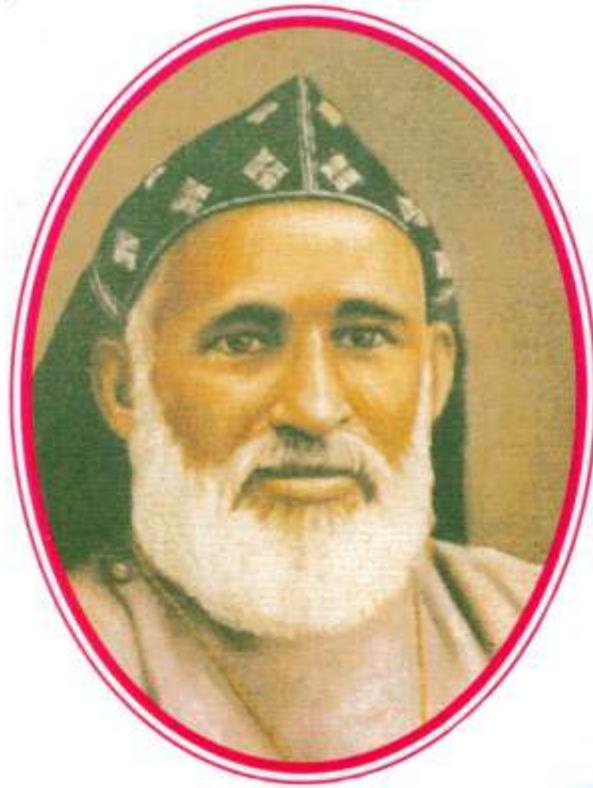


# Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan

(Mar Thoma XVII)

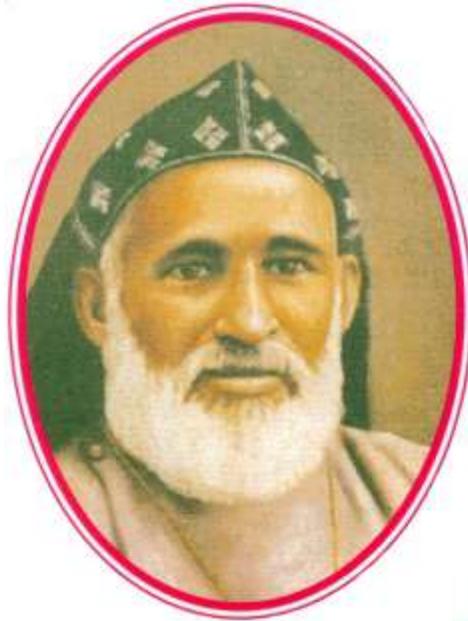


1880 - 1947

Biography of Marettu Kochu Thirumeni

# **Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan**

**(Mar Thoma XVII)**



**1880- 1947**

**Life story of Marettu Kochu Thirumeni**

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## Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan (Mar Thoma XVII)

(30 October, 1880 - 01 September, 1947)

*"Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma was the most Christ like person I have ever known. Abraham Mar Thoma was a Bishop of supreme simplicity. From his childhood he learned to trust in the promises of God and to expect that they would be fulfilled. He used to spend whole nights in prayer in order to solve problems."*

*- Bishop Stephen Neill\**

\*(Bishop Stephen Neill (1900 -1984) was the Anglican Bishop of Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu) from 1939 – 1945. He was one of the Maramon Convention Speakers during the time of Abraham Mar Thoma.)

