somewhere we have always visited upon our trips to London is the British Museum. As Assyrians, what we have in London, we do not have in other places of the world. I would say the British museum would be one of my favourite places.

Kassi, you must be following English Premier League football! Do you have a favourite team?

HG Mar Awraham: This is a very difficult question seeing as I don't follow football. I do this to maintain the peace between all sides! The last thing we need is for football politics to enter the church domain!

What message do you have for our church and our nation?

HG Mar Awraham: Live by the Lord's commandments, and love everyone as you love yourself – do charity and spread the love of the gospel by action and

deed. Be proud of who you are, learn your language and teach it to your children.

Rev Fr Ramen: To keep the faith, the connection to the church, and to keep hold of our language, culture and traditions. We are living in some unprecedented times and as we continue on, it only gets harder and harder. Our people are dispersed throughout all the countries of the world. The further dispersed, the harder it is to keep connected together and to hold strong onto the pearls that we've inherited from our ancestors. Keep the faith, have a strong presence and involvement in your parishes, and at the same time keep the language, culture and traditions. These two are the water of our bodies (Hydrogen and Oxygen - H2O), our physical bodies need water, therefore our identity and existence here on earth needs the Church and Nation.

To finish, what is your favourite bible quote?

HG Mar Awraham: 2 Corinthians 2:15, 'For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.' God loves us for we remind Him of Christ His Son, whom He gave as ransom for our sins. When we pray to God, our prayers ascend as a sweet aroma before God's throne, echoing the price He paid for our atonement.

Rev Fr Ramen: 1 Corinthians 15:58 "Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be firm, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

We would like to take this opportunity to thank His Grace and Rev Fr Ramen for their time and participation in our second Christmas edition and we pray that God continues to guide them in their ministry and that their service shines in the Kingdom of Heaven.



HG Mar Awraham congratulating his brother Rev Fr Ramen on his priesthood ordination with HG Mar Benjamin looking on proudly on Sunday 6th September 2020

A Token of Appreciation

By Diana Hinar

A token of appreciation to our beloved faithful for all their love and support in these trying times.

Life has changed dramatically in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic this year, and with the church particularly having to adapt to and implement a whole new way of operating. But thanks to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, and thanks to members of the clergy and all faithful, the Church was able to continue its ministries.

On 23rd of March this year, our Church doors closed. We may have had to adhere to social distancing but nothing could stand between us and God. The Church continued its ministries and our parishioners joined weekly bible studies through zoom, watched Holy Raza from their living rooms and grew closer to the Word of God. We also received monthly bukhra delivered to our homes by dedicated volunteers.

When government guidelines were eased, on 12th July 2020 - the day of commemoration of St Mar Yosip Khnanisho - our beloved Church reopened for public worship and private prayer and we were able to take Holy Communion again.

The committee worked very hard to accommodate us whilst keeping us all safe. We would like to thank them for all their efforts and hard work this year. The community really came together during these unprecedented and difficult times and we can't thank them enough for their support.

As a token of utmost appreciation to all faithful for their love and support to the Church in these difficult times, on Saturday 19th December, His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis, Rev Fr. Tony Malham and St Mary's Cathedral organised a Christmas package with the 2021 Diocesan calendar, a portrait of His Grace, a home blessing prayer and 2 candy canes to be delivered by our devoted volunteers to the homes of all faithful of our Church. It was wonderful to see the smiles on the faces of our community upon delivery.

Just a note - the candy cane has a very special meaning associated to it. The white of the cane represents the purity of Jesus Christ and the red stripes are for the blood He shed when He died on the cross for our sins. The peppermint flavour can represent the hyssop plant that was used for purifying in the Bible.

Thank you to all our Parish volunteers for all their help on what was a truly wonderful day.

May the Lord richly bless all the faithful for all their love and kindness and all that made this mission happen. May He protect you under the shadow of His wings.

