

THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS OLGA, MATUSHKA OF ALL ALASKA

A Spiritual Tale and a Coloring Activity
for Young Hearts



*“Rejoice, guardian of the suffering and wounded, watching
over us with thy prayers!”*

— From Akathist to Saint Olga of Alaska

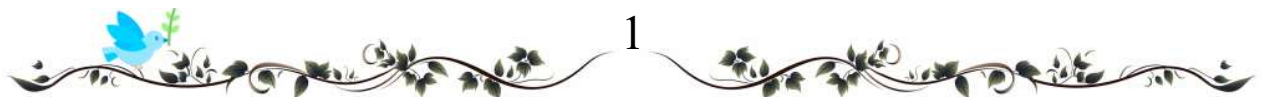
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With gratitude to everyone who made the creation of this
educational book possible.

Alex, Olga and the Goncharov family. 😊





This book was created with the blessing of † Archbishop Alexei of Sitka and Alaska, and with the blessing of our parish priests at St. Herman of Alaska Orthodox Church in Langley, BC, Canada—Father Lawrence Farley and Father Gregory Wright.

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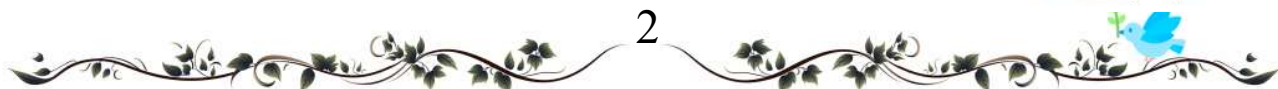




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A Blessing from † Archbishop Alexei of Sitka and Alaska

Thank you for this beautiful children's work. It is a truly extraordinary and moving work—both spiritually rich and pedagogically gentle. It weaves together Orthodox hagiography, Alaskan Native culture, and accessible storytelling in a way that is deeply respectful, beautifully crafted, and entirely worthy of the holy woman it honors.

It will not only teach children about a Saint—it will form them in the Orthodox vision of holiness. May your efforts bear fruit in the hearts of many young readers, and may Saint Olga intercede for your family and this labor of love.

†Archbishop Alexei

†Allgiliyaq Ciukliq Kilirnaq

†Архиепископ Алексей

The God-protected Diocese of Sitka and Alaska





Why Was This Book Created?

Have you ever known someone who didn't wait to be asked for help—someone who just showed up, quietly, kindly, with a warm smile and open hands? Someone whose kindness feels like a warm lamp in the dark?

Maybe it's a grandmother who slips an extra snack into your backpack. Or a neighbor who fixes your bike without saying a word. Or a teacher who notices when you're sad and says, "You seem sad. How can I help you?"

Saint Olga of Alaska was like that. She just lived a quiet life in a small log house in a quiet village called Kwethluk, where the wind blew cold and the river stayed frozen half the year.

But from that little home, her love reached across the tundra—and all the way to heaven.

People called her **Olinka**. She was a mother of many children. A village midwife. A healer. A baker. She sang in the church choir. She stitched warm clothes and little boots by hand. She was a priest's wife. A friend.



*Illustration: Saint Olga of Alaska
at her house*



Her days were filled with ordinary things—but she did each one as if she were serving Christ Himself.

If someone was sick, she brought healing herbs and whispered quiet prayers over their bed.

If a woman was afraid during childbirth, Olinka stayed through the night, holding her hand until the baby's cry filled the room.

If a child had no mittens in winter, she cut and sewed a pair from scraps of cloth.

If a young girl was hurting, she didn't push the girl to talk. She just stayed—listening, praying—until the pain grew smaller.

Some people say she could see what others carried inside—the joy, the sorrow, the hidden wounds. And she treated every person with gentleness, as though they were very precious.

She never asked for attention. She never demanded praise. In fact, she tried to hide the good things she did. But love like hers can't stay hidden for long.

This book was created because her story needs to be told—not only in churches on her feast day, but also in bedrooms, and living rooms like yours.

Saint Olga's life is a gift for anyone who has ever wondered, “*Can someone like me really become holy?*”

Yes. You can! And Saint Olga will show you how.



Who Is Saint Olga of Alaska?

Saint Olga's story might feel far away—told across mountains and rivers, in a time before mobile phones and Internet. But her life reaches into our present like a warm hand stretched across a cold table.

She teaches us that you don't have to be perfect to be kind. You don't need to be rich, powerful, or famous to change the world. All you need is a heart that listens and prays to God—and hands that are willing to help.

Saint Olga's story matters because she reminds us that **holiness begins in quiet places**—in whispered prayers, in bread shared with neighbors, in mittens sewn for children. She didn't write books, give speeches, or have her own YouTube channel. She became a saint by loving God and loving people—**again and again and again**.

She shows us that you don't have to be a monk or a priest to become a saint. What matters is a faithful heart, helping hands, and the courage to love. Her life teaches us that every small act of service—like baking prosphora (the special bread used for Holy Communion, pronounced pross-FOR-ah), singing in the church choir, cleaning and decorating the church, teaching children, mending clothes, or comforting someone who's hurting—can become holy when done with love and faith to glorify God.

Saint Olga became a bridge between worlds. In church, she stood behind the left choir stand and sang along softly in Yup'ik and Church Slavonic—the two main liturgical languages used in Kwethluk during her lifetime. Holy Week hymns, Panikhida irmosi (special memorial





hymns), and Christmas hymns were passed down by heart, sung in Slavonic just as her ancestors had done as part of the living oral tradition of her parish and family. English was not yet common in village services. But the prayers she knew—woven from ancient words and loving repetition—rose like incense alongside her people’s hopes and sorrows. She offered herbal remedies together with Orthodox prayers and showed that the Christian faith can take root and blossom in every land and language.

To be **fully Orthodox and fully Native**, she showed, is not only possible—it’s **truly beautiful**.

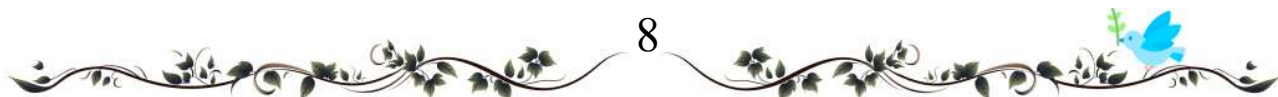
She became a healer of the hurting. Women who had suffered deep pain—especially abuse—found peace through her prayers, her presence in dreams, or even just by whispering her name. That’s why so many now turn to her as a patron saint of the wounded, the forgotten, and the afraid. And for the people of Alaska, she became something even more—**Matushka of All Alaska**.

Two centuries before Olga was born, **Saint Herman of Alaska** came by boat from Russia.

He planted the seed of Orthodoxy in the Alaskan wilderness. He told Bible stories to children by lamplight. He cared for orphans and for the sick.

Saint Olga was a mother. But her mission was the same. Like Saint Herman, she taught the Gospel with her life full of love.

Saint Herman was a monk. He lived alone on Spruce Island. He grew vegetables and healing herbs to feed





and care for the sick, told Bible stories, and he taught the Native people how to garden in the harsh Alaskan land.



Illustration: Saint Herman of Alaska caring for the sick

Saint Olga lived in the heart of her village in Kwethluk. She sang hymns in Yup'ik and Church Slavonic—possibly even the very same ones Saint Herman once taught his orphans. Across two centuries, **their voices joined in a single prayer rising from the Alaskan wilderness**. She offered herbal remedies and wrapped the wounded in prayer and warmth.

Both Saints baked prosphoras and bread. One grew vegetables and healing herbs, and prayed in silence. The other sewed parkas—warm fur-lined coats—and whispered Psalms beside the stove. Neither sought praise or recognition.



To them, these were just everyday things. But in God's eyes, they were acts of love—and that made them holy. Together they show us: Saints are not just faraway heroes from long ago. They might be your neighbor. Your grandmother. Or even... you.

Saint Herman lit the lamp of Orthodox faith in Alaska and Saint Olga kept it burning.

And now... it's your turn to carry the light forward.

But before we follow her footsteps across the snowy trails of her life, let's look at the land where her story began—a place of frozen rivers, dark skies with beautiful Northern Lights, and mystical mountains... where the Orthodox Faith took root in the tundra.

Turn the page and step into **Alaska...**



Alaska – the Great Land

Have you ever stood in a place so quiet you could hear the snow fall? So wide that rivers twist across the land like silver ribbons and the mountains look like giants asleep under the clouds? That place is called Alaska.



Illustration of Alaska

It's the biggest state in America—so big it could swallow Texas, California, and Montana and still have room for more. (Alaska is about 1.7 million square kilometers, while those three states together are only about 1.3 million.) Its wild coastline is longer than the shorelines of all the other U.S. states put together. The tallest mountain in North America, Mount Denali, also called McKinley, rises here like a white cathedral of stone and ice.



But Saint Olga didn't grow up near Mount Denali. She grew up in a small village called **Kwethluk**—a tiny dot on the map on the south bank of the Kwethluk River.

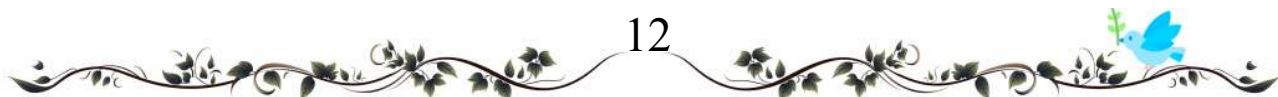
The land there is called the **tundra**—flat, wide, and open to the sky. It's soft and spongy in summer, covered with moss, dwarf willows, and bright pink fireweed that blossoms after the long winter. In the distance, you can see the **Kilbuck Mountains**, where young Olinka once helped herd reindeer.

Alaska's seasons are dramatic. In July, temperatures can reach 27 °C (80 °F), with the sun shining all night. In January, they can plunge to –40 °C (–40 °F), with only a few hours of daylight. People traveled by boat in the summer, heading to fish camps or nearby villages, while schools were closed from May until August. In winter, they used snowmobiles or dog sleds to get around, crossing frozen rivers and snowy trails.

And in the sky, especially on long cold nights, something magical happens—the **Northern Lights** appear, painting ribbons of green and pink that dance like living fire across the heavens.



Illustration: Northern Lights





The Real People of the Land

The first people to live in this land were the **Yup'ik**—which means “the Real People.” They’ve been here for at least **10,000 years**, hunting caribou, fishing for salmon, and picking wild berries under the open sky.

In Yup'ik villages, **sharing is important and sacred**. If one person has food, they share with everyone. When a story is told, it often ends with a gift—something passed from hand to hand like a piece of the story itself.

Even today, many Yup'ik families speak their native language at home. They use snowmobiles and dog sleds, they write letters and make video calls, new things and old ways woven together. Just like Saint Olga once did.



Illustration of Kwethluk

The village of Kwethluk has about 800 people. Houses sit up on stilts to stay safe when the river floods each spring. Saint Olga’s childhood home stood near a small wooden church, built by Orthodox believers sometime



after 1900. When she was a teenager, the village came together to build a larger church, completed in 1935. Then in 1978, just one year before Saint Olga's repose, the villagers finished a new, third church building. Today, this is where Saint Olga's holy relics rest, in the heart of the village she loved.

If you ever visit Kwethluk one day, here are some Yup'ik words you might hear:

Yup'ik Word	Pronunciation	Meaning
Yup'ik	YOOP-EEK	Real person
Kwethluk	KWE-thluk	Bad-muddy river
Quyana	koo-YAH-nuh	Thank you
Ana	AH-nah	Mother
Ata	AH-tah	Father
Nunaput	noo-NAH-poot	Our land
Meq	MEHK	Water
Imarpik	ee-MAHR-pik	Ocean
Tuntu	TOON-too	Caribou
Tumyaraq	TOO-myah-rahk	Trail
Agayun	ah-GAH-yoon	God
Agayuvik	ah-GAH-yoo-vik	Church
Agayutem Aanii	ah-gah-YOO-tem AH-nee	Mother of God





From Russia to Alaska: The Journey of Faith

Long before Alaska became part of the United States, it belonged to the Russian Empire. In 1741, Russian explorers and fur traders first reached its icy shores. Many of them married into Native families, learning local languages and ways of life. They dressed like the people, hunted with them, and raised children together.

Then, in 1794, something even more important arrived—Orthodox Christian missionaries. Because family and ancestors are so important in Alaska Native life, the Orthodox faith—received not by force but through love, marriage, and kinship—became part of their homes, their hearts, and their heritage.

One of them was Saint Herman, a gentle monk from Valaam Monastery in Russia. He and seven other missionaries crossed the ocean and landed on Kodiak Island, bringing the light of Christ to this cold and rugged land.

Saint Herman didn't try to force the Native people to change. Instead, he loved them. He learned their language and defended them when they were mistreated. He baked bread for hungry children and prosphora for the Church. He grew healing herbs in his garden and shared them freely. In the evening, he told Bible stories by lamplight, wrapped children in blankets, taught them to sing Orthodox hymns, and prayed under the stars.

In 1867, the Russian Empire sold Alaska to the United States—but the Orthodox faith remained, alive in the hearts of the people who had made it their own.



Now that you've seen the land she loved, the village she served, and the church she helped keep alive, it's time to meet young Olinka—before she was Saint Olga, before she was even Matushka.

Turn the page, and meet the child who learned to fish with her bare hands, listen to the wind, and carry warmth into the coldest Alaskan nights. Let's step into her footsteps... a child of the Tundra.



A Child of the Tundra (Birth – age 9)

On a freezing February day in 1916, in a log cabin beside the frozen curves of the Kwethluk River, a baby girl was born. Snowflakes danced outside, and inside the one-room home, steam from sprucewood and tundra tea filled the air. Her mother, surrounded by women of the village, wrapped the newborn tightly in reindeer furs. The baby cried out—not in fear, but as if to say, “I’ve arrived!”

Her parents, Olinka Paniikaq Pavilla Evan and Evan Qamulria Nicolai, named her **Olinka Arrsamquq Evan**. In Yup’ik tradition, children often receive names passed down from elders who have recently passed away. Olinka was named after her grandmother on her father’s side—a kind woman remembered for her laughter, healing hands, and strong prayers.

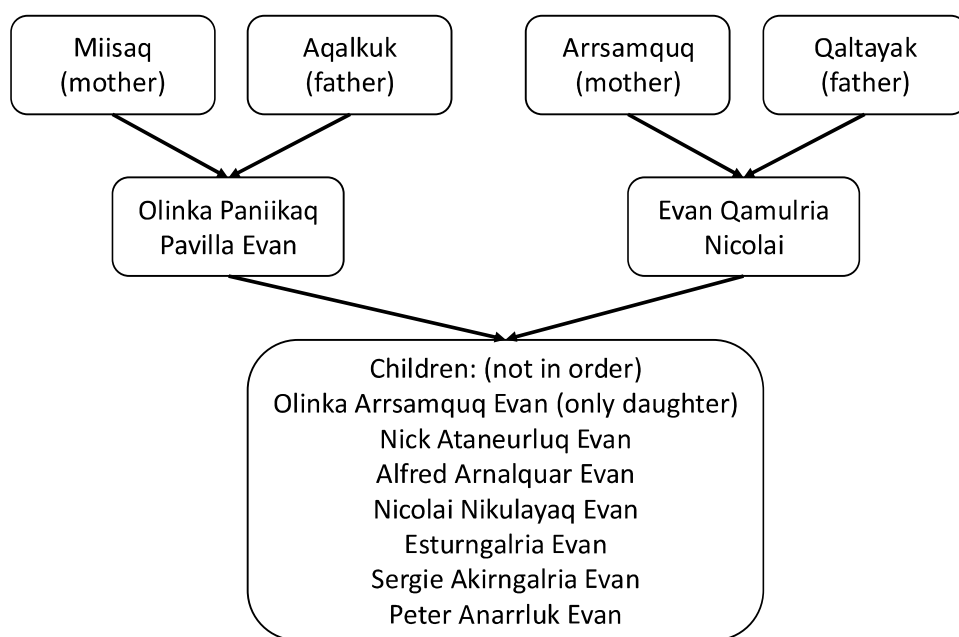
The name Arrsamquq may come from the word arrsam (meaning “poverty” or “lowliness”) and the affectionate suffix -quq. It might mean “she who is little and poor,” “the humble one,” or even “beloved of God in her lowliness.” In traditional Yup’ik culture, names expressing humility or misfortune were sometimes given to protect children from early death. It was a way of saying to the unseen world, “Pass over this one.”

Her last name, Evan, came from her father’s first name—a common practice in Yup’ik naming customs. Many Yup’ik names carry deep, mysterious meanings that connect people across time. By receiving her grandmother’s



name, Olinka carried part of her spirit forward into a new generation.

The chart below shows Saint Olga's family roots and name connections, based on a family tree shared by her granddaughter, Olga Skinner [1].



Olinka's family tree

So, from the moment she arrived, everyone treated Olinka with special tenderness. She carried the name of her grandmother, and with it, a living memory. Some elders greeted her with gentle smiles and said, “Ah, Arrsamquq!”—honoring the name and the legacy it held. In their arms, she was more than a newborn—she was a connection to the past, a blessing from those who had gone before.

At her Orthodox baptism, the priest gave her the Christian name **Olga**—in honor of Saint Olga, Equal-to-the-Apostles and Blessed Great Princess, who brought the light



of Christ to Russia. But at home and in the village, she remained Olinka or Arrsamquq—the baby named after her grandmother, wrapped in the love of a whole village.

The Only Girl Among Brothers

Olinka was the first of seven children—and the only girl. That meant her childhood was filled with both work and wonder.

Her father, a skilled reindeer herder, taught the boys to hunt, fish, and drive the sled dogs. Her mother, soft-spoken and strong, passed down every skill a Yup'ik woman needed to run a home, care for children, and survive the long winters. She also taught Olinka the old ways of healing— how to make warm healing tea, wrap sore hands and feet, and listen for signs in the body and spirit.

“Olga was the only daughter in a large family and was taught from a young age to care for her brothers and assist her mother,” wrote her granddaughter, Anita M. Skinner, in a graduate thesis about her grandmother’s life [1].

While her brothers chopped ice, hunted ducks and ground squirrels, and set fish-traps, Olinka learned to sew, cook, tan hides, and pick berries in the summer sun.

“Children were expected to work from an early age,” [1]

By age five, Olinka was already carrying water in a spruce-root bucket, stepping carefully so not a single drop would spill. The water was needed for tea, and the fire was waiting.



By seven, she could thread a bone needle and sew fur mittens. Her first pair was finished in secret—under the kitchen table—stitched with tiny, careful hands.

At nine, she could split kindling with a small axe. Her father had taught her to aim with care, because a strong and true swing could keep the stove burning warm through the long winter nights.

Each chore was a lesson. Each task was a preparation. And Olinka soaked it all in.

She became like a little mother to her younger brothers, soothing their cries and telling stories while their parents were out hunting or fishing. By the time she was thirteen, Olinka could run the household on her own—hauling water from river, lighting the stove, and keeping the little ones safe and warm. Her parents had taught her well, passing down the knowledge and strength needed to care for a family in the harsh Alaskan wilderness. Sometimes winter came early on the tundra, and when snow was falling and no one else was home to start the fire, she wasn't afraid and didn't wait. She just did what needed to be done.

