

## FACES OF LUTHERAN MISSIONS IN INDIA



*K. G. Naether.*

### 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.



Krishnagiri  
in Tamil-Nadu

CHRIST SHOWED GRACE TO HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT K. G. THEODOR NAETHER IN THE FACE OF hardships with mission agencies and granted him patience to proclaim the Word of God without seeing immediate fruits of the Gospel.

There are many parallels between the faith, life, and struggles of pioneer Lutheran missionary Ziegenbalg and K. G. Theodor Naether. Like Ziegenbalg, Naether struggled as a child (Naether did not speak until over 3 years old) and as a young man (Naether desired to be a Lutheran missionary but his father discouraged him for some time). Theodor left his hometown in Bautzen in Saxony to attend mission school. Here he learned how to understand and communicate the truths of Scripture. He even began to learn the Tamil language, using Ziegenbalg's *Tamil Grammar*.

Commissioned and ordained, Naether was sent by the Leipzig Mission Society to India on June 30, 1887, assigned to manage the Lutheran Press that Ziegenbalg had founded in Tranquebar 175 years before. In February 1892 he presents a paper on divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. However, half the other local missionaries from Leipzig do not agree with his theological position. Naether appeals to the mission leaders in Leipzig, but when a representative arrives in India from Leipzig, Naether and Mohn are expelled and left to find funds for their trip back to Germany.

Back in Germany in 1894 Naether and Mohn find sympathetic ears among leaders of the Free Church in Saxony, who encourage Naether to contact C. F. W. Walther in America.

Naether visits Missouri and is examined by Fr. Zucker, who had also left the Leipzig Mission. On October 13, 1894 Naether and Mohn accept the call to be LCMS missionaries in India and are commissioned during an afternoon service at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Saint Charles, Missouri on Sunday, October 14 before 240 people. C. M. Zorn preached and President Schwan addressed the two missionaries on the basis of Acts 26:16-18.

On his way to India via Germany, Naether is engaged to schoolteacher Johanna Naumann of Dresden. Theodor leaves for India in December of 1894 and Johanna follows in 1895.

Immediately after his arrival in India, Naether surveys areas in South India at a good distance from the region where Leipzig Mission missionaries are conducting work. After reporting back to Zucker, they select the town of Krishnagiri in the Salem district. Naether opens a school for boys in August 1895.

Other missionaries who have left the Leipzig Mission are called by the LCMS and arrive to help Naether. Kellerbauer arrives October 25, 1895 with his fiancée and Johanna Naumann. Theodore and Johanna are married October 29. F. E. Mohn arrives with his wife and child in 1896. R. Freche arrives February 3, 1897.

The Naethers' suffer the bitter loss of their firstborn son and daughter, both in June, 1899. Daughter Elisabeth is born November 24, 1899; daughter Maria is born April 27, 1901.

The Krishnagiri mission under Naether does not see the first baptism of a local convert until March 10, 1900. Naether works alone in Krishnagiri (other LCMS missionaries work in other locales) until the arrival of Johanna's brother George A. Naumann.

In the first months of 1904 the plague breaks out in the region. Naether visits a local family who had just lost their mother and newborn child to the plague, and gives the mother and child a proper burial. Naether, believing he has been infected, walks to a local apothecary but becomes so weak he is taken home in an ox cart. Kellerbauer and a doctor arrive from Bangalore. The doctor gives the rest of the Naether family a daily dose of whisky to prevent further infection. Naether gives instructions to Kellerbauer and writes his last will and testament. He dies of the plague on February 13, 1904. Johanna, Naumann, and Kellerbauer attend the funeral service that same day. Kellerbauer bases his sermon on 2 Corinthians 6:1-10.

On July 26, 1904, daughter Ida is born to Johanna. The widow and daughters return to Dresden in April 1905. Naumann continues the missionary work in Krishnagiri.

