

Vidhuwan Kutty Achen (Rev. Yustus Joseph)

1835-1887

Life story of a Priest
who wrote 26 Hymns in the
Kristheeya Keerththanangal
(Hymn Book of the Mar Thoma Church)

Vidhuwan Kutty Achen
(Rev. Yustus Joseph)
1835 - 1887

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Rev. Yustus Joseph

1835 - 1887

Sthuthipin! Sthuthipin! Yeshu devane Halleluiah paadi
Sthuthipin! Sthuthipin! Yeshu devane
Sthuthipin Lokaththin- Paapaththe neekkuvaan
Adhipannai Vanna- daivakunjaadine

- Hymn no. 49 Kristheeya Keerththanangal

This Hymn is sung every year to conclude the final meeting of the Maramon convention by the congregation. This practice started in the first Maramon convention in 1895, and still continues. The author of this Hymn is Vidhuwan Kutty Achen. (Rev. Yustus Joseph) He was a dedicated Brahmin, and then a CMS priest and finally the founder of a church called Youyomaya Sabha.

In addition to this hymn the following hymns in the Kristheeya Keerththanangal (Hymn book of the Mar Thoma Church) are written by him.

New No.	Old No.	Hymn
19	17	Senayin Yehovaye! nee vaana senayodezhunnallhenhame
23	21	Varuveen naam Yehovakku paaduka- reksha tharunna jeeva
48	48	Yeshu deva! Yeshu nayaka! Shriyeshu naada! Yeshudeva
49	49	Sthuthipin sthuthipin Yeshu devane Halleluiah paadi
50	50	Devananadhanaa! Vandhanam- jevanatha-devanandhanaa
52	52	Sthothrram Yeshu naadhane! Manuvelane! Manuvelene!
54	54	Akileshanandhanenu Akilandhanayakanu
82	82	Deva Devanu mangalam-Mahonnathanaam
132	123	Marrudivasam marriyamakan Yerurushalemil varunnundannu
136	127	Parama thanayanaakum- yeshu devan aetthavum
139	130	Deva Deva nandan - kurisheduththu povathu kaanmeen
141	132	Veenhaal-Seeyon kumaari-thaanhaal azhalaazhiyil
189	178	Aathmaave! Vanneduka... Vishuddhaathmaave
143	134	Enthoranpithappane! ee paapimel-Enthoranpithappane
156	146	Inne-shu raa-jan uyarththe-zhunn etthallelu-jah!
157	147	Jeeva naayakene! Manuvele! En-En-En-En-Jeeva
160	150	Vaanalokathezhunnallinal Sreeyeshu nadhan
207	192	Enthu Cheyyendu njaan - en jeevanadha
208	193	Kumbidunnenen jeevanatha - devathi deva
212	197	Yeshuve ! Karunasanaa! Maha dhoshi njanayyo
209	194	Jeevanayakanku meshuve paapiyakumen yachana
340	340	Paaduveen sakala bhumeeye - devanu puthiya paattayi
341	341	Manujanivan Bhagyavan - manujanivan
388	266	Kantha! Thamasam menthaho
391	270	Yeshu rajenttezhunnallathin mun dhoodu kalitha nadannu
426	395	Christhuyeshu Shishyarrude kalukale

Birth

Ram Iyer (Rev. Yusthus Joseph - before conversion) was born on 6 September, 1835, in a Tamil Brahmin family in the Manippuram Village near Palghat. Venkateswara Iyer (Venkateswara Bhagavather) and Meenakshi Ammal were his parents. By profession they were temple singers. Ram Iyer was one of seven children; he had five brothers and one sister.

Education and Marriage

Ram Iyer had his early education from a Brahmin teacher in Palghat, who taught him Malayalam, Tamil and Music. After that his maternal great grandfather, a famous astrologer taught him Sanskrit and Astrology. By the time he was 22, he became an expert in Astrology, Grammar, Mathematics and Music. During this time Ram Iyer's father, who was a temple singer, shifted the family residence to Sasthankotta, a temple town in Travancore. It was while residing in Sasthankotta, Ram Iyer married Seetha Devi aged 10, of Puthoor Madam (Madam-house of Brahmin) of Karunagappally.