*"When I was called into the ministry I had a widowed and ailing mother and two sisters who depended on me. For the last 40 years God has been enough, not only for my own needs but for the needs of those who depended on me. Young man, I trust that the same Lord shall be enough for your needs as well, for the needs of those who depend upon you."*

*- Bishop Abraham to a young man who wanted to go for mission work*

### Birth and Childhood

Bishop Abraham (his pet name was Kochavarachen/ Kochoonju and in the school records his name was M. N. Abraham – Marettu Ninan Abraham) was born on October 30, 1880, in Eraviperoor near Tiruvalla. His mother Mariamma was a member of the Kariikkattu family which is a branch of the famous Sankaramangalom family of Eraviperoor. Members of the Kariikkattu family were members of the Eraviperoor Mar Thoma Church. His father, Ninan was a member of the Marettu family of Kalloppaara. Members of the Marettu family were rich and strong believers of the Jacobite Church. Abraham had two elder sisters and he was the only son of his parents. Abraham's father died when he was very young (five years old) and he was brought up by his mother with the help of his uncle (mother's brother). Abraham's mother, Mariamma was a very God fearing woman, who used to pray for hours keeping the child Abraham in her lap. Tears from her eyes used to fall on his head.

### Education

Members of the Kariikkattu family were strong supporters of the reformation movement in the Mar Thoma Church. Abraham had his primary education in the Malayalam school, in Eraviperoor and after that he joined in the Government

School in Tiruvalla. He regularly attended Sunday School classes and prayer meetings at his home parish. While he was studying in Tiruvalla, he attended gospel meetings conducted by an Anglican Priest - Rev. Thomas Walker of Tirunelveli. During one of these meetings, at the age of 13 he accepted Jesus as his personal Saviour and started working among students in Tiruvalla. He used to arrange special prayer meetings for his classmates and other students in the school. From a young age he had the desire to become an evangelist in the Mar Thoma Church.

For his college degree, he studied in CMS College Kottayam, S. P. G. College Trichy and Madras Christian College. Abraham was the prayer group secretary in all the places he studied. He was not a bright student. Many times he failed in his school final and degree examinations. Afterwards he went to Canada and obtained an M.A. and B.D Degrees from the Wycliffe College of the Toronto University.

### **Encounter with the Lord**

Abraham's uncle (mother's brother) was looking after his educational expenses. Once Abraham approached his grandfather in Kallooppara for money, but he did not get a positive response from him. Disappointed by the attitude of his grandfather, Abraham returned to Eraviperoor early morning the very next day. On his way back he entered the Eraviperoor Mar Thoma Church (It was an open thatched building without any walls and doors) to pray. He started praying with a broken heart. During his prayer he had a personal experience with the Lord, like that of the great saint Sadhu Sunder Singh. He heard God asking him "Do you believe that I am All-Sufficient for you in your life or rather do you believe in my all-sufficiency". He did not see the Lord with his physical eyes but he was sure that it was the Lord who spoke to him. He then rededicated his life to God. Bishop Abraham used to quote this incident, repeatedly during his life time in student camps and conferences.

### **Abraham loses his Ancestral Property**

According to the Syrian Christian traditions Abraham was to get 1/3 of the Marettu family's property (his father's share). But due to his close association with the Mar Thoma Church his grandfather did not give him his share.

### **Headmaster of Nicholson Girls School**

Before his ordination M. N. Abraham worked as the headmaster of the Nicholson Girls School in Tiruvalla, and taught in the S. C. S. High School as an assistant teacher.

## **First University educated Deacons of the Mar Thoma Church**

M. N. Abraham (Marettu, Kalloppa) and M. P. Pothen (Philipose) (Velliyampallil, Mallappally) were the first two persons with university degrees, who became deacons in the Mar Thoma Church. Titus II Mar Thoma ordained both of them on 30 April, 1911, in the Mar Thoma Church in Tiruvalla.

## **Deacon Abraham attends the Keswick Convention**

Deacon Abraham visited England on his way back from Canada. There he had the privilege to attend the Keswick Convention meetings, where he could meet many church leaders. His foreign trips gave him a clear understanding about the world outside India.

## **Divisional Secretary**

On 5 December, 1915, Deacon Abraham became Priest. The ordination ceremony was held in the Mar Thoma Church in Eraviperoor. During that time Mar Thoma Church was divided into seven regions for administrative purposes. The divisions were Kottayam, Tiruvalla, Maramon, Kozhencherry, Chengannur, Kayamkulam, and Kottarakkara. Rev. M. N. Abraham was appointed as the Divisional Secretary in charge of the Kayamkulam Division.

## **Consecration - 27 December 1917**

Titus II Mar Thoma led the consecration ceremony of Bishop Abraham which was held in a special *madhubaha* (altar) built on the Seminary Mount (S. C. S Compound) in Tiruvalla. A huge Kottil and a big Pandal were made to accommodate the large crowd (approximate 20,000) who attended the ceremony. This was the first time a consecration ceremony was held outside a church building. Mar Coorilos and Mar Athanasious of the Thozhiyoor Church and Bishop Dr. Gill from the Anglican Church were present for the consecration ceremony.

## **Suffragan Bishop**

From 1917 to 1944, Bishop Abraham was the Suffragan Metropolitan. He was popularly known as "Marettu Kochu-Thirumeni. For 27 years, Metropolitan Titus II and Bishop Abraham worked together. The passing of a constitution for the Mar Thoma Church, giving due places to Bishops, Clergy and Laity; and the bringing into use of a tentative *Qurbana Thaksa* (Liturgy of the Holy Communion) were peacefully achieved during their administration in the Church.

## **Formation of Sevika Sanghom and Voluntary Evangelists Association**

The consecration of Rev. M. N. Abraham as a Bishop was a great event in the Mar Thoma Church. He infused new spirit and vigor into the evangelistic work of the Church. He traveled throughout India and was a known figure in all the missionary circles as a great evangelist. He believed that every Marthomite is an evangelist.

His vision and far sightedness led to the formation of Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom in 1919 (Sevika Sanghom was established on Friday, 14 February 1919 in the Maramon Convention) and the Voluntary Evangelists Association in 1924. He was behind the establishment of the Vanitha Mandiram in Tiruvalla, the training institute of the Sevika Sanghom.

## **Importance of Prayer and Fasting**

Bishop Abraham was a man who gave due importance for prayer and fasting. His day always started with Morning Prayer at 4.30 am. In addition to Sunday fasting he used to fast and pray half a day in a week. Once in a month a whole day was set apart for prayer and fasting. One month in a year was set apart for prayer and rest.

## **Visits to Holy Land and Ceylon**

Bishop Abraham got the privilege to visit the Holy Land (Palestine) in 1927. Eight elaborate articles about his journey were published in the news papers. He also visited Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for gospel meetings.

## **Visit to North Indian Churches**

In 1934, Bishop Abraham made an extensive trip to visit the churches outside the Kingdom of Travancore. He went up all the way to Sialkote town, which is presently in Pakistan. His convention meetings held in these places were well attended (India and Pakistan were one country before 1947).

## **Bishop Abraham's mottos**

*"What is life if it is not for service; what is service if it is not for Christ"*

*"It is far better to burn out than to rust out"*

*"Seekest thou great things for thyself; seek them not. Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God".*

These were the mottos of his life and messages.

### **Bishop Abraham's quotation**

One of the quotations of Bishop Abraham, which is on the walls of our Mission Hospital in Hoskote reads as follows:

*"I tied his wounds and the Lord has healed him."*

### **Tribute to Bishop Abraham**

Bishop Abraham's photos are placed as a memorial in several western seminaries, Christian institutions and one in the Philadelphia Boys Hostel at S. I. B. S. (South India Biblical Seminary) Bangarapet near Kolar, Karnataka.

### **Parish Visits**

Church members had great appreciation for the messages of "Kochu Thirumeni." Because of his western education he had an open mind and broad ideas which helped the upliftment of many of our parishes. Usually on Thursday or Fridays he went around on his parish visits. For thirty years, Mr. Varghese accompanied Thirumeni as his cook and driver. Bishop used to carry his folding cot during his parish visits. His stay would always be in the Church. As usual he kept his morning walk during the parish visits. In the evening, *Majilis* (open court) was held in the courtyard of the church buildings.