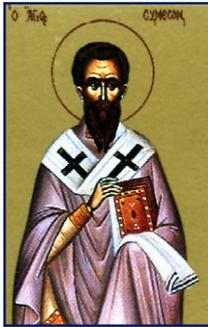


(Top) A portrait of HG Mar Awraham, a signed home blessing prayer and the 2021 Ecclesiastical Calendar. (Below) Over 350 packages ready to be delivered, containing the portrait & blessing, 2021 Ecclesiastical calendar and 2 candy canes to all the faithful.



Mar Shimun Bar Sabhai

By Bernadette Youna



The Church of the East has many Patriarchs, and one in particular is Mar Shimun Bar Sabhai.

Mar Shimun Sabhai became the head of the Church of the East in 320 A.D. This was around the time when Sapor II was the King of Persia, and both the Roman and Persian empires were at war. The Persians became very suspicious of any activities of the Christian people.

Mar Shimun was ordered by Sapor II (King of Persia) to collect double the tax from Christians, due to the heavy expenses caused by the war between the two countries. The Patriarch refused to listen to the order as he argued that his people wouldn't be able pay as they were too poor. Mar Shimun also stated that he didn't want to be a 'tax collector'.

Sapor II and Mar Shimun were personal friends; however, the King was influenced and surrounded by the Mazdean hierarchy. They ordered the King to arrest the Patriarch, and to destroy every single Christian Church.

When Mar Shimun was arrested, he made a farewell statement to the people of the Church, "May the cross of our Lord be the protection of the people of Jesus. May the peace of God be with the servants of God and stabilise your hearts in

the faith of Christ, in tribulation and in ease, in life and in death, now and for evermore."

Mar Shimun was recognised as brave and a protector of the Church of the East because he didn't give up on his faith. The King of Persia asked the Patriarch to worship the sun if he wanted freedom for himself and his people, to which Mar Shimun noted "the sun went into mourning when its creator died."

Sapor II repeated his request but Mar Shimun was adamant he was going to stay firm and did not overturn his decision. This resulted in him receiving the crown of martyrdom. The crown of martyrdom is bestowed on those who bear witness of faith, and are killed because of their religious beliefs.

Mar Shimun was sadly killed in 339 A.D. but he died with faith and nobleness. Mar Shimun wasn't a coward and should be remembered for his brave actions. He could have escaped his own persecution by collecting tax off his people, but that could never be an option to him. The patriarch also didn't spare his life to worship the sun, as he could never lose his strong faith in God.

We thank God for our Patriarchs. Let this be a reminder to you all to never give up on your faith in God.

James 1:3 – "For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness"

The information used for this article was sourced from the book 'The Nestorian Fathers' by Mar Aprem

Exploring the themes of Chekov's "The Bet"

By Nina Khalil

Reflecting back on the books that I have read is a regular habit of mine. One particular short story came to mind which I'd like to share with you; 'The Bet'.

The Bet was written by the Russian playwright, Anton Chekhov, in 1889. Chekhov writes about a wealthy man, a banker, who makes a bet with a young lawyer, following a long discussion over capital punishment.

The banker was rather adamant that a death penalty is more humane than spending life in prison. The lawyer on the other hand disagreed and thought that 'to live is better than not at all'. The banker insisted to bet by giving the lawyer 2 million rubles if he could spend 15 years in prison. The agreement was that the lawyer could have anything he desires, however, in total confinement; with no direct contact with the outside world. He could however, write and receive notes. The bet was agreed.

During the first few years, the lawyer suffered from loneliness and depression but eventually began to read on various subjects such as history, philosophy, languages and the Gospels. He also played different instruments. Over the years, the banker's fortune began to decline and worried that if he loses the bet, it will affect him financially. This leads the banker with no option but to plan to kill the lawyer.

