

Malabar Mission Newsletter

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Our Mission

The Malabar Mission Society is a group of Christians interested in assisting the Malabar Mission Circle in India as it shares the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ along the Malabar Coast by supporting, with prayers for God's blessings,

- the spread of the Gospel, and
- the Circle's witness



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THE APOSTLE OF ANANTAPUR: THE CONVERSION STORY OF SHAIKH ISMAIL

(An abridged version of Shaikh Ismail's own testimony by Roland E. Miller)



The story of Shaikh Ismail includes much more than his conversion. What he did after that and what he is doing now has an epic ring. The readers of this Newsletter know about the remarkable Anantapur movement of some Telugu-speaking Muslims and Hindus towards the Saviour, centred at Anantapur. Shaikh Ismail is the leader of that movement which was well described in the 2010 spring edition of the Newsletter and earlier. How did he get started on this missionary road?

The answer to that question can only be the work of the Holy Spirit. Nothing but a divine impulse could have produced such an event and its outcomes. As is well-known certain societies are more resistant to the message of the Gospel than others. Among them must be included most Muslim societies. Why that is the case is another story. This fact alone makes Ismail's conversion a demonstration of God's power and, in his own words, "the abundant love of God towards me." But in addition is the fact that it was as it were "out of the ground," and could not have been anticipated at the human level.

Ismail was born July 1, 1949, in the village of Ganjukunta in Anantapur District, northwest Andhra Pradesh. Andhra is a huge state located in south India. It has much variety, but the dominant and state language is Telugu. In rural areas many Muslims reflect Telugu culture, even though in Andhra's cities Urdu is the common Muslim language. Ismail was born in that rural context and in a loyal Muslim family. His parents were firm in their religious practice including the five daily prayers and the required fast. Ismail remembers their frequent recitation of the name of the Prophet Muhammad. Like all Muslims they also admired the prophets Moses and Jesus (*Isa*).

Despite Ismail's religious upbringing things took a different course after his father died and his two elder brothers took charge of the family affairs. By that time he had turned 18 and had drifted into a period of restlessness. By his own admission he lapsed into a period of sinful behaviour. He kept attending the mosque and maintained the outward appearance of a pious individual, but he left home frequently, and even felt suicidal impulses. The unhealthy pattern was interrupted after three years when an itinerant Christian witness arrived in his village. The Christian gave a clear witness to Christ through his singing, praying and teaching. Ismail's mother developed an interest in listening to his message. She

even asked the Christian to pray for her wayward son and one day took Ismail to meet him.

The Christian's words and ideas seemed incomprehensible to Ismail. In particular the teaching about sin did not make any sense to him because he believed that heaven is "a free boon" for all Muslims.

(Continued on page 2 - see Apostle of Anantapur)



Shaikh Ismail baptizes Telugu-speaking converts

APOSTLE OF ANANTAPUR (con't. from page 1)

How could sin annul that fact, he wondered. The Christian pointed out that sin produced a universal condemnation that required a special solution. A spiritual break-through came for Ismail when the Christian witness pointed out the references to Jesus in the Quran. Ismail had a superficial knowledge of Jesus whom he called *Isa Nabi* (Jesus the Prophet) and *Isa Masih* (Jesus the Messiah), but he had never actually read the many Quranic references to Jesus, all of them complimentary although incomplete. Ismail testifies that by reading them he came to the realization that Jesus is the "the real saviour of the mankind." The great event took place in 1969, in his 20th year. He repented, believed and began to spend all his time with Christians, learning more from them about the Saviour. He was convinced that Jesus had personally communicated to him the message of 1 John 1: 9: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Now Ismail's troubles began since it is contrary to Muslim law to change one's religious affiliation. Villagers complained, and his elder brothers took him to task. His consistent answer to them was this: "Jesus has changed my life." To divert his attention, Ismail's family arranged his marriage with Jubeda Begum in 1970, but he continued on his chosen path. Deeply distressed, the family members became very angry, and his new wife too was saddened. His mother was sympathetic (and Ismail believed she had come to faith), but she pleaded with him to be content to be a secret believer. He remained firm in his decision but the pressures were heavy. Now he began to take refuge in the Bible and its promises. He was moved by the Lord's words in Mark 10, 29-30, indicating that we must be companions in Christ's suffering.