Life Between the River and the Mountains

Winters in Kwethluk were long and silent, with snowdrifts higher than a sled-dog's back. Olinka walked to the one-room school in a neighbor's cabin, where she studied for two short months each year. She reached the fifth grade—the highest class offered then—and learned just enough to read the Psalms aloud by lamplight.

But in the summer, everything changed.



As the tundra bloomed and the rivers thawed, Olinka's family traveled into the Kilbuck Mountains to tend their reindeer herd. It was in those high valleys—soaked in green light and dotted with wildflowers—that Olinka came alive.

She followed her mother through mountain trails, learning how to find clean water, read tracks in soft mud, and listen for the changing winds. Some days she tried her hand at bare-hand salmon fishing in the icy streams. Other days, she helped set tiny traps for parka squirrels. These chores didn't feel like work—they were games full of giggles, surprises, and lessons the mountains never stopped teaching.

Years later, she would look back on those summers and call them “the happiest valley.” Later, as a grown woman and mother, she told her daughters, “If anything happens to me, you can bury me right here.” [1] She meant it. Her heart had taken root in those mountains.

The Years of Sickness

But not every memory was happy.

From 1900 to 1920, terrible sicknesses swept across Alaska. Influenza. Measles. Smallpox. The Yup'ik people called one of the worst outbreaks Pupigpak—“the big sore.” Entire villages disappeared. In Kwethluk, only seven families survived the 1900 epidemic.

Olinka's father remembered how coffins filled the little church.



As a girl, Olinka helped her mother gather healing roots and boil spruce pitch to make salves—special pastes used to soothe wounds and fevers. She watched closely as the women treated fevers, wounds, and grief. These were her first lessons in healing—the first steps on the path that would one day make her a midwife.

Those early years left a mark on her heart. She never forgot what it felt like to lose a neighbor, a cousin, or a friend. So she opened her home to everyone—travelers, visitors, and even strangers. No one left her house hungry, and no one ever left alone. This wasn't just kindness—it was her way of life.

A House of Faith and Tradition

Like many homes in the village, sacred and everyday objects lived side by side. Hand-painted icons stood near tools for hunting and gathering. A kerosene lamp lit the evenings, and dried salmon hung above bundles of tundra tea gathered in summer.

Every night, the family gathered for prayers in the Yup'ik language. They stood quietly as soft chants rose like incense through the rafters.

Her granddaughter Anita wrote, “As a child, Olga was quiet and loved to be out on the land. She was deeply spiritual even from a young age, drawn to prayer and silence.” [1]

Before she became a Matushka...

Before she became a midwife, a mother of eight...





She was just a little girl in a big snowy world—
working, watching, praying.

And even then, the spiritual seeds were growing in
her heart.

Responsibility brings joy—each little chore prepared
her to serve thousands one day.

Suffering brings compassion—the years of sickness
did not harden her heart; they softened it.

Faith and culture together make us strong—Olinka's
Yup'ik heritage and Orthodox faith wove together like a
strong basket, able to carry every burden and every
blessing.

As she grew, Olinka's days were full of laughter,
firewood, salmon, sewing, snow, and stories. She was not
rich or famous. But she was already learning what it meant
to give—completely and joyfully—just as Christ did.

In Olinka's earliest years, a priest might arrive by
dogsled only twice a year to celebrate the Divine Liturgy
and bless the homes. But this was about to change.

Olinka was ready for the next step on her path. And
just in time, someone new arrived in the village—a priest
whose quiet faith would help shape her future.

Turn the page to meet him.



New Priest

The wind howled across the frozen tundra of Alaska, sweeping little snowdrifts up the sides of sod houses in the village of Kwethluk. Nine-year-old Olinka peeked out from the doorway of her family's home. Her breath formed tiny clouds in the frosted air.

T There! A dogsled was pulling up outside the church. A man stepped off—wrapped in furs, with kind eyes and a calm presence. He wasn't tall, and he didn't wear a beard like the priests in the old icons. But there was something strong and steady about him.

The villagers didn't know much about him yet. Only that he had come from Russian Mission with his wife and two children—and that he was their new priest. His name was Father Nicolai Epchook.

But Father Nicolai was not just any priest. He was **Creole**, which meant he had both Native Alaskan and Russian ancestry. People like him often spoke more than one language and understood the traditions of both cultures. He had grown up speaking Yup'ik and was deeply rooted in the Orthodox faith.

He was born in the village of Russian Mission, a spiritual center once known as "Russian Mission on the Yukon," where generations of Yup'ik people had embraced the Orthodox faith. He learned from Aleut clergy in the region and was later sent for training to Unalaska—one of the oldest Orthodox centers in Alaska. There, he studied under experienced clergy, learning to serve in both Church Slavonic and Yup'ik.





As Fr. Michael Oleksa writes:

“Archpriest Nikolai Epchook, originally from Netsetvetov’s original Yukon Delta headquarters, ‘Russian Mission,’ learned much from the Aleut clergy who resided in the area, and he was ordained after spending some months at Unalaska” [8].

Before coming to Kwethluk in 1926, he served as a deacon under Bishop Amphilokhii Vakulskii. He was later ordained and assigned to this small village by the Kuskokwim River. What no one knew at the time was how much his quiet footsteps would shape their lives—especially Olinka’s.

A Voice That Spoke to the Heart

At church the next morning, Olinka stood and prayed together with her relatives. She had been to church many times before, but this time was different.

When Father Nicolai stood before the altar, he didn’t just chant in Church Slavonic like other priests. He also spoke in Yup’ik—her language. The language of her parents, her neighbors, and her heart. That was rare. But it was no accident. He had studied Yup’ik deeply and



Photo: Fr. Nicolai Epchook (center) with Chief Hariton Jackson (left) and Reader Paul Nicolai (right). St. Nicholas Church, Kwethluk, early 1950s.



even taught hymns and readings in both Slavonic and Yup'ik to future generations of church readers [8].

And the words weren't loud or fancy. They were gentle. His voice was deep and kind, like the hum of the river under the ice. People also remembered him as cheerful and light-hearted—someone who could lift spirits with a smile or a small joke, even in the darkest months of winter.

Olinka leaned closer. During the sermon, Father Nicolai spoke in Yup'ik. His words were gentle and clear—perhaps verses like: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Those sermons from Father Nicolai could have been God's whisper to her young soul—because in time, she would live those very words with her hands, her heart, and her prayers.

New Church

A few years later, when Olinka was a teenager, Father Nicolai inspired the village to build a new bigger church—a strong one made of cedar. This was the second church in Kwethluk. His vision was not just for a building, but for a spiritual home that would echo with prayer and song in Yup'ik for years to come [8].

Everyone helped. Men chopped trees along the river. Women mixed and boiled fish-glue to seal the wood. Children, including Olinka, carried planks, filled buckets, and pounded nails.





Finally, in 1935, the new St. Nicholas Church stood tall, with a shining cross on top and a bell tower that echoed like a song across the tundra.

Father Nicolai rang the bell for the first time. It was a sound Olinka never forgot—like the voice of heaven dancing through the snowy air.

This is how the nave of that second St. Nicholas Church—built in 1935 with the help of the villagers and young Olinka—looks today. The church is still used during warmer months for special services, though it has no heating.



*Photo: Interior of the historic St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, built in 1935.
Photo taken in 2024.*



In this 2024 photo, Father Vassily Fisher stands in prayer at the altar, continuing the legacy of faith passed down from Saint Olga's generation.

In 1978, just one year before Saint Olga's repose, a third and larger church was completed. Nearly half a century later, in 2024, Saint Olga's holy relics were reverently transferred there, where they now rest—surrounded by candles, icons, and the prayers of her people.

The new nave looked breathtaking. Warm cedar panels wrapped the space in light. Icons of Christ and the Theotokos watched over the faithful. A chandelier gleamed overhead, like golden snow suspended in midair.



Photo: Nave of the current Saint Nicholas Church, built in 1978, where Saint Olga's relics are now enshrined.





Across the Snow with Christ

But Father Nicolai wasn't the kind of priest who only stayed inside warm buildings. He tied up his boots and packed his traveling bag with everything he needed: holy water, blessed oil, pre-sanctified gifts for Holy Communion, his Bible, and the worn prayer book he carried everywhere. Then he stepped onto his dogsled. With the dogs pulling through snow and wind, he crossed frozen rivers and white hills to visit the sick, bless new homes, and pray with families in need—bringing Christ to the people, one home at a time.

Over the years, he traveled thousands of miles by dogsled and kayak across the tundra and rivers of southwest Alaska. “Sometimes he would be gone for weeks visiting the other parishes,” remembered Father Martin Nicolai, a Yup'ik Orthodox priest from Kwethluk, whose family lived in the village during Father Epchook's time. “Boats and kayaks in the summer, and dog teams in winter were his transportation.”

He baptized entire families, taught the children to sing church hymns, and blessed the first fish camps each spring. “My grandmother remembers him teaching and singing while piggybacking one of his children,” Father Martin shared. “Even when the weather was bitterly cold, he always blessed the waters down at the river in Theophany. When he lifted up the cross, the waters running down would freeze on his hands.” His records showed he traveled as far as the headwaters of the Kuskokwim and down to the coastal villages, serving wherever he was needed.



Father Michael Oleksa—a beloved Orthodox priest, educator, and storyteller who served in Alaska for more than forty years—wrote about this: “Father Nicolai Epchhook... remained at Kwethluk for the next thirty-six years... Pastoral visits required weeks of difficult and often dangerous sledding and kayaking... Without exaggeration, therefore, it is possible to conclude that the very existence of Orthodoxy among the Yup’ik people... is due primarily to the work of Aleut and Creole missionaries who devoted their lives to the evangelization of their mainland neighbors.” [8].

What about Olinka? Olinka was still young, but she was thoughtful, honest, and trustworthy. It’s possible that on occasion, she may have accompanied him on some local visits—perhaps to help with small tasks. Whether or not she traveled with him, she was certainly watching and learning what quiet service looked like. From his example, she began to understand that holiness often walked in snow-covered boots and spoke in soft words.

Love, she realized, wasn’t just something you feel—it was what you do for others. It was helping, listening, and giving without expecting anything back. Olinka was learning all of this—not only in church, but also in the place she loved most: the mountains. That’s where she felt closest to God. And that’s where her story begins to take shape—one quiet step at a time.

Let’s follow her into the hills and snowdrifts, where prayers rise like mist, and reindeer walk beside the stars...





The Girl Who Loved the Mountains (Ages 9 – 17)

Olinka could hear the mountains before she ever saw them. Long before the Kilbuck Range appeared on the horizon, she could feel it—a deep, low hum beneath the ice, like a drum echoing through the land.

Every April, before the river ice had fully broken, the whole family packed their supplies, harnessed the dogs, and left the village behind. That was the season when ground squirrels began to stir in their burrows, and their meat and fur were needed for food and clothing. Reindeer were also used—both for their meat and their hides, which were sewn into warm winter clothing and bedding. The sled rails hissed over late snow and awakening tundra, gliding toward the high country. The houses of Kwethluk faded into the distance, just a few thin wisps of chimney smoke under the blue sky. Ahead of them, the sharp ridges of the Kilbuck Mountains rose like giants waking up from winter.

Martha Qerruralria Nicolai, Olinka's first daughter, remembered: "She used to tell stories about when she was a girl. She never stayed in the village. She mostly spoke about the mountain wilderness." [1]

They traveled for two days. At night they stopped to boil tea and feed the dogs. The air smelled cleaner the higher they climbed—like stone, snowmelt, and sky. Finally, they reached Qanirtuuq Lake—also called Kagati Lake—a high mountain lake that marks the beginning of the Qanirtuuq (Kanektok) River. This was a traditional Yup'ik hunting area, and that's where the family set up their



mountain camp [1]. Sometimes several families would stay together there for a while.

Life at Camp

Olinka, already tall for twelve, slept beside Aunt Martha in a sealskin bag. Like many Yup'ik children, Olinka had learned by watching—how to build a fire, when the salmon would run, and how to tell the weather by the way clouds moved or the wind shifted. Elders didn't use many words. The land was the teacher, and Olinka listened well [2].

Before sunrise, she would tiptoe outside to milk the reindeer does—the female reindeer that gave milk. They weren't like dairy cows, you had to move gently, speak softly, and know just the right angle to pull the milk into a birchwood cup for tea [1].

If a reindeer's hoof got sore or cracked from walking on sharp rocks, Olinka knew just what to do. She gently warmed up birch-tar salve—a thick, sticky medicine made from tree sap—and rubbed it into the split hoof until the animal gave a quiet sigh of relief [1]. By midday, she was busy again—patching harnesses, braiding strong ropes out of rawhide, and checking that the corral fences held firm. And when night fell and shadows stretched across the valley, Olinka took her place on night-watch. She circled the herd slowly, tapping two spruce sticks together—tap-tap!—to keep curious wolves from creeping too close [1].

Martha Qerruralria Nicolai, Olga's first daughter remembered it with a laugh: “When they returned to the





village, people would say, ‘You smell like reindeer!’ And she would say the villagers smelled like mud.” [1]

Olinka loved every moment of those mountain days.

At night, inside the canvas tent, the lantern glowed amber and the mountains began to sing—wind in the spruce trees, the deep howl of wolves, the soft chimes of reindeer bells. Nobody owned a radio. They didn’t need one [1].

Fish, Squirrels... and Sudden Laughter

As Olinka grew older, the mountain chores grew too. But between hauling water and feeding the herd, there were moments of wild joy—the kind that didn’t just make memories, they became stories.

After chores, the children played games that helped feed the family. These weren’t games like in a schoolyard. They were made of cold rivers, clever traps, and quick hands. The goal wasn’t just food—it was teamwork, laughter, and learning how to live.

Olinka still loved **bare-hand salmon fishing**. She crouched beside the icy streams, slipped orange fish eggs onto her fingers like beads, and dipped her hands into the water. She stayed as still as stone. When a curious salmon came close—grab! Sometimes the fish got away, splashing her skirt and soaking her sleeves. But Olinka only laughed harder, flicking water at her brothers like it was part of the fun [1].

She was also good at squirrel hunting. The children set tiny traps near the burrows and carried cloth bags for their catch. They called them parka squirrels, because their



soft fur lined the warmest winter coats. There was a rule they all knew: show mercy. End the animal's life quickly, kindly, and with one twist of the hand [1].

But one day, Olinka forgot. She thought a squirrel was gone, and dropped the limp body into her bag. Halfway down the trail, it woke up. It sprang out in a flurry of claws and fur! Her brothers screamed. Someone tripped. Someone else rolled into a bush. Everyone ended up breathless, howling with laughter [1].

That night, as the lantern glowed and supper warmed in the pot, the tale was told again—this time with even more drama and sound effects. That was the way of things in the mountains: the chores taught your hands, but the stories taught your heart.

The Reindeer and the Singing Tree

One foggy evening, Olinka and her friend were walking near the herd when a bull reindeer suddenly charged. His antlers looked like giant hands, ready to toss them through the air. The girls froze for half a second—then Olinka's friend snatched up a fist-sized rock from the ground. They scrambled up a stunted spruce tree just in time. Clinging to a low branch, her friend let the rock drop. THUD! It landed square between the bull's antlers.

He collapsed. The girls stared in horror. Had they just... killed someone's reindeer? They rehearsed their apology the whole way back to camp. But just as they reached the trail, the "dead" reindeer stumbled past—dizzy, grumpy, and very much alive [1].





From that day on, the little spruce became their **Singing Tree**. Every spring they tied pieces of bright yarn to its branches and prayed: “*Thank You, Lord, for turning fear into laughter.*” [1] That story stayed with Olinka for the rest of her life.

Side Trail: How the Reindeer Came to Alaska

Did you know reindeer didn’t always live in Alaska? In 1896, a Presbyterian missionary and the First US Government General Agent of Education in Alaska named Dr. Sheldon Jackson brought the first Siberian reindeer to western Alaska [3]. He believed that Native families—especially the Yup’ik—could use the herds for food, clothing, and income, just like the Sámi people did in Norway.

The reindeer were much calmer than wild caribou and easier to take care of. In the years that followed, many Yup’ik families began raising them. They built simple fences called brush corrals out of tree branches to keep the animals from wandering off. In winter, they rode sleds through the mountains to bring the reindeer salt to lick and hay to eat [3].

But not all of Dr. Jackson’s ideas were helpful. While the reindeer brought food and income, he also worked to stop Native children from speaking their language. He tried to replace the Orthodox Faith with his own beliefs. Many Yup’ik people suffered because of these changes. [9]

Still, the Orthodox Church remained strong—because it had already become part of their families, their stories, and their hearts.



Olinka grew up right in the middle of this exciting time. By the 1930s, the Kuskokwim region had over 43,000 reindeer [3]. Her family was part of it—raising, guarding, and learning from the animals. Even after the herds dwindled during World War II, the memories stayed strong. Reindeer herding had shaped not just the land—but the people.

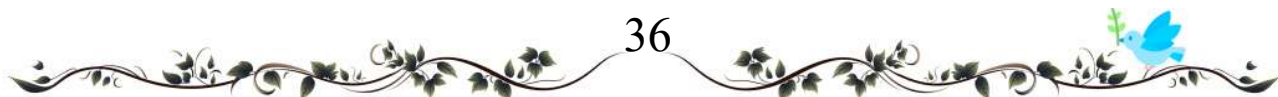
Dawn Prayers and Starry Lessons

Night-watch could be long and lonely. The wind howled. The reindeer shifted in their sleep. But Olinka was not afraid. She walked slowly, matching each step with a quiet prayer: “*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.*”

Every breath became a prayer. Every shadow became a reminder: God made this ridge. God watches over this herd [4].

The **salmon runs** taught her about God’s generosity. The **birch fences** reminded her of God’s protection. Even the darting squirrel, quick and unexpected, made her smile—God’s creation was full of surprises. Like the elders who gave thanks for every berry and taught their children never to waste, Olinka saw every gift of the land as holy.

Living on dried fish, boiled tundra moss (called lichen), and careful sharing taught her never to waste—and always to give what she could. Years later, when she baked bread for the village children, she gave it away freely, remembering how the land had once fed her. It was her quiet way of saying, “The land cared for me—now I care for you.” [4]





Coming Home Again

In September, the geese flew overhead, pointing the way home. The family rolled up the tent, packed smoked meat and dried fish, and tied their little round boats—called *angyaqatak*—to the sleds. Just before the trail turned back toward Kwethluk, Olinka paused. Snow had already touched the highest peaks. Somewhere up there, the Singing Tree waited for spring yarn and girls' laughter. She didn't say anything. But she felt it—the mountains had moved inside her. Like a little bright mountain range behind her ribs, humming every time she prayed.

Someday, she would become **Matushka Olga**, the kind and holy woman who comforted the sick, watched over the hurting, and sang church hymns from memory. But before all of that, she was just a girl who loved the mountains. And the mountains—by the grace of God—loved her back.

But even as the family returned to village life, a new season was already stirring in Olinka's heart. The girl who once chased squirrels and prayed beneath the stars would soon grow into a young woman—with new joys, new trials, and a love that would shape a whole community.

Her next journey was waiting: becoming a wife and mother—living with the quiet strength that would one day make her a saint.



Becoming a Wife and a Mother (Age 18 - 40)

Olinka sat quietly in the sled as it glided over the frozen Kuskokwim River, bundled in furs and deep in thought. She was on her way to Bethel, the regional hub for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Her home village of Kwethluk was just 11 miles away by air—but by dogsled, in the heart of the Alaskan winter, the journey was much longer.

It was December 1, 1934, and **Olinka Arrsamquq Evan**, only eighteen years old, was going to be married. Her family had helped arrange the marriage, as was common among Yup'ik families at the time. Her future husband, **Nicolai Ooliggaq Michael**, was also from Kwethluk and worked as a trapper. After years of prayer and preparation, the day had finally come.

On their **marriage license**, her name was written as **Olinka Evans**, with an “s” added to the end. This was a common change made by English-speaking officials who were unfamiliar with Yup'ik naming traditions. But in her community, she was known as **Evan**—a name that came from her father, following the Yup'ik custom of using a parent's first name as a family name.

We also know from their official marriage certificate that Olinka and Nicolai were legally **married in Bethel** on that day, not by a priest, but by a United States Commissioner. This surprises some people—why wasn't their wedding held in the Orthodox Church, especially since Olinka's priest, Fr. Nicolai Epchook, lived in Kwethluk?





MARRIAGE LICENSE DOCKET

Precinct Seeshel Div. No. 1

In the Matter of the Application for a Marriage License
by Nicolai Michael
and Olinka Evans
1934

No. 351
This number should correspond with the number of the Marriage License and the Marriage Certificate.

FILINGS	
<u>Dec 1</u>	Application of Male Applicant
	Application of Female Applicant
	Statement
	Consent
	License issued
	Marriage Certificate recorded

APPLICATIONS

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ss.
Territory of Alaska.
I, Nicolai Michael, being first duly sworn, on oath depose and say: I am the MALE applicant for the issuance of a Marriage License to myself.
Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 1 day of December, 1934.
United States Commissioner.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ss.
Territory of Alaska.
I, Olinka Evans, being first duly sworn, on oath depose and say: I am the FEMALE applicant for the issuance of a Marriage License to myself.
Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 1 day of December, 1934.
United States Commissioner.

STATEMENT

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ss.
Territory of Alaska.
I, Nicolai Michael, and Olinka Evans, being first duly sworn, each for himself and herself, and not one for the other, on oath depose and say:

MALE APPLICANT	FEMALE APPLICANT
Full Name? <u>Nicolai Michael</u>	Full Name? <u>Olinka Evans</u>
Relationship to Female Applicant, if any?	Relationship to Male Applicant, if any?
Nationality? <u>Ex</u>	Nationality? <u>Ex</u>
Color? <u>Brown</u>	Color? <u>Brown</u>
Residence? <u>Longluks</u>	Residence? <u>Longluks</u>
Occupation? <u>Trapper</u>	Occupation? <u>Trapper</u>
Are you a Minor? (Under the age of 21 years)	Are you a Minor? (Under the age of 18 years)
If you are a Minor, give the name and residence of your parents or guardian.	If you are a Minor, give the name and residence of your parents or guardian.
How many times have you been married?	How many times have you been married?
How were your prior marriage or marriages dissolved?	How were your prior marriage or marriages dissolved?
Do you know of any legal reason why this marriage should not be solemnized?	Do you know of any legal reason why this marriage should not be solemnized?
	<u>Nicolai Michael</u> Male Applicant.
	<u>Olinka Evans</u> Female Applicant.
Subscribed and sworn to before me, this _____ day of _____, 19____.	Subscribed and sworn to before me, this _____ day of _____, 19____.
	United States Commissioner.

AFFIDAVIT OF CONSENT TO THE MARRIAGE OF A MINOR

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ss.
Territory of Alaska.
_____, being first duly sworn, on oath deposes and says: I am the Parent, or Guardian, having the actual care, custody and control of _____ whose age is _____, and I hereby give my full consent to _____ marriage with _____ and request the United States Commissioner at _____ to issue the proper Marriage License.
Subscribed and sworn to before me, this _____ day of _____, 19____.
United States Commissioner.

Marriage Certificate of Olinka Evans and Nicolai Michael, dated 1 December 1934



The answer may be simple. Although Fr. Nicolai Epchook was the village priest, he also traveled constantly to serve nearby communities and might not have been in Kwethluk or Bethel at the time.

But there's something else we know for sure: December 1 falls during the Orthodox Nativity Fast—a holy season of prayer and preparation for the birth of Christ. In fact, on the Old Calendar still followed by the Orthodox Church in Alaska at that time, December 1 corresponded to November 18. The Nativity Fast begins on November 15, so Church weddings would not normally be allowed unless a special blessing was given. So even if a priest had been present, it's likely the Church wedding (the sacrament of marriage) had to be postponed.

It's very likely that the young couple planned to receive a Church wedding blessing later in January, after the Nativity Fast ended. This was a common practice in Alaska: many couples were first married in a civil ceremony, then received the sacrament of marriage in church when a priest was available and the season was right.

We don't know the exact date of Olinka and Nicolai's Orthodox Church wedding, but it likely took place shortly after the Nativity Fast ended in early January 1935—when the season of fasting had passed and a priest was available.

Olga Skinner, Olinka and Nicolai's granddaughter, later recalled hearing that “as arranged, Olinka married Nicolai O. Michael of Kwethluk on January 7, 1935.”[1] This date, however, is Christmas Day on the Orthodox calendar, when weddings are not typically permitted. It is





therefore more likely that their sacramental wedding was celebrated in the days that followed once both the fast and the feast had concluded, and a priest could preside over the Crowning service.

We can imagine that gold crowns were placed on their heads during the Orthodox Crowning Service. Prayers may have been sung in Slavonic and Yup'ik. The warm scent of wax and incense might have filled the little village church. Even if the moment came weeks or months later, Olinka would have stood there with the same quiet joy and prayerful heart.

Their family and neighbors would have celebrated in traditional Yup'ik fashion—with food, dancing, laughter, and prayer. Maybe children skated along the frozen river under the northern lights, while elders shared stories and songs that warmed the soul.

At the time of their marriage, Nicolai was not yet deeply involved in the Church, and communication between the young couple may have been difficult. He spent long stretches out on the land. But Olinka was steady and faithful. We can imagine her lighting a small lamp each evening, crossing herself, and quietly whispering her husband's name in prayer.

And those prayers were answered. In time, Nicolai became a Reader in the Church, and eventually, he was ordained a priest. That journey began with Olinka's patient, unwavering love—the kind that shines like a candle through the darkest night, and leads others gently toward the light.



In the years that followed, their home became more than a place to live—it became a shelter, a refuge, and a quiet symbol of the Church itself.

A House with an Open Door

Olinka and Nicolai moved into a small, three-room log house. It had a stove made from an old oil drum, a few benches that flipped into beds, and a pantry stacked with dried fish, seal oil, and loaves of sourdough bread.

It wasn't much. But to everyone who entered, it felt like a palace. Something sacred filled the space.

If a child was hungry, she fed them. If a neighbor was cold, she made space near the stove. If someone needed to talk, she listened with her whole heart. Even strangers knew that Olinka's house was a safe place.

During the spring flood of 1964, eighteen people napped on her floor. Three teachers' babies slept in handmade cradles. A woman who had been hurt by her husband rested quietly near the stove, wrapped in one of Olinka's soft parkas. Her daughters curled up on the floor, never complaining.

Olga's daughter Anita later described her mother: "Mom was approachable. I mean **she was like the mom of the whole village**. Because even people from the villages, they would stop by and instead of saying, "How's Arrsamquq?" they'd say, "How's Mom?" Like she's everybody's mom. I mean that's how you felt around her. She was a mom and she was willing to take care of you."





Joy and Sorrow

Over the next twenty-five years, Olinka gave birth to thirteen children. There were no hospitals in Kwethluk. No nurses. No pain medicine. She gave birth in her own home—sometimes surrounded by family, and sometimes entirely alone. Her strength came from deep within, shaped by prayer, love, and a quiet trust in God [1].

Of the thirteen, eight children survived. The others were lost to illness in an era before vaccinations reached the villages.

When a child died, Olinka would stand quietly at her icon corner and whisper prayers in Yup'ik. She lit her lamp. She gave her sorrow to God. And then, somehow, she found the strength to carry on.

Her granddaughter and biographer, Anita Skinner, later wrote:

“Love for children is a quality often used when talking about Olinka. Perhaps this was influenced in part by her experiences of losing her own children and others close to her. She modeled this quality and passed it on to her children” [1].

And she did. She didn't just love her own children—she loved them all. Every child who came to her door found a place in her heart.



The Mother-Craft Toolbox

Olinka didn't learn her skills from books or classes. She learned them from mothers, grandmothers, and aunties. Here are just a few of them:

Skill	Yukon-Kuskokwim Style
Sourdough	Starter kept in a sealskin pouch, warmed near the stove.
Healing tea	Labrador leaf + willow bark + wild flowers. "God's aspirin," she called it.
Comfort crafts	Tiny fur dolls / fur mittens / fur boots
Storytelling	Yup'ik legends laced with Gospel hope and ending with prayer

No one taught love like Olinka did—with bread, tea, fur dolls, bedtime stories, and prayer.

Her House Was Her Monastery

Olinka's home was full of work—wood to chop, mouths to feed, clothes to sew, diapers to wash—but it was also grounded in prayer.

Her granddaughter, Anita Skinner, described the family's daily rhythm this way:

"The family started each morning with three prostrations and the Psalm 142 in Yup'ik 'With my voice I cry out to the Lord'. A quiet moment, a hot breakfast of mush and coffee followed."





When Father Nicolai was home, the house sometimes became a chapel. Parishioners would come quietly for confession or advice, and the children would learn to whisper and wait.

Evenings brought their own kind of peace. Olinka would sit beside the stove with her sewing basket and her children nearby. Though we don't have the exact words she chanted, her daughters remember the prayers and hymns woven into those moments.

"We can still chant the Holy Week hymns by heart," one daughter shared. "She planted them in us like seeds."

A Heart Ready for More

In these early years, Olinka was not yet known as "Matushka," not yet the woman whose name would one day be sung in prayers. But something was forming inside her. Like sourdough quietly rising near the stove. Like seeds beneath the snow.

Years of delivering her own children had prepared her hands.

Years of making healing teas had trained her senses.

Years of welcoming others had opened her heart to the world.

She didn't yet know it—but soon, women would knock at her door in labor.

Soon, her kitchen would become a birthing room.

Soon, she would be more than a mother.

She would become a midwife.





The Midwife of Kwethluk

In the cold and quiet corners of the Alaskan tundra, a good midwife was hard to find—and absolutely essential. Babies didn't wait for good weather or clear skies. Planes couldn't always fly, and the nearest hospital was often days away. So, when a woman was ready to give birth, someone from the village had to step forward—someone who knew what to do, even in the middle of a snowstorm. That someone was Olinka.

She had already given birth to many children of her own. She knew what it meant to be scared, to feel pain, to hope—and to grieve. Of the thirteen children she brought into the world, five died during the first years of their lives [1]. The sorrow of losing them stayed with her. Perhaps that's why she became a midwife—not just to help babies be born safely, but to walk beside other mothers through moments of fear, pain, and joy.

What a Midwife Did

Olinka didn't have medical training, a doctor's coat, or modern medical tools. She didn't carry a stethoscope or keep any special medicine. But when a woman was in labor, she brought something more powerful—steady hands, a calm voice, and deep faith.

She would listen for the baby's heartbeat using a hollow tube she had carved from driftwood. No machines. Just her ear and her prayer. If the umbilical cord needed tying, she would use strips of willow bark she had boiled





herself—clean, simple, and made from what the tundra gave.

As she worked, she prayed out loud. She might whisper some Psalms while rubbing the mother's back to help her breathe through the pain.

If a fever came after birth, Olinka would soak cloths in cold river water to bring down the heat. And when a mother's milk was slow to come, she would bring her to the nearest steambath and gently sweep her back with warm birch twigs. The warmth helped the body. The prayers helped the heart.

Olinka never worked alone. She always worked with Christ. Even though there was no hospital nearby, her presence made the room feel safe—like holy ground.

A Birth Story Everyone Still Tells

One grandmother remembered her own birth story this way:

“I kept moaning, ‘Slaaviik, help me!’ Then suddenly she was there in the doorway, snow still on her parka. She whispered the Jesus Prayer once for each contraction, laid warm spruce-tip cloths on my belly, and the baby slid into her hands before sunrise.” [1]

Olinka never took money. “All children are God's wages,” she would say [1].

And sometimes, by the time the mother opened her eyes, Olinka was already gone—only the warmth of a fresh sourdough loaf left behind on the stove.



A Quiet Kind of Strength

Olinka never waited for thanks. She didn't give long lectures or speeches. Her strength was quiet. She helped, and then she stepped back. In the hearts of those she helped, Olinka didn't just help them deliver babies—she delivered hope.

But midwifery was only part of her calling. Because Olinka also knew how to heal with what the land gave her—leaves, roots, blossoms, and steam. Her hands had learned the secret language of tundra plants. And her next kind of healing began not with a cry in the night, but with the soft snap of a twig.

Let's follow her into the next chapter—where prayers grew in gardens, and medicine hung from rafters.





Healing Hands of the Tundra

In the village of Kwethluk, when someone got sick, they didn't go to a hospital. There wasn't one nearby—not for hundreds of miles. Planes couldn't always fly. Roads turned to rivers in spring. But people knew where to go: a warm, quiet home where bundles of herbs hung from the ceiling and the air smelled like mint and spruce. That's where Olinka lived. And Olinka knew how to heal.

She wasn't trained in a clinic or university or called "Doctor." But everyone in the village trusted her. She had learned the old ways—passed down from her mother, her aunties, and the village Elders. These were Yup'ik traditions, taught by watching, listening, and practicing with care. She also learned by prayer—because to her, healing comes from God.

Where Healing Begins

We don't have many written records of exactly how Olinka learned her healing ways. But we do know she was a midwife, that she delivered babies and comforted mothers. We also know that the Yup'ik people had a rich tradition of plant-based medicine—one Olinka surely inherited and used with faith.

This chapter draws from those traditions, based on the book *The Medicinal Flora of the Alaska Natives* by Ann Garibaldi [7], to show what Olinka likely knew, practiced, and passed on.



The Secret Lives of Leaves and Roots

Some people think that only doctors can cure disease—and that healing only happens in hospitals. But long before there were doctors, hospitals, or medicine in plastic bottles, healing came from another place: from the land God created for us.

God gave the world plants, flowers, roots, and berries not just for food, but for medicine too. He gave people the wisdom to see what helps and what harms. And to the people of Alaska, He gave Elders and healers like Olinka.

Olinka didn't go to medical school. But she had two powerful gifts: faith in God and knowledge passed down through generations of Yup'ik people.

In the spring, when snow still hugged the edges of the riverbanks, Olinka would head out with a basket and a prayer. She might look for **willow bark**, carefully peeling the smooth inner layer. This was the old way to ease pain—willow bark holds a natural medicine similar to aspirin. Elders warned us never to take too much—and always to thank the tree after harvesting [7].

But Olinka didn't just know “willow.” The Yup'ik people recognize over 30 different kinds, growing across the tundra and riverbanks. Some are tall and bushy, others low to the ground. Each shares healing powers—but each holds its own secret gift:

One kind, **Diamond Willow** (*Salix* spp.), known in Kwethluk as cuukvaguaq [CHOOK-fa-ghuak], was used for medicinal purposes—especially for treating sore throats, mouth irritation, and infections.





Whether for fever, sore throat, or aching muscles, Olinka trusted the willows that God had planted around her village. She didn't just see branches—she saw healing medicine waiting quietly under the bark.

In early summer, when the tundra turned soft and green, she gathered ayuq [ah-YOOK]—**Labrador tea**. This low, hardy plant has strong-smelling leaves that helped with coughs and chest congestion. Dried and steeped in hot water, it made a golden tea that warmed the chest and calmed the lungs [7].

She likely picked **fireweed** petals to ease stomach aches, and gathered cottonwood buds, which she mashed into salves for sore muscles [7]. For more serious illnesses, she used the root of devil's club—a spiny, powerful plant known throughout Alaska for treating infections, lung problems, and arthritis [7].

Each season brought its medicine. Olinka knew exactly when to go out. In May, she looked for the green curls of wild celery and horsetail to help with cleansing and strength. In June, the tundra bloomed pink and purple with yarrow, whose soft petals helped stop nosebleeds and clean wounds [7].

By July, the bees guided her to wild rose bushes, where she picked bright red rose hips, full of vitamins to fight off illness during the long winter [7]. Her hands moved quickly but gently—always with respect.

And moss? It wasn't just padding in baby cradles. In summer and early fall, when the tundra was damp and green, Olinka would gather soft moss for healing. Warmed



gently by the fire or steamed, it was pressed onto wounds to clean them and stop bleeding. Some Elders even soaked it in seal oil to make it stick better. It was nature's bandage—fresh, gentle, and always ready.

Some plants she probably dried in the breeze and tied into bundles with string. Others she may have soaked in oil to make salves. Sometimes, she likely ground the roots with a stone and mixed them with animal fat to make healing pastes. And other times, she may have filled jars with leaves and berries, added a spoonful of sugar or seal oil, and left them to ferment slowly—until the juices turned tangy, rich, and strong.

Her shelves weren't just for cooking. They were a forest pharmacy—lined with teas, powders, salves, and jars of blessings.

Fermenting, Drying, and Preserving

In the dark corners of the smokehouse, bundles of mint, fireweed, and yarrow hung from the ceiling, drying slowly where the sun wouldn't bleach their color or steal their scent [7].

She collected tan'gerpak (tan-GAIR-pack), or crowberries, along with blueberries and salmonberries, and mashed them into cakes or spread them on spruce branches to dry. Sometimes she stirred them into akutaq (ah-goo-DAHK)—a creamy mix of berries and seal oil that gave strength to sick or weak people [7].

Roots like wild parsnip were sliced and buried in the cold earth to keep fresh. Others, like licorice fern root, were chewed raw to ease a sore throat [7].





Olinka didn't waste anything. She knew how to watch and listen to the land and how to preserve its gifts.

A Steambath of Healing

When someone was very sick—when the fever wouldn't break, or the cough got worse—Olinka brought them to the maqivik (mah-KEE-vik), the steambath hut near her home.

In Yup'ik villages, maqiviks were usually small, private bathhouses built beside the home and shared by family or neighbors. Like the Russian *banyas* they were modeled after, they had wood-burning stoves covered with stones. A pot of water was placed into the stove or on top of it to boil, sending steam into the air.

To help the sick, Matushka sometimes added wild sage, willow leaves, or cedar to the boiling water—plants known to open the lungs and calm the spirit [7]. Some of this fragrant herbal steam was poured onto the hot rocks to fill the room with heat and medicine.

The sick person sat wrapped in a blanket. Their skin sweated. Their breath deepened. Their pain began to leave.

Sometimes Olinka placed a warm cloth soaked in herbal tea on their forehead. Sometimes she just held their hand and sang a quiet hymn in Yup'ik. And always—she prayed to God for guidance and help.



She Healed with More Than Herbs

People said Olinka's healing didn't stop with teas or steams. It went deeper—into the heart. She could sense when someone was silently suffering. She never asked. She simply made tea and wrapped them in a warm quilt [1].

Some women came with headaches. Others came with sadness they couldn't name. Some came with pain they'd carried since childhood. She treated them all—with warmth, stillness, and prayer.

Sometimes, she made a healing salve from the roots of devil's club—a prickly forest plant known for its power in Yup'ik tradition [7]. She stirred it into hot Labrador tea, traced the sign of the Cross over the pot, and whispered a prayer for healing.