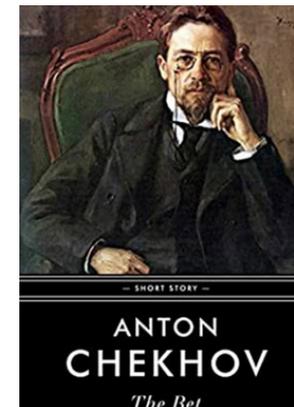
One day, before the agreed period was over, he went into the lawyer's room in order to check on him. He found him sleeping with a letter on a table, written by the lawyer. Unexpectedly, the letter thanked the banker for providing him the opportunity to travel to various places through his readings, the ability to read and write in different languages, falling in love through the novels that he had read and understanding religion. The lawyer also writes that he will leave a few days earlier than the time agreed, which would invalidate the bet. The banker respects the lawyer, who added positivity into his life, as many analysts suggest.

This short story ends here. The interesting fact is that Chekhov does not tell us a great deal about the lawyer's emotions and thoughts throughout the story. Instead, he finalises it with an open ending; a room for various philosophical interpretations.

What is interesting however is that Chekhov indirectly elaborates that the lawyer grew spiritually over the years and realised that earthly things are not what humans need. Chekhov may have therefore wanted to lead the readers to the conclusion that the 2 million rubles would not have given the lawyer this knowledge and maturity that he had gained. Instead, it was his persistence, belief and patience that helped him survive these years in total confinement. We may agree that the lawyer sacrificed years of his life to prove his moral principles.

Whilst many of you may have a different view or interpretations to The Bet, I would like to invite you to reflect on how the main concept of this story may relate to our current reality, particularly to our adaptation to the world with this pandemic. You may agree in seeing the importance of reconsidering what is truly needed and what can be discarded, in order to live a life that is morally fit. It is fair to suspect that the lawyer's strategy towards the years spent in confinement was simply hope. It was hope that led him to explore life in his own unique way - by educating himself on the valuable life lessons. It is always hope that aids humanity to see light at the end of the tunnel.

Thank you for reading. Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas.



Edy's Arts & Crafts

By Edwina Daniel

People with young children will know the challenges of trying to keep them occupied and stimulated on a daily basis – especially during a pandemic! Edwina has a number of fun arts and crafts activities that you do at home, and the best part is that most of the things you'll need can be found in almost any average household. Keep on reading to find out about all the fun crafts you can make for next Christmas and Easter!

Christmas Crafts

Finger Painting Christmas Baubles

Create baubles with your children using paper plates, or create your own using card paper (you can draw around a bowl of any size and cut).

Things you need:

For babies:

- Edible paint - white yoghurt and different colour food colouring

Children 1 year plus:

- Paint – you can make your own paint (flour, water, and food colouring)
- Glue
- Scissors
- Colour buttons and sequins to decorate the bauble



Christmas Wreaths

Cut the centre of the plate out to create the wreath. Decorate around the circle in green paint. Glue on Pom-poms, sequins or any decorations you may have. Be as creative as you like!

Things you need (Ages 2+):

- Paper plate
- Glue
- Ribbon
- Green paint
- Pom-poms
- Sequins

For babies to 12 months:

You can encourage the babies to use sponges with the paint to create patterns. (Be careful not to use sequins or pom-poms when crafting with babies, as they are a choking hazard).



Snowman & Father Christmas Decorations

Craft a cute snowman together - this one won't melt! All you need are the following basic items (there's an alternative for Father Christmas, too!)

Things you need (Ages 2+):

- Paper plate
- Cotton wool
- Card
- Scissors
- Glue
- Red paint (for Father Christmas)
- Christmas



To create the snowy body, paint a layer of glue on the paper plate and stick the cotton wool on top. You can cut out shapes for the snowman's hat, scarf, eyes, hands, mouth and nose using different colour card. You can repeat the same process above for Father Christmas by carefully painting the cotton wool in red.



Christmas Jumper

Create fun jumper designs just by using some card and crafts. No need to wear a Christmas jumper, just make a decorative one instead!

