

## **Mount Carmel Church, Khetri**

Khetri is a village Panchayat located in the Kamarup district of Assam state, India. It is a conglomeration of Assamese, Garos, Karbis, Tiwas, Boros, Santals, Rabhas, and Adivasis. They live in harmony, overcoming sectarianism in this rural setting. Most of them live in tin roofed houses protected by bamboo walls. It is an area of high hills and valleys. Agriculture is the mainstay of the people. People are economically poor. Their common language is Assamese but each group has got its own dialects. Majority people of this area are Hindus. Christians are just a minority and Baptists form a big number.

From the year 1960 onwards Fr. Philip from St. Josphe's parish, Panbazar was visiting Khetri. His missionary effort came into fruition, when Mr. Robising's family received baptism marking the beginning of Catholicism there. Gradually, Khetri mission began to flourish with new families coming forward to embrace the Catholic faith. Since there was no Church the holy Mass and prayer services were conducted in different houses.

In the year 1980 Fr. Mario Porcu, an Italian Salesian missionary, Fr. Augustine and Fr. Lukose Cheruvalel SDB along with Sr. Elsa Geroge MSMHC, Sr. Flora MSMHC and Sr. Martha MSMHC visited Khetri village from the newly erected parish of Sonaighuli. They were assisted by four catechists namely Mr. Sunedra Sangma, Mr. Nicolson, Mr. Immanuel Topno and Mr. Monsik Sangma. By this time people felt a strong need for having a new church that led them to identify a plot of land for the new church.

A plot of land was located in Khetri, close to the thirty-bedded hospital. On 8 October 1981 5 bighas and 2 kattas of land was purchased. Under the leadership of Fr. Mario, a thatched bamboo shed was erected to meet the spiritual needs of the people. In 1987, the new church was built and was blessed by Archbishop Hubert D' Rosario SDB of Shillong.

In 1995 St. Patrick's parish was erected at Sonapur bifurcated from Sonaighuli. Khetri mission became part of the new parish. Fathers from St. Patrick's administered the sacraments to the people of Khetri. During this period there was a steady growth in the number of the faithful.

A new chapter was opened in the history of Khetri mission by the arrival of Ursuline Sisters on 22 September 2005. In the following year a primary school was started in a bamboo shed. The School was inaugurated by Archbishop Thomas Menampampil on 19 February 2006 and Sr. Elizabeth OSA took charge of the school.

In 2010 Fr. Crosper Sangma the parish priest of St. Patrick's together with the Ursuline and MSMHC sisters started '*Mahila Group*' to empower and unite the women folk of Khetri.

The starting of Divine Retreat Centre in Khetri in 2009 by the Vincentian fathers for the Spiritual Revival and Renewal of the people brought greater blessings to the people. Cutting across the boundaries of religion, cast and culture they spread the Good News of Christ to all.

The Carmelite fathers were added to the mission on 5 February 2013 marking another beginning. The first to arrive was Fr. Jess OCD who was followed by Fr. Bellarmine Joseph who took charge as the priest in-charge of the mission.

Seeing the possibility of further development of the Khetri Mission, Fr. Jayaraj OCD, the Regional Vicar with the permission of Archbishop John Moolachira invited Jalpaiguri Province of the congregation of the daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi (DSA). They joined the mission On 25 February 2016.

Khetri mission was officially erected as a parish on 16 July 2016 with Fr. Bellarmine Joseph as its first parish priest.

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