

K.G. THEODOR NAETHER

The First Missouri Synod Overseas Missionary

BORN: **SEPTEMBER 14, 1866** *Bautzen, Germany*

DIED: **FEBRUARY 13, 1904** *Krishnagiri, India*

CHRIST SHOWED GRACE TO His faithful servant K.G. Theodor Naether in the face of hardships and granted him patience to proclaim the Word of God without seeing immediate fruits of the Gospel.

Following ordination, Naether was sent by the Leipzig Mission Society to India in 1887, assigned to manage the Lutheran press that Ziegenbalg had founded in Tranquebar 175 years before. In 1892, he presented a paper on divine inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. However, half the other local missionaries did not agree with his theological position. Naether was expelled from the Leipzig Mission Society for his views in December 1893.

Back in Germany in 1894, Naether found sympathetic ears among leaders of the Free Church in Saxony, who encouraged him to contact C.F.W. Walther in America. Naether visited Missouri and was examined theologically. On October 13, 1894, Naether and fellow ex-Leipzig missionary Franz Mohn accepted the call to be LCMS missionaries in India and were commissioned in St. Charles, Mo. the next day.

On his way to India via Germany, Naether was engaged to schoolteacher Johanna Naumann of Dresden. Theodor left for India in December 1894 and Johanna followed in 1895.

Immediately after his arrival in India, Naether surveyed areas in South India, and selected the town of Krishnagiri, where he opened a school for boys in August 1895. Theodore and Johanna were married October 29, but the Naethers suffered the losses of their firstborn son and daughter, in June 1899. Daughter Elisabeth was born November 24, 1899; Maria was born April 27, 1901.

Naether sowed the Gospel seed tirelessly, but did not see much fruit. (The Krishnagiri mission did not see the first Baptism of a local convert until March 1900.) Johanna's brother, George Naumann, who was also commissioned by the LCMS, arrived to join the work in Krishnagiri.

In the first months of 1904, the plague broke out in the region. Naether visited a local family who had just lost their mother and newborn child to the plague, and gave the mother and child a proper burial. Naether, then walked to a local apothecary but was so weak he needed to be taken home in an ox cart. A doctor arrived from Bangalore and gave the rest of the Naether family a daily dose of whisky to prevent further infection. Naether then gave instructions to his fellow missionaries and wrote his last will and testament. Theodor Naether died of the plague on February 13, 1904. His last words were in English: "It is time." Johanna Naumann and George Kellerbauer attended the funeral service that same day. The sermon was based on 2 Corinthians 6:1–10.

On July 26, 1904, daughter Ida was born to Johanna. The widow and daughters returned to her family in Dresden in April 1905. George Naumann continued the missionary work in Krishnagiri.

For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit lcms.org/175.



DISCOVER MORE

Elizabeth, Ida and Maria Muerk, **"Life of Missionary K. G. Theodor Naether,"** trans. Martin J. Naumann, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (January 1967): 180–88.

Herman H. Koppelman, **"The First Decade of Our India Mission,"** trans. Martin J. Naumann, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (January 1955): 163–85.



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