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THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY



Christmas and New Year Blessings in Christ!



Father Alexey Streltsov reads at St. Andrew's Christmas Liturgy

By Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin

The shepherds came and found Him whom they were looking for. And we might think that we have also reached the goal of our journey. During the Advent season, we looked ahead and waited for Christmas. And now it has come; the Child is born; the incarnate Word has come into the world. The angels rejoice in heaven.

And it may seem that this is already the culmination. But this is not so: after passing Advent, we do not stop, but we continue our Christian pilgrimage, a journey to the Kingdom of Heaven. On the very first Christmas, the way of Christ on the earth was just beginning, and then He went through baptism, preaching, the establishing of the Eucharist and the cross – through the resurrection and dwelling among His faithful in word and sacraments.

And our path also continues. We come to Christ and go with Him and follow Him. And we no longer find Him in the manger, but in the liturgy; in the church at her altar, where we obtain our salvation. To constantly come to find Christ is what it means to be a Christian; to go to the heavenly Kingdom.

I congratulate you with Christmas and I wish you a happy and churchly New Year! ✠

Emuckon Beebarog

Remembrance and Reconnection in Tomsk

By The Rev. Daniel Burlakov



Fr. Alexander Gan, Dr. Annemarie Wagner, Fr. Daniel Burlakov

This year we commemorate not only 500 years of Reformation but also 100 years of the Soviet Revolution. There are still many people who celebrate this event, though it brought great suffering to people of Russia, including severe persecution of Christians. Millions were killed or imprisoned in death camps for their faith. Last pastor of Tomsk's Lutheran congregation was arrested and died in prison and church was destroyed.

We know practically nothing about fate of the parishioners of Saint Mary's congregation and can only guess that some of them had to flee the country, some were persecuted.

But this summer I've got a very surprising e-mail from Austria. In this letter, a lady named Annemarie Wagner asked us to help her to find information about her aunt who was baptized in our church in 1919!

Most of the church's archives and property was lost or destroyed but fortunately some of the books survived (including one's from 1919) and are being kept in the state archives.

In September Dr. Wagner came to Tomsk and was able to find the records of her aunt's baptism. Our town is very different now, and it is impossible to find exact place where her grand parents lived, and the old church building is replaced by a Ferris wheel (in Russian "Devil's" wheel). But despite all that, she was very grateful to God for being in a place that played a

big part in her family's history. She joined us for the Friday night service. After about ninety years she became a living connection between "old" and "new" Saint Mary congregation.

Here is the short story of Dr. Wagner's grandmother:

Her name was Valentina, she was born in 1896 in St. Petersburg (Russia), her father was Dutch and mother British. In 1918 she was a nurse ("sisters of mercy" as they were called in Russia) and got married to Vladimir Pommer (Baltic German) who was an engineer in the army of general Alexander Kolchak. With this army they retreated to Siberia and settled for a short time in Tomsk where their daughter Daisy was born in October, 1919 (baptized in November).

But the war was not over and they had to flee further East to Krasnoyarsk, where Daisy died in July, 1920. Shortly after this, Daisy's father was executed by Bolsheviks (Communists' name at that time).

Valentina married again. Her second husband (Dr. Wagner's grandfather) was an Austrian POW, who by that time had lived in Siberia for five years. They had to flee from Communists to the most eastern part of Russia, Vladivostok. Over there they boarded Japanese ship to India, Sumatra, Hamburg. In 1921 they finally settled in Austria.

Although none of them was Russian, they spoke our language at their house, so Annemarie speaks it very well and she was able to fully participate in liturgy and prayed with us. It was a great honor and pleasure meeting with her in Tomsk.✠



Valentina, Moscow 1918

An Interview with the President of SLMS: The Rev. Daniel S. Johnson - Part 3

By the Rev. Larry Beane

Continued from the last issue.

Is there a generation gap between Russians who grew up in the USSR vs. those who can't remember Communism?

Yes, I think there is! Those who remember the USSR see it in two ways: Those who are without a job and cannot find work, remember the job stability they think existed under the Soviet system (even though it may not be an accurate memory). They often express a desire to return to "the days when everyone had a job." Then there are also those who remember the brutality and repressions suffered under the atheistic communists. They have no desire to return to such a life. But those who never experienced the Soviet life (the generation born after 1990) cannot relate with such a "romantic view of the USSR." Nor can they understand the great fear and even terror others express over the thought of returning to such an oppressive regime. The younger generation watches American movies and buy western products. They learn English in school, and are able to surf the internet, play western-style video games and read American and other western news sources. They are much more tuned into a world view, which their parents may find difficult to understand.

What is it like to see children baptized in the church as babies, now becoming adults?