As the village bedlam increased Ismail's family felt compelled to present him with an ultimatum—either retract or be excommunicated and lose your inheritance. They demanded that he put his response in writing. He wrote that he would accept the penalties rather than disown his faith. He was given 24 hours before he had to leave his home and family. During those moments he was greatly consoled by what he called the golden words of Isaiah (46:4): "Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn

grey, I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear, I will carry and will save."

Taking his unhappy wife with him Ismail went 30 kilometres away to the village of Mopidi. Their hardship was severe. They had no possessions, very little food, and no work. They were in a personal wilderness. Only the charity of others kept them alive. His wife cried out, "How can we go on, why cannot your God provide for us?" In turmoil she left him and returned to her family in Anantapur where she stayed for three months. She resisted her parents' demands that she divorce Ismail, and returned to him, but she continued to beg him to alter what seemed to be a destructive decision. Finally in her hopelessness she turned to suicide. Obtaining a bottle of pesticide from a farmer, she consumed half of it and fell down. As her body lay convulsed on the floor Ismail threw himself down beside her in prayer and she vomited out the poison. To Ismail it was God's miracle: "She came back to her normal condition, praise the Lord. He gave her life back." When she had recovered, Jubeda begged God for forgiveness, and she took the decision to accept Jesus, informing everything to her parents. "It was an awesome news for them and other relatives too." From that time she joined Ismail in faith and witness. "Many visitors started to come to see and listen to her testimony."

Now somehow there was food twice a day. Their sufferings and persecutions were far from over but as Ismail says: "God performed many miracles and saved us from many dangers." They decided to spend their lives and efforts to tell others the good news of the Saviour and His free salvation. Ismail's ministry became a travelling one as he carried his witness over four districts whose fruit is the extensive Anantapur movement that is taking place today. Four daughters and a son were born to the family. The daughters all married Muslim converts, while the son now helps Ismail's ministry after doing theological studies in Bangalore. Ismail is now called "*shaikh*" by his many new fellow believers, a term of respect for a patriarchal, venerated leader. Yet he is a quiet unassuming man whose message to fellow Christians is a simple one.

"Lastly I would like to say a word. God provided us everything and protected us. The same God will also save you if you keep faith in His word. May God bless you." ❖

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: "REJOICE WITH ME"

- Rev. Howard Ulmer



These are the words of the shepherd who found the lost sheep and the woman who found the lost coin. Jesus says, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:7) Our gracious and loving God searches and seeks people to bring them into his kingdom. Our God sent Jesus, His only Son, into the world to take on human flesh and blood and to suffer and die on the cross to redeem us. On Easter morning He rose from the dead to proclaim his victory over death and the power of evil.

Jesus came "to seek and to save the lost." He came for you and for me, for the people in North America, and also for the people in India. The Malabar Mission Society continues to support the Gospel Workers in India as they share the Good News of God's love in Jesus through Vacation Bible School, Bible Correspondence Courses and evangelistic outreach. The new Viewbook, "Your Entry to a World of Service", highlights the many ways that God provides in sharing the Gospel with the people in India. Together we "seek the lost" and "**Rejoice**" when the lost are found. We thank you for your faithful prayer support and financial assistance. May God bless this mission. ❖

NEW WORKERS WELCOMED

- Rev. Carlton Riemer, MMS Project Officer

We welcome Mr. Chandra Segar as a new worker at the Open Door Men's Reading Room in Kannur. He began in March, 2010. He is 23 years old and has completed "10 plus 2," as they call it in India. It is equivalent to grade 12 or high school graduation in Canada. He is a member of a Lutheran Church in Ambur, Tamil Nadu. Rev. Victor says he is a "very good worker." The Project Officer looks forward to meeting him in person in October 2010, when he plans to visit Malabar.