Ramayyer's Mother becomes sick

About this time Ram Iyer's mother became sick. They took her wherever they could for her treatment and tried all sorts of medicine and mantras. But it was of no use. Her condition became worse and on the advice of one of their Christian neighbours they even tried reciting Christian prayers. To their amazement it made her well. The Christian friend was Thomas Kunju, younger brother of the Mathew Mar Athanasius Metropolitan (Mar Thoma XIII, 1818-1877) of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

Thomas Kunju stayed at Thevalakkara with his father-in-law (Thevalakkara Kunchandy Vaidyan) and he was a good friend of Ram Iyer's father Venkateswara Bhagawather. As per the instructions of Thomas Kunju they prayed to a saint who was buried in the Thevalakkara Martha Mariam Church, and Ram's mother was cured. This incident made the Iyer family curious as to who this Jesus was and what the Christian faith was all about. Venkateswara Bhagavather and family shifted their residence once again to a house closer to Thevalakkara Kunchandy Vaidyan's Medical clinic.

Higher Education

While staying in Karunagappally Ram Iyer continued his education under the guidance of the famous teachers of that time, Palakkal Kottoor Aashan and Azhakathu Karanakuruppu. He got the privilege to read the ancient theological books kept in the Azhakathu family archives. By seeing the intelligence and interest of his student, Ahakathu Kurupp gave Ram Iyer the name "Vidhuwan Kutty" (which means 'intelligent student / boy').

According to some other historical versions the title "Vidhuwan Kutty" was given to him by the Maharaja of the Travancore Kingdom, during the Navarathri Maholsavam (A

temple festival of the Sri Padmanabha Swami Temple) in Trivandrum. The Maharaja used to visit the Navarathri Mandapam daily to enquire about the welfare of the priests and temple workers. In answer to the Maharaja's enquiry about their food arrangements, the boy Ram Iyer who was at the temple with his father complained that despite the temple's perfect arrangements, there was a shortage of fish. This response greatly surprised the Maharaja, as Brahmins never ate fish. But Ram Iyer wasn't talking about fish to eat, but about the fish in the temple pond. (Usually there were fish bred in the temple pond to eat leftovers that got washed off the priests' hands. This kept the pond fresh and clear.) Ram, though quiet young was quick to notice that there were no fish in the Sri Padmanabha Swami Temple's pond. His smart observation made the Maharaja refer to him as Vidhuwan Kutty.

Reading the Bible

The Iyer family was very impressed with the exemplary Christian life led by Thomas Kunju. On many occasions they brought their doubts and queries of the Christian faith to Thomas Kunju and to his father in law Kunchandy Vaidayan. Thomas Kunju presented a Malayalam Bible to Venketesawara Bhagavather as a birthday present. Bhagavather and his family began to read that Bible. They never thought that the Bible would transform their lives. It was by reading the Bible that he became aware of divine truths and the presence of some force working in his mind. So the Bhagavather's family continued their discussions with Thomas Kunju and Kunchandy vaidyan. Ram Iyer also read the Bible and to oppose his Christian friends in debates, he began to do a thorough study on the Bible. But the transforming love of Jesus Christ for sinners was something new to his ideologies. Ram Iyer found it difficult to digest the sacrificial life of Jesus on the Cross.

Dialogue with Rev. Joseph Peet - CMS Missionary

Rev. Joseph Peet was an Anglican C.M.S Missionary who was staying in Mavelikkara. Rev. Peet was a very learned man and got his education from the famous Cambridge University in England. He had written a grammar book in Malayalam for those who spoke Malayalam. Ram Iyer, on reading this book, wanted to meet Rev. Peet. So he went to Mavelikkara and had a long talk with the missionary, on the Christian faith and teachings of the Bible. Rev. Peet could answer all Ram's doubts, and left him amazed with his knowledge in world religions and their doctrines. He even visited Ram Iyer and his parents in Thevalakkara and had a friendly chat about Christianity with them.