Things you need:

- Card
- Materials to decorate your jumper:
- Scissors
- buttons, gems
- Glue
- goggly eyes, shiny materials



Draw and cut out a jumper shape on card. Using glue and a variety of decorative materials, your child can create their own unique designs. Have them try adding a snowman, or Father Christmas!

Salt Dough Ornaments

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup water



Instructions:

1. Mix salt and flour
2. Add in half the water, and as you mix, gradually add the remaining water
3. Knead until the dough is smooth
4. Place your cut-outs onto a baking sheet, and then use a straw to cut out a hole at the top of decoration. This is where you will hang the decoration from
5. Baking: The temperature should be at around 160c for at least 1 1/2 hours, or until dough is dry. Let the ornaments cool down first before decorating

Once dry, paint your salt dough ornaments using regular acrylic paints. Glue on beads, buttons, or any fun accessory. Finish off with a clear glazed glue for your ornaments to have a pretty effect. Make sure you wait for the paint to dry first, and then loop a ribbon through the hole. Now your ornament is ready for hanging on the tree! **You can use this same recipe to create Easter decorations - just buy some Easter shaped cutters, and have your little one paint away!**

Easter Crafts

While the Christmas crafts can always be used for any every day activity, we also have some Easter themed activities that you can prepare ahead for.

Hand print chicks

Things you need:

- Yellow card
- Orange card
- Yellow paint
- White card
- Orange paint
- Buttons or goggly eyes

Instructions:

1. Cut an oval shape using the yellow card
2. Cut a small triangle for the beak using the orange card
3. Using the yellow paint hand print your little one's hands
4. Using the orange paint foot print your little one's feet
5. While you're waiting for the hand/foot print to dry, encourage your little one to stick on the chick's eyes and mouth.
6. Once dry, cut around the hand and foot prints, and stick them onto the chick

Tissue Paper Egg

When colouring eggs gets a bit too much, why not make your own paper ones? All you'll need is a selection of coloured tissue paper, glue and card

Instructions:

1. Scrunch the different colour tissue paper together (children ages 2+ can be encouraged to do this)
2. Cut a large oval shape using the card. This will be base for the egg
3. Stick scrunched tissue paper onto the egg using glue

Lolly-stick Cross Craft

Things you'll need:

- Assorted craft supplies like sequins, buttons etc.
- Jumbo craft sticks
- Regular-sized craft sticks
- Glue

Instructions:

1. Use a small dab of glue to attach the regular-sized craft stick to the jumbo craft stick in the shape of a cross
2. Squeeze white glue all over the craft stick cross
3. Have your child place various craft supplies on top of the glue
4. Leave to dry

For more arts and crafts ideas, follow [@edys_art_and_crafts](#) on Instagram!

Plain Kadeh Recipe

Kadeh are traditional type of Assyrian biscuit, typically baked during Christmas and Easter time. They can be enjoyed at almost any time of the day, and go perfectly with a hot cup of chai! This basic recipe will show you how to bake the plain version, and will provide 8-12 servings depending on how big you want to make them.

Ingredients for kadeh:

- 1.5 kilos of self-raising flour
- 500g of butter
- 1 large can of evaporated milk
- Sachet of yeast mixed with a little water and sugar to dissolve
- ½ cup of natural yoghurt
- ½ cup of double cream
- 3 eggs (for mixing)

Ingredients for egg wash:

- 2-3 egg yolks
- Water

Method:

Combine all ingredients by hand, and knead for at least 10-15 minutes until a smooth dough is formed.