She never separated science, tradition, or faith. To her, they were like threads in a kuspuk—the traditional hooded dress her grandmother wore. Each part had its place. Each one made the whole stronger.

Comfort for Hidden Wounds

Olinka also cared for women whose pain was invisible. Some had been hurt long ago in ways they couldn't speak of. Others carried sorrow like a heavy stone. But somehow, Olinka could see it.

Years after her repose, stories began to spread—letters, dreams, and testimonies from women across North America. They didn't know each other. But they all described the same thing: a short Native grandmother who came to them in their sleep, wrapped them in a caribou





quilt, and gave them peace [1]. Some even said their nightmares disappeared forever.

That's why many today call Saint Olga the patron saint of those who have suffered abuse.

What We Can Learn from Her

Olinka didn't go to school to become a healer. But with her hands, her prayers, and her love, she brought healing wherever she went. You don't have to be a midwife to follow her example. **You can say a quiet prayer before helping your parents or younger siblings and whisper, "Lord, please guide my hands".**

You can be ready to help by learning simple things—like how to comfort a friend who's had a bad day. Maybe you carry a piece of candy, a soft toy, or a handkerchief in your backpack, just in case someone else needs it more than you. And when you give—give quietly. Olinka believed that the best gifts were the ones no one noticed—except God.

In every village, there is someone who listens first. Someone who gives without asking. Someone who shows what it means to love like Christ. That's what Olinka did.

In the hearts of those she helped, Olinka didn't just help them deliver babies—she delivered hope. Even as she cared for mothers and children across the tundra, Olinka's own life was changing. The man she had married—Nicolai Michael—was no longer just the quiet postmaster. He had begun preparing for something much bigger. Soon, their little home would become the heart of a church community. And Olinka would take on a new calling: not just a mother



of many children, but a Matushka—a priest's wife, a leader in faith, and a servant of God in every corner of village life.

But before we follow her into that next part of her journey... **Let's brew some tea!**



Hands-On Activity — Brewing Tundra Tea

Saint Olga of Alaska was famous for the steaming **Sayuq (Labrador-tea)** she carried to the sick. People remember her arriving with a simple cup of healing: steeped leaves, a few wild rose hips, and sometimes a spoon of sugar—if she had any. She used what grew around her.

But what if you don't live near Alaskan herbs? Don't worry—here is a more simple blend that mimics the same evergreen aroma with ingredients from any grocery store. This recipe makes 2 cups and is perfect to share with someone who needs a little love.

Ingredients and How They Help Us

Ingredients	How It Heals Us
1 chamomile tea bag	Calms your stomach and helps you relax.
1 tablespoon dried rose hips	Full of vitamin C—keeps your body strong and boosts your immune system.
½ teaspoon dried mint or a few fresh leaves	Clears your head, helps with breathing, and adds a cool, fresh taste.
6 cranberries (fresh, dried, or frozen)	Add color, a fruity sweet taste, and help fight colds.
2 teaspoons of sugar	Makes it taste sweet and smooth—just like Olga's tea.



How to Make It (Ask an Adult to Help!)

1. Get your ingredients ready. Put the chamomile tea bag, rose hips, mint, and cranberries into a small teapot.
2. Add hot water. Pour 2 cups of hot (not boiling) water over everything. Add the sugar and stir a few times.
3. Let it rest. Cover the pot and wait 5 minutes while the tea brews and the color changes.
4. Strain and serve. Pour the tea through a strainer into two mugs.
5. Say a quiet prayer and make the sign of the cross over the mugs.
“Lord Jesus Christ, bless this tea. Make it a healing and holy drink for our bodies and our hearts. Amen”
6. Sip slowly. Take small sips. Close your eyes and breathe in the steam.

Try the same tea cold in the summer—just let it cool and add some ice cubes.





A Priest's Wife

Before Reader Nicolai Michael became a priest, another holy man quietly guided the Church in Kwethluk—Father Nicolai Epchook, the elder priest of the village. In the winter of 1962, Fr. Epchook grew weak. Fr. Nicolai fell asleep in the Lord on the evening of St. Basil's feast day on January 14, 1962 before the feast of Theophany. Some people call that day the Russian Old New Year.

But his love for the Church didn't die. It lived on in the people he had quietly prepared to serve God—including Reader Nicolai O. Michael, a faithful churchman, respected postmaster, and husband of the woman who would become Saint Matushka Olga.

As Father Martin Nicolai later recalled, "Fr. Nicolai O. Michael was a reader for some time before being sent to Sitka right after the death of Fr. Nicolai Epchook. He was ordained deacon and priest in Sitka and came home as a priest."

Together with Fr. Michael Tinker of Kasigluk, Nicolai traveled over 900 miles from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta to Sitka, where both men were trained and ordained just days apart by Archbishop Amvrossy (Merezhko). There was no seminary in Alaska at the time—so the bishop personally trained and guided those who were ready to serve.

"The former U.S. postmaster, Nicolai Ooliggaq Michael, succeeded Archpriest Nicolai Epchook in the early 1960s," wrote Fr. Michael Oleksa, "as the Russian Mission



reader, Gabriel Gabrieloff, was ordained to serve on the Yukon after Father Changsak's death. Neither man was seminary-trained, but their commitment to the Church and their years of experience convinced the diocesan bishops at the time of their qualifications. As archpriests, both men built new churches in their respective villages, contributing funds and months of physical labor to the effort. In the next generation, Kwethluk and Russian Mission, with a total combined population of perhaps five hundred parishioners, produced six priests and two deacons." [8]

Ordination and the Birth of a Matushka

On May 15, 1962, prayers and incense rose inside St. Michael's Cathedral in Sitka, the historic church founded by St. Innocent of Alaska. There, Reader Nicolai Michael was ordained to the Holy Priesthood. Though Olinka could not make the long and costly journey from Kwethluk, she was surely praying at home—preparing her heart, her home, and quietly embracing the sacred calling that awaited her.

He was ordained by Archbishop Amvrosy Merezhko who served as the Bishop of Sitka and Alaska from September 1955, until 1967.

When Fr. Nicolai returned home, the church of St. Nicholas welcomed its new priest. And standing at his side, with her head covered in a white scarf, Olinka received the title that would stay with her forever: **Matushka**.

† **Archbishop Alexei of Sitka and Alaska**, the current ruling bishop of the Orthodox Church in Alaska, explains it this way:



“The word Matushka isn’t just a nickname. It comes from the Russian word *mat’*, meaning ‘mother,’ and the gentle ending *–ushka* makes it tender—like saying ‘dear mother.’ Matushka isn’t about how old someone is. It’s about love. It’s about honor. It’s a word full of warmth and respect, used for a priest’s wife—but also for holy women who care for others like a mother, with prayers, kindness, and strength. Sometimes Orthodox Christians even call the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, ‘Matushka,’ because she is the mother of us all. In Kwethluk, the village where she lived, when people said Matushka, they didn’t just mean ‘a priest’s wife.’ They meant: ‘She is the mother of this parish.’ The one who sewed, and wept, and prayed. The one who wrapped the bodies of the dead with her own hands. The one who still comes in dreams to help the hurting. That’s why we call her Matushka Olga. Not just a title. Not just a name. A love word. A holy word. A true name.”



Behind Every Liturgy – Matushka's Hidden Work

From the outside, no one would guess how much Matushka Olga had done for the Church, especially when everyone was sleeping. Each week, she rose in the dark to knead the dough for prosphora—the holy bread used in the Divine Liturgy. The stovepipe clicked with heat and Olinka's hands worked on the dough to make prosphora for the Liturgy. As she stamped top parts of the prosphora with the ICXC NIKA seal, combined them with bottom parts, and then pierced them with a needle 5 times each, she whispered a prayer list—parents, grandparents, children of her own and all her neighbors—so every loaf carried the whole village to the altar.

Father Michael Oleksa, in his book *Orthodox Alaska: A Theology of Mission*, wrote: “Week after week she diligently prepared eucharistic bread, the prosphora, serving as the principal agent by which the created universe was transformed into an offering to God at the village liturgy.” [8]

It wasn't just flour and water. It was a prayer. A gift. A quiet offering of the whole world to heaven—shaped by her hands and lifted to God through the Liturgy.

She didn't have catalogs or fabric stores to buy church clothes for her husband. Instead, she used whatever she could find—old flour sacks, scraps of colorful cloth, even strong thread made from seal intestines. Carefully, stitch by stitch, she turned these simple things into beautiful vestments for Fr Nicolai to wear at the altar. “She prepared the Prosphora, Eucharistic bread for church. She also made





the vestments for my grandfather,” her granddaughter said. [1].

She worked quietly to prepare the little church for every feast. Before services, she scrubbed the wooden floor until it shone—hauling water from a hole cut through the river ice in winter. On special days, she gathered grasses and greenery from the tundra to brighten the candle stands and walls.

They had no choir books in those years—but everyone knew the hymns by heart. Matushka Olga stood behind the left choir stand and sang quietly along with the services, her voice blending with the prayers of the people.

“Matushka did not sing in the choir,” recalls Father Martin Nicolai, “but she stood behind the left choir stand. The reader and choir were on the right choir stand and the left was reserved for young girls studying to become choir members. Like everyone in the church, she sang along to the hymns the choir was singing.” Though not a formal choir member, her presence and knowledge inspired those around her. Her quiet voice was part of a living tradition—where worship wasn’t just read from a book, but lived, remembered, and passed from heart to heart.

Father John Shimchick, an Orthodox priest and writer who has studied the lives of many saints and Church leaders, wrote: “She knew the hymns of many feast days, including Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Pascha in Yup’ik by heart” [6].

This is also confirmed by Father Michael Oleksa: “Her knowledge of services was exceptional. Not many



Orthodox today have committed to memory the entire service for a major feast, but Matushka Olga knew the hymns of Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Pascha in Yup'ik by heart. Whenever a visiting priest entered her house, she hurried to don her scarf and approached with her right hand on top of her left, palms upward, requesting a blessing" [8].

Her granddaughter later wrote: "Though English was not her first language, she had memorized the sacred hymns of the Church's feasts... in her native Yup'ik language, and she could sing them by heart. ... She was quietly pious and prayerful, instilling Christian faith in her children and community not by words so much as by her example" [1].

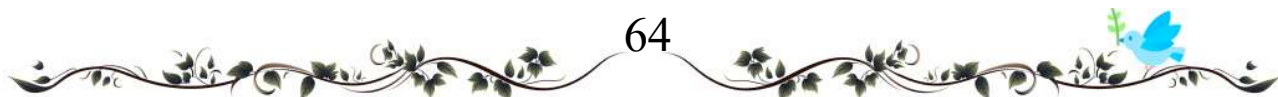
She probably taught those hymns to children, passing them down so they could sing them aloud—during church services, and even while steering boats across the Kuskokwim River.

Hospitality that Melted Barriers

In Kwethluk, there were no hotels—not even one. So when visitors arrived from nearby villages for feast days or church conferences, someone had to find them a warm place to sleep. That someone was Matushka Olga.

"She told relatives which visitors would sleep in their houses," one family member remembered. "She treated everyone the same—Yup'ik, white, Orthodox or not. If they were hungry, she made sure they ate." [1]

In her small log home, everyone was welcome. Babies of schoolteachers napped beside tired fishermen. State troopers passed bread to Moravian choir ladies. One time, a mail clerk from a steamship—not Native and not





church-going—stood shyly at the edge of her kitchen, unsure what to do. Matushka didn't hesitate. She smiled, handed him a pair of warm fur mittens, and said gently: "Now your fingers are local." [1]

That's how she preached—not with sermons, but with love, soup, laughter, and kindness.

Father John Shimchick once said that her life was "a living icon of the Gospel used on the Sunday of the Last Judgment." [6] That's the day we remember how Christ told us to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and care for the least of His brethren.

Matushka did that every single day.

At her table, there was only one rule: no gossip.

"Bread turns sour when words turn ugly," she'd say. [1] And everyone knew she meant it.

Echoes of Saint Herman of Alaska

Long before Olinka walked the snowy paths of Kwethluk, another humble servant of God walked the shores of Kodiak: Saint Herman of Alaska.

He was quiet.

He baked bread for orphaned Aleut children.

He sewed cassocks from torn ship sails.

He welcomed the traders who visited the island with both food and spiritual teaching, saying, "From this day, let us love God above all." [8]

Matushka Olga followed that same spirit.

She baked sourdough for any child who peeked through her frosty window. [1]

She stitched vestments for her husband from old flour sacks—just like Herman had done with canvas sails.



She greeted strangers with a warm smile and made them feel like family.

In August 1978, Matushka Olga was awarded the Cross of Saint Herman by Archbishop Gregory (Afonsky)—the highest lay honor in the Diocese of Alaska. He gently draped it around her neck at the end of the Feast-day Divine Liturgy. The enameled medal, suspended from a red, white, and blue ribbon, bore the icon of Saint Herman, whom she deeply loved.

As Fr. Martin Nicolai recalled: “The St. Herman Cross was awarded to Matushka Olga by Bishop Gregory in 1978 and a gramota for her faithfulness. It was placed on her body for burial.”

Glimpses of Grace in Parish Life

The world would one day recognize Matushka Olga as a saint. Her cross, her kindness, and her hidden holiness would be uncovered and honored. But years before that she was simply serving the people of her village with quiet, everyday grace.

Let us return to the year 1968, to a Pascha night in Kwethluk, under a frozen sky.

That night, lanterns blew out in -30°C (-22°F) wind. Darkness swept over the village. For a few still seconds, the Paschal procession stood in silence.

Then, a single voice rose through the cold:

“Christ is Risen from the dead...”



It was Matushka Olga. Her voice alone carried the hymn across the snow until the candles were relit and the people joined in song again. [1]

In 1973, early ice froze the river. After a church conference, fourteen guests were stranded in Kwethluk with little food. But Matushka boiled one pot of salmon stew, broke two loaves—and somehow, everyone was fed.

“It was like the Gospel story of the five loaves,” one family member said. [1]

Father Nicolai served at the altar, but Matushka Olga served the whole village at home.



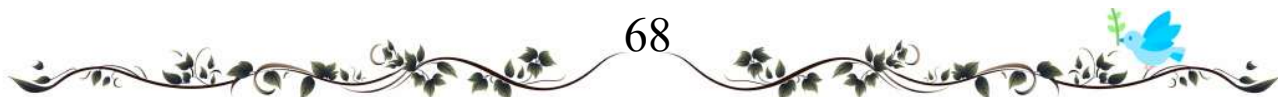
The Mother of Everyone

In the heart of Kwethluk, halfway down the boardwalk that stretched like a wooden ribbon through the snowy village, stood a log house with smoke curling from its stovepipe. Children said the door was never truly closed—just leaning. If the wind blew hard enough, it might swing open on its own, and you’d find yourself inside, standing in the warm light of Matushka Olga’s kitchen.

Inside that little home, the oil-drum stove never went out. Pans of bannock—a simple flatbread made from flour, salt, and water—were always sizzling on the griddle by the fire. Parkas hung near the door, and the air smelled of Labrador tea and woodsmoke. There were children everywhere—her own, the neighbors’, and even a few who had no one else.

Martha Qerruralria Nicolai, Olinka’s eldest daughter, remembered: “Her house was always full... If she take a walk up the village she would have ten or twelve kids with her... some of them are my cousins and some of them are somebody’s kids... Even when they’re drunk or acting crazy she never push them away... But they want to be with her” [1].

Each morning started with hot bread and tea or coffee. By midday, the sewing needles clicked as snow clothes were mended, patched, and lined with warmth. And when the sun dipped low, they gathered around bowls of steaming soup and stories by the fire.





“We always had lots of kids in here... just so they could have a roof over their heads, warm place, and some place where there’s food.” —Lillian Michael [1]

Clothing the Cold Feet of the Delta

Winter in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta wasn’t just cold—it was brutal. Temperatures could drop to -45°C (-49°F), and store-bought boots were too expensive for most families. Kids wrapped their feet in whatever they could find—old rags, burlap sacks, and even strips of seal hide.

Olinka had a better solution. In the long evenings after chores were done, she and her daughters cut soles from parka fur or seal skin and stitched them into soft, fur-lined mukluks. She didn’t just sew for her own children or even just for Kwethluk kids. Her love reached far beyond the village.

As Father Michael Oleksa wrote: “She was constantly sewing or knitting socks or fur outerwear for others. Hardly a friend or neighbor was without something Matushka had made for them. Parishes hundreds of miles away received unsolicited gifts, traditional Eskimo winter boots (‘mukluks’) to sell or raffle for their building fund. All the clergy of the deanery wore gloves or woolen socks Arrsamquq had made for them” [8].

Later, her daughter Martha added:

“Sometimes she made gifts, like when visitors would arrive—like for conferences or Christmas. Her gifts were made by hand, not store-bought. Only what she made herself. She gave to whom she pleased. She made kaapaaqs



(netted hair coverings). It takes one week to make one hairnet with beads. Those are what she made. She made gifts for her lady friends. She made qaspeqs too (hooded tunics). Sometimes, even now, although our mom passed away in 1979, people show me what she had made and gave to them as gifts. Some ladies, they keep 'em.” [1]

A Roof for Women in Danger

In those days, there were no shelters or crisis lines. But there was Matushka Olga's home. Anita and Lillian described how women in distress would come quietly and find safety. Her house was always open, and she never turned anyone away—even those society ignored or feared [1]. She offered them warmth, tea, clean clothes, and peace.

This is why many people remember her as a guardian for women and children.

“For anyone suffering in silence, her message is: you are not alone, and your purity before God is not lost – evil done to you does not define you.” —Canadian Orthodox History Project [4]

The Vision in the Hut

One woman from New York, who had suffered terrible abuse as a child, once shared her story with a priest.

While praying one night, she had a powerful vision. First, the Holy Theotokos appeared and gently led her into a snowy clearing. There, a kind Native woman stood beside a small earthen hut—called a barabara—which Yup'ik families used for warmth and shelter during the long winters.





Inside, the woman helped her kneel and guided her through something that felt like giving birth—not to a baby, but to all the pain she had been holding inside for years. The woman told her to breathe and push, just like during labor. And as the tears came, so did the pain—leaving her at last.

When the pain was gone, they stepped outside. The sky above them was full of Northern Lights.

“This is God’s sign,” she said, “that He can create great beauty from complete desolation.” [1]

The woman woke up weeping with joy—and healed. Later, when she was shown a photo of Matushka Olga, she recognized her instantly.

Joy Without Applause

But for all her giving, she never wanted praise or money. One day, the school tried to pay her for helping with English lessons. They handed her an envelope with money. But Olinka didn’t want it. She returned the envelope—with the money still inside—and added cookies into it [1]. That was her way of saying: “I’m not doing this for money.”

Teacher of Unexpected Lessons

Long before anyone outside Kwethluk knew her name, Olinka was teaching quiet lessons—around the table, in the steambath, and on the riverbank.

“I would see her sometimes teaching the ladies... the older people that hadn’t gone to school, teaching them how to read. Some of them were post office workers or health aides.” —Anita Michael [1]





She also gave advice about money. In Yup'ik style, she used seal oil trade as an example.

“She'd tell people, ‘When you sell that four gallons [of seal oil] for thirty dollars, don't go buying something right away. Wait until the buyers come back in two weeks’”
—Anita Michael [1]

All eight of her surviving children grew up to serve—some as teachers, others as nurses or interpreters.

“Mom was like the mom of the whole village... she was willing to take care of you.” —Anita Michael [1]

And when the work was done—the sewing packed away, the soup bowls rinsed, the little ones curled up in their blankets—Olinka would sit down by the stove and begin to speak. Not with sermons or lectures, but with stories.

In the soft glow of lamplight, as snow tapped gently against the windows, children gathered at her feet to listen. Her stories weren't just for entertainment. They taught the children about their people—the wisdom of the Elders, the ways of the tundra, the meaning of family, and the beauty of God's world. She passed on Yup'ik traditions, old village tales, and quiet lessons about faith and kindness.

Because in her house, the night was never just for sleeping. It was for stories—stories that stitched memory and meaning into the lives of everyone who heard them...





Story-nights in Olinka's house

In the Alaskan village of Kwethluk, winter could swallow the sun by 3 p.m. The river, wide and frozen, cracked and popped like distant gunshots. Outside, the wind sang through snowdrifts. But inside Olinka's log house, something magical was about to begin.

Matushka Olga and the children gathered close as the oil lamp hissed to life. Its warm glow cast golden circles on the floor and mystical shadows on the walls. The little ones nestled nearest the stove, legs crossed, mittens off, cheeks still red from the cold. There was no electricity, no humming fridge, no buzzing phone—just the soft crackle of firewood and the steady breath of the lantern.

Their father, Father Nicolai, was often upriver visiting families or blessing new homes. But when he was away, Matushka Olga—Olinka—became both mother and village bard. She slid the lamp down onto the floor, pulled a worn blanket over her knees, and waited until every child was quiet. And then, her voice rose—soft, deep, and full of wonder.

Stories Made of Ice, Fire, and Faith

Olinka didn't just tell stories. She wove them—like threads into a parka. Her tales were spun from the old Yup'ik legends she had learned as a girl, but she laced them with something else: the quiet courage of the Gospel.

There was the tale of Akaguagaankaaq, the hungry giant of the tundra.





He was enormous and thick-headed, with footsteps that thudded like falling trees. Children always knew to run home before he came—but one day, they didn't listen. They played farther and farther from the village, ignoring their parents' calls. That's when the youngest boy smelled something awful—like rotting meat and smoky breath—and heard a voice in the wind:

“I smell little children warm in the sun.

I'll eat them all, one by one.” [5]

The other children didn't believe him—until they too smelled it. Then they saw the shadow stretch across the tundra. Akaguagaankaaq was real. And he was coming.

The giant scooped them up like berries into a sack made from his trousers. He tied the legs shut, hung it in a tree, and stomped off to fetch his knife. But before long, a brave little chickadee flew down from the branches. The children called out, “Chickadee with the strong beak, help us!” And the bird, small but fierce, pecked at the knot until it came undone. One by one, the children were lowered safely to the snow.

Before they ran, they filled the giant's trousers with sticks, grass, and rocks. Then the chickadee tied it back up and flew away.

But Akaguagaankaaq wasn't finished.

He returned, hungry and growling, only to find a bag full of rocks. Furious, he chased the children to the river—where a tall crane with legs like stilts stood waiting. “Crane





with the long legs that stretch,” they begged, “help us to the other side!”

The crane laid her legs across the river like a bridge. One by one, the children crossed. Then she folded her legs just as the giant stepped onto the deepest part of the water.

With a splash, Akaguagaankaaq was gone—swept down to the sea forever.

When Olinka told this story, her voice likely slowed near the ending. Those who remember her say she used tales like this to guide children with gentleness and wisdom. The story of the giant warned children not to stray too far from home—but it also reminded them never to lose hope, that help can come in small, unexpected ways. Even a tiny bird could become a rescuer. Even in the face of danger, you were never truly alone.

Her version wasn’t just about fear—it was about courage, cleverness, and the truth that you are never too small to be brave.

And always, it seemed, she ended her stories with quiet reverence. Perhaps a sign of the cross, or a whispered prayer of thanks. Her children remembered not just the tales—but the feeling that each one was a gift from God.

To Olinka, storytelling wasn’t just something fun to do. It was a kind of healing. A way to soothe frightened children or remind them who they were.

When kids had nightmares about the epidemics—memories of relatives lost, or scary things whispered around campfires—she told the story of Akaguagaankaaq.



Not just to warn them to stay close, but to give them power. “We will NOT be eaten!” they would shout together, giggling, the darkness pushed back by their courage.

Her daughter Lillian later said, “That gave us a lot of time to spend with our mom. Especially at bedtime to hear all these stories that she had to tell... Back then when there were no streetlights, no electricity, that kind of seemed to bring us a little bit closer, especially at bedtime. That’s when mom would start telling us these stories.” [1]

Years later, Lillian grew up to become a teacher. She never forgot the way her mother’s stories made the world feel safe and wide and full of light. In the 1970s, while working at the Bethel Bilingual Education Center, she adapted her mother’s story of Akaguagaankaaq for young readers. She added Yup’ik syllables, simplified the language, and even helped create colorful art so first-graders could fall in love with it too. [5]

Then in 1993, a children’s author named Teri Sloat retold the story as *The Hungry Giant of the Tundra*, in memory of Olinka and with gratitude to Lillian. The book was filled with beautiful illustrations and bold letters, and soon children all over North America were reading the bedtime story that had once been whispered by a kerosene lamp in Kwethluk. [5]

The Light of Two Lamps

Two hundred years before Olinka, another quiet voice lit up the wilderness. On Spruce Island, Saint Herman of Alaska had gathered Aleut children around a seal oil lamp. He read them the Scriptures and told them of Christ, not





with fire and thunder, but with stories, bread, and kindness.
[8]

Both of them taught with tales. Both planted Gospel seeds that would one day grow into readers, priests, books, songs—and saints.

When Olinka sat by the lamp and told her stories, it was as if Saint Herman was sitting there too, nodding gently in the shadows.

And even now, long after her oil lamp was extinguished, her voice still speaks.

All you have to do is listen.



Preparing for Heaven

In her later years, Olinka Michael—known to the world as Matushka Olga—became like the heart of her village. She no longer had to rush between sewing, stirring soup, or scrubbing church floors. Her daughters now carried much of that work.

“Increasingly freed from domestic chores as her remaining daughters assumed more of the load,” wrote Father Michael Oleksa, “she traveled with her husband to regional conferences, sharing her experience and wisdom with another generation of matushki. She enjoyed visiting other parishes during travel but was always glad to return home to Kwethluk” [8].

The world around her had changed. The village of her youth, once a circle of small, semi-subterranean sod houses, had become a modern Yup’ik town—“with a diesel generator, a grade school, high school, community center, Head Start program, clinic, and a grocery store. Public radio and television from Bethel, seventeen miles down river, brought news and images of the world into every Yup’ik home. Wood stoves gave way to oil, dog sleds to snowmobiles” [8].

And yet, Olinka stayed the same. Calm, steady, quietly joyful. Until one winter, a shadow passed over her life. She began to feel weak and tired. Her daughters noticed that she was losing weight, though she never complained.





The News No One Wanted

At first, she didn't tell anyone. But eventually, she was persuaded to go to the hospital in Bethel, and then on to Anchorage for further tests. The news that returned was heavy: terminal cancer. "It was too late, they said. There was nothing they could do" [8].

And how did Matushka Olga react? Not with tears. Not with anger. As Oleksa wrote, "Matushka Olga received the news without bitterness or emotion, and returned home to prepare for the inevitable" [8].

But her family wasn't ready to give up. Two of her daughters journeyed to Kodiak, where they prayed at Monk's Lagoon and before the relics of Saint Herman of Alaska. When they returned, they found her bed empty.

Where was she?

Outside.

"She was outside, hauling buckets of water from the village well in order, no doubt, to do a load of laundry, or perhaps to scrub the kitchen floor" [8].

For nearly a year, her health returned to normal. It was like a gift from heaven—one last season to teach, to serve, and to love.



Last Winter, Last Lessons

But by the next summer, her strength was fading again. She could no longer walk to church without help. That August, during the feastday liturgy, Bishop Gregory placed the St. Herman Cross around her neck—the highest award for a layperson in the diocese. She wore it humbly [8].

As autumn approached, she began to prepare. Not just for herself, but for everyone around her. She gave instructions gently, as if she were passing down recipes, not responsibilities. How to bake Prospora and Pascha bread. How to make the herbal tea for fevers. How to mend a torn floorboard in the church. She asked her family to share her few belongings with others, choosing who should receive each thing. She even had her wedding dress cleaned [8].

“She told her sons and daughters not to grieve for her,” wrote Father Michael. And she worried only for one granddaughter, whom she had raised as her own. “She expressed regret that she had taken a granddaughter into her home, not because she loved her less, but because she feared that the granddaughter might mourn her grandmother’s passing too deeply” [8].

The Gentle Repose

On November 8, 1979, Olinka asked for the Prayer of the Departing Soul. She crossed herself three times and lay back on her pillow. Her son Ivan sat nearby, finishing Psalm 90. A few breaths later, she “fell asleep in the Lord” [1].

Neighbors said the village grew strangely quiet. Even the river seemed to pause.





The Funeral the Tundra Would Never Forget

As the news of her passing reached nearby villages, something strange happened. It was November. By that time of year, the Kuskokwim River should have been sealed in thick ice, and the land hard and white with snow.

But that night, “a strong southerly wind blew forcefully and continuously,” wrote Father Michael. “The snow melted. The ice broke. Boats that had already been pulled ashore were suddenly able to float” [8].

People came. From Bethel. From Napaskiak. Even from Lake Iliamna and the Yukon. Hundreds gathered in the new church that had just been consecrated. And when the funeral procession stepped outside, something else happened.

Birds. “A flock of birds... accompanied the coffin to the grave site. Although by that time of year, all birds had long since flown south. The birds circled overhead” [8].

And the earth itself made room.

“The usually frozen soil had been easy to dig because of the unprecedented thaw. That night, after the memorial meal, the wind began to blow again, the ground refroze, ice covered the river, winter returned. It was as if the earth itself had opened to receive this woman. The cosmos still cooperates and participates in the worship the Real People offer to God” [8].

Years have passed since that unforgettable day. But in Kwethluk, her memory never faded.



In the church, a photograph of Matushka Olga still hangs on the wall. Someone carefully embroidered a cloth border and added red and orange flowers. This photo was placed there by her people, by someone who loved her.

For them, she never left. They still feel her presence. They still pray to her. They still call her “Matushka.” And now, the whole Church joins them in calling her Saint Matushka Olga of Alaska.



This photo of Matushka Olga hangs in the church in Kwethluk.





A Quiet Goodbye, A Lasting Light

No one recorded Matushka Olga's last words. But her whole life was a prayer.

A prayer whispered in the quiet hours beneath the northern lights.

A prayer of hands baking bread and brushing a child's hair.

A prayer of a voice rising alone in a frozen Paschal procession.

She did not fear death—because she had already placed her entire life in God's hands.

She had loved much. And in the Orthodox Church, love is stronger than death.

Her funeral was not the end. It was a door swinging open. And beyond it—heavenly light.

The earth opened—just wide enough for her.

Then it closed again, holding her gently in its arms.

Now, the whole Church knows what the people of Kwethluk always knew:

She is a saint.

Matushka Olga of Alaska has been glorified by the Orthodox Church.

Her name is sung in the services.

Her icon is painted with a halo of light.





And the little stories once shared between neighbors
are now carried across mountains, oceans, and time.

People around the world are beginning to pray to
her—asking for help, for comfort, for healing.

And just as she never turned away a tired mother or a
lonely child in her lifetime,

She does not turn them away now.

Matushka Olga is still helping.

Still healing.

Still loving.

Her work has only just begun...





A Light That Does Not Fade

Many years passed. People continued to tell stories about Saint Olga of Alaska across the world. They remembered her quiet strength, her warm hands, her deep love for God and for everyone she met. Her grave in the village of Kwethluk became a place where people stopped to pray. Some left flowers. Some just stood silently and whispered, “Thank you, Matushka Olga!”

And then, in November 2024, something extraordinary happened. The Orthodox Church gave its blessing to uncover her holy relics. During this sacred moment, clergy made a remarkable discovery: the Cross of Saint Herman was still there.

Gently resting beneath her blouse, the enameled golden medal had not tarnished with time. It looked just as it had when Bishop Gregory placed it around her neck in 1978—the year before she died. Its tiny icon of Saint Herman of Alaska was still clear and bright.

Bishop Alexei of Sitka and Alaska confirmed the finding. [Anchorage Daily News, Nov. 20, 2024]. Even in death, Saint Olga’s faith was still shining.



Photo: Cross of St Herman of Alaska



But this moment leads us to an important question—one that many young hearts might ask:

Why do we uncover the relics of saints? Why do we venerate their bones or the things they wore?

That's a good question. And to answer it, we have to go deeper—into the mystery of God's grace, and how it can change not only our souls but even our bodies.

In the Orthodox Church, we believe salvation isn't just about "*going to heaven someday*." It means becoming one with God—through Jesus Christ—not only in the future, but starting now. When we open our hearts to Him in prayer, in love, in the sacraments, His grace enters and transforms us. It's real and powerful. And it doesn't disappear when we die.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov once said,

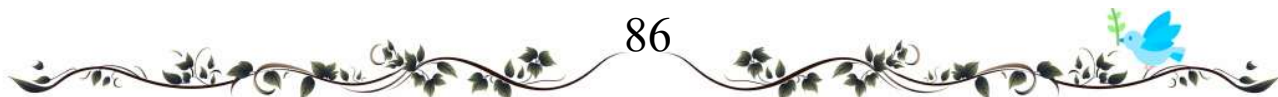
"The true aim of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit."

When a person lives in that grace for many years, something beautiful happens. Their whole life begins to change and reflect God's light.

That's what happened to Saint Olga.

She lived a quiet life in a small log house beside the river, but every part of her life was touched by prayer, and everything she did was to serve Christ. She loved—deeply, faithfully, quietly.

People say she became a "living icon"—a person whose life reflected the face of Christ. And when someone like that dies, the Church does not forget them. Because





even their body—once full of the Holy Spirit—can still shine with grace.

That's why we venerate relics!



Photo: Vladyka Alexei views for the first time the new reliquary for Saint Olga.

In the Bible, the bones of the prophet Elisha brought a man back to life (2 Kings 13:21). The Apostle Paul's handkerchiefs healed the sick (Acts 19:11–12). And even today, when the relics of saints like Saint John of Shanghai or Saint Matrona of Moscow are visited, people experience healing and peace. God's power is not limited by time or space. Sometimes, even the clothes of a saint—or a simple medal—can become reminders of heaven.

So when the Church placed Saint Olga's relics in St. Nicholas Church in Kwethluk, it wasn't just a ceremony. It was an invitation.



People now come to her with prayers. They bow.
They kiss the reliquary. Not because her bones are magic,
but because her life was filled with grace—and that grace
still remains in her relics and touches others.

When we venerate Saint Olga's relics, we are saying:

“Thank you, Matushka Olga. Thank you for showing
us how to live and love like Christ. Please pray for us.”

Her cross remained. Her memory remains.

But most of all—her light remains with us.

And it calls each of us to shine with that same quiet,
peaceful love.

Because even the smallest acts of kindness—done for
Christ's sake—can shine forever.

Holy Righteous Matushka Olga, pray to God for us!



Spiritual Lessons by Father Lawrence Farley

The first lesson we can learn from the life of St. Olga is that (as we sometimes hear) “charity—or in this case sanctity—begins at home.” God calls us to be holy and that includes being kind, patient, and helpful. We should try to behave like that to everyone, but first of all we must try to behave like that to members of our own family.

Sometimes that can be very hard. That is because the people we live with all the time are most likely to be the ones who hurt us and so it is all the more important to be kind and forgiving to them. God will help us to be holy if we ask Him for help in doing this. We will find that if we can be kind to those in our family, it is easier to be kind to others around us such as our friends and those in school.

The second lesson we can learn from St. Olga is the importance of always saying little prayers. Our prayers don’t always need to be long or prayers that are written in a prayerbook. We can talk to God from our heart many times during the day, thanking Him when nice things happen to us and when beginning a task—even a task as humble as cleaning our room or helping around the house. The prayers can be as short as “Lord have mercy” or “Thank you, Lord” or “Please bless this person.” The important thing is to continue to talk to God throughout the day, as St. Olga did.

Finally, we can learn from St. Olga that it is important to do our good deeds as quietly as possible, not drawing attention to ourselves. St. Olga always served others, but never put herself forward or asked to be thanked



or praised. We should do the same. God sees all that we do, including our prayers and our good deeds, and He will reward us. We do not need people to praise us; God's reward will be enough.

Saint Olga didn't do everything by herself. She was part of her Church family! She went to church every Sunday, sang quietly during services, baked bread for Holy Communion, helped clean and decorate the church, and cared for others. That's how she stayed close to Jesus—by praying with her parish, serving with others, and learning with her church. She teaches us that if we want to love God, we should be part of His Church too! That means going to church, helping out, and loving the people around us—just like a big, warm family.





Dates of Commemoration

- Born: February 3, 1916
- Reposed: November 8, 1979
- Canonized: November 8, 2023
- Glorified: June 19-22, 2025
- Feast Day: October 27
(Revised Julian/ Julian: October 27 / November 9)
and also commemorated with All Saints of North America, 2nd Sunday after Pentecost.



Photo: Reliquary for Saint Olga in St Nicholas Orthodox Church in Kwethluk



Color Saint Olga of Alaska drawing

Dear children and parents! Let's color a special drawing of The Holy Righteous Olga, Matushka of All Alaska—a kind and gentle woman who loved and helped everyone around her.

In this picture, Saint Olga stands inside her wooden house in the village of Kwethluk. She wears a dark blue parka with flower patterns and a light blue scarf with little white dots—like falling snow. One hand is raised in blessing, and in the other hand she holds a clay bowl filled with clean, clear water, a symbol of her work as a midwife. Over her wrist is a white towel with a red cross—a sign of healing and loving care. Behind her is a warm log wall, a window showing the snowy village church, and a small icon of Saint Herman of Alaska.

Let's bring this beautiful scene to life!

Step-by-Step Coloring Instructions

1. The Halo

Color the halo behind Saint Olga's head golden yellow or soft orange. It shows that she is holy and close to God.

2. Her Scarf

Use light blue for her scarf, and keep the little dots white like snowflakes.

3. Her Robe (Parka)

Color her parka dark blue—like the deep winter sky. The flower patterns can be blue, orange, green, and soft red to match traditional Alaska Native designs.



4. Her Hands and Face

Use warm skin tones for her kind face and hands. You can add a little pink to her cheeks to show the cold outside.

5. The Bowl of Water

Color the bowl light brown or reddish-brown to look like clay. The water inside should be light blue to show purity, calm, and life.

6. The Towel with the Cross

Color the towel white or cream, and the cross bright red. This reminds us that she comforted and healed others.

7. The Log Cabin Wall

Use light or medium brown for the wooden walls. Let the wood texture show through, just like a real log home in Alaska.

8. The Icon of Saint Herman

Use gray or brown for his robe and gold for his halo. The background can be soft natural colors.

9. The Window Scene

Color the snow outside white and gray, the sky light blue, and the little church white with a green roof and golden dome.



 Would you like to download this coloring page?

Scan the QR code on the right to download a printable version of the coloring page. Share it with your friends, siblings, or Sunday School!