Rev. Peet gave them a copy of the Malayalam translation of John Bunyan's 'The Pilgrim's Progress' to read. It was after reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* that they decided to become Christians.

Opposition

The news soon spread that the Iyer family were converting to Christianity. Many Hindu religious leaders came to them to persuade them to withdraw their decision. Even their

relatives tried their best to change their minds, but to no avail. Ram Iyer's in-laws came and took his wife to their house forcefully, but they were firm in their decision.

In 1861, between July and September they were all baptised in the C. M. S. Church in Mavelikkara by Rev. Joseph Peet. Ram Iyer was baptized on 4 August, 1861. They were given new Christian names. (The names were selected from Acts 1:21. The name Justus, in Malayalam is written as Yusthus).

Their new names were:-

Venkateswara Bhagavather – name changed to Yusthus Korunallios (Cornelius)

Meenakshi Ammal- Sara Sathiya Bhodhini

Ram Iyer- Yusthus Joseph

Venkitakrishnan- Yusthus Yakkob

Subramanian- Yusthus Mathai

Suryanarayanan- Yusthus Yohannan

Govindan- Yusthus Philipose

Padmanabhan- Yusthus Samuel

Ram Iyer's wife's name was changed from Seetha Devi to Mary

Due to the strong opposition from relatives and religious leaders they were forced to stay with missionary Rev. Joseph Peet, in the Mission Bungalow in Mavelikkara for a long time.

Becoming a Priest

After becoming a Christian, Ram Iyer (Justhus Joseph) was sent to Kottayam seminary to study Greek and English and the Bible. On 26 November 1865 he was ordained as a deacon in the CMS church. In December 1865 he was ordained as priest and CMS appointed him as the assistant vicar of the Mavelikkara CMS Church.

First Assignment

During the middle of the ninetieth century many Hindu customs and superstitions were followed in Church. Religious life consisted of certain ceremonies, rituals and festivals. Offerings were made to saints to avoid calamities and to gain personal advantages. Special festivals were held on the Feasts of certain saints where the images of the Saints were taken in procession to please them and to win their favor.

Rev. Yusthus Joseph, through his messages based on the Bible convinced his parishioners for the need of revival in their life. Revival meetings were held in and around Mavelikkara. His talent in singing was an added bonus in his meetings. CMS Church authorities were pleased with the work of the new priest Rev. Yusthus Joseph. He was appointed as the Vicar of the Kannetti Parish. With sincere efforts, he conducted revival meetings in

Thevalakkara, Krishnapuram, Puthuppally, Kattanam, Cheppad and other nearby places. Many committed their lives to the Lord from the CMS church and the Syrian Church. Every where people began to sing and dance and began to rejoice in the Lord.

Revival movement

Revivalism is a special approach to religion or one's faith that gives importance to individual religious experience rather than the main doctrines. It is always associated with fervent emotional singing, preaching, confessing, dancing etc. We had experienced many revival movements in Syrian Church. Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu was the birth place of revival movements in South India. It was started in 1860, by CMS Missionaries and came to Travancore through an unknown preacher called Mathai Upadeshi and carried on by Vidhuwan Kutty Achen (Justus Joseph). In 1864, Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan allowed Ammal, the daughter of a famous Tamil convert, Vedanayaka Sastri, to visit the churches and inspire the people through her Christian Songs. In 1873, Vidhuwan Kutty Achen became the leader of this movement. In 1894, Tamil preachers David and Wordsworth took over the leadership of revivalism. The Maramon convention was started in 1895. Later the spirit of revivalism was continued by the blessed leaders like CMS missionary Rev. Thomas Walker from Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, PUNCHAMANNIL MAMMEN UPADESHI and MUTHAMPACKAL KOCHOONJU UPADESHI.

According to Alexander Mar Thoma *"The revival movement in Kerala owed much to the evangelistic zeal of laymen. In the early days of the Maramon Convention, two friends from Tamil Nadu, David and Wordsworth helped with forceful gospel messages. Sadhu Kochoonju Upadeshi and PUNCHAMANNIL MAMMEN UPADESHI kept the fire burning for many decades, helping thousands to continue in spiritual joy and sacrificial living."* (The Mar Thoma Church - Heritage and Mission - Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan)

Arulappan - Tamil Evangelist

John Arulappan Upadeshi (Evangelist Arulappan) from the CMS church in Tirunelveli was the founder of the Revival movement in South India. He trained many to preach the messages of revivalism. Brothers of Rev. Yusthus Joseph- Yusthus Yakkob Kutty and Yusthus Mathai Kutty became disciples of Arulappan and learned lessons of Revivalism thoroughly from him, and returned to Central Travancore to propagate it.

Rev. C. Masilamani - of Nagercoil

Revivalism in South Travancore was propagated by Rev. C. Masilamani. He was a priest in the CMS church in Nagercoil. His messages could almost hypnotize people and thousands believed whatever he said. Women brought their ornaments and donated them to him. Many sold their properties and animals and brought the money to him. All these things were done in the name of the Lord. Rev. Masilamani bought a big coffee estate with this money. When his first wife died he married her sister. He was thrown out of the Church by the CMS missionaries and then settled in Madras permanently.

First Stage of the Revival Movement in Central Travancore

After getting proper training from Arulappan Upadeshi, Yusthus Yakkob Kutty and Yusthus Mathai Kutty started their work in Central Travancore. Yakkob Kutty was a good orator who could convince his listeners, while Mathai Kutty was a blessed singer. The topics of their messages were 'confession', the 'second coming of Jesus Christ', and '1000 years of rule' (the Millennial Reign of Christ). Soon they became famous and thousands followed them. Everyone believed that Yakkob Kutty and Mathai Kutty had special powers and that they were anointed workers of God. The brothers followed the example of Rev. C. Masilamani and amassed great wealth.

Second Stage of Revivalism

In July 1873, one woman in the Mankuzhy (a place near Kayamkulam) CMS church had a very strange vision. In her vision she saw a black cloud coming down from heaven and resting on her shoulders. She then heard a voice saying, "Confess or you will die". The same night Mathai Kutty's wife also had a similar vision. Within few days a teacher in Kattanam CMS School also had a similar vision. No one realized that all these incidents were pre-arranged tricks by the brothers Yakkob Kutty and Mathai Kutty. These brothers convinced their brother Rev. Yusthus of their teachings.

Prophet Koodarapallil Thomman.

Prophet Koodarapallil Thomman was from the Chenkulam village in Kottarakka. No one knows much about his early life or background. Prophet Thomman was a good friend of Yakkob Kutty and Mathai Kutty. And because of their influence Rev. Yusthus Joseph visited this prophet in Quilon. In the presence of Rev. Yusthus Joseph and so many others Prophet Thomman made his notorious prophecy. Thomman prophesied "*Jesus Christ will come after six years (six years from 30 May 1875) and the seventh year all the believers will be gathered to his kingdom. So turn away from the sins and change your life*", and Rev. Yusthus Joseph and the others present said "*Amen*".

Rev. Yusthus Joseph - Cheated by his brothers and friends

Being a member of the high class Brahmin family, CMS missionaries had great respect for Rev. Yusthus Joseph. They sincerely appreciated and supported his work in all possible ways. But the relationship of Rev. Yusthus with the revivalists and Koodarpallil Thomman were not acceptable to the CMS Church.

Unfortunately Rev. Yusthus Joseph believed the prophecy of Koodarpallil Thomman and began to speak accordingly in all his meetings. Letters were sent out to the Madras Bishop, all the CMS missionaries, all the heads of the Syrian Churches, all the priests from other churches explaining in detail of this prophecy. But most of them didn't give importance to these letters.

The CMS Church authorities, ex-communicated Rev. Yusthus from the Church on 9 October, 1875. A little more than a week later, on 18 October, 1875 Rev. Yusthus Joseph established another Church - Kannetti Unarvu Sabha- (Kannetti Revival Church). Rev. Yusthus Joseph was the head of this church.