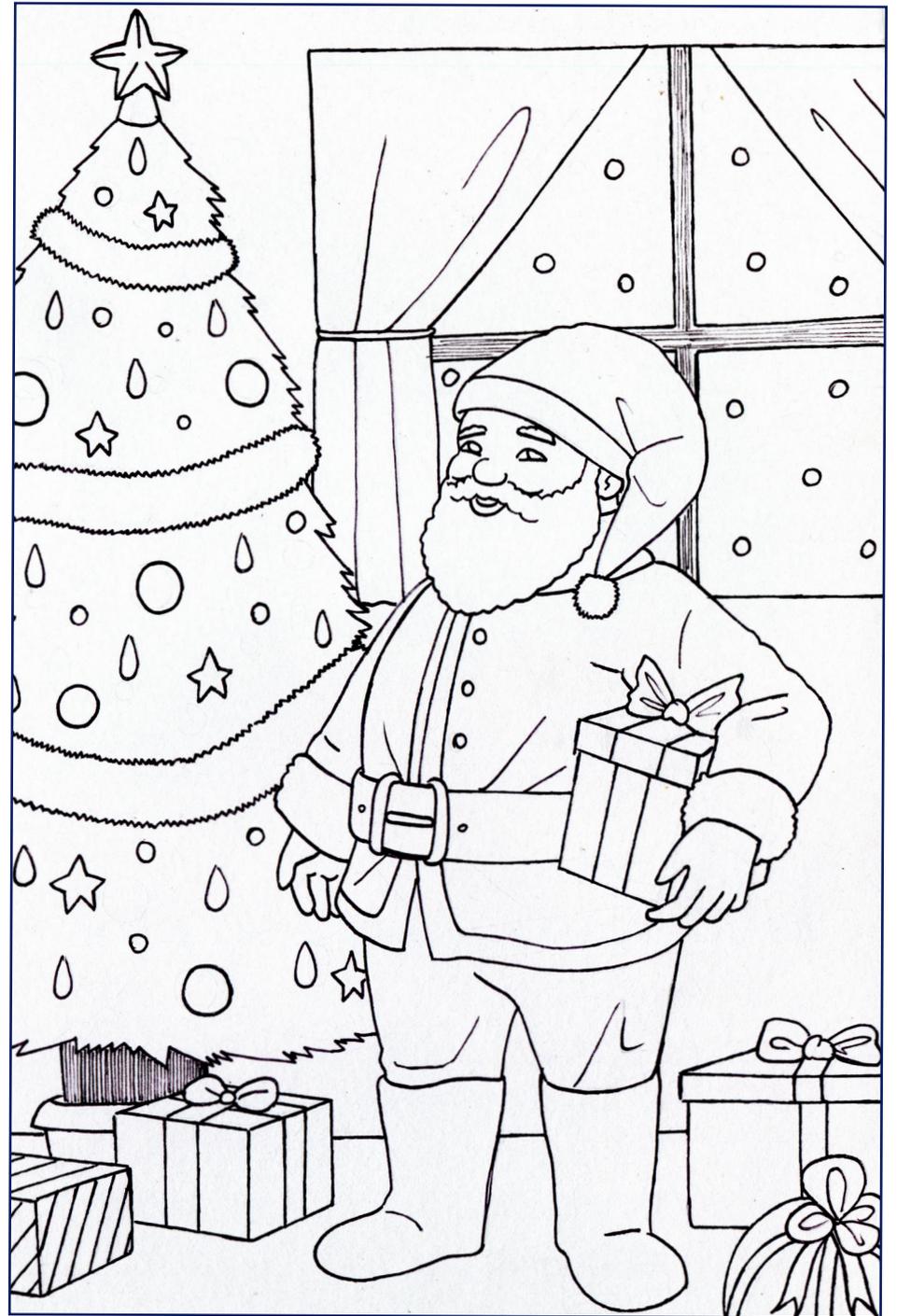
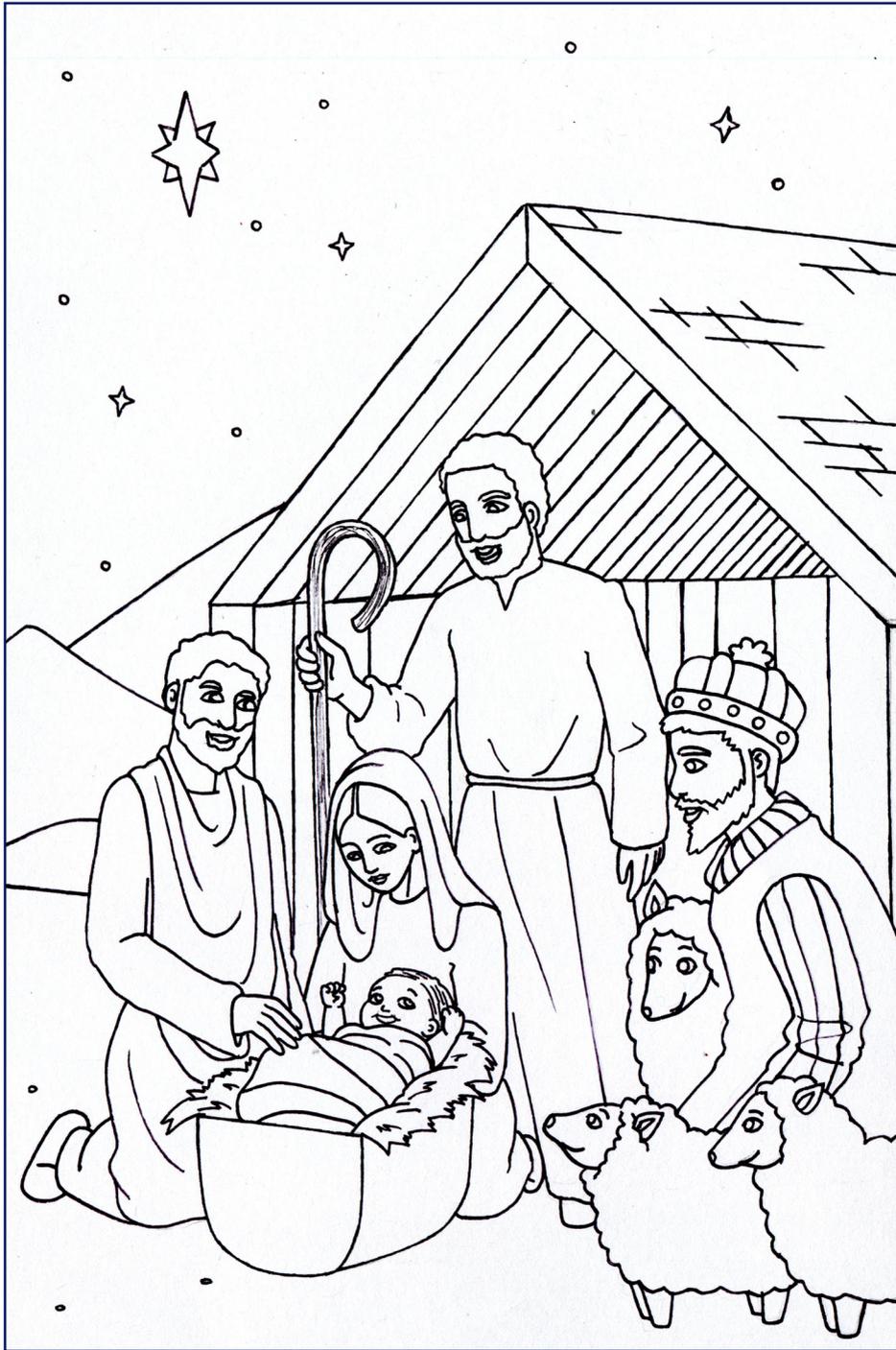
Shape the kadeh by hand, and lay them on your baking tray. Be sure to lay baking parchment first to avoid the kadeh from sticking to the tray.

