

## FACES OF LUTHERAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

### K. G. Theodor Naether

**Born:** September 14, 1866  
Bautzen, Germany

**Died:** February 13, 1904  
Krishnagiri, India

Lutheran Missionary who fought for the infallibility of Scripture and established the first international Missouri Synod mission.



*T. Naether*

CHRIST SHOWED GRACE TO HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT, K. G. THEODOR NAETHER, in the face of doctrinal disagreements with the Leipzig Mission and many of the other Leipzig missionaries who had also been sent to India to do mission work. Expelled from the Leipzig Mission at the end of 1893 because of his conservative doctrinal positions, Naether was subsequently called by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to begin new mission work in Krishnagiri. A boys' school was soon opened. Naether married Johanna Naumann, but the couple suffer the devastating loss of their first two children in June 1899. The first convert in Krishnagiri was baptized after five years of proclaiming to local Hindus and Muslims. Naether was joined by others expelled by the Leipzig Mission but called by the Director of the LCMS Board for Foreign Missions, C. M. Zorn: missionaries F. E. Mohn, G. Kellerbauer, R. Freche. Naether led the missionary team until the plague broke out in the region and he became infected after ministering to a dying mother and child. Naether handed over direction of the mission to George A. Naumann's (Johanna's younger brother). Theodor Naether died on February 13, 1904. The couple's daughter Ida was born July 26, 1904.

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### Karl Gustav Theodor Naether

- **September 14, 1866** First-born son of shoemaker in Bautzen in Saxony.
- **June 30, 1887** After 4 years of training, Naether is sent by the Leipzig Mission for service in India
- **August 28, 1887** Arrives at Colombo. Works for first two and a half years as treasurer and manager of the Lutheran mission printing house in Tranquebar.
- **February 1892** Presents essay on inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture during conference of Leipzig missionaries, but many do not agree with Naether. He appeals to mission leaders in Leipzig.
- **December 31, 1893** Expelled as missionary from Leipzig Mission. Returns to Saxony and arranges meeting with sympathetic Saxon Free Church leaders on April 3. Leaders urge Naether to make inquiry to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Missouri Synod in America.
- **October 12–14, 1894** Mission Board meets during Western District of the LCMS in convention. Both Naether and Mohn accepted as members of the LCMS and given diploma of vocation on October 13. Commissioned at Immanuel Lutheran Church in St. Charles, Missouri, October 14.
- **November 7, 1894** Arrives back in Germany via steamship Spree. Engaged to schoolteacher Johanna Naumann. Naether leaves for India in December; Johanna follows the next year.
- **February 1895** With the consent of the LCMS Mission Board, he begins work in Krishnagiri.
- **March 10, 1900** First convert baptized in Ambur.
- **February 7, 1904** During an epidemic of the plague, Naether visits local family who had just lost the mother and newborn child to the plague. Naether gives the mother and child a proper burial; but becomes infected himself.
- **February 13, 1904** Dies of plague and buried next to his two infant children who died in 1899.

... IN THE PAST YEAR I HAVE GENERALLY SPOKEN GOD'S WORD IN 124 places; in 27 villages only once; in the remaining 97 villages at repeated times. ... Were it possible to establish a list of the names of the individual listeners, it would, of course, appear that it is only a few with whom I succeeded to meet repeatedly. However, without a constantly repetitive meeting with the individual it is not to be expected that one can attain personal influence upon them. . . . That is also therefore difficult because they know that we missionaries consistently chastise them with the Law and want to console them with the Gospel—the prideful, self-righteous man doesn't like that though—and that we would like to catch them with the net of the Word—they do not want to accept the certain ensuing grief caused by their fellow countrymen. Time after time it seems to me to be a wonder and fills me always anew with great joy when ... I find listeners. To my joy there are more leads than usual, if now and then I discover familiar faces. They are generally thankful that one remembers them, and then I have usually better listeners in them than before. In places where it was difficult at first and recurrently to gather people, I had found a sizeable crowd in the recent past. If one finds such a virtually considerable "congregation" of altogether sympathetic people, the preaching is easier and more joyful; one also debates more profitably.

—Letter dated December 20, 1895

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