*Pioneer missionary who fought for the clarity and integrity of the Scriptures in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Tamil people.*

## FACES OF LUTHERAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

### Karl Gustav Theodor Naether

- **September 14, 1866** First-born son of master shoemaker (Gustav and Ida) in Bautzen in Saxony.
- **1883** Leaves Bautzen to attend mission seminary in Leipzig. Studies Catechetics, Bible Interpretation, Homiletics, and Tamil grammar. Graduates in 1887. Ordained and called to mission work in India.
- **June 30, 1887** Given send-off by the *Missionskollegium* (Mission Board) as Naether, Bexell, Meyner, and Rueger leave for India via London. In England Naether works on his English language skills.
- **July 30, 1887** Naether boards steamship *Neckar* leaving London bound for Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- **August 28, 1887** Arrives at Colombo and boards another ship bound for Tuticorin (modern-day Thoothukudi), India.
- **August 31, 1887** Met on shore by missionary Paul Sandegren and taken to final destination of Madura.
- **August 1887** Works for first two and a half years as treasurer and manager of Lutheran mission printing house in Tranquebar.
- **Spring 1890** Works as missionary in Madura (modern-day Madurai) and Chingleput (modern-day Chengalpattu).
- **February 1892** Presents essay on divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture during conference of Leipzig Mission. Many other missionaries do not agree with Naether's position. Naether appeals to Leipzig Mission board.
- **1893** Works as a missionary in Tajore (modern-day Thanjavur) and Anakeidu. He also manages mission stations in Panruti and Manikramam (modern-day Manigramam).
- **December 31, 1893** Expelled as missionary from Leipzig Mission. Salary cut and no money given for trip home. Other Leipzig Mission personnel ordered to not associate with Naether, Mohn and Kempf. Christians at Leipzig mission station in Tangore give deposed missionaries an Oxford Bible as farewell gift, enscribed with words of Rev. 2:10.
- **1894** 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.
- **April 24, 1894** LCMS Board of Foreign Missions meets and is favorable to calling Naether and Mohn. Board meeting with President H. C. Schwan takes place on May 1.
- **August 6, 1894** Examined by Fr. Zucker.
- **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 Saint Charles before 240 people on afternoon of October 14. Mission Board director C. M. Zorn preaches on Matthew 28:18–20; President Schwan addresses the missionaries using the text of Acts 26:16–18.
- **November 7, 1894** Arrives back in Germany via steamship *Sprea*. Engaged to schoolteacher Johanna Naumann, daughter of Dresden bookseller Heinrich I. Naumann. Naether leaves for India in December; Johanna follows the following year.
- **December 30, 1894** Leaves ill Mohn in Germany and sets sail for India.
- **January 20, 1895** Arrives at the Indian port Tuticorin (modern-day Thoothukudi) and met by Kempf. The two explore mission opportunities in northern part of Salem District of Madras region. Sends regular letters to his bride, his parents and to the LCMS Mission Board.
- **February 1895** With the consent of the LCMS Mission Board he begins work in Krishnagiri—a distance from the presence of any Leipzig Mission work. Rents a place to stay from a Muslim on May 29. Opens school August 1895.
- **October 25, 1895** Kellerbauer (resigned March 16, 1895 from Leipzig Mission) arrives with his fiance and Johanna Naether. Kellerbauer begins work in Bargur.
- **October 29, 1895** Theodor and Johanna married in Salem four days after she lands in Colombo.
- **1896** F. E. Mohn arrives with wife and child. Begins work in Ambur.
- **February 3, 1897** R. Freche, having left the Leipzig Mission, is called by LCMS and begins work in Vaniyambadi.
- **March 7, 1897** Naether's first son, Johannes, is born. Dies of dysentery June 29, 1899.
- **September 4, 1898** Naether's first daughter, Dorothea, is born. Dies of dysentery June 25, 1899.
- **November 24, 1899** and **April 27, 1901** Daughters Elizabeth and Maria born.
- **March 10, 1900** First convert baptized in Ambur. Takes Christian name Devasahayam ("God help me").
- **1902** George A. Naumann (youngest brother of Johanna) arrives from America with wife and child. Works with Naether in Krishnagiri.
- **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. Naether, believing he has been infected, walks to local apothecary but becomes so weak he is taken home in an ox cart. Kellerbauer is fetched. Doctor arrives from Bangalore and gives members of the Naether family a daily dose of whisky to prevent infection.
- **February 13, 1904** Dies of plague. Johanna, Naumann and Kellerbauer attend the funeral that same day.
- **July 26, 1904** Daughter Ida born.
- **April 1905** Johanna and daughters return to Germany.



Photograph of Naether family taken in 1902.

... 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 joyfully; one also debates more profitably.

—Letter dated December 20, 1895