New Church of Rev. Yusthus Joseph

Even though the CMS church ex-communicated him, many believed in him and his messages. He had congregations in Kannetti, Thevalakkara, Chengannur, Mavelikkara, Aranmula, Poovathoor, Kozhencherry, Tiruvalla, Mannar, Niranam, Thalavady, and Chennithala. About 1500 families and 11 priests from different churches joined his group. There were 16 Parishes in total. Koodarapallil Thomman and Omallur Eappen were the assistants of Rev. Yusthus Joseph in the administration of this Church. All the Church members eagerly awaited the second coming of Jesus Christ, after six years.

Vision of Koodarapallil Thomman and Omallur Eappen

During one of these days the main prophets of this new church (Koodarapallil Thomman and Omallur Eappen and others) had a strange vision. In their vision they saw for three days (from 10 to 12 August, 1876) that “there was going to be total darkness all over the world and this was the sign of Jesus’ second Coming.” They did their best to make this vision known to the whole world. They even sent telegrams to the Travancore King, Queen Victoria of England, Canterbury Archbishop and Pope.

Because of this vision their Church became strong. More and more people joined the group. Like the Early Church of the first century, many sold their properties and gave the money to Rev. Joseph. Ornaments and money was offered or donated to Rev. Yusthus Joseph which was collected in big baskets. Most people lost interest in their business’ and agriculture. Some stopped construction work of their houses. In many places, common feasts were arranged from the money of believers who sold off their properties.

In many places in Central Travancore people used to carry “Choottu Katta” (a bundle of dry coconut leaves which can be used as a torch in darkness-during night time) where ever they went thinking that darkness would come at any moment.

August 10-12, 1876

Unfortunately nothing unusual happened on these days. As usual the sun was bright as ever. The Church leaders immediately came up with a new teaching. According to them the darkness was there, but not visible to human eyes. It was a spiritual darkness which could be seen only through the eyes of the faithful believers. But this new doctrine was not accepted by the common believers. Most of the people left the new church. Even Omallur Eappen who was one of the strong supporters of the church departed. He committed suicide on 25 July, 1878 by hanging himself on a tree in a place called Vettiyyar. Koodarapallil Thomman and Yusthus Mathai Kutty (Brother of Rev. Yusthus Joseph) died of small pox.

Second Coming of Jesus- on 2 October 1881

According to Vidhuwankuty achen, the second coming of Jesus was supposed to happen on the night of 2 October 1881. He and his followers waited for that event by counting the hours. He was awake the whole night with his followers to receive the Lord. But Jesus didn't come on that night. With a desolate heart he wrote the Hymn: (No.388 (266) in our Book)

“Kantha! Thamasam Enthaho! Vannidan Yeshu- Kantha Thamasam Entanho”

Contributuion to Malayalam Christian Literature

Kerala Christians used to have Hymns and worship songs which are mainly used for their church worships and festivals. They are generally classified as “Palli Paattu (Church Songs) not having much literary value. It was through the hymns of Vidhuwan Kutty Achen, Christian Hymns got a standard and acceptance in Malayalam Literature. Vidhuwan Kutty was a very learned man who was well versed in Malayalam, Tamil, Sanskrit, English and Greek. More over being a very religious Brahmin before conversion he had sound knowledge of all Hindu doctrines and practices. He could make use all this knowledge while writing Christian Hymns. The surpassing poetic beauty of his Hymns is so great that even now almost all the Groups/ sects of the Kerala Christians use his Hymns in their worship services.

Contribution of Vidhuwan Kutty to the Kerala Church

Even though it was difficult to agree with his teachings and prophecies many people were awakened by his sermons and a thirst for real truths were seen every where. More and more people began to read the Bible to know the truth. In 1873, 1119 copies of the Bible were sold in Kerala. But in 1874 the number increased considerably and 3034 copies were sold.

This growth in the readership of the Scriptures gave a moral boost to the printers of the Bible- the CMS press in Kottayam. Because of his sermons and the reading of the Bible many turned away from alcoholism, witch craft, magic, stealing etc. People began to spend more time in prayer and fasting and many lives were transformed.

