

## What's in a name?

# The Twin was not the only one

**T**homas was not alone in doubting. Although Jesus appeared in the upper room on Easter Day, we found ourselves with Thomas eight days later.

The Gospel accounts reveal a fascinating interplay of belief, disbelief, and unbelief among the disciples. Unravelling the intricacies of their thoughts at this pivotal moment is a puzzle that psychologists and theologians find intriguing.

In Luke's account, Jesus eats before the disciples. Ghosts do not need food. Mark's account ends with the frightened women, who are too afraid to share what they have been told.

Matthew's account of the Ascension reminds us that while they were with Jesus for forty days, some still doubted.

Throughout history, Thomas has often been unfairly criticised. Perhaps this is because he was the one named. We can empathise with the power that a name holds.

Laws are signed into existence under the name of our King. I doubt we would hear the charge "stop in the name of the King!" in Australia these days, but if you go to court, the trial will be known as Rex vs your name or entity. There is power in the naming.

Thomas is only given one name, "Didymus" or "the twin". Strangely, in Aramaic, the very name Thomas means "twin". Thomas the Twin is effectively Tom Tom, and no wonder in John 14, if you excuse the Dad joke, Tom Tom asked for directions from Jesus on how to get to heaven!

In Mark's gospel, Thomas is listed as "Jude" or "Judas", a brother of the Lord. With that in mind, his resemblance to Jesus may have led to the nickname.

What if we view Thomas' encounter with the Risen Jesus in light of our baptismal commitments of "turning towards Christ"?

There is certainty that in accepting that this was indeed the Risen Jesus, Thomas utters the most profound naming of the real person of Jesus: "My Lord and my God!" He accepts that it is indeed the risen presence of Jesus and names him for who he is. This is the power of the name.

Yet, poor Thomas continues through history known as the 'doubter,' but it is through his testimony that many come to believe, even though they have not seen. They believe because Thomas named Jesus for who he is, the name Saint Paul reminds us of: "...that every tongue confesses, every knee should bow."

Fifth-century patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril, wrote of Thomas' declaration.

Cyril, died in 444, (and noting Fr Jeff's sermon on Maundy Thursday, I now need to hedge my bets and stay either true to academic accuracy or return to a former period), the 444th year of the Common Era, or allowing for Julian and Gregorian calendar discrepancies, circa 451 anno Domini nostri Jesu Christi.

I turn to Christ

Whatever floats your boat in the Church of Petros by the Lake, I'll let you ponder, but for the sake of adding that to an argument about how many angels can ice-skate on the head of a needle and if this indeed is the same needle whose eye inhibits to the ability of camels to enter the kingdom of heaven. Thankfully, whilst we are all wonderfully made in the image of the Divine, we are individually different and named as inheritors of the kingdom by our baptism.

Back to naming again, but first, let's talk about what Cyril had to say! (Cyril, as a name, is from the Greek word "Kyrie" meaning "Lord!") Lord Cyril wrote:

*As always, Christ had to be patient with Thomas when he said he would not believe the other disciples when they thought they were seeing a ghost.*

*Because of his desire to convince the whole world, he most willingly showed them the marks of the nails and the wound in his side; because he wished those who needed such signs as support for their faith to have no possible reason for doubt, he even took food although he did not need for it.*

*But when anyone accepts what he has not seen, believing in the word of his teacher, the faith by which he honours the one his teacher proclaims to him is worthy of great praise.*

*Blessed, therefore, is everyone who believes the message of the holy apostles who, as Luke says, were eyewitnesses of Christ's actions and ministers of the word.*

*We must listen to them if we desire eternal life and long for a dwelling place in heaven.<sup>12</sup>*

This is where real hard work begins for us. It is okay to ask questions. Many of us who have journeyed with loved ones to the time of death know that questions are raised, if not by the loved ones, but by those around them. What is next? Who should I believe? What if...a common question beginning. The thing is, we are asked to think. Jude the Twin, or Thomas, asks the same question of Jesus.

"We do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"<sup>3</sup>  
And then, "Unless I see the scars..."