This is a great joy to me! In one of the older videos I show at SLMS presentations, the viewer can see many young children. Many of these young children are now teenagers and young adults and are active in the life of the church. I am reminded about this growth of the church every time I show the video. A young man I met as a boy in a remote village many years ago, met me last month when I was in Novosibirsk at a symposium and he wanted to talk with me. He is now a university student in Novosibirsk and attending liturgy regularly at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Novosibirsk. One young man I met on my first trip in 2000 is now an ordained deacon. A young girl I have known for 18 years is now a young wife and mother of two children. Both of her children are baptized and attend liturgy regularly with their parents and grandparents and great-grandmother. So, this young church is already, after 20 years, entering her fourth generation. The list of examples I could recite, goes on and on!

What are the biggest challenges facing the clergy and laity of the SELC?

Secularism in Russia continues to remain the greatest challenge. However, the state of poverty which exists in much of Siberia and especially in the remote villages



Fr. Daniel (right) with Fr. Alexey teaching in the bell tower of St. Mary's, Tomsk

remains a serious problem. It is this extreme poverty which I think contributes to the demoralization which is so rampant in much of Siberia. When I see this condition of life I want to help. But there is only so much I can do. I have become convinced that my work with the SLMS is the best way I can help the Church help these people. The only way such demoralization can be changed is through the preaching of the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments. Through the financial gifts of her donors, the SLMS helps make it possible for the pastors of the SELC to visit their congregations in these remote villages and deliver Christ through their pastoral care.

What are some things members of the SLMS can do for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Siberia and across the Russian Federation and the former USSR?

Certainly, the need for prayers are great! But along with prayers, the SELC needs financial support so the pastors can continue to serve the people of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The people in the villages are very poor and most people have no money to donate so the congregation can buy wine and bread for Holy Communion. Money to buy fuel to heat the churches or pay heating bills in wintertime is a luxury many congregations do not have. Many pastors must travel hundreds of miles every week to visit their congregations and parishioners. This costs money to buy gasoline or train tickets. One pastor travels 10 hours by train every week to serve one of his congregations. So, I say that prayers and regular financial gifts to the SLMS is the

(Continued on page 5)

Below: A little one celebrates the birth of the Christ Child at St. Andrew's Parish, Novosibirsk



Above: Christmas joy in Tuim at the Parish of the Transfiguration

Left: Silent Night in Novosibirsk at St. Andrew's Parish



Right: Proclaiming and hearing the Christmas Gospel in Yekaterinburg at the Parish of Sts. Peter and Paul



simplest thing which our American friends can do for our Siberian Lutheran brothers and sisters. Also, the seminary, located in Novosibirsk, is under financial difficulty and under threat to close. Without a confessional seminary to train pastors for the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the future of a confessional Lutheran Church in Siberia becomes very unpredictable. So, support to maintain the seminary is also very important.

But Pastor Beane, even though the financial gifts which the SLMS has given to our Siberian Lutheran brothers and sisters for the past 15 years have been significant, (I thank our donors for their generosity in giving to the SLMS), the “greater gift” is what our Siberian Lutheran brothers and sisters have given to us – they have demonstrated to us by their stubborn faith and trust in the baptismal promise, that the Church endures. Indeed! She endures forever! For this reason, the Church sings it in Her liturgy: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth!” From her own history, the Lutherans in Siberia have learned to know that the Lord is indeed a “Lord of undefeatable armies” – He is Sabaoth! The Gospel of Christ’s atonement cannot be defeated! This, I believe is the greater gift. To this, we can all say “Amen!”

Thank you, Pastor, for your years of service to the church and to our brethren abroad, and for answering my questions! Спасибо!

Пожалуйста! Мне было очень приятно ответить на ваши вопросы!

(You are welcome! It has been my pleasure to answer your questions!)

The Rev. Daniel S. Johnson is a pastor rostered in both The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC). He recently served as Area Representative to Eurasia – Church Relations for the LCMS. Prior to being transferred to LCMS Church Relations, in July 2016, Rev. Johnson worked as a deployed missionary to Siberia, the Baltics and Central Asia, for the LCMS Office of International Mission (OIM), (2012 -16). While deployed by OIM he and his wife lived in Germany where he commuted to Siberia and other places, as assigned. He served as Senior Pastor at Redeemer Lutheran Church – Marshalltown, IA from 1993-2012 and Trinity Lutheran Church – Wellsville, NY from 1990-1993. He currently serves as President of the Siberian Lutheran Mission Society (SLMS) and is a charter member (since 2002). He served as newsletter editor to the SLMS from 2002-2012 and has traveled to Siberia many times since 2000. In 2014, Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC) bestowed on him the “Silver Cross” in recognition of his ongoing service to the SELC. In March 2016, the SELC consistory appointed him as Mission Advisor to the bishop. He currently lives in Marshalltown, Iowa with his wife, Amy. ✕

The Russians are Coming!

Every year, in January, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, holds its annual Symposia series. Typically, Bishop Vsevolod travels to the conference and often brings guests from Russia if they are available. While in the U.S., they drive around the country accompanied by Pastor Daniel Johnson to visit as many parishes and supporters of the Siberian Lutheran Mission Society as possible.

This year, the Bishop will bring his son Yuri, as well as Natasha Sheludyakova, the organist at St. Andrew’s Parish, Novosibirsk. Father Daniel Burlakov of St. Mary’s Parish in Tomsk is bringing his sons to tour America, and will be visiting many of our congregations as well.

We were grateful to have Father Pavel Khramov, professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Novosibirsk to come to the Gulf Coast to speak at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Fair Hope, Alabama for Reformation Day. Thank you Pastor William and Melissa Parsons, as well as the hospitable saints of Redeemer for hosting Father Pavel!. Thank you also to Deacon Richard and Lisa Iverson of Salem Lutheran Church in Gretna, Louisiana for hosting Father Pavel, allowing him to rest after his long flight as well as to enjoy the ambiance and hospitality of New Orleans, and to assist at the Divine Service at Salem.

If you are interested in having one of our Russian brethren visit your congregation please contact Pastor Daniel Johnson or Pastor Larry Beane (see front cover for contact information). Although the travel itineraries are set for this year’s symposia, if you’d like to try to get a visit for next year, or if you would like to work out a visit at another time (there are times of the year where flights are very affordable), please let us know!

Having one of our Siberian brethren visit is something that you will never forget! ✕

Fire in Tuim

In late November, Transfiguration Parish in Tuim (pronounced "Too-EEM") suffered a fire. It has been repaired, and they were able to celebrate Christmas in their church building, a one-time Communist Party office. But our Siberian brethren need emergency financial help. Your gift to SLMS is the quickest way to provide assistance. Father Vitaly Gavrilov is one of the pastors featured in the documentary "The Other Half of the Truth" - which is on YouTube. Tuim is the site of a notorious GULAG (labor) camp, but today has the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a faithful pastor providing hope. What follows is the report we received concerning the fire.—Ed.

1 Peter 4:12-13: Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

These words of Saint Peter the Apostle are comforting for us Lutherans in Tuim. For last two years already we were happy that a previous difficult years without normal heating gone, because new furnace (boiler) was purchased and the modern heating system was installed in our church building. So great was the gift from our brethren in Faith Lutheran church (Plano, TX). Last two years, we almost did not freeze during winters.

But this winter, when the heating season begun something went wrong.

On Saturday, November 4, due to spontaneous electricity outages in our region, the pump stopped and the water in the system stopped circulating, the furnace boiled and ripped out two valves, but as the coal in the furnace continued to burn, the pressure sensor melted and burst.

The next day we found the necessary parts in Abakan and started heating again on Monday. Everything worked again; it became warm inside of the church building. But then a real "fiery trial" came to us. At the night, people called me and cried that a smoke is coming from the church roof! Thanks to our kind neighbors!

Urgently rushing to the church, we were horrified! The building inside was full of fire and smoke. The ceiling was burning in the church hall, part of the ceiling began to collapse, a big hole was in the floor from the coals. Finally, firefighters arrived and they stopped the flame. Nobody was hurt.

The fire occurred in the ceiling near the pipe. The state of the church building was hazardingly dangerous. And it became impossible to serve the liturgies. While there is a resuscitation of the building, the liturgies and the Catechism classes will take place at the pastor's apartment.

We have already started repairs, but we don't have enough funds to buy the necessary building materials. We need some help! For today, the parish has 4000 rubles (67 dollars). We received some help already from our brethren in Yekaterinburg and Novosibirsk. Now we inspect level of damages and calculate the necessary amount for repairs.

Pray, please, for us! ✕



From the Editor: The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC) continues to grow and be a place where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the Holy Sacraments provided for sinners seeking forgiveness and healing of body and soul. In the newsletters of **The Siberian Lutheran Mission Society (SLMS)** the members of the SELC reveal their faith and hopes. They are Russians seeking an answer to challenges and problems in their lives. They are a people who have been called by Christ in the healing waters of Holy Baptism and fed by the holy precious food of His body and blood. They may speak a different language but they are all baptized in the name of the same LORD and eat and drink the same Jesus. These are a people who know the mission of the Church – a mission which begins and finds its conclusion in the Word and Sacraments properly administered. We invite you to read this newsletter with a prayer of divine grace for our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Siberia. Their challenges in a land of pagan Buddhism, shamanism, and atheism is great. Your prayers and continuing support is appreciated.

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