The India Evangelical Lutheran Church assigned two probationers to work in the Malabar Mission Circle beginning in April 2010.

So we welcome Mr. D. Wilson into our midst, as he serves in Bethel Lutheran Church, Naduvil, and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Chengalai. His wife's name is Roshitha; she is the daughter of the sister of the Rev. D. V. Bernard, the principal of Concordia Theological Seminary, Nagercoil, India. They have two daughters: Navya (age 9) and Vindhya (age 7). They are living in the parsonage behind the church in Naduvil. The congregation sponsors a nursery school and tailoring school, supported by MMS.

Similarly, we welcome Mr. N. Shine Jose. He is newly married and working in Vellarmala in the tea estates area. They are living in a rental home in Chooralmala, where the previous worker stayed.

A probationer is similar to a vicar or theological intern in the Lutheran Church–Canada or the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. The

difference is that the internship in India comes at the end of four years of theological studies with no return to the seminary, rather than making the internship the third year of the four years of seminary training. Probationers in India are eligible for ordination after successfully completing the four years of study at the seminary and three years as a probationer, rather than after the four years of seminary training, one of which is an internship. It is a rigorous theological training program that the IELC has, and as a result their pastors are highly esteemed in their congregations and communities.

Many probationers are assigned to a village where there is no Christian presence, and many of them gladly and eagerly accept the challenge to plant a new church in that place within three years and even to make it self-supporting, if possible, within that time. The challenge to build up the struggling congregations in Naduvil, Chengalai, and Vellarmala is no less monumental and demanding.

Your Project Officer taught both of these gentlemen as students at Concordia Theological Seminary, Nagercoil, in January–April, 2009, when he taught courses on Introduction to Islam and Muslim-Christian Encounter. They are gifted students, faithful workers, zealous evangelists, and recognized as leaders by their peers.

May God bless the growth experiences of the probationers in MMC!! And may God bless their families, as they live among the people in these communities for three years. May God bless all the workers in MMC with enthusiasm and joy in spreading the Gospel in word and deed. ❖



Probationer Mr. D. Wilson with his daughters Navya and Vindhya. Mr. Wilson serves at Naduvil and Chengalai.



Probationer Shine Jose works in Vellarmala.

VETERAN MISSIONARY COUPLES HONORED AT 2010 LCMS CONVENTION

Six couples, more than 220 years of service

July 12, 2010 — Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) President Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick honored six veteran missionary couples at the LCMS' 64th Regular Convention held in Houston, TX. Included in the list of honorees were Dr. Roland and Mrs. Mary Helen Miller, co-founders of the Malabar Mission Society and missionaries to India from 1952 to 1976.

Quoting Dr. Thomas Zehnder, executive director of LCMS World Mission: "These missionary veterans have served God and their Savior throughout their lives of professional church work through LCMS World Mission. Their love, knowledge and expertise has been used to share the Gospel with unreached people and train leaders in developing national Lutheran churches in Venezuela, East and West Africa, India, Taiwan, Asia and Japan. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod shall be forever grateful for their dedication and sacrifice as they have willingly served for so many years." ❖



Mary-Helen and Roland Miller with Arlene and Carlton Riemer at the 2010 LCMS Convention

In Appreciation

The Malabar Mission Society sincerely thanks the following who have so generously given special gifts ...

