

St Jacob Netsvetov: Enlightener of Alaska

Commemorated July 26th

His father moved to Alaska as part of the Russian-American-Company and his mother was a native Alaskan from the Islands of Atka. Jacob was the oldest and grew up in the Aleutian Islands. His parents raised their kids as Orthodox Christians and ensured they learned to read and write in Russian but also speak Unangan (the native language of the Alut). His parents struggled to educate their kids, but decided it was important enough to fight for. His brother became a shipbuilder, his sister married a successful clerk and he went to seminary. He married Anna, was ordained a priest, and requested to return to Alaska with his father in 1829. He was the first native Alaskan Orthodox priest!

His "parish" was the chain of Aleutian Islands all the way to the Kuril Islands - that is approximately 2,175 miles* of tiny islands between Alaska and Russia almost to Japan! He built a tent as his church building that he could carry on his baidarka (native kayak) to visit his parishioners in their villages. Island to island. They have extreme weather in the Bering Sea. St Jacob would have constantly been paddling through fog with the wind beating the snow and rain at him as he traveled from village to village.

He worked with Father John Veniaminov to build a church building on Akta Island. With a building, they had a place to teach kids the faith and how to read in both their native language and in Russian- since they had just began translating the gospel and services into Unangan. This parish still exists. The "St Nicholas parish is a central part of village life"*** and the school is still the only one on the Island.

His wife died of cancer in 1836 and then his father died when the house burned down just the next year. Full of grief, Father Jacob requested to leave for a monastery. While he waited, he got a surprise visit.

In 1841 Father Jacob was visited by Bishop Innocent for three days. He was encouraged and in 1844 he began ministering to the Eskimo along the Yukon River. This massive river cuts Alaska in half from West to East. It flows for a curvy 1982 miles beginning in British Columbia and ending in the Bering Sea . Father Jacob spoke Unangan and Russian but here the people Eskimo spoke Yupik, so he learned this too. He did not just learn to speak it; he created an alphabet to write it. Then he began his real work, translating scriptures and services into their own language.

Eventually St Jacob was sent to a parish in Sitka by Bishop Innocent. This is where St Jacob's wife had been buried and now as an old man in poor health it was a good place for him to serve. The final resting place of St Jacob has been lost to nature but there are efforts using ground penetrating radar to find his relics.

The Journey of Saint Jacob around Alaska!

Using the map label each location-

- 1) Find St George's Island, where St Jacob may have been born
- 2) He attended seminary in Irkutsk and stayed there to serve his first parish
- 3) He returned "home" to serve along the Aleutian Islands
- 4) He built a church in Atka
- 5) He served a chapel in Sitka

On map of Alaska

The Aleutian Islands are named for the Aleut people who live there. They have been hunting and fishing here for 8,000 years.

-Trace along the islands with your finger- do you see a shape?

-The islands form an archipelago chain of islands.

What is an archipelago?

They span about 1,200 miles. That is about the same distance as the entire East coast- from Maine to Florida! If you drove it, that is 20 hours (nonstop) on the Interstate.

-Try using Google Maps to find a 20 hour drive from you, how far can you go?

Did you know the Bering Strait gap is only 25 miles across?

Starting at Cape Wales Alaska and traveling across the Diomed Islands and then to the Chukotka Peninsula of Russia.

What is 25 miles from your house?

Try using Google Maps find something 25 miles from your house.

How far is it from your house to your parish Church? How long does it take to get there?

How big is Alaska?

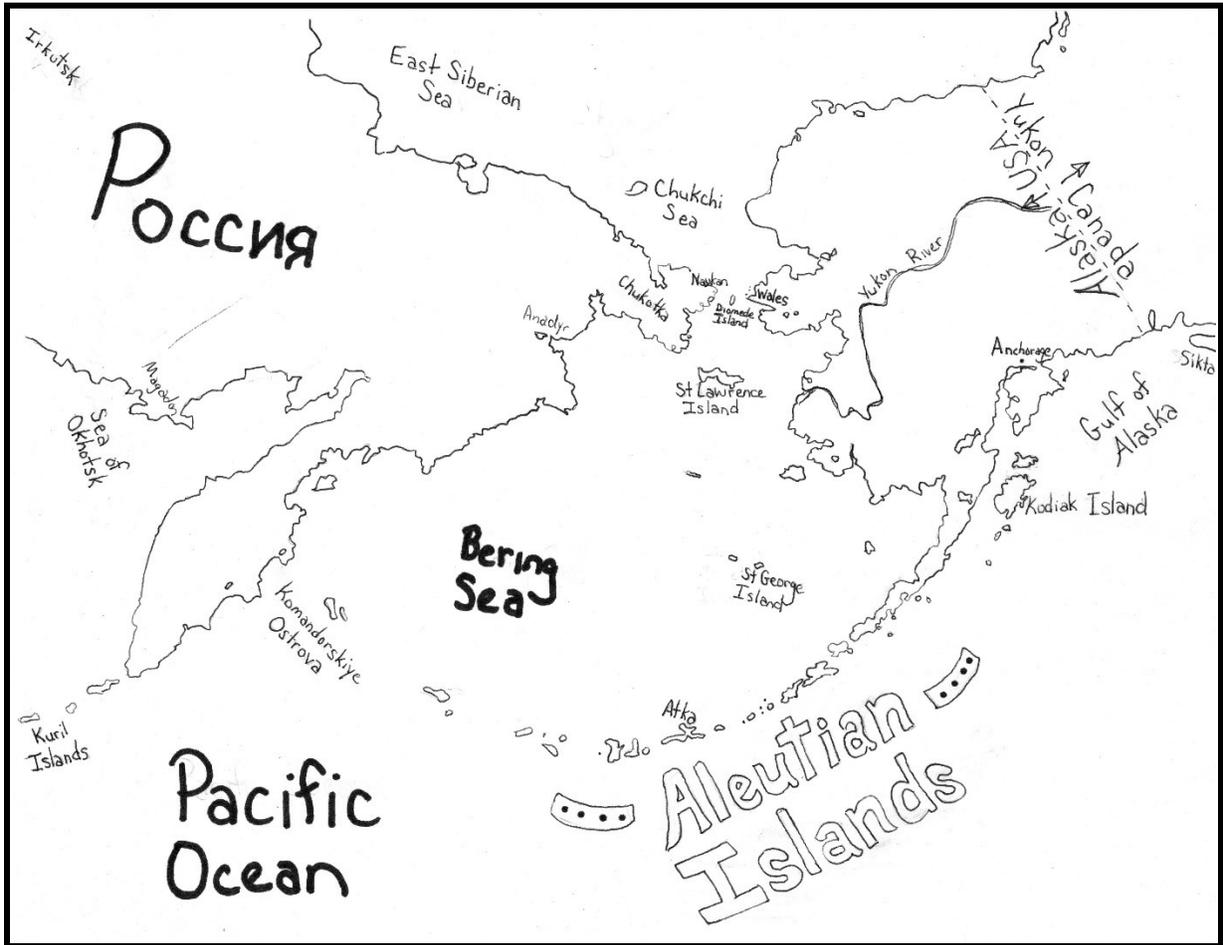
Color in Alaska

Can you find your state?

Estimate how many times your state can fit inside Alaska?



Follow the journey of St Jacob



Resources

Biography

<https://www.acrod.org/readingroom/saints/stjabob-alaska>

<https://myocn.net/saint-jacob-netsvetov/>

http://orthodoxcanada.ca/Saint_Jacob_Netsvetov_of_Alaska

Commemoration service

https://www.sttikhonparker.org/files/Menaion/RLE_0726-cSt-Jacob-of-Alaska.pdf

Geography

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bering_Strait_crossing

Aleutian Islands

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Aleutian-Islands>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40316566?seq=1> *

<https://www.oca.org/parishes/oca-ak-atksnc> **Atka Parish**

Interesting little article

The hunt for relics

<http://orthochristian.com/81997.html>

Non-Orthodox perspective on the missionary work-

written about the "Russian colonization" of Alaska, very long and for high school or parents who may have an interest

<https://depts.washington.edu/cspn/creole-policy-and-practice-in-russian-america-iakov-egorovich-netsvetov/>