That was the time for the common man to meet the Thirumeni and to have an open discussion or express complaints etc. People from other religions also used to visit Thirumeni on such occasions to receive his blessings.

### **Man of Faith and Authority**

Bishop Abraham had an intimate relation with his Master. Many times instant answers were obtained to his prayers. Many of our parents/grand parents have seen God answering his prayers by stopping heavy rains during the Maramon convention meetings and much more.

There was a cinema theater in Kozhencherry near the St. Thomas High School. Many youths used to go to this cinema during the Maramon Convention meetings skipping the meetings in the convention Pandal. Thirumeni instructed the owner of this theater not to have any shows at the time of the convention meetings. The owner disregarded the instructions of the Thirumeni; and the theater caught fire during the very next show and was reduced to ashes.

## **Camps and Summer Classes**

Bishop Abraham used to conduct camps and summer classes for the students and youths. Camps used to be for two to fifteen days. Topics such as Worship, Sermon Preparation, and Church History were taught by him during these camps. He became close friends with each participant in his camps. He used such occasions to find people who had a desire or the call to be priests and missionaries of the Church.

## **Code of Good Manners and Morals**

Bishop Abraham was concerned with the manners and morals of our church members. He tried to improve the general standard of our members through his writings and sermons.

Some of his instructions were:

1. We must see the good qualities in others before criticizing them.
2. If someone drops something in front of you, do not stand as an observer, pick it up and help him.
3. If one of your co-travelers is carrying two bags try to share his burden.
4. Do not spit on the road or public places; keep the environment clean and healthy.
5. When you go for a meal do not grab all the good dishes and finish your meal immediately. Allow others to take first.
6. When you walk in the sun or rain try to share your umbrella with any other person who is in need.
7. Always respect and help girls and women.
8. Help your wife and mother in their kitchen work.
9. Show respect to all your guests.
10. Maintain clean and personal hygiene habits.

## **Bible reading, Daily devotion and Prayer**

From his student days he used to get up at 4.30 am in the morning for his Bible study, daily devotion and prayer. He continued this practice until his death. He believed that it is better to see the face of God before seeing the face of any human being. In addition to Bible Reading Cards he used books like "My utmost for His Highest", "Streams in the Desert", "Springs in the Valley", "Daily Light", "Abide in Me", "Come ye apart" and "In the green pastures" for his daily devotion.

Bishop Abraham was the first Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church with a university degree. He was an M.A and B.D (Bachelor of Divinity). He was the

first Bishop outside the Palakunnathu family (Abraham Malpan was from the Palakunnathu family in Maramon. Our Bishop Mathews Mar Athanasius was Abraham Malpan's brother's son. Thomas Mar Athanasius and Titus I were children of Abraham Malpan. Titus II was also from the Palakunnathu family).

### **Greatness of Abraham Mar Thoma**

"Bishop Abraham strongly believed that evangelism was the responsibility of every member of the Church and not of the clergy alone. He emphasized that every man and woman was called to be the witness of Jesus Christ, irrespective of his secular occupation. It was this conviction that led him to organize groups of people and give them specialized training in personal evangelism. Thus the Voluntary Evangelists Association was established as a voluntary lay movement of the Church. The women of the Church also were encouraged to take up their part in fulfilling the mission of the Church. He encouraged the formation of the Mar Thoma Suvisesha Sevika Sanghom, which is the women's auxiliary of the Evangelistic work in the Church.

One of his greatest aims was to find proper and able people for both the ordained ministry of the Church and for lay activities. It was through his influence that many educated people came to join the ministry of the Church, when they could have got lucrative positions elsewhere. After finding out suitable young persons, he arranged to send them for appropriate higher education and theological studies. He organized special summer schools for lay people engaged in secular jobs, for Bible study and training.

The Vanitha Mandiram for training women workers also was developed with his active encouragement. The call that he gave to young men and women was to go and live in the villages of India in different language areas, resulted in the establishment of Ashrams in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, up to the borders of Tibet. His help was sought by Christian friends all over India to lead evangelistic conventions. Such assignments took him from Cape Kanyakumari in the south, to Kashmir in the north. He was a friend of every missionary in India and all of them looked up to him for inspiration and guidance. The Tiruppathur Ashram and the Kodikanal Ashram established by members of other Churches regarded him as their friend, guide and philosopher.

He was the President of the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association and the National Missionary Society (NMS). Even though he was suffering from acute diabetes for many years, he went on working without pause with the motto "it is far better to burn out than to rust out". A training centre for Voluntary Evangelists in the Church was named after him - Abraham Mar Thoma Bible Institute. Even though he was Metropolitan only for four years, his long ministry as a Bishop strengthened the Church in all its missionary enterprises. He was

called to eternal rest in 1947." - *Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan - "The Mar Thoma Church- Heritage and Mission"*.

"Abraham Mar Thoma was a fervent evangelist; his chief contribution lay in the promotion of Evangelistic work of lay leadership in the Church. For this purpose he worked through three main organizations in the Church - the Evangelistic Association, the Voluntary Evangelists Association and the Sevika Sanghom, over all of which he wielded great influence. He succeeded in recruiting a number of graduates for the ministry of the church and in encouraging young men and women to follow the Ashram way of life with the view to strengthen evangelistic work.

Another of his notable contributions was in his popularizing the principle of church support through voluntary offerings instead of through fees connected with church ceremonies. His great idea for the Mar Thoma Church was that it should pull its weight in the evangelization of India. He succeeded in a considerable measure, with this idea.

The Metropolitan was a staunch nationalist who stood for the democratic rights of the people. He resisted the undemocratic and dictatorial actions of Dewan Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer and was instrumental in getting a resolution passed by the Sabha Council condemning Sir C. P's move to proclaim Travancore as an independent state following the lapse of British Paramountey" - *Mar Thoma Sabha Directory*.

### **Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma's visit to Bangalore and Hoskote**

Towards the end of 1946, Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma who had a great burden and zeal for the evangelization of India, visited the Bangalore Church and was informed of possibilities of opening a mission field at Hoskote. A friend in Bangalore took him to Whitefield where Mr. A. C. Zachariah had arranged a meeting of Christian friends in that area. Seeing the genuine enthusiasm of the people assembled there, the Bishop was overwhelmed with joy and through his inspiring message and prayer challenged the audience to march forward in faith for the building up of the Kingdom of God in the area.

In the first week of January, 1947 Bishop Abraham was taken to Hoskote by the friends in Bangalore. Visiting Miss. Bagshaw at the House of Praise, he gathered more detailed information about the place and its people and was greatly impressed by the way God was leading the way for mission work, in the locality claiming the fulfillment of God's promise in Joshua 1:3, the Bishop prayed to God "*to give the place the soles of their feet had trodden upon and beseeched the Lord to give the nation for the Church's inheritance*". Hoskote mission field was established on 27 June, 1947, few months before the demise of the Thirumeni.

### Final days of Thirumeni

Thirumeni was a diabetic patient. It was diagnosed at the age of 46; after which he lived for a further 21 years. He used to take insulin injections and was very active till the last day of his life. On Friday, 30 August, 1947, while he was having a discussion with the Rtd. Chief Engineer I. C. Chacko about the plans of the present Abraham Mar Thoma Memorial Bible Institute in Amalloor, he became very ill and was rushed to the near by Aramana (Bishop's residence). He passed away at 6.30 am on Monday Sep 1, 1947, and was buried in the St. Thomas Church Cemetery in Tiruvalla.

"May His will be done" was the final words of Thirumeni.



