

## Mar Thoma Marriage – An Overview

### Intention to Marry

After the groom and the bride have come to an understanding of their intention to get married, the parents or the elders approach the Vicar of the Church and convey of this intention and the preferred date of marriage.

In the Mar Thoma Church the wedding is not held on Sunday (set apart for worship), Friday (commemorate death of Christ), 25 days of Lent before Christmas and 50 days of Lent before Easter (time of prayer and meditation).

### Marriage banns

Once the date of marriage and which church it is going to be held is finalised the marriage banns is prepared. Generally the wedding is in the groom's parish. The marriage banns is a public announcement of the proposed marriage. Typical marriage banns would be:

Marriage of Mr (*name*) son of Mr. & Mrs. (*name*) of the (*name of the church and location*) with Ms. (*name*) daughter of Mr. & Mrs. (*name*) of the (*name of the church and location*) is proposed to be held on (*date*) at (*church*). Any impediments towards the same must be informed in writing to the vicar.

The vicars of the churches to which where the groom and the bride belong, announce the Marriage Banns. In the Mar Thoma Church the marriage banns is announced on two Sundays and any member having an objection to this marriage is expected to inform the Vicar. If there is paucity of time special approval can be taken from the Diocesan Bishop to wave the announcement or restrict it to one announcement.

### Pre-marital counselling

The groom and the bride go through mandatory counselling class by the Vicar in preparation for the marriage. In preparation to the marriage counselling class the groom and the bride are encouraged to study the information on marriage at the Parish website.

### Preparatory work

Prayer ... Uphold the proposed marriage in your prayers.

Two wedding rings ... During the wedding service these are blessed by the Minister (Bishop/Achen conducting the marriage) and the Bishop/Clergy participating in the wedding. It is then put on the ring finger of the groom and bride respectively by the Minister.

One gold chain ... During the wedding service the gold chain is used by the Minister to crown the groom and the bride which is then put on the neck of the groom.

Mantrakodi ... This is the wedding saree brought by the groom for the bride. During the wedding service the groom drapes the Mantrakodi over the bride's head.

Minnu ... The Minnu is a flat piece of gold in the shape of a Banyan tree leaf with inlay of a cross on one side in tiny seven gold granules. Banyan is a evergreen tree with spreading branches having several trunk like roots – the tree is a picture of stability and rest for all who comes under its shade.

Minnu is held together by seven strands of thread twisted together. On the seventh day God rested from all the work of creating he had done (Gen. 2:2). Seven is a picture of completion and rest. During the wedding service the groom ties the strand with the Minnu around the bride's neck.

Penkettu ... There is a particular way the knot has to be tied while tying the Minnu with the strand. Around the bride's neck. The groom is encouraged to learn this in advance: the edge of the right strand is placed on the top of the edge of the left strand. The right strand edge is then taken under the left strand and brought back up. The edge of the right strand is once again placed over the edge of the left strand and then is taken under the left strand to form the knot.

General ... If you choose to have the Church choir for the wedding the request has to be made in advance to the Choir secretary. All the members of the choir are offering voluntary service and may not be able to break away from their work/study/home commitments to affirm their presence. There is a choir fee. If you intended to invite a speaker to share a wedding message the details of the speaker needs to be discussed with the Vicar. If videographers and photographers are present they should be instructed to avoid powerful focus lights constantly on the Minister. The videographer/photographer cannot go inside the railing area to for their shoot.

## **Wedding Day**

On the day of the marriage the Vicar/Achen visits the house of the groom and the bride before they leave for the church for prayer.

The groom and the bride are the most important person on this day. In the olden tradition in their respective homes the groom and the bride are made to stand on a mat in presence of the family members, close relative and elders. Sometimes the teacher of the groom or bride is also invited for this occasion. The groom and the bride respectively give 'dakshina' (Malayalam meaning gifts/presents) to the elder/teacher who in turn would bless him/her. The Vicar prays on the occasion.

## **Wedding Service**

The rings, the chains, the Minnu on seven strands of thread and the Mantrakodi are handed over before the wedding service to the Minister which is placed on the table.

The marriage service is not held in the Madbaha (the sanctum sanctorum). The celebrant stands in the 'Azhikk-akam' (Malayalam meaning inside the railing), i.e. the space between the veil and the railing.