A Prayer While You Color

While you color, take a moment to think about how Matushka Olga helped others—by praying, by listening, and by simply being kind.

You can whisper this prayer while you color her image:

Holy Righteous Matushka Olga, pray to God for us.

Help me to be helpful and caring for others—just like you.

Amen.





The Holy Righteous Olga, Matushka of All Alaska





Akathist to Saint Olga, Matushka of All Alaska

Before we begin the Akathist to Saint Olga, let's take a moment to understand what it is and what some of the old words mean. An **Akathist** (say it like this: “ah-KAH-thist”) is a beautiful prayer in the Orthodox Church. It's written like a poem or a song and helps us thank and praise God, the Holy Theotokos (Mother of God), or a saint—like our beloved Saint Olga of Alaska. The word “Akathist” means “not sitting” in Greek, because we usually stand when we pray it, to show respect and love.

This special prayer has two kinds of parts:

A **Kontakion** (say: kon-TAH-kee-on) is a short song with a special message.

An **Ikos** (say: EE-kos) is a longer part that praises the saint and tells a story about them.

You'll also hear the word Alleluia a lot. It means “Praise the Lord!”

Sometimes in prayers and holy books, we find words that sound old or unusual. These are not mistakes—they are treasures from the past, like little golden keys that open the door to beautiful prayers.

Here are some of those special words and what they mean:

- **thou** – means you (when speaking to one special person with love and respect—like your mother, or like the Lord Jesus in prayer)
- **thee** – also means you (used when something is done for or to that one special person)





- **thy** – means your (like “thy will be done”)
- **thine** – means yours (like “I am thine, O Lord”)
- **didst** – means did (like “thou didst save me”)
- **art** – means are (like in “Our Father, who art in heaven”)
- **hast** – means have (like “thou hast loved me”)

These words were used long ago when people spoke gently and respectfully to just one beloved person—like when you look into your mother’s eyes, not when you speak to a whole classroom full of faces. That’s why we use them when praying to God: they help us speak to Him with love, reverence, and closeness.

When we say, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” it’s like saying, “Our Father, You are in heaven,” but in a more beautiful and honoring way.

This Akathist was written by Archbishop Alexei, the Bishop of Sitka and Alaska. We are very thankful to him for writing it and giving us permission to share it with you in this book.

Now, let’s read and pray the Akathist to Saint Olga, our Matushka of All Alaska—who helped so many people with love, kindness, and strong faith...



Kontak 1

O blessed mother Olga, radiant with Christ's love, / thou
didst walk humbly upon the ancient tundra and sacred rivers
of Alaska/, clothing thy children in warmth and comforting
those in sorrow./

Rooted deeply in the faith brought by the saints of old,/ thou
didst warm the hearts of thy people with the fire of Christ's
compassion./

Now, standing before the Throne of God, intercede for us
who lovingly cry out to thee: /

Rejoice, our gentle mother, shelter and hope of thy people!

Ikos 1

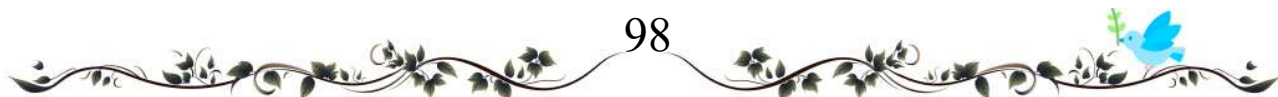
The Creator of all, who raises up the lowly and fills the
hungry with good things, adorned thee, O righteous mother
Olga, with a heart of mercy and hands of grace.

In the land of icy rivers and boundless tundra, thou didst
become a living gospel, carrying Christ's love through quiet
acts of kindness, through prayer and ceaseless labor.

Like the saints who brought Orthodoxy to thy land, thou
didst teach not with words alone, but by embodying faith
itself—walking the path of humility, love, and self-sacrifice.
And so, with love, we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, child of the Kuskokwim, illumined by the light of
Christ!

Rejoice, true daughter of Orthodoxy, walking the path of
the saints before thee!





Rejoice, gentle nurturer of children and refuge of struggling mothers!

Rejoice, thou who didst clothe the cold in garments of warmth and love!

Rejoice, for thou didst cherish the wisdom of thy ancestors, yet set thy heart on the Kingdom above!

Rejoice, for in thee was revealed the beauty of a life offered to Christ!

Rejoice, healer of wounded souls, anointing them with kindness and prayer!

Rejoice, comfort of the sorrowful, showing the way of patience and peace! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of thy people!

Kontak 2

Seeing thy kindness to all, O blessed mother, the people of thy village turned to thee in their need, for thy heart was open to the suffering. As a midwife, thou didst bring forth life with thy hands, and as a mother in Christ, thou didst bring forth healing through thy prayers.

Even in death, the Lord did not let thy love be silenced, but granted thee to appear in visions, comforting those who mourn.

Now, standing among the saints of Alaska, thou dost still offer prayers before the throne of the King of glory, and we lift our voices, singing:

Alleluia!





Ikos 2

With gentle hands and a heart full of prayer, thou didst serve as a midwife, welcoming new life into the world.

Yet thy love did not cease at birth, for thou didst continue to nurture not only the bodies of these children, but also their souls, guiding them toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

Through storms and bitter cold, thou didst go where mothers labored, never fearing hardship. And even now in the hush of midnight sorrow, thou dost draw near to those who weep, laying thine unseen hands upon their heads, whispering peace into their troubled hearts, as a mother soothes her children's cries.

Therefore, we thy children cry aloud to thee:

Rejoice, thou who didst bring life into the world with thy hands and into eternity with thy prayers!

Rejoice, gentle midwife, for in thee was revealed the mystery of birth and rebirth in Christ!

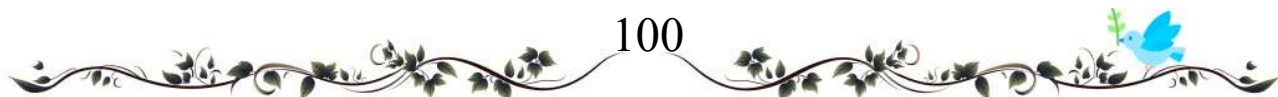
Rejoice, for thou dost still come to the suffering, bringing healing unseen!

Rejoice, for thou dost visit the troubled in their dreams, soothing their hearts with holy peace!

Rejoice, for thou didst cradle the newborn, even as Christ receives souls into the bosom of Abraham!

Rejoice, for through thee, the light of Christ shines upon the sorrowful!

Rejoice, guide of the weary, leading them to the ever-flowing waters of mercy!





Rejoice, warm embrace of the forsaken and forgotten! //
Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of
thy people!

Kontak 3

With steadfast faith, thou didst bear life's trials, trusting in
the Lord who upholds the humble.

Through labor and hidden prayer, thou didst store up
treasures not on earth, but in heaven, teaching us that the
path of holiness is walked not in great deeds, but in quiet
faithfulness.

And so, with hearts made glad, we cry:

Alleluia!

Ikos 3

The frozen tundra and silent mountains shaped thee, O
blessed mother, yet the grace of God formed thy heart in
faith and humility. From childhood, thou didst walk the path
of thy elders, gathering their wisdom and setting thy soul
upon Christ. Tending to the gifts of the earth and walking
northern trails, thy every step became an offering, thy
breath a whisper of the Jesus Prayer into the wind.

Thy hands, shaped by labor and love, sewed garments as
coverings of mercy, baked prosphora as offerings to God,
and adorned thy sisters with the beauty of modesty and
prayer.

And thy voice, gentle and steadfast, passed on what thou
hadst received—teaching, even when scarves were cast
aside, that the kapaq, the beaded crown of honor, should be



worn before the Lord, that no prayer should rise without a veiled head.

So, guided by thy quiet strength and faithfulness, we lift our voices and sing:

Rejoice, child of the tundra, in whom the wisdom of the elders dwelt!

Rejoice, humble seamstress, whose stitches warmed both bodies and souls!

Rejoice, gentle teacher of reverence, who wove the kapaq as a crown of modesty and grace!

Rejoice, for thy whispered prayers rose like incense upon the northern winds!

Rejoice, guardian of ancestral paths, illumined by the light of Christ!

Rejoice, for thou didst serve in hidden ways, offering thy labor as unceasing prayer!

Rejoice, shining lamp of humility, dispelling the darkness of pride!

Rejoice, patient mother, who bore the burdens of others with silent love! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of thy people!

Kontak 4

Neither winter's frost nor sorrow's weight could shake thee,
O gentle Arrsamquq, for thy heart was rooted in Christ, the unshakable Rock.



Like the northern spruce standing firm through storm and snow, and the moose braving the wind-swept tundra, thou didst endure every trial with meekness and unwavering trust in God.

Now radiant in the peace of His Kingdom, strengthen us through thy prayers, that with steadfast hearts we may cry unto Him who is our refuge.

Alleluia!

Ikos 4

The Lord has glorified thee, O holy mother Olga, for thou didst walk in His commandments all the days of thy life.

Neither hardship nor sorrow turned thee aside from the path of righteousness, for in thy heart dwelt the peace of Christ, and on thy lips, the words of prayer.

Now in the heavens, thou dost intercede for us who honor thee, praying that we too may follow the way of holiness.

And so, with grateful voices, we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, bright fireweed of the tundra, blooming with the beauty of faith!

Rejoice, steadfast soul, planted firmly in the grace of Christ!

Rejoice, for all saw thee as their mother, and thou didst love each as thine own!

Rejoice, teacher of trust, leading us to rest in the mercy of God!

Rejoice, guardian of the suffering and wounded, watching over us with thy prayers!



Rejoice, faithful servant who found peace in the Lord!

Rejoice, gentle hand that lifts the fallen, guiding them back to Christ!

Rejoice, firm voice that speaks the truth in love, calling us to repentance! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of thy people!

Kontak 5

All the faithful of Alaska and beyond glorify thee, O holy Matushka Olga, for in thee shines the image of true womanhood—a heart full of love and a soul radiant with Christ's light.

Imitating our Most Pure Lady Theotokos, thou didst gather the sorrowful to thy bosom, as she once cradled the Christ Child in her arms, revealing the quiet strength of humility and the healing power of love.

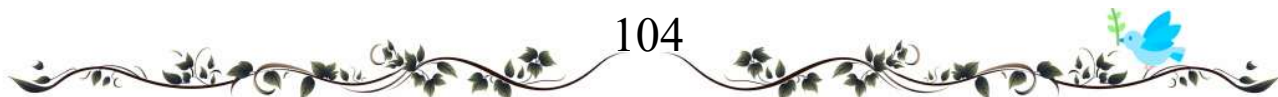
Where pain abounds, thou dost draw near, a mother among mothers, offering healing, peace, and strength to those in need.

Therefore, with hope and thanksgiving, we cry unto thee:

Alleluia!

Ikos 5

Thou didst weave garments with thy hands to warm the bodies of thy people, but greater still, thou didst clothe them in the love of Christ, covering the sorrowful with peace and the weary with hope.





Like a mother sharing the first salmonberries of summer,
thou didst not keep goodness for thyself, but gavest to all
freely, teaching that true joy is found in giving.

Even now, thou dost stretch forth those same hands,
blessing those who turn to thee in prayer. And so, we cry
aloud:

Rejoice, gentle guide of the lost, leading them with love!

Rejoice, compassionate healer of bodies and souls chilled
by grief!

Rejoice, intercessor for those in despair, bringing them
before the throne of God!

Rejoice, for thou dost bring hope to the hopeless, even from
beyond the grave!

Rejoice, for thy hands once blessed all who came to thee—
and they bless us still!

Rejoice, for thy prayers warm our souls like a fire on a cold
winter's night!

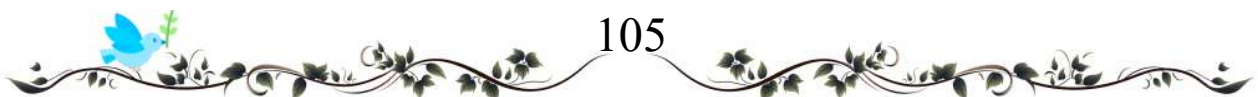
Rejoice, lamp upon the evening tundra, leading us to Christ!

Rejoice, quiet voice of wisdom, teaching us that to love is to
serve! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of
thy people!

Kontak 6

O holy and righteous mother, the Lord has revealed in thee
the beauty of the meek, for thou didst hunger and thirst for
righteousness, and now thou art filled. In thy humility, thou





didst seek not earthly honor, but the treasures of the Kingdom. And because thy heart was widened by love and shaped by lowliness, Christ exalted thee as a mother and intercessor for His people.

For the faithful of Alaska, thou art a new light shining upon the ancient path, guiding thy children with love.

Therefore, with grateful voices, we sing

Alleluia!

Ikos 6

In a time of great change, thou didst stand as an anchor—steadfast and unshaken—holding fast to the wisdom of thine ancestors and the holy tradition of Orthodoxy.

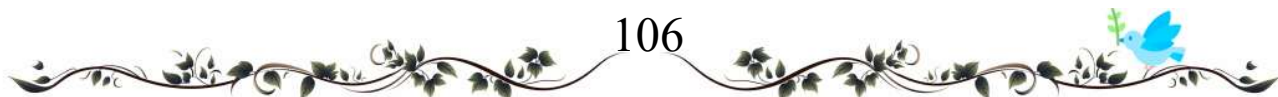
In thee, faith and heritage were lived as one, for thou didst cherish the land as a gift from the Creator while setting thy heart upon the Kingdom on high.

Rooted in the faith brought by the Russian missionaries, thou didst sing the hymns of the Church until they shaped thy soul like water smooths the stones. Even now, amid the tempests of this world, thou dost guard us with unceasing prayers. And so we cry aloud:

Rejoice, wise mother who followed the ancient paths of righteousness!

Rejoice, for thou didst lead thy people to see their elders' wisdom fulfilled in grace!

Rejoice, disciple of Holy Orthodoxy, showing that faithfulness leads to the Kingdom of God!





Rejoice, for the hymns of the Church shaped thy soul,
teaching that prayer is the breath of holiness!

Rejoice, for thou didst teach thy children to bow before the
Cross and to seek Christ in all things!

Rejoice, for thy spirit watches over rivers, villages, and all
who call upon thee!

Rejoice, for Kwethluk was blessed by thy prayers, revealing
that a righteous life sanctifies the land!

Rejoice, for thou didst love both land and people as gifts
from the Creator, teaching us thankfulness! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of
thy people!

Kontak 7

Thy love knew no bounds, O holy mother Olga, for even in
death, thou dost not forsake thy people.

In Christ, thou livest forever, and through His mercy, thou
dost still visit the sorrowful, bringing healing to the
wounded and hope to the despairing.

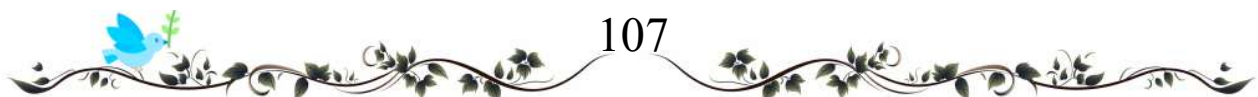
Therefore, with faith, we cry aloud:

Alleluia!

Ikos 7

O holy Matushka, thou didst open thy home to those in
need, offering shelter to the forsaken and warmth to the
forgotten.

Yet thy love reached beyond earthly comfort, for in thee
they found not only a home, but the mercy of Christ.





Even now, thou art our refuge, and the door opens still—
through visions and dreams, healing wounds unseen and
wiping away silent tears. Once, to a grieving daughter, thou
didst reveal the radiant dwelling prepared for her departed
mother, turning grief into peace and sorrow into hope.

Therefore, with reverence, we cry out:

Rejoice, gentle mother who comfortest souls before sorrow
is revealed.

Rejoice, visitor in dreams, revealing the mercy of heaven!

Rejoice, for thy love flows like a river, melting the ice of
sorrow through the warmth of thy prayers!

Rejoice, protectress of those cast aside by the world, for in
Christ, none are forgotten!

Rejoice, for thy prayers shine like the northern lights,
illuminating the long winter night of the soul!

Rejoice, for thou dost gather the lost as a mother gathers her
children, bringing them to Christ!

Rejoice, unseen guardian of women and children in danger,
sheltering them in thy prayers!

Rejoice, messenger of Christ's mercy to the suffering,
revealing the Lord's unfailing love! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of
thy people!

Kontak 8

Hidden from the world, yet known by God, thou didst live a
quiet life, O holy Matushka Olga, storing up treasures not



on earth but in heaven. Though unseen by men, thy prayers and labors were known to Christ, who crowned thee with glory.

And now, as one who has found rest in the Lord, thou dost continue to intercede for those in sorrow, teaching us that holiness is found in faithfulness.

Therefore, with love, we cry aloud:

Alleluia!

Ikos 8

Thou didst endure all things with a quiet spirit, O Saint Arrsamquq, showing forth patience in suffering and steadfastness in trials.

Like the righteous ones of old, thou didst embrace those whom the world had cast aside, seeing in them the face of Christ.

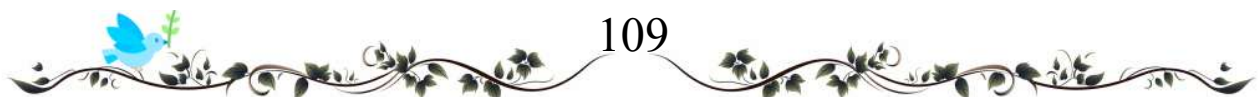
Even now, thou dost not turn away from us in our weariness and sorrow, for with thy pure and merciful heart, thou still seest the image of Christ—even in us, who are broken and unworthy.

Therefore, with humble hearts and trusting souls, we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, for thou didst live a hidden life, yet thy love was known by God!

Rejoice, for thou didst weave prayers into the very fabric of thy garments, making thy work a sacrifice of love!

Rejoice, kind healer of wounds seen and unseen, comforting the broken-hearted!





Rejoice, tireless intercessor before the throne of God, lifting up those in sorrow!

Rejoice, gentle light shining through the long winter nights, bringing hope to the afflicted!

Rejoice, faithful one who teaches us to endure all things in Christ!

Rejoice, strength to the weary, bearing their burdens in prayer!

Rejoice, quiet refuge for those who suffer in silence, revealing that no one is forgotten by God! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of thy people!

Kontak 9

Saint Herman first planted the seed of the Gospel in Alaskan soil. Saint Innokenty tended it with wisdom and care, and Saint Yakov shepherded it with the love of a father among his people.

From their sacred labor, a holy root took hold in this land—and from that root, thou didst spring forth, O Saint Olga our mother, as a bright blossom in the Alaskan summer.

Thou didst draw strength from their faith, wisdom from their teaching, and humility from their example.

Through thee, Orthodoxy came to be woven—gently and fully—into the daily lives of thy people.

Now, standing with them before the throne of the Most High, thou dost intercede for us who cry out: Alleluia!



Ikos 9

The Lord, who glorifies His saints in every land, has raised up a golden chain of holiness in Alaska, each link strengthening the next.

Saint Herman's prayers first sanctified this land, Saint Innokenty's wisdom laid its foundations, and Saint Yakov's love gave it a shepherd's heart.

Yet holiness is not only in the past, for in thee, O blessed mother, their prayers bore fruit anew. Thou didst not merely follow their path, but dost continue to labor with them still—through hidden service, humble love, and unseen prayers that even now rise like incense before the Lord.

