

Saint Jacob Netsvetov

Saint Jacob was born on Atka Island, part of the Aleutian Chain, in 1802. His mother was an Aleut native of the island, and his father was Russian. They had three other children, and though they were poor, they made sure all their children were well-educated. In 1823 the family moved to Siberia. Jacob's siblings would all become professionally successful. His two brothers went to study at the Saint Petersburg Naval Academy, but Jacob longed for a different kind of life, and so he enrolled in the Irkutsk Theological Academy.

In 1825, he married Anna Simeonovna, and was tonsured a subdeacon. One year later he graduated, and was assigned to Holy Trinity-Saint Peter Church in Irkutsk. Three years later he was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Michael, who had also ordained Saint Innocent.

Father Jacob's deepest desire was to serve in Alaska. In the spring of 1828 his wife and father joined him on the arduous journey. Thirteen months and fourteen days later they arrived at his island birthplace. There was work to be done immediately. The island had no church building, so Father Jacob made a large tent in which to conduct services, and to take with him on his missionary journeys. These journeys took him across his huge "parish" which stretched out for 2000 miles. Exhaustion and violent weather didn't deter him from visiting remote villages and settlements. During these same early years Father Jacob oversaw completion of the Church of Saint Nicholas, and then turned to construction of a school. Several of its graduates would become leaders of the Aleut communities in the next generation.

Father Jacob had many talents and skills. He hunted and gathered for food, and also prepared specimens of local fish and marine animals for natural history museums in Russia. At the same time he was consulting Saint Innocent on translation issues while creating a Unagan-Aleut alphabet. He then translated the Scriptures and important Church texts.

Personal tragedy struck in 1836. His beloved 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. Permission was granted, but because no one came to replace him, he remained in Alaska. At this crucial time, Bishop Innocent invited Father Jacob on a sea voyage to Kamchatka. As they sailed, Saint Innocent comforted the grieving priest, managing to dissuade him from entering the monastic life and convincing him to continue his work in Alaska.

With renewed zeal, Father Jacob carried on until 1844, when Saint (Bishop) Innocent appointed him to head a new mission in the Yukon. He began traveling to hundreds of settlements on the Yukon River, preaching to the Yup'ik people. In 1845, while visiting a village, he was confronted by the local chief or shaman who told him that the villagers wanted no part of his preaching. However, after several hours of spiritual conversation, Father Jacob brought him and the whole village to faith in Christ.

In later years Father Jacob faced false charges made by a disgruntled assistant. Though the charges were eventually dropped, the experience further impaired his declining health. He spent his final year serving a Tlingit chapel in Sitka, where he died in 1864. His funeral took place at St. Michael Cathedral in Sitka. The location of his grave is unknown.

1. Reading Comprehension Quiz¹

✳ Who convinced St. Jacob, after his wife died, not to become a monk?

✳ How did St. Jacob differ from his two brothers in his choice of a life's work?

✳ What part did a large tent play in Saint Jacob's work in Alaska?

✳ What building project did Saint Jacob begin after St. Nicholas Church was completed?

✳ What did Saint Jacob do that benefited natural history museums in Russia?

✳ What fact kept Saint Jacob from returning to Russia after his wife and father died?

¹ Designed by the Department of Education, Youth, and Hellenic Culture of the Greek Archdiocese of America.

✳️ What area did Saint Jacob visit and preach in after his voyage with Saint Innocent?

✳️ Where did Saint Jacob serve as a priest in the final year of his life?

2. **Evangelization efforts.** We read in Acts 14:19-22, that St Paul's life is similar to Saint Jacob's experience with the shaman. A shaman is considered to be a spiritual leader, a helper and a healer in indigenous communities. This person tried to keep Fr. Jacob's message away from his villagers, the same way St. Paul's adversaries tried to quiet him down. Nevertheless, Father Jacob was successful in turning the shaman and the village to Christianity. List at least three qualities that you think Father Jacob needed to accomplish this.

3. **A good missionary.** Do you have the qualities you have just mentioned when referring to St. Jacob? If you do, then you would be a good missionary.

4. **Word Search.** Search for the words that are given below. They may be written horizontally, vertically, diagonally, in a normal or reverse order. The first group of children who finds all the words is the winner!

ALASKA ALEUT ALPHABET ATKA IRKUTSK JACOB
MISSIONARY RUSSIAN SETTLEMENTS SHAMAN SPECIMENS
SUBDEACON TENTTHEOLOGY TRANSLATION YUKON

