

Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas, the Apostle, Melbourne



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CIRCULAR

The Celebration of Pesaha: A Heritage of Faith and Family Tradition

With Palm Sunday, we enter the Holy Week- the final week of the Fifty Days' Lent. Today, we commemorate the glorious entry of the Messiah into Jerusalem. The rituals and prayers we observe during these holy days, as we meditate upon the Passion, Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, carry profound spiritual meaning.

As parents living abroad, you hold a sacred responsibility to pass on certain noble traditions of faith to your children with the utmost care. In an era where many precious customs of the Marthoma Christians are vanishing, I wish to remind the new generation of our traditional *Pesaha* (Passover) observance.

1. The Feast of Pesaha: Background

The Old Testament Passover is a generational remembrance of God liberating the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It was a celebration featuring unleavened bread and a sacrificed lamb (Exodus 12:1-30). However, Jesus chose this very feast for His Last Supper. By offering His own Blood instead of the lamb's blood, and His own Body instead of the unleavened bread, He instituted the Holy Eucharist (Luke 22:1-38). For 2000 years, we have passed down this experience of God through a simple and soul-stirring Pesaha observance.

2. Breaking the Pesaha Bread: A Unique Heritage

The breaking of the Pesaha bread is a sacred tradition preserved within our families for generations, and it is unique to our community among global Christian denominations. It signifies the deep Jewish roots of the St. Thomas Christian faith.

The Preparations

- **Spiritual Preparation:** Preparation begins with a Lenten Confession involving all family members. Even those who may not have strictly followed the Great Lent observe rigorous fasting and dietary discipline during Holy Week.

- **External Preparation:** Families abstain from celebrations and entertainment. The home and its surroundings are cleaned, and clothes are washed and readied. Much like preparing for a great journey, the home must be ready before Maundy Thursday (Exodus 12:11).

3. Preparing the Bread and Milk

The primary elements are the unleavened Passover Bread (Pesaha Appam or Inri Appam) and the Pesaha Milk, crafted with coconut milk, jaggery, and spices.

- **Inri Appam:** The batter is made from rice flour and prepared immediately without allowing it to ferment. It is also called Kurishappam or Inri Appam. "INRI" stands for "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37). It is prepared after bathing and wearing clean clothes and may be baked on coals or steamed.

- **The Cross (Kurishu):** On the dough kneaded by the mother, the head of the family prayerfully places a cross made from the palm leaves received at church on Palm Sunday. Only one such "Crossed Bread" is made per household, though more bread may be made from the same dough.

- **Pesaha Milk:** Prepared with coconut milk, jaggery, and spices, it also contains a cross made of palm leaves. There was an ancestral custom of pouring the coconut water onto the roof when breaking the coconut, symbolizing the sprinkling of the lamb's blood on the doorposts by the Israelites.

4. The Rite of Breaking the Bread

On the night of Pesaha, the family gathers for dinner, followed by the breaking of the bread led by the family elder. This is done to ensure the Pesaha meal is the final food consumed that night.

- **The Family as the Altar:** The home is the true stage for this rite, where the father or elder acts as the celebrant, highlighting their role within the family.

- **The Order of Prayer:** The rite begins with the reading of Holy Scripture, specifically Psalm 135 and Exodus Chapter 12.

- **The Breaking:** The elder removes the cross from the bread and divides it into 13 pieces. It is then distributed to everyone according to age, received with both hands outstretched. This is the only occasion in our homes where the head of the family serves the food.

- **The Manner of Eating:** The bread is eaten while standing, symbolizing the urgency of the Israelites as they prepared to depart Egypt. The bread is dipped into the Pesaha milk.

- **Note:** This specific Kurishappam is traditionally not served to those who are unbaptized or non-Christians.

5. The Social Dimension

If a direct relative has passed away since the previous Pesaha, that family does not steam the bread in their home as a sign of mourning. Instead, relatives or neighbors bring Pesaha dishes to them, reinforcing love and unity among the faithful.

As Pesaha is a domestic celebration, there are no official ceremonies for it in churches. However, for students living abroad and those living alone, our parishes may conduct this ceremony informally.

I urge every family in our Eparchy to observe Pesaha with preparation this year, explaining the meaning of this tradition to our children and encouraging them to participate wholeheartedly.

I wish you all a blessed Holy Week and a glorious Easter. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

With love in Christ,

Chancery, Melbourne.
27.03.2026

Bishop John Panamthottathil CMI
Bishop of Syro Malabar Eparchy, Melbourne

NB: This circular is to be read during the Holy Qurbana in all churches of the Melbourne Eparchy on Sunday, 29 March 2026.