Therefore, with joy we cry out: Rejoice, new jewel among the saints of Alaska, a fresh bloom upon the ancient tree of faith!

Rejoice, for thou didst draw strength from Saint Herman's fatherly love, teaching by the witness of thy life!

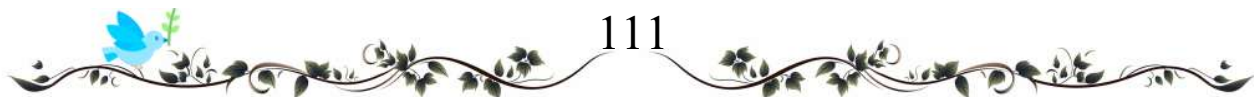
Rejoice, for thou didst treasure Saint Innokenty's wisdom, yet taught with the quiet power of love!

Rejoice, for Saint Yakov brought Christ's light from afar, while thou didst shine from thy village to the world!

Rejoice, for though thou didst walk the lowly path, the Lord has lifted thee up among His saints!

Rejoice, thou who gathered the saints' legacy into thy heart and returned it transfigured in love!

Rejoice, for through thee, the prayers of all the Alaskan saints are woven into a single hymn before the Lord!





Rejoice, for thou art proof that the golden chain of holiness in Alaska is not broken, but strengthened in our day! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of thy people!

Kontak 10

Desiring that none should be lost, the Lord gave thee a heart after His own, O holy mother Olga.

Though pierced by the same sorrows as thy people, thou didst not turn to thine own suffering, but didst pour thyself out in love.

Strengthened by faith, thou becamest their healing and their hope.

Now before the throne of God, thou dost pray for those who cry aloud:

Alleluia!

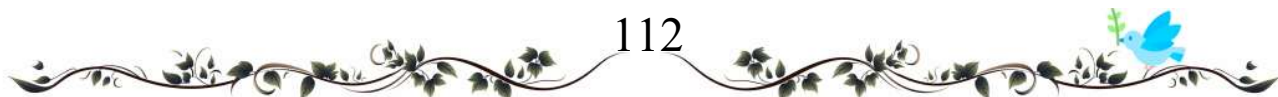
Ikos 10

A gentle healer in life, thou hast become a swift helper in heaven, O holy mother Olga.

In visions, thou didst appear beside the All-holy Mother of God, guiding a wounded soul into peace and healing.

With loving eyes and gentle hands, thou didst free her from pain and shame, restoring the beauty of her life through Christ's mercy.

Marveling at thy compassion, and the power of thy prayers, we gratefully cry:





Rejoice, gentle companion appearing with the Virgin
Mother of God!

Rejoice, healer whose hidden love tends wounds too deep
for words!

Rejoice, quiet intercessor restoring dignity and hope to
wounded hearts!

Rejoice, thou whose tenderness transforms shame into
joyful freedom!

Rejoice, hidden saint whose holiness shines forth by grace
divine!

Rejoice, thou who silently leadest souls from darkness into
Christ's gentle light!

Rejoice, thou whose compassion reaches where earthly eyes
cannot see!

Rejoice, humble mother whose silent presence restores the
soul's lost beauty! //

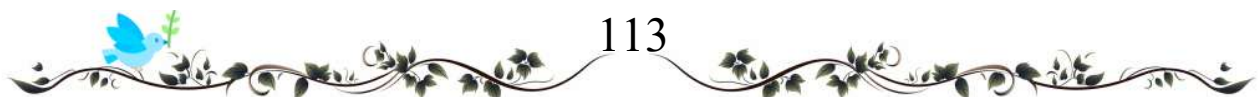
Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of
thy people!

Kontak 11

Thy prayers rise as incense before the Lord, O righteous
mother, for even after thy departure from this life, thou dost
continue to minister to those in need.

In Christ, there is no death, and through His mercy, thou
dost still appear to the suffering, granting them healing and
peace.

Therefore, with grateful hearts, we cry out: Alleluia!





Ikos 11

Who can describe the depths of thy love, O holy Mother Olga? Even as thou didst serve with quiet faithfulness during thy earthly life, so now dost thou intercede with boldness before the throne of God, bringing comfort to those who suffer.

The Lord has granted thee to be swift in thy intercessions, a ready help in time of trouble, and a refuge for the broken-hearted.

Seeing thy fervent prayers and the mercy thou dost pour forth upon the world, we cry aloud:

Rejoice, tireless intercessor for thy people before the throne of God!

Rejoice, for thou dost embrace the broken-hearted, teaching us to trust in Christ!

Rejoice, beacon of light to those lost in despair, showing them the path of faith!

Rejoice, swift helper of those in affliction, reminding us that God is near!

Rejoice, for thou dost grant courage in adversity, strengthening the faithful through prayer!

Rejoice, for through thee we grow in faith and love, bearing one another's burdens!

Rejoice, voice that speaks in dreams, calming the hearts of the weary with words of peace!

Rejoice, steady hand that lifts the fallen, guiding them back to Christ! //





Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of thy people!

Kontak 12

O holy mother, filled with divine love, thou didst bear the burdens of others as thine own, never turning away those in need.

Through compassion, thy heart was transfigured, reflecting the mercy of Christ. Now, as thou standest before Him in glory, pray for us, that we may find courage to follow thy example and be transformed by His grace, crying worthily unto Him:

Alleluia!

Ikos 12

Even the earth bore witness to thy holiness, O righteous mother Olga! At thy repose, the frozen ground was softened, the rivers opened, and a great wind carried news of thy departure.

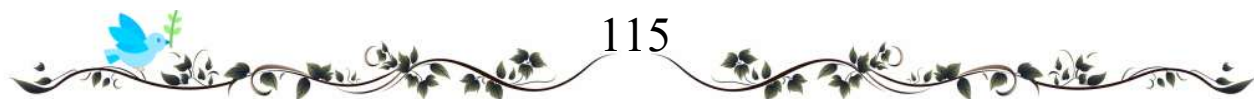
Birds that had long since flown south returned, circling above thy coffin as if to escort thee to Paradise.

These signs proclaimed that those who love God are never forgotten—neither in heaven nor on earth.

And so, with awe and reverence, we cry out:

Rejoice, for even the wind and rivers bore witness to thy holiness, proclaiming the glory of God!

Rejoice, for winter yielded to the warmth of heaven, opening the earth to receive thee in peace!





Rejoice, for birds returned from distant lands to sing thy
praise and honor thy repose!

Rejoice, quiet witness whose death became a hymn of the
mercy of our Lord!

Rejoice, humble saint honored by all creation at thy holy
departure!

Rejoice, protectress whose blessing sanctifies the land of
Kwethluk and all Alaska!

Rejoice, thou whose falling asleep awakened creation's
hidden praise of God!

Rejoice, thou who didst enter eternal spring, warmed
forever by Paschal grace! //

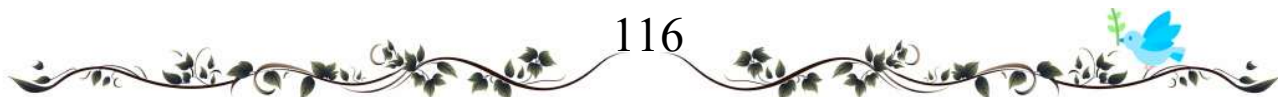
Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of
thy people!

Kontak 13

O Saint Olga, holy Matushka of Kwethluk, thou who didst
walk gently upon the ancient tundra and follow the path of
humility and love, receiving the grace of God in abundance:
accept this hymn of praise from our lips.

Now standing in radiant joy before the throne of the Most
High, intercede for us, that our hearts may be filled with His
mercy, our faith made steadfast, and that at the end of our
days, we too may enter into the light of His Heavenly
Kingdom, chanting: Alleluia!

*(Kontak 13 is read three times,
then Ikos 1 and Kontak 1 are repeated.)*





Ikos 1

The Creator of all, who raises up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things, adorned thee, O righteous mother Olga, with a heart of mercy and hands of grace.

In the land of icy rivers and boundless tundra, thou didst become a living gospel, carrying Christ's love through quiet acts of kindness, through prayer and ceaseless labor.

Like the saints who brought Orthodoxy to thy land, thou didst teach not with words alone, but by embodying faith itself—walking the path of humility, love, and self-sacrifice. And so, with love, we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, child of the Kuskokwim, illumined by the light of Christ!

Rejoice, true daughter of Orthodoxy, walking the path of the saints before thee!

Rejoice, gentle nurturer of children and refuge of struggling mothers!

Rejoice, thou who didst clothe the cold in garments of warmth and love!

Rejoice, for thou didst cherish the wisdom of thy ancestors, yet set thy heart on the Kingdom above!

Rejoice, for in thee was revealed the beauty of a life offered to Christ!

Rejoice, healer of wounded souls, anointing them with kindness and prayer!





Rejoice, comfort of the sorrowful, showing the way of
patience and peace! //

Rejoice, Saint Olga, our gentle mother, / shelter and hope of
thy people!

Kontak 1

O blessed mother Olga, radiant with Christ's love, / thou
didst walk humbly upon the ancient tundra and sacred rivers
of Alaska/, clothing thy children in warmth and comforting
those in sorrow./ Rooted deeply in the faith brought by the
saints of old,/ thou didst warm the hearts of thy people with
the fire of Christ's compassion./

Now, standing before the Throne of God, intercede for us
who lovingly cry out to thee: //

Rejoice, our gentle mother, shelter and hope of thy people!

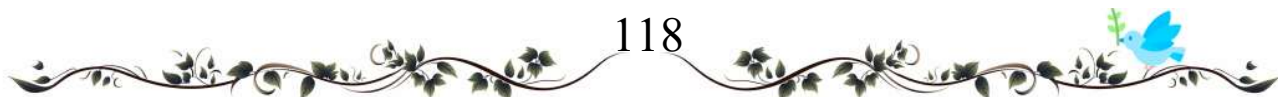
Prayer

O holy Matushka Olga, gentle heart of Alaska and
protectress of Kwethluk, thou who didst walk softly upon
the ancient tundra, bearing Christ's peace into every
dwelling, clothing those in need with warmth and dignity,
and comforting the sorrowful—forget not thy children.

As thou didst cherish the land and share its gifts, teach us to
live with gratitude and reverence for all God's creation.

May our lives be marked by harmony, generosity, and
forgiveness, bearing one another's burdens in humility.

Now, from thy heavenly rest, cover us with the mantle of
thy compassion. Nourish our souls with heavenly grace and
gently guide us along the ancient paths made holy by Christ.





Look tenderly upon the land that bore thee—Kwethluk and all Alaskan villages—where thy people walk paths of hardship, burdened by loneliness, sorrow, and habits that destroy the soul.

Pray fervently, beloved Arrsamquq, that the enslaving passions may be broken, that the shadows of despair may be scattered, and that Christ's healing love may flood every heart with light and peace.

Strengthen our communities to remain faithful to Orthodoxy amidst every trial, preserving our ancestral ways illumined by heavenly truth.

Watch tenderly over our youth, protect their innocence, and grant them courage in adversity. Strengthen our elders, whose wisdom and prayers uphold the faith. Grant patience and gentle strength to parents and clergy, that they may lead by humble example and quiet love.

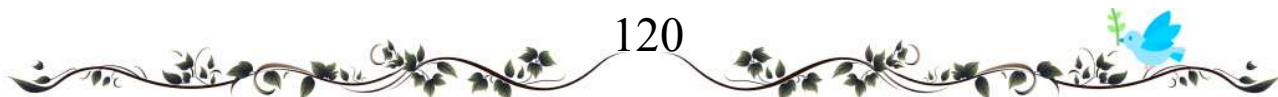
Thou didst bear the sorrows of others as thine own, listening with patience, healing with kindness, and lifting the broken with a mother's love.

Thou didst wrap the grieving in prayer, comfort the ashamed with a gaze that judged not, and whisper hope into wounds hidden from all but God.

And now, as thou standest before the throne of Christ, where there is neither pain nor sighing, stretch forth thy unseen hands over us: warm those of us chilled by despair, guide those of us lost in the storm, and shelter us all beneath the veil of thy holy prayers.



When our earthly journey draws to its close, may our souls behold thee waiting at the gates of Paradise, thine arms outstretched like a mother welcoming her children home, thy gentle voice calming our hearts, saying: “Come, beloved of Christ, fear not, for the Lord hath prepared a place for thee.” O holy Matushka Olga, let not one of thy children be lost, but by thy prayers gather us all into the everlasting joy of the Kingdom, where the unwaning light of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit shineth forever, unto the ages of ages. Amen.





Dear Reader,

*We hope you enjoyed learning about the life of Saint Olga
Matushka of All Alaska and learned how to pray to her.
Share your new knowledge with your family and friends!*

*God bless you!
Orthodox Toys*





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Watch the Documentary about St Olga of Alaska

Recollections of Saintly Matushka Olga
– by Russian Orthodox Diocese of Sitka and Alaska

Scan this QR code with your smartphone, open the link, and watch the film about St Olga of Alaska





About Orthodox Toys and Our Products



Welcome to Orthodox Toys, our heartfelt family endeavor, based in British Columbia, Canada. Our mission is to engage in missionary work and educational outreach through our creative and inspiring toys, icons, and DIY kits focused on promoting a deep understanding and appreciation of the Orthodox Christian faith, history, and our Church tradition.

Our journey began in January 2019, as a hobby to create a special wooden toy for our youngest daughter to learn about the Orthodox Church building. With divine help and dedication, the project evolved, and by August 2019, the first prototype was born.



Driven by our faith and passion for education, we decided to expand our efforts beyond our family. We envisioned a unique wooden block toy that children could use to construct an Orthodox Church while also learning about its essential elements and the significance they hold in our faith.

With the guidance of our beloved Priest Father Lawrence Farley, we started crafting informative and accessible materials to explain the Orthodox Church, the Liturgy, and faith to parents and kids alike.

Choosing Canadian Red Cedar wood for its beauty and durability, we completed the set's design by the end of





2019 and shared 15 sets with our friends. Witnessing the positive impact on our community, we sought Father Lawrence's blessing and launched an Etsy store in January 2020, making these toys available worldwide.

Since then, our family has dedicated a big part of our lives to this missionary work, aiming not for financial gain but to serve God and help others understand the Orthodox Christian faith. We continue to produce and ship these educational sets globally, with each family member playing a role in the process, from creating content and making toys, to quality control.

Beyond the Orthodox Church building wooden block toy, we have expanded our collection to include a variety of educational sets for Orthodox families and Sunday schools. These sets encompass different aspects of our faith, such as the Orthodox Church Iconostasis Educational Set, Holy Theotokos Icon Decorating Set, Orthodox Cross Educational Set, Orthodox Wood Cross Necklace, Saint Matrona Educational Set, Saint Herman of Alaska Educational Set, and more.

Join us in our mission to inspire young minds and deepen their faith through education. "Orthodox Toys" is more than a hobby; it's a labor of love, a missionary project that follows in the footsteps of Saint Herman of Alaska by sharing the beauty of our faith with the world.

With love in Christ,

Alex, Olga, and the Goncharov family





Please follow us on social media:



Facebook:



Instagram:



Books:



Music:



Here is the list of other educational products we make.



Orthodox Church Building Solid-Wood Blocks with Iconostasis, Bell Tower, Altar Table, Olive Wood Crosses and Wooden Storage Tray.

Build an Orthodox Church building while learning about its main parts and understanding structure purposes using: 40+ handmade pcs, a solid wood Iconostasis and a sticker set, a bell tower, an altar table, three olive wood Orthodox Crosses from Bethlehem. Comes with wooden storage box and step by step building instructions.



This Orthodox Church building wooden block set is a great gift for kids and is also ideal for Orthodox Church Sunday schools.



Orthodox Cross Educational Set with elements of the Holy Land

This Orthodox Cross educational set was created to teach our children about the Cross: 1) its history; 2) about the different places in the Holy Land including Bethlehem, Mount Tabor, The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and The Mount of Olives; and 3) how these places are related to the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.





Orthodox Church Iconostasis educational set with stickers and booklet

This educational set is created with one simple goal - to teach our kids about Orthodox Icons and the Iconostasis.

Kids can build an Iconostasis using a wooden board and highly detailed icon stickers, while learning about icons, the Iconostasis, its history, purpose, structure, and more.

This educational set is an amazing Christmas gift and a great educational tool for Orthodox Church Sunday schools.





Orthodox Prayer Rope Educational Set With elements of the Holy Land and booklet.

This educational set will teach our children about the Prayer Rope: 1) its history; 2) its purpose; 3) about different types of Prayer Ropes; and 4) how to use it in everyday prayer practice.

We also wanted to make this set very unique and this is why we added an Orthodox Cross with elements of soil from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre built at the place where our Lord Jesus Christ died and resurrected.

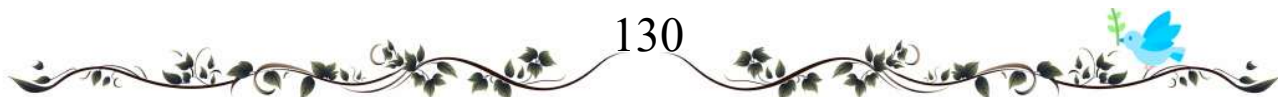


Orthodox Prosfora Stamp Educational Set

We created this Educational Set to teach parents and their kids to bake Prosfora for their Orthodox church and keep this tradition in their hearts so that we may continue serving Holy Communion until our Lord will come again. This Prosfora Seal is made of olive wood harvested in Bethlehem and its handle is made from Canadian Red Western Cedar.



The educational booklet describes the whole process in detail with pictures and recommendations. This educational set is a very unique and amazing gift for our brothers and sisters in Christ and their kids who plan to bake prosphoras.





Cats Mystery Puzzle Educational Set

We created this educational set to teach our kids to draw cat faces and together look at cats from a different perspective. We also hope to uncover a mystery - to see what God is teaching us through these cute animals about us, our family, love, and our salvation. This Cat's Mystery Puzzle Educational Set a unique and great gift for any special occasion such as birthdays, baptisms, Pascha or Christmas and can also be used by Sunday Schools.



Make Your Own Orthodox Prayer Rope.

We created this educational set to teach you and your children about the Prayer Rope: 1) its history; 2) its purpose; 3) about different types of Prayer Ropes, and 4) how to make your own prayer rope, and 5) how to use it in everyday prayer practice. In this set, you will see 33 beads, rope, a needle threader and an Orthodox cross that contains incense from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem built at the place where our Lord Jesus Christ died and resurrected.





Orthodox Christian Keepsake Box with Olive Wood Cross from Bethlehem

As Orthodox Christians, we typically have many sacred and sanctified objects that we have collected and received as gifts from our friends: icons, crosses, flasks with blessing oil, items from the Holy Land, candles, prayer ropes, prosphora, and antidoron, just to name a few. Although we love to have and see them around, wouldn't it be great to have a special box to store all these precious items in one place?



We thought about this too and that is why this box was created!

St Spyridon and Nicodemus, the Prosphora-bakers of the Kiev Caves. Orthodox Christian Handmade Icon.

Sts. Spyridon and Nicodemus, the Prosphora-bakers of the Kiev Caves, are the Patrons of Prosphora bakers. Unfortunately, their icon is very rare and hard to find in North America. This educational set was created to solve this problem – by providing their icon and information about their life. This set comes with an icon mounted on a Canadian red cedar board and an educational booklet.





