

# The Assyrian Church of the East: A Glimpse into Ancient Christian Traditions and Enduring Faith

When one thinks of ancient civilizations and their rich cultural heritage, it is impossible not to mention the ancient Assyrians. While their empire thrived in the heart of Mesopotamia, it is their contribution to Christianity and the establishment of the Assyrian Church of the East that continues to echo through time. In this article, we will take a deep dive into the history, traditions, and enduring faith of the Assyrian Church of the East.

## 1. Origins and Foundation

The Assyrian Church of the East traces its roots back to the apostolic times, claiming direct descent from the followers of Jesus Christ in the region of ancient Mesopotamia. According to tradition, the Church was founded by Saint Thomas the Apostle, who evangelized the lands that now constitute Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey.

Over the centuries, the Assyrian Church of the East established its patriarchal headquarters in various cities, including Seleucia-Ctesiphon (currently part of modern-day Baghdad) and later in the city of Erbil, Iraq. This church, also known as the Nestorian Church, played a pivotal role in the spread of Christianity throughout Asia, reaching as far as China.

### **The Assyrian Church of the East: History and Geography** by Captivating History(Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4 out of 5

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## The Assyrian Church of the East

History and Geography



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Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
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## 2. Doctrines and Beliefs

The Assyrian Church of the East adheres to the teachings of the Nicene Creed, which affirms the divinity of Jesus Christ. However, it developed its own unique set of theological perspectives that separate it from other Christian denominations.

One of the distinguishing features of the Assyrian Church of the East is its emphasis on the two natures of Christ: divine and human. This belief, known as the Dyophysite Christology, acknowledges that Jesus possesses both divine and human characteristics.

Another fundamental aspect of their doctrine is the sacramental life of the Church. The Assyrian Church of the East administers the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, penance, matrimony, anointing of the sick, and ordination. These sacraments are seen as transformative experiences that foster spiritual growth and connection with God.

## 3. Liturgical Traditions

The liturgical traditions of the Assyrian Church of the East are a testament to its ancient heritage. The Church employs the "Qurbana" as its primary liturgical rite. This liturgy, conducted in the Aramaic language, consists of various prayers, hymns, and scriptural readings.

During the Qurbana service, the Eucharist is celebrated as the central act of worship. The Assyrian Church of the East holds a profound reverence for the Eucharist, considering it a tangible means of receiving the body and blood of Christ. The faithful partake in the Eucharist with intense devotion and spiritual contemplation.

#### **4. Persecution and Resilience**

Throughout its history, the Assyrian Church of the East has faced numerous challenges and periods of severe persecution. Despite these adversities, the Church has demonstrated remarkable resilience and unwavering commitment to its faith.

One of the most tragic chapters in the history of the Assyrian Church of the East is the Assyrian genocide, which occurred during World War I. Alongside other Christian communities, the Assyrians were targeted by the Ottoman Empire, resulting in mass killings and forced displacements. Thousands of Assyrians lost their lives, and many ancient churches and monasteries were destroyed.

Despite these atrocities, the Assyrian Church of the East managed to survive and rebuild its communities. Today, it continues to grow and flourish globally, with sizable populations in the United States, Australia, Canada, and Europe.

#### **5. Contemporary Challenges and Outreach**

In the modern era, the Assyrian Church of the East faces various challenges, ranging from the preservation of ancient manuscripts and artifacts to the emigration of its congregations due to unstable political and social conditions in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the church has made significant efforts to preserve its cultural and religious heritage. Organizations and individuals across the globe work tirelessly to digitize ancient texts, restore damaged churches, and ensure the transmission of traditional liturgical practices to future generations.

The Assyrian Church of the East also engages in interfaith dialogue and ecumenical relations with other Christian denominations and religious groups. These initiatives aim to foster understanding, peace, and cooperation among diverse religious communities.

The Assyrian Church of the East stands as a testament to the enduring power of faith and the resilience of ancient traditions. Rooted in a rich history dating back to the apostolic times, this church has faced numerous challenges throughout its existence but has remained steadfast in its commitment to preserving its unique theological perspectives and liturgical heritage.

Today, as the Assyrian Church of the East navigates the complexities of the modern world, it continues to inspire and captivate believers and historians alike. Let us recognize and honor the profound contributions of this ancient Christian community, ensuring the preservation of its faith for generations to come.

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The cradle of the Church of the East was in Mesopotamia (between the Tigris and the Euphrates), where it developed its first centre at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, then the capital of the great Persian Empire and today an archaeological site to the south of Baghdad. From the very beginnings of Christianity until the fourteenth century, this Church experienced a remarkable expansion in Asia, its missionaries carrying the Gospel from Persia to India, via the Persian Gulf, and even as far as China. The Church of the East reached China as early as the seventh century via Central Asia and the celebrated Silk Road that linked China to the Mediterranean world. Much later, in the late fourteenth century, the invasions of the Mongol conqueror, Timur Lang (Tamerlane), across Asia brought about a great decline of the Church of the East. Eventually, after the genocide suffered by Christians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915, and the massacres that followed in Persia, the Church of the East and its people were on the verge of extinction. In 1940 the patriarchal seat was moved to Chicago (in the United States) and then in September 2015 to Erbil (in northern Iraq). Many of the faithful have left the Middle East and have formed diaspora communities throughout the world. The history of Christianity in the Middle East and well beyond, in Central and Eastern Asia, is very little known. In this book, the reader is invited to travel in time and space and undertake the fascinating discovery of a very ancient apostolic

Church, the Church of the East, whose two-thousand year history constitutes an indispensable chapter in the history of the universal Church.



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