Mar Thoma Church and Vidhuwan Kutty Achen,

According to Most. Rev. Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Vidhuwan Kutty Achen had a vital role in the Revival movement of the Mar Thoma Church “*The spiritual revival started by an unknown preacher Mathai Upadesi and carried on by Rev. Yustus Joseph (Vidhuwan Kutty) a famous scholar and musician and a Brahmin convert, had its influence throughout Central Travancore.* -Christianity in India and a brief history of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church by Most. Rev. Juhanon Mar Thoma.

26 out of the total 427 hymns in the *Kristeeya Keerthhanangal* (hymn book used by the Mar Thoma Church) are written by Vidhwan Kutty Achen.

Final days of Rev. Yustus Joseph

After 2 October 1881, Rev. Yustus Joseph led a very silent life without much involvement in religious matters. But his brothers and followers established a church called “Youyomaya Sabha” Now this church has got less than 150 families on roll.

In 1887 at the age of 52 Vidhuwan Kutty Achen passed away. His tomb is at the CSI church in Kannetti near Mavelikkara.



Important Events during Vidhuwan Kutty Achen’s life

1835	Sep 06	Born in Manipuuram Village, Palghat.
1856		Marriage with Seetha Devi of Karunagapally
1860		Revival movement starts in Thirunelveli
1861	Aug 4	Baptism –Ram Iyer becomes Yustus Joseph
1863		Revival movement reaches in Nagercoil CMS Parish
1865	Nov 26	Yustus Joseph becomes Deacon
1865	Dec	Yustus Joseph becomes priest- Asst. Vicar of CMS Parish in Mavelikkara
1869	Jan 4	Vicar of Kannetti (Place near Mavelikkara) Parish
1873		Revival movement reaches Central Travancore
1873-81		Prime time of the Revival Movement
1873		A woman in Mankhuzhy CMS Church sees a vision
1875	May 30	Koodarappalil Thomman declares that Jesus Christ will come after six years on 2 Oct 1881.
1875	Oct 9	CMS Church ex-communicates Rev. Yustus Joseph
1875	Oct 18	Yustus Joseph establishes Kanneetti Unarvu Sabha (Kannetti Revival Church)
1876	Aug10-12	Koodarappalil Thomman and Omallur Eappen declared that total darkness would occur in the world (But it never happened).
1878	July 25	Omallur Eappen commit suicide.
1881	Oct 2	Second coming of Jesus Christ as per the declaration of Koodarappalil Thomman, & beginning of Yustus Joseph Era.
1887		Rev. Yustus Joseph Passes away.



Notes

Maramon Convention - A mammoth religious convention of Christians, (started in 1895 by The Mar Thoma Church but attended by people belonging to all communities), is held at Maramon, every year on the vast beds of River Pumba. The convention takes place in February / March 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.

Ashan - The Malayalam word for School Teacher (School Master).

Upadeshi - Upadeshi in Malayalam means a person who gives advice. But in Christian literature Upadeshi means a gospel preacher or an evangelist.

Ram Iyer – In some places it's pronounced as Ramayyar.

Yustus Joseph - The name Justus is taken from the Verse Acts 1:23 “*So they (Apostles) proposed two men: Joseph who was called Barabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias...*” In Malayalam Justus is written as Yustus.

Temple Singers- Temple singers are very learned classical singers with wide knowledge of the Hindu faith and doctrines. They used to present musical concerts during festival /prayer times in the temple.

John Bunyan (1628-1688) - Bunyan was born in 1628 in England in a poor family. He was led to the Lord through his wife in 1647. Because of preaching without permission from the Church of England, Bunyan was put in prison. From the Prison he wrote the Pilgrim's Progress in 1678. The Pilgrim's Progress has been printed, read and translated more often than any book other than the Bible. People of all ages have found delight in the simple, earnest story of Christian, the Pilgrim. The reading of The Pilgrim's Progress can be not only a pleasurable experience, but a life changing one as well.



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The End

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All For His Glory