The Poor Widow's Offering Educational Set for Sunday schools

Use this educational set to teach your kids about the Poor Widow's Offering Bible story. Two included replica coins make this lesson more interesting and engaging. This Poor Widow's Offering educational set is ideal for Sunday schools and makes a good gift for kids ages 5 and up.



Orthodox Prayer Bracelet DIY Kit

We noticed that many grown-ups, like bishops, priests, deacons and others, use prayer ropes and bracelets in the Orthodox Church. These cool tools help them with their prayers and make them grow closer to God. We thought that kids would love to have their own prayer bracelets too! So, we made this set to teach children and new converts about prayer bracelets: how they started, what they're for, and how to make your very own!





Blessing in the Orthodox Church. Educational set

"Blessing in the Orthodox Church" aims to educate and guide parents, children, and youth in understanding and practicing blessings.

🌿 In a world longing for peace, this educational set offers a simple, grace-filled way to reconnect with God each day.

📖 The book included in this set teaches families that blessings aren't just rituals—they're moments of divine love and presence.

This set includes 4 x Orthodox Crosses made from olive wood from Bethlehem, 2 x Orthodox ICXC car stickers, a flask of Nard Oil, and an educational book.





St Matrona of Moscow. Orthodox Christian Handmade Icon and Educational Set.

Experience the wonder and spirituality of one of Russia's most revered saints, Saint Matrona, with this handmade educational set. It comes with a beautifully hand-crafted replica of the icon of Saint Matrona hand-painted by the Icon-painting workshop of Ekaterina Ilyinskaya in Moscow, Russia (reprinted with their permission). It is mounted on a Canadian red cedar board and comes with an educational booklet filled with fascinating details about her life, and 30 Preciosa Bohemian crystals. The booklet provides step-by-step instructions on how to decorate the icon with the crystals, making it a hands-on educational experience for children 5 and above.

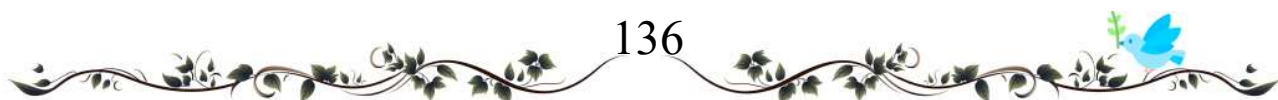




Learn About the Most Holy Theotokos and Decorate Her Icon. Handmade Educational Set with Bohemian Crystals and Tools.

We created this educational set to teach us and our children about the Holy Theotokos: 1) her life; 2) spiritual lessons we can learn from her; 3) about Panagia Ierosolymitissa icon; 4) why and how do we pray to the Mother of God; and 5) Days of her commemoration.

The set includes a hand-made icon mounted on a Canadian red cedar board, a supply of 75 Preciosa Chaton Rose Bohemian Crystals, non-toxic glue, tweezers, and a comprehensive educational booklet. The booklet provides step-by-step instructions on how to decorate the icon, making it a hands-on activity for the whole family.





Make and Decorate an Angel Educational Toy.

What do we know about the Angelic world that surrounds us? Why does this world exist? Is it good or bad? How does it affect us? How can we seek Angels' help? How can we harness their assistance to protect ourselves and our families against evil? How should we pray to them? Answering these questions is the primary purpose for creating this educational set – to teach our kids about the Angelic world, to help them expand their minds, and to make them aware that our world holds many more things than meets the eye.



Orthodox Wooden Blocks Perpetual Calendar Educational Toy.

This wooden toy was created to teach kids and their parents about the Orthodox Calendar and Great Feasts.

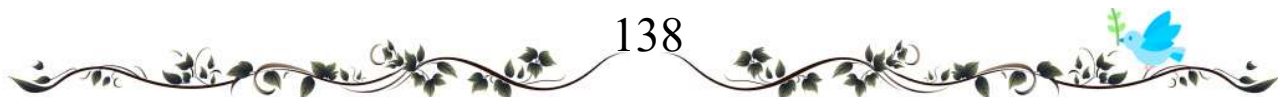
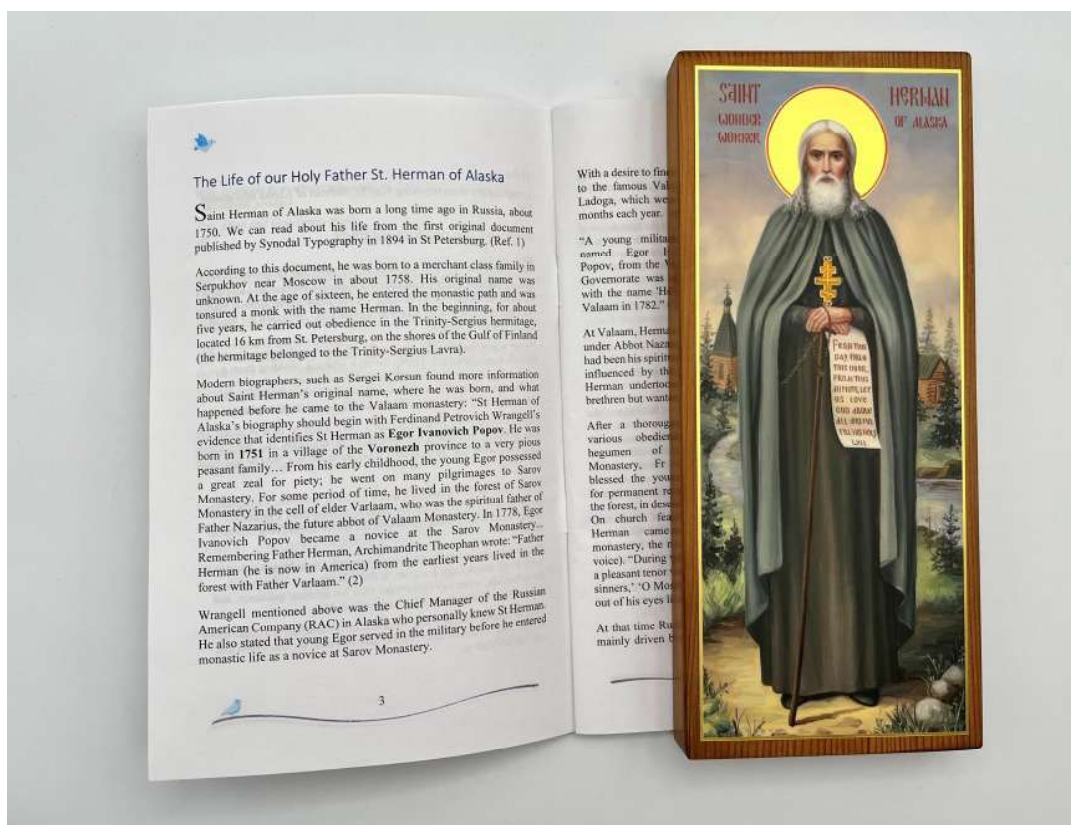
Kids can build a perpetual wooden blocks Orthodox Calendar using provided wooden blocks and sticker sheets. They can use stickers or draw numbers, names of the weekdays, months, and 12 Great Feasts on the wooden blocks while learning about the Orthodox Church calendar.





Saint Herman of Alaska. Handmade Educational Set.

Discover the story of one of the most revered saints in North American Orthodoxy, St. Herman of Alaska. As an 18th-century Russian missionary, he dedicated his life to bringing the Gospel to the Aleutian people, dedicating his life to their well-being, and to defending them from exploitation. His life on Spruce Island, where he lived in peace until 1837, is a testament to his unwavering devotion to the Lord and the people he served. This educational set includes a perfect reproduction of the Icon of St. Herman, hand-painted by the Icon-painting workshop of Ekaterina Ilyinskaya in Moscow, Russia and reprinted with their permission.





St Paisios of Mount Athos. Orthodox Christian Icon.

Saint Paisios (1924–1994) is one of the greatest saints of our time and is remarkable in many ways. He speaks to us through his writings in a modern and simple language—like a loving father speaking to his small children. His spiritual guidance and teachings are filled with real-life, modern-day examples that are easy to understand. When we pray to Saint Paisios, share our struggles, and ask for guidance, we can be confident that he understands us and will help.



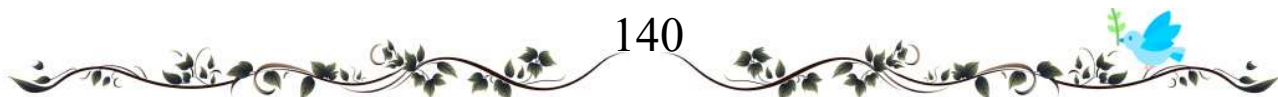
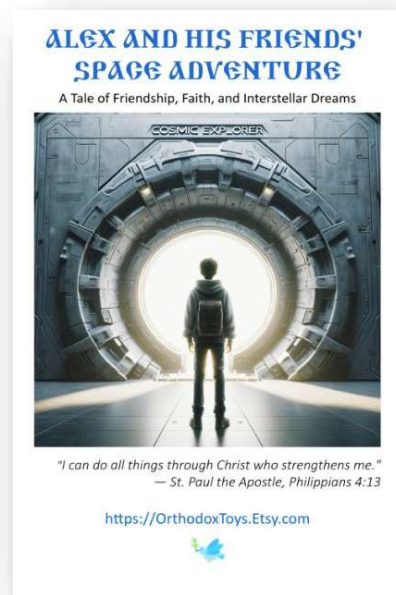


Alex and His Friends' Space Adventure: A Tale of Friendship, Faith, and Interstellar Dreams

Alex and His Friends' Space

Adventure 🚀 " is an inspiring story for young dreamers! Join Alex and his friends as they turn an old spaceship they found at a scrapyard into a gateway to the stars. With some help from the spaceship onboard Ai Stellar 🤖, they learn that science and faith can coexist and help them to survive in space! This journey shows how studying hard and believing in God can lead to amazing adventures. It's a tale to spark the inner cosmonaut in every reader and remind them that Orthodox Christian faith is a guiding light, anywhere in the universe!

In this new edition, a thrilling Secret Chapter reveals their daring first test flight, bringing the excitement of space travel to life. Each chapter features hidden QR codes linking to original music 🎵, making the story a full adventure. Along the way, the friends learn lessons of Orthodox faith, finding courage, kindness, and hope through prayer and trust in God.





Icon “Synaxis of the Archangels”. Handmade Icon and educational booklet

What do we know about the Archangels and about the Angelic world that surrounds us? Why does this world exist? Is it good or bad? How does it affect us? How do we pray to them? How can we use them to protect ourselves and our families against evil? Answering these questions is the main reason this educational set was created – to teach you and your kids about Angels’ world from the Orthodox Church perspective.

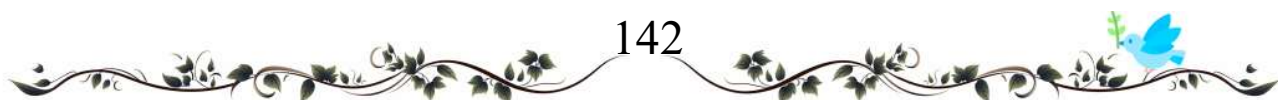
This set comes with a replica of the "Synaxis of the Archangels" icon hand-painted for us by the renowned Icon-painting workshop of Ekaterina Ilyinskaya in Moscow, Russia (reprinted with their permission).





People with Disabilities, Service Dogs, and the Kingdom of God

We created this toy to teach you about different types of disabilities and why they happen. It also shows you what the Bible says about how to be kind and helpful to people with disabilities. You will learn how to pray for yourself, your family and friends who have disabilities or are sick. You will also learn how you can help to become a puppy raiser, take care of a puppy and teach it to become a service dog. Finally, you will learn how to decorate this toy.





Wedding icons and educational book: An Orthodox Guide to The Sacrament of Marriage

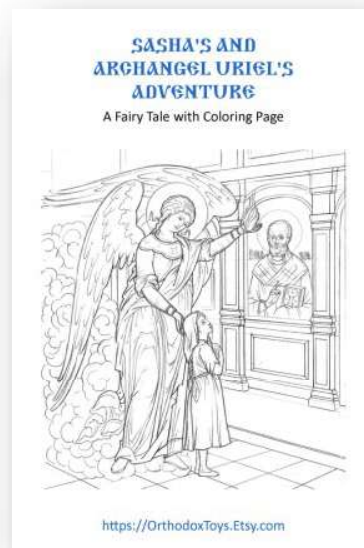
This comprehensive educational set comes with two wedding icons and a book exploring Orthodox Christian views on marriage. It delves into the spiritual meaning of this divine union, presenting marriage as a journey towards salvation, love, and a reflection of Christ's love for His Church. The book offers insights from Church Fathers, scriptural teachings, and practical advice for couples. A vital resource for understanding the depth and beauty of Orthodox marriage. Both icons are perfect reproductions from the Icon-painting workshop of Ekaterina Ilyinskaya in Moscow, Russia, and reprinted with their permission.





Fairy Tale and Coloring Page: Sasha and Archangel Uriel

This educational set combines the magic of storytelling and the joy of coloring. Inside this set, you will find a carefully curated booklet featuring the fairy tale. Written with love and care, this heartwarming story follows the adventures of Sasha, a young girl exploring her faith and embarking on a transformative journey with the guidance of Archangel Uriel. The tale beautifully introduces children to the significance of the Orthodox Church, its traditions, and the importance of church services.



Candles in the Orthodox Church. Educational Set with Pure Beeswax Sheets and Parent's Guide.

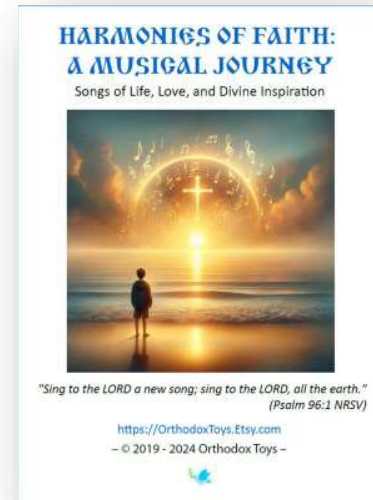
We made this educational set to teach our kids how to make their own candles using pure beeswax sheets while learning about how these candles are used in the Orthodox Church, about their history and symbolic meaning: What do candles symbolize? What ingredients are used to make candles? These are some questions that we answer in this educational set.



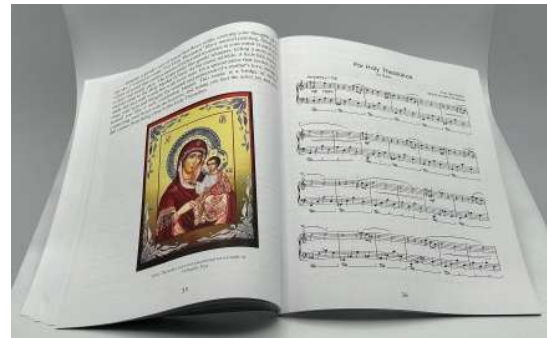


Harmonies Of Faith: A Musical Journey. Songs of Life, Love, and Divine Inspiration. 10 Beautiful Piano Pieces.

Ever since my music school days 🎹, I've dreamed of music that tells deeper stories—melodies that resonate with our souls ❤️. This book is that dream come to life, blending piano compositions 🎵 with narratives that explore love, faith, and the divine. Designed for intermediate players, each piece and its story invite you into a world where music bridges us to something greater, echoing my journey to Orthodoxy.



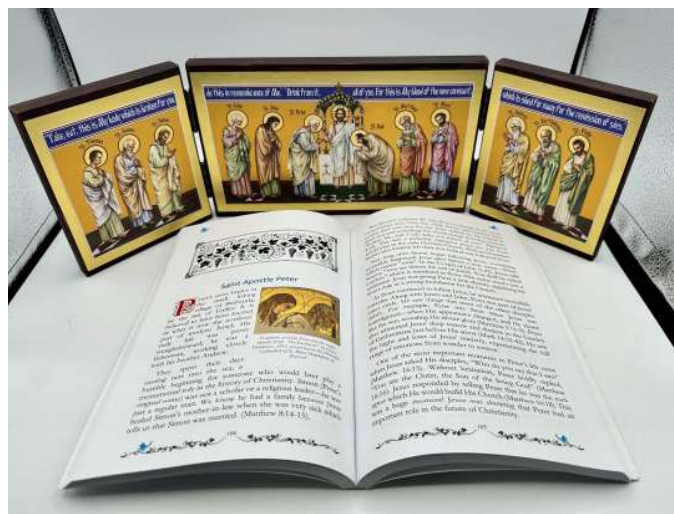
This collection is more than piano pieces; it's an invitation to witness how music can lead to spiritual discovery and transformation ☀️. As you play these 10 beautiful pieces and explore their stories, you're on a journey that mirrors my path to finding faith and meaning in life. Perfect for teenagers and adults eager to explore music, narrative, and spirituality, this book guides understanding how art can connect us to the divine 🙏.





Educational Set: Handcrafted Triptych Icon and Guide to the Liturgy.

Discover the beauty of the Holy Eucharist and the Apostles' mission with this special educational icon set. Inspired by Viktor Vasnetsov's *The Eucharist* (1911), this handcrafted triptych icon fosters a deeper connection with the Orthodox Liturgy for families and children. Hand-painted by the Icon-painting workshop of Ekaterina Ilyinskaya in Moscow, it is reprinted with their permission.



✨ Key Features:

🎨 Handcrafted Triptych Icon

A stunning, foldable reproduction of *The Eucharist* icon, ideal for prayer corners, Sunday Schools, or personal devotion.

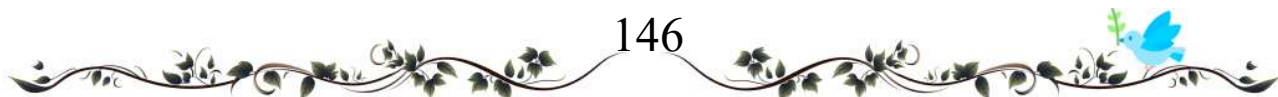
📖 The Sacred Liturgy and Holy Apostles book

A detailed, step-by-step guide to the Divine Liturgy, featuring illustrations, insights on the Apostles, hymns, prayers, and practical tips for active participation.

📏 Dimensions: 47cm x 14cm x 2cm

⚖️ Weight: 1 kg

🍁 Made in Canada





Sasha's Journey to Her First Confession.

Join young Sasha on a heartfelt journey toward her first confession. Guided by Archangel Uriel through vivid dreams and real-life challenges, Sasha comes face-to-face with the passions that trouble her heart—like anger, gluttony, and vanity—and discovers how humility, patience, love, and repentance lead to healing and peace.

With wisdom from the saints and gentle teachings of the Orthodox Church, Sasha's story offers encouragement and clarity for children preparing for confession.

Written for young hearts 🧡, this book helps children ages 8–14 understand what sin is, how to prepare for confession, and how to begin walking the path of repentance with courage, hope, and love.

Includes reflections, scriptural insights 📖, stories of saints, and a special Q&A section by Fr. Lawrence R. Farley.

SASHA'S JOURNEY TO HER FIRST CONFESSION

A Tale About Passions and Virtues for Young Hearts



*"The Christian cleanses the temple of his heart from all impurity,
in order to receive Christ the Lord who comes to him."
— St. Theophan the Recluse, The Path to Salvation*

<https://OrthodