



THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN
MISSION SOCIETY



Merry Christmas!

Blessings from the Cathedral

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By Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin

Brothers and sisters,
The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem (Luke 2:15) to see the Savior born. “Bethlehem” is translated as “House of Bread,” and on Christmas night, it became the real House of Bread: the Bread with a capital letter, the Bread descended from heaven (John 6:33), the Bread of which we receive eternal life (John. 6:51).

That is why in the heavens above Bethlehem, the angels sang about “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14) - peace with God, who so loved us, that He sent His only begotten Son to us, so that we might live through Him (1John 4: 9).

Let us hurry and go to where Christ the true Bread from heaven awaits us. And let us constantly come to church in the new year to worship Christ here, not in front of His manger, like the shepherds, but in front of the altar, from where the salvific Eucharist is given to us.

My beloved parishioners, I congratulate you with Christmas and I wish you a good, happy and churchly New Year!

And we wish you all God’s blessings at this Christmas time and New Year! ☩



Above: St. Mary's Parish in Tomsk



Above: Traditional moneyboxes to collect for Christmas presents for poor children

Right: Train station in Novosibirsk



Below: On the road to Beryozovka



Above: Bp. Vsevolod Lytkin with Dcn. Vadim Raskin at St. James Parish, Novokuznetsk



Left: Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Yekaterinburg

Deacon Vitaly Smirnov Ordained into the Priesthood



Fathers Alexey (left) and Daniel (right) assist Bishop Vsevolod

On Sunday, December 23, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Rev. Deacon Vitaly Smirnov was ordained a priest.

The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church retains the traditional grades of the Office of the Holy Ministry of bishop, presbyter (priest), and deacon. A man typically serves several years as a deacon, usually assisting a parish pastor, before he is himself ordained to the priestly ministry. Father Vitaly served for four years in the diaconate before his presbyterial ordination.

Ordinations are carried out by the bishop with assisting ministers.

Bishop Vsevolod served as the minister of ordination, assisted by the Rev. Alexey Streltsov, rector of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Novosibirsk, and the Rev. Daniel Burlakov, pastor of St. Mary's Lutheran Church in Tomsk.

All three solemnly placed their right hands on Deacon Vitaly's head, as Bishop Vsevolod pronounced the ordination:

By virtue of the authority given to me, I, with my brethren in the ministry, entrust you, according to the apostolic tradition, through the laying of our hands, with the sacred ministry of the Word and sacraments, and, define and ordain you as a priest of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, in the name of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit! May the Lord bless you, and make rich fruit in the vineyard of the Lord, and let this fruit be to everlasting life. Amen.

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Father Vitaly was invested with a new pastor's stole, and was also invested with the silver pectoral cross that is worn by the bishop and by all presbyters in the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church — a custom among Lutheran and Orthodox priests in Russia that dates back before the Russian Revolution.

Three days later, the day after Christmas: St. Stephen's Day, Father Vitaly celebrated his first Mass, also at the cathedral church, St. Andrew's parish in Novosibirsk.

We rejoice with Father Vitaly, his family, the saints of St. Andrew's parish, and with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ and we pray for Father Vitaly to be blessed in his ministry of Word and sacrament!



Bishop Vsevolod blesses Father Vitaly



Left to Right: Dcn. Oleg Epps, Fr. Pavel Khramov, Fr. Alexey Streltsov, Bp. Vsevolod Lytkin, Fr. Vitaly Smirnov, Fr. Daniel Burlakov



Father Vitaly's first Divine Service



Father Vitaly distributes the Holy Supper

An Interview with Tatiana Sokolova

By The Rev. Pavel Khramov

Why did you start to write and translate hymns?
What did initiate it?

A professor of our seminary in Novosibirsk, Alan Ludwig pushed me. After a theological conference, he approached me and said very seriously that we need to talk. It was six months after my confirmation.

Here I need to say that my way to the church was difficult and painful. You might read my story in SLMS Newsletters (June and November 2014). I was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church, but haven't stayed there for long time. When I found our Church, I still was afraid of everything. I knew that it is so easy to make a mistake, lose everything, and be deprived of piece and joy for years. I just found the Church which confesses exactly the same what I longed and fought inside me for so long. Sometimes I thought that all my inner words, discussions and cries went as water to the sand. It seemed to me that nobody heard. It is not true. To Him I said all those years, "Lord, I have



no hope, but Your mercy," He had heard me.

Finally, I was in the Church, my Church. Common sense whispered, yes, even trumpeted to be invisible, to avoid any troubles. Do only necessary things, be plain, and do not come closer than five yards to a pastor. Now I can speak about this with a smile, but it was my feeling then. Alas, that my "defensive strategy" was blown away with a couple words of Rev. Ludwig.

"Do you mind to try to translate hymns? Olga Suhinina (a translator and instructor in the seminary) said that you write poems," said Father Alan.



Tatiana (back row, second from left) teaches Sunday School

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“No!” I was very determined, “I can’t.”

Then for about half an hour I was explaining why it was impossible. I said that it is necessary to know the theology in order to translate hymns, and I’m not a theologian at all. I said that it is very scary, I could put something heretical in a hymn. This responsibility is too big for me. Surely, I’m the wrong person for this task.

Doctor Ludwig listened to me, nodded his head. I was glad that he understood me, my reasons seemed to be persuasive. Then with the wise shake of his head he asked, “Will you take just one hymn for translation, or will you take some at once?” And at the word “some” his eyes twinkled with a joy. I was at a complete loss. “One,” I said. Father Alan dropped, as he was a five-year-old boy and I took a bicycle from him. I feel ashamed for agreeing only on one hymn. I translated it; he approved and said I can continue. I remember that he was surprised; he expected it will be woman poetry, but his anticipation was wrong.

That’s how I became hymn translator.

A year later, when I was sitting in Dr. Ludwig’s class on Psalms, I wrote my first hymn. He was sad that time, I wanted to gladden him. He composed very beautiful music for it.

For long time I was coming back to one thought again and again: “You are not worthy to do it. It should be somebody else, good theologian and holy person. And you are a woman, you should “learn in silence with all subjection.” You are not a theologian, you are not holy at all. You’d better sit in your shell, let some worthy people do it.” I contemplated God, His deeds for us, for me. I see my coming to the Lutheran Church as His miracle. My deliverance was so providential, I cannot keep gratitude

inside. Poetry is my way to express this gratitude. So, I wrote new hymns and did new translations, despite of my feeling of my unworthiness.

Finally, I gave up to those thoughts. I stopped to discuss and just agreed. Am I unworthy? Of course, just as all of us. Am I virtuous? No, but Christ clothed me in His virtue. How do I know it? Every week I come to the church, where the priest puts the Body and Blood in my mouth: Christ in me and I in Him. It stops all discussions and the devil’s plots.

I will write and translate hymns until a holy poet and theologian appears. When he will come, I’ll think what to do.

All my Christian life I asked God: “Lord, what do I live for? Others can develop something complicated, do open-heart surgery, and sell steel pipes on phone. And I am poet, what’s the point? Take me into Your Kingdom,” - I added immediately: “Thy will be done. If You made me a poet, You need me somehow.” I think every Christian can remember a similar story of the Lord’s unexpected answers to our prayers. I can’t think of some things, but He never abandons us, He hears and helps.

The Bible says that nobody can confess Jesus as Christ, but by the Holy Spirit. When I started to work on hymns, I often thought it could not be true, it is too good. There are Christians smarter, more talented, better than me. Why, then, me? However, God always acts out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy. I can only rely on His will. Let Him see who and how will serve Him.

There are too many “I” in all these questions and doubts; too many vanity and inner turmoil.

All this is like a swarm of insects. They are not important. The answer is always before our eyes in Christ crucified.✠

Christmas Blessings from the Parish of the Transfiguration, Tuim





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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