The groom enters the church from the door opposite the Madbaha, walks though the aisle and stands closer to the railing. The bride comes in (through the same door) accompanied by the father. The bride has to have her head covered during the wedding ceremony. The bride comes and stands on the right hand side of the groom facing the Madbaha. A married sister/aunt from the side of the bride stands behind the bride.

## **Wedding Liturgy**

The Mar Thoma Syrian Church recognizes marriage as a Holy Sacrament signifying God's act of uniting a man and a woman to become husband and wife. The ceremony is far more than just a divine blessing of a human contract. The mystery of the relationship between husband and wife is compared to that of Christ's union with the Church. The order of service is rich in symbolism, essentially in that while Christ is the Divine Bridegroom, the Church is the Bride. This symbolism is expressed through chants in Malayalam and hymns as well as prayers in English, both of which strongly communicate the permanence of the unity in marriage as purposed by God.

The service is conducted in two parts – Blessing of the Ring and Blessing of the Crown. During the ancient times these were two services done separately but now owing to practical reasons is done together.

### **1. Blessing of the Ring (Engagement)**

Though the couple has already arrived at an understanding earlier and agreed for this marriage, this is again confirmed in the church before this august gathering. The minister puts the rings on the fourth finger of the right hand of the groom and the bride, which they accept from him as a token of the givenness of their marriage by God

In the Christian faith Christ is the husband and the Church is the bride. God called Abraham to be the father of the nations. Abraham is a picture of God the Father. Isaac is the only son of Abraham. Isaac is the picture of Jesus Christ the Son. Abraham sent his chief servant to find a bride for his son Isaac. The servant identifies Rebecca and comes back with her as bride for Isaac. The servant is a picture of the Holy Spirit who brings the church (the bride of Christ) to Christ.

In the Mar Thoma marriage the ring is not put by the groom on the hand of bride and vice versa. It is the Minister who puts the ring on the finger the groom and the bride. This is a picture of the Holy Spirit bringing the groom and the bride in the holy matrimony. The minister puts the ring on behalf of Christ and church as a sign of the covenant.

### **2. Blessing of the Crown (Marriage)**

During the second part of the service, the minister uses a gold chain to crown the heads of the groom and the bride while praying that they may be adorned with the crown of righteousness and joy all the days of their life. The crown is a symbol of the authority and royal privileges in Christ. The bride uncovers her head during her crowning (care should be taken to ensure that the bridal attire does not have any crown on the head). The blessings of God who blessed Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sara, Isaac and Rebekah are invoked on the couple. In case of a remarriage the crowning is not done as it was done during the earlier marriage service.

An important part of this section is the reading of the epistle to the Ephesians in which St. Paul reminds us of the duties of the husband and wife in their life together. Then the minister joins the right hands of the groom and the bride, and reads a portion from the Gospel of St. Matthew, where Christ emphasizes the inseparable bond into which the bride and groom enter. Thereafter, the groom ties the 'Minnu' around the bride's neck and covers her head with the 'Mantrakody' (the wedding sari), both of which elements are adopted from the Indian local culture. At this point in time the sister or the aunt who stood behind the bride moves away and the sister or an aunt of the groom now stands behind the bride. This is an indication that the bride has now become part of the groom's family.

The groom and the bride does not take any vows, instead, the ceremony is concluded with the Exhortation to the couple in which their sacred duty to each other is enjoined upon them in the name of "One who knoweth the heart and the mind". This is considered far more binding than a vow uttered or a contract drawn up.

### **Signing the Marriage Register**

After the wedding service the husband and the wife sign the marriage register. Two witnesses also sign the register. They now give their first offertory as a couple to the church. The husband and the wife turn to the congregation and are introduced by the Vicar as the newly wedded couple.

### **Marriage certificate**

The Newlywed must make it a point to avail the Marriage Certificate from the Parish office. Additional copies of the Marriage Certificate can be availed when needed by requesting the Parish office.

### **Church Membership**

The newly wedded husband can avail a new membership as 'Head of the Family' or continue as a member under the present Head of the Family.

### **General**

The newly wedded couple is encouraged to participate regularly in the Church worship and other activities of the Church. They should be engaged in the study of the Word and family prayer. They should set aside a portion of their income for contribution to the church and the needy