## Main Events in the lifetime of Most Rev. Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan

1880	30 October	Birth of Abraham Mar Thoma
1883	29 November	Birth of Sadhu Kochoonju Upadeshi
1888	5 September	Formation of Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association
1898	9 December	Consecration of Titus I Mar Thoma
1905	25 February	Formation of Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam
1909		First Mission field outside Kerala – Karwar Mission
1909	20 October	Metropolitan Titus I passes away.
1910		First Mar Thoma Students conference
1911	30 April	Ordination as Deacon- in the Mar Thoma Church Tiruvalla
1912	July	Higher studies in USA
1914	28 June	Beginning of the First World War
1914	November	Returns to India after higher Education with M.A., B. D degrees
1915	5 December	Becomes Priest (Ordination) in Mar Thoma Church Eraviperoor
1915		Parish priest (vicar) in Mar Thoma Church- Kayamkulam
1917	27 January	Kovoorachen – Ipe Thoma Kathanar - Passes away
1917	27 December	Becomes Bishop at the age of 37
1919	14 February	Formation of Sevika Sanghom
1919	28 June	First World War ends.
1921	June	Establishment of Union Christian College in Alwaye.
1923	13 October	Rev. M. C. George (Father of Alexander Mar Thoma) passes away.
1923	13 December	Silver Jubilee celebration of Consecration of Titus II
1924		Formation of Voluntary Evangelistic Association
1925		Beginning of the Malayalam wing of the Christian Literature Society (CLS)
1926		Establishment of Mar Thoma Theological Seminary at Kottayam
1927		Birthday offertory during the church service introduced by Titus II
1928		Establishment of T. A. M Press in Tiruvalla
1929		Wall Street Crash - beginning of The Great Depression
1930		Medical aid fund for sick clergy - introduced in the Church by Titus II
1931	19 July	Kottarathil Thomas Kathanar - Co-Founder of Evangelistic Association passes away.
1933		Formation of Yuvajana Sakhyam
1936	27, 28 Dec	Centenary Celebrations of Reformation in Maramon Mar Thoma Church.
1937		Consecration of Juhanon Mar Thoma and Mathews Mar Athanasious
1939	September	Beginning of Second World War
1940		Beginning of Ankola Mission.-North Karnataka

1944	6 July	Titus II passes away.
1944		Abraham Mar Thoma becomes Metropolitan.
1945	2 September	End of the Second World War
1945	30 November	Sadhu Kochoonju Upadeshi passes away
1947	27 June	Beginning of Hoskote Mission, near Bangalore, Karnataka
1947	14 July	Punchamannil Mammen Upadeshi passes away.
1947	15 August	Freedom for India from British Colonial rule.
1947	1 September	Abraham Mar Thoma passes away.



## NOTES

**Maramon Convention** - A mammoth religious convention of Christians, (started in 1895 by The Mar Thoma Church but attended by people belonging of all communities), is held at Maramon, every year on vast beds of River Pumba. The convention takes place in February in an atmosphere of devotion and lasts for a period of eight days. Addressed by speakers of international repute and attended by innumerable devotees, this is the largest Christian convention in the world.

**Reformation** - Reformation is a process of reforming for the better. It can also be an improvement. Reformation in the Syrian Church was started by a priest called Abraham Malpan, (1796-1845) of Maramon.

**Mar Thoma XVII** - After getting freedom from the Portuguese Church (Roman Church), Archdeacon Parampil Thomas Kathanaar was consecrated as Mar Thoma I in 1653.

Abraham Mar Thoma was Mar Thoma XVII. The present Metropolitan Mar Chrysostom is Mar Thoma XX

**Rev. Thomas Walker** - A CMS Missionary from Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. He was the main speaker of the Maramon convention from 1899 to 1912.

**Hoskote Mission** - One of the main mission fields of the Mar Thoma Church established in 1947 by Rev. A. C. Zachariah (Kuriannoor) and Mr. M. T. Joseph (Maramon). Hoskote is 25 Km away from Bangalore city on the old Madras Road.

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# The End

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