This man who was to take the gospel to the Tamil people of South India gives us the name above all other names, the name that all should confess, and at whose utterance every knee should bow and confess, "My Lord and my God."

This is the beginning of our baptismal journey. "Do you turn to Christ?"  
I turn to Christ.

Before baptising a child or adult, we ask, "What is this child's name?"  
And in the name of our Lord and God, we are baptised as our Christian name is dedicated to our Lord and God.

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Barnecoat OSB: **Cyril of Alexandria**. (d. 444) succeeded his uncle Theophilus as patriarch in 412. Until 428 the pen of this brilliant theologian was employed in exegesis and polemics against the Arians; after that date it was devoted almost entirely to refuting the Nestorian heresy. The teaching of Nestorius was condemned in 431 by the Council of Ephesus at which Cyril presided, and Mary's title, Mother of God, was solemnly recognized. The incarnation is central to Cyril's theology. Only if Christ is consubstantial with the Father and with us can he save us, for the meeting ground between God and ourselves is the flesh of Christ. Through our kinship with Christ, the Word made flesh, we become children of God, and share in the filial relation of the Son with the Father.

<sup>2</sup> [https://liturgy.sluhostedsites.org/2EasterB040724/theword\\_journey.html](https://liturgy.sluhostedsites.org/2EasterB040724/theword_journey.html)

<sup>3</sup> John 14.1-6a

I turn to Christ

I have been asked what you should call me. As a former umpire, I doubt you will surprise me with any name, but my Christian name is Dennis. My written title is The Reverend. My licence names me Rector. Some people relate to me as representing the “Father”; others take offence to misapplying some scriptures or three.

Jude Thomas, Didymus, the Doubter, the Apostle. He gave us the name above all other names. When we turn to Christ, we assent to this person as the one in whose name we are called. We believe in our Lord and God, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour, the one who was, who is, and is still to come.

**B**lessed is the one that comes in the Name of the Lord.  
**H**osanna in the highest.

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Icebreaker Question:

If you could have any fictional character as your best friend, who would you choose and why?<sup>4</sup>

Why is questioning an essential part of our faith journey?

*Context: Dennis encourages asking questions, as it helps deepen our understanding and faith in Christ.*

*Application Question: What questions have you asked or would like to ask about your faith?*

*How do you think seeking answers will help you grow?*

How can doubt, like Thomas's doubt, lead to a deeper faith?

*Context: In the sermon, Thomas's doubt led him to a profound declaration of faith when he saw Jesus and recognised him as the Risen Lord.*

*Application Question: Think about when you experienced doubt but came out with a stronger faith. How can you use this experience to encourage others?*

How does the power of names relate to our faith and the way we view ourselves?

*Context: The sermon discusses the significance of names, like the way Thomas identifies Jesus as 'Lord and God,' and how our Christian names are dedicated to the Lord in baptism.*

*Application Question: What does your Christian name mean to you, and how does it shape your identity and relationship with God?*

According to Cyril, what is the significance of eyewitness testimony in cultivating faith?

*Context: Cyril states that those who believe in the message of the apostles, who were eyewitnesses of Christ's actions, are blessed and worthy of praise.*

*Application Question: How can you share your experiences and testimonies to help cultivate faith in others?*

How does the phrase 'Do you turn to Christ?' relate to baptism and our commitment to follow Jesus?

*Context: In the context of baptism, this question signifies the commitment to follow Jesus and the beginning of the baptismal journey.*

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<sup>4</sup> Image generated by AI using Adobe Firefly

## I turn to Christ

*Application Question: In your day-to-day life, what are some ways you show your commitment to turn to Christ and follow Jesus?*

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*Prayer Prompt:*

Pray for the Holy Spirit to help us apply the sermon to our lives this week

- Ask God to deepen our faith in Jesus, even in times of doubt or uncertainty
- Pray for the courage to ask questions and seek understanding in our journey of faith
- Seek God's guidance in turning to Christ daily and living out our commitment to follow Him.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Questions generated with the assistance of church.tech, AI for Churches