In memory of:

- **Lucy Brunke**
Mark & Monique Dickinson
- **Rev. Clarence & Ramona Cherland**
Carl & Meredith Cherland
- **Phyllis Guebert**
Mark & Monique Dickinson
Rev. Karl & Judy Keller
Rev. Darwin & Lila Pollard
Rev. Carlton & Arlene Riemer
Emerald Schoepf
- **Marcella Riemer**
Rev. Carlton & Arlene Riemer
- **Oscar Sommerfeld**
Martha Sommerfeld
- **Bud Weir**
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- **Fred Wymer**
Martha Wymer

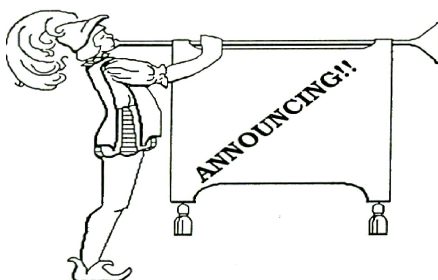
In honour of Elizabeth Zoller's birthday:
Hans & Etta Zoller

In honour of Hans Zoller's birthday:
Elizabeth Zoller



Memorials and gifts honouring special occasions are welcomed by the Malabar Mission Society, and are used to support the Lutheran Church in India to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know His love. All donations are accepted for income tax purposes. Special-occasion gifts and memorials will be acknowledged in future issues of the Newsletter.

*Send your gifts to
The Malabar Mission Society
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VACATION BIBLE SCHOOLS FEED JESUS' LAMBS

- Rev. Carlton Riemer, MMS Project Officer

Summer (April and May in India) is not a vacation time for the Gospel Workers in the Malabar Mission Circle. Even in the tropical heat, when the air is still and the Sun beats down relentlessly, as the monsoon winds and rains develop over the ocean waters, they are busy working with their congregations and in their stations to conduct Vacation Bible Schools. VBS continues to be one of the most effective projects that the Malabar Mission Society supports.

In 2010 The Malabar Mission Circle conducted 24 Vacation Bible Schools with a total of 1,363 children attending. Most of them were Hindus (580) followed by Christians (544), and 239 were Muslims. Thirty-six teachers shared the love of Jesus

with these children whom Jesus referred to as lambs and commanded us to feed them. Vacation Bible School is also a wonderful way for young people to have their first experience as leaders and teachers in Christian education, as they take responsibility for telling some of the stories or leading some of the songs or games. Some of them grow into regular teachers in the Church.

Wandoor and Thiruvally together held

five camps under the leadership of Rev. S. S. Oliver and Mr. C. D. Solomon. They had the highest number of students: 328. But Miss Soosan George and Miss Lizy from the Vanitha Women's Reading Room in Kannur came in a close second with four camps held in Kannur and Naduvil, which is 25 kilometers inland from Kannur. They also came in second with 244 children. While Wandoor-Thiruvally had the largest number of Hindus: 184, Kannur-Naduvil had the largest number of Muslims: 121. The VBS in Kalpetta, led by retired Pastor Rev. P. G. Henry, had the largest number of Christians attending: 140 out of a total of 212 students.

Vacation Bible Schools were also held in Vadattupara (two sessions with 57



Mr. Richard and a VBS class

students), Malappuram (one session with 41 students), Chelloor (one session with 15 students), Calicut (three sessions with 70 students), Sulthan Bathery (four sessions with 198 students), Mamivayel (one session with 61 students), Chooralmala (one session with 33 students), and Meenangadi (one session with 104 students).

May God bless the seeds of His Word planted in these Vacation Bible Schools with a bountiful harvest. ❖

The Malabar Mission Society is pleased to announce the completion and availability of the **MMS Viewbook: Your Entry to a World of Service.** In the words of President Howard Ulmer: "The Viewbook provides a glimpse of how God's grace and mercy has touched the hearts of people ... During the last twenty years the mission and ministry of Malabar has achieved remarkable growth. The Pastors, Catechists and Gospel Workers continue to share the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ to the people in India. God has blessed their courageous and bold witness to Hindus and Muslims in their communities."

If you are interested in a copy of the Viewbook, or would like to receive additional copies of the booklet, please contact the Malabar Mission Society either through our email address: malabarmission@sasktel.net or our postal mailing address in Regina. (Please also note that a portable document format (PDF) version of the Viewbook is posted on the Malabar Mission Newsletter page of the MMS website.)