



BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH

Office of the Metropolitan, Synod Secretariat, Thiruvalla, Kerala, India.

SHEPHERD'S LETTER

December 2018

✠In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Dear brothers and sisters, Barekmor!

It is indeed a great joy for me to write to you, my children in faith, once again. I have been extensively travelling in the past few weeks, visiting our clergy and parishes in the country of Myanmar and then joining with the many thousands of our church members in the state of Punjab India, where I had the privilege to teach from God's Word and celebrate the Holy Communion together with them.

I am reminded of St Paul's words in Philemon 1:5, "I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints." I should also say that in my travels, "your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you...have refreshed my heart" (Philemon 1:7).

We are drawing to the close of yet another year in our lives. The month of December is a blessed month indeed—full of activities and festivities, a time for looking back at God's blessings in this past year and a time to look towards a fresh start in the new year. Let me take this time therefore, to remind you of some of the things which we will need to give attention to during this time of the year.

Lectionary: As you know, the new Lectionary for the year 2018–19, has been developed for our use. It is a collection of pre-selected Scripture readings for use in our Sunday worship and other special days of the year. It has a theme or subject for each week of the year, based on the church calendar, and four Scripture passages to be read each week. The new Lectionary will come into effect from the first week of December, as the Advent season starts. Make sure you all have a copy of it so that it can become a guide for us to systematically read and study God's Word together.

Advent Season: Right from the first century onwards, the church universal has followed celebrating different seasons as part of the church calendar, and the Advent season is how the Christian year starts. It is a liturgical season lasting four weeks leading up to Christmas. Meaning 'coming', this is the season where we look forward to the second coming of Jesus and also look back to remember the first coming of Jesus into this world. It is a season of hope and of longing, of joyful expectation and of peaceful preparation.

Christmas: The Advent season leads up to Christmas, the greatest celebration of our lives as Christians! Christmas is the time where we remember God's only Son, Jesus, coming to the world—conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. It is a time when we celebrate our God, who so loved the world and came to be one among us. So you see, Christmas is the greatest event to happen in history—ever! With the coming of Jesus into our world, history changed forever!

This is the right time to share the Christmas story with those who have not heard about it. Whether it be through Christmas stars or carols, special programs (like dances, dramas, skits or street shows on the birth and life of Jesus) or by sharing our love and kindness to those in need around us, let us make use of this season of the year and share God's love to all.

Youth Assembly: Let me also remind you all to keep praying for the Youth Assembly of our church which is being held from 31 December 2018 through 6 January 2019 in Kerala India. It is the largest gathering of young people of our church till date, where more than 6,500 of our youth representatives from all across our parishes will come together for a week—to celebrate, be encouraged and have fellowship with each other. Please pray for the preparations which are underway, the team making all the arrangements, for favourable weather, safe travel of the participants and for all of the participants to have an encounter with Jesus. Please also continue to put your best efforts into raising finances for this event.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I am looking forward to visiting several of your parishes in the coming year, where I will have the joy of seeing you face to face, having fellowship with you and to be mutually encouraged in faith. Let me end by saying that, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith [especially during this

season of Advent and Christmas] and that it bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing we have in Christ” (Philemon 1:6).

The grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit be with your spirit, forever. Amen.

✠Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan.