

Saint Jacob Netsvetov

Enlightener of the Native Peoples of Alaska

2 In the 1820s, he began studies at the Irkutsk Theological Academy in Siberia.

3 Saint Jacob was ordained to the priesthood in 1828.

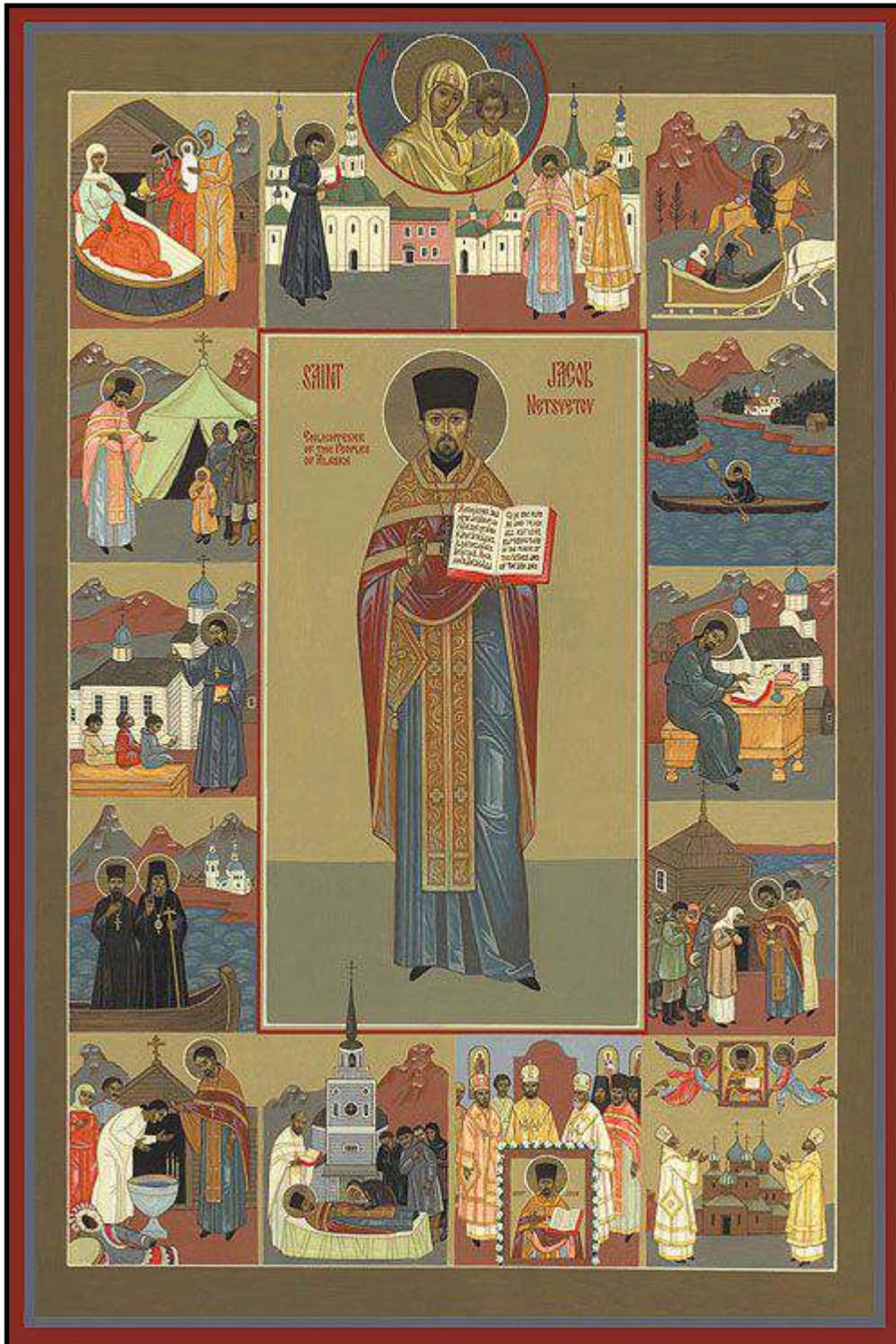
1 Saint Jacob was born on Atka Island, Alaska in 1802. His mother was Aleut, while his father was Russian.

5 Saint Jacob initially celebrated services in a tent, as there was no church building on Atka Island.

7 A school to train Aleut Church leaders was organized and built by Saint Jacob.

9 After the death of his wife and father, Saint Jacob continued to minister with Saint Innocent in Alaska.

11 Despite the resistance he sometimes faced, Saint Jacob brought many to Jesus Christ, including entire villages, as a result of his preaching.



4 Desiring to serve God in Alaska, Saint Jacob began the 13-month journey to Alaska in 1828.

6 Saint Jacob spent much time visiting remote villages and settlements that stretched some 2000 miles.

8 Scripture and other texts were translated by Saint Jacob, who devised an Unangan-Aleut alphabet.

10 In 1844, he began ministering to the Yup'ik people in many settlements along the Yukon River.

14 After Saint Jacob's glorification, his veneration spread across Alaska and all North America.

12 After a period of declining health, Saint Jacob died in Sitka, Alaska in 1864. His funeral was celebrated in Archangel Michael Cathedral.

13 In March 1994, the Holy Synod of Bishops decided to glorify him as the first native-born American saint in recognition of his holiness and missionary zeal.

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Saint Jacob Netsvetov was born on Atka Island, Alaska in 1802. His mother was an Aleut native of the island, and his father was Russian. Though poor, they made sure their four children were well-educated [1].

In 1823, he and his family moved to Siberia. His siblings would all become professionally successful. But Jacob longed for a different kind of success. Declining to follow his two brothers to the Saint Petersburg Naval Academy, he enrolled in the Irkutsk Theological Academy [2].

In 1825, he married Anna Simeonovna and was tonsured to the order of subdeacon. One year later, he graduated from the seminary and was assigned to serve at Holy Trinity-Saint Peter Church in Irkutsk. In March 1828, he was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Michael, who had also ordained Saint Innocent [3].

Father Jacob's deepest desire was to serve in Alaska. In the spring of 1828, his wife and father joined him on the arduous 13-month journey to his island birthplace [4]. Immediately upon his arrival on Atka, he began plans to build a church. In the meantime, he celebrated services in a large tent, which he often took with him on his missionary journeys [5]. These journeys took him across his huge "parish" – a vast area stretching some 2,000 miles. Exhaustion and violent weather did not deter him from visiting remote villages and settlements [6].

After construction of the Church of Saint Nicholas was completed, Father Jacob turned to overseeing the building of a school. Several of its graduates would become leaders of the Aleut communities in the next generation [7].

Father Jacob had varied interests. He prepared many specimens of fish and marine animals for natural history museums in Russia. At the same time, he consulted with Saint Innocent on translation issues while devising an Unangan-Aleut alphabet. He then translated the Scriptures and important Church texts [8].

Soon personal tragedy struck. In 1836, his beloved wife Anna died, and a year later he lost his father. In deep sorrow, he asked for permission to return to Irkutsk and become a monk. While his request was granted, he remained in Alaska because no replacement had been assigned. It was at this crucial time that Saint Innocent invited Father Jacob on a sea voyage to Kamchatka. As they sailed, Saint Innocent comforted the grieving priest, dissuaded him from entering the monastic life, and convinced him that he should continue his ministry in Alaska [9].

With renewed zeal, Father Jacob carried on until 1844, when Saint (Bishop) Innocent appointed him to oversee a new mission in the Yukon. He began traveling to hundreds of settlements on the Yukon River, preaching the Gospel to the Yup'ik people [10].

While Father Jacob was visiting a village in 1845, the local chief or shaman angrily told him that the villagers wanted no part of his preaching. But after several hours of spiritual conversation, Father Jacob brought him and the whole village to faith in Christ [11].

In later years, Father Jacob faced false charges which were eventually dropped, although they further impaired his declining health. He spent his final year serving a Tlingit chapel in Sitka, Alaska, where he died in 1864. While his funeral was celebrated at Sitka's Archangel Michael Cathedral, the location of his grave remains unknown [12].

In March 1994, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America proclaimed Father Jacob a saint – the first to have been born in America [13]. His glorification was celebrated later that year at Saint Innocent Cathedral, Anchorage, Alaska [14].

Holy Father Jacob, pray to God for us! ■