Using a fork, prick the surface of your kadeh a few times to stop them from rising too much when baking. Tip: you can use the fork to create decorate patterns if you're feeling creative!

In a small bowl, mix 2-3 egg yolks with a little bit of water to create the egg wash. Using a brush tool lay an even layer of egg wash onto the kadeh.

Pre-heat the oven on gas mark 5-6. When the kadeh are ready, pop them into the oven at gas mark 6 and bake until golden brown.

The hard part is waiting patiently while they cool down before eating. Enjoy!



CREATIVE CORNER

Submit your art, photography or written pieces for a chance to be featured in the magazine!

We are always excited to share and showcase any creative work that our community has to offer.

Do you have a passion for art, graphic design, photography or even writing? Would you like to contribute and share your work in the magazine?

Please contact Treeoflife@acote.org.uk for the chance to have it included in the next or future editions!

We'd like to thank Daniella Shlimo (14 years) for her wonderful artwork, which is the cover design for this edition!



By @ArtworkBYBelle



By Daniella Shlimo (14 years)

Puzzle Solutions

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ENGLISH	ASSYRIAN	ASSYRIAN (w. Vowels)
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Jesus	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ
Arbil	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ
Holy	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ
Church	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ
Monastery	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ
East	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ
Offering	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ
Faith	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ
Assyria	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ	Ⲛⲛⲛⲛ

Christmas Film Quiz answers

1. A 2. B 3. B 4. C 5. A 6. C 7. A 8. B

MEET YOUR EDITORS

Josh Coleman, Content Editor

Due to the pandemic, Josh was not able to begin his year abroad in Spain back in September, so has been carrying on with his Spanish studies virtually. In the extra time he gained, he began studying Arabic virtually. Fortunately, he will be able to begin his year abroad in January, so he is looking forward to getting to Spain to begin his new job and continue his studies alongside. He will be spending time with family over Christmas before he leaves. He wishes a Merry Christmas to all of our wonderful readers!



Diana Hinar, Content Editor & Treasurer

Diana was born in Baghdad in 1983 to parents Odisho Odisho and Linda Aziz and moved to London in 1990. She gained her BA in Media Studies in 2004 from De Montfort University, Leicester and went back to college in 2010 to study a diploma in Accounting, receiving her Level 4 certificate in AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians) from Hammersmith College. For the past 12 years, she is an Accounts



Payable and Receivable Clerk and PA to the CFO at Low Profile Fashions Ltd, a clothing manufacturer and is owned by entrepreneur and dragon on Dragons Den Touker Suleyman. Alongside this she is a freelancer in the production department at Sky News and Sky Sports News. Diana loves travelling and photography.

Bernadette Youna, Advertising Creative & Content Editor

Bernadette who was born and raised in London is daughter to John and Karmen Youna. She has graduated from her university this year and is currently looking for full time jobs in digital marketing. Bernadette is also in the events committee where she creates all the graphic designs and posters for each event. Current read: Where to begin by Cleo Wade



Belinda C. Yonan, Editor In Chief & Creative Design



Born and raised in London to parents Jane Odisho and Aoner Yonan, Belinda obtained her BA in English Literature and Hispanic studies at Queen Mary University of London. During her time at Queen Mary's, Belinda spent a year abroad in Seville, completing her humanities studies at Universidad Pablo de Olavide. Passionate about film and languages, she has gone on to work in cinema and TV post-production, handling localisation projects for major theatrical releases. Belinda enjoys keeping herself busy, freelancing in illustration, and Spanish to English translation. When not handling client work, Belinda can be found working on her personal artwork, and projects promoting mental health awareness.

As always, we would like to thank our Church for its infinite guidance, and for keeping us united through these times. We would also like to thank our community for working hard in its contributions to the church, and for sharing all the new content in this latest edition.

We would especially like to thank Rv. Tony Malham, Odisho Odisho and Aoner Yonan for their assistance and contribution to the Assyrian content and translation.

The Tree of Life will be back with its next issue in Summer 2021. Until then, stay safe and well!

If you would like to contribute to the magazine, share ideas, stories or photos, please contact
Treeoflife@acote.org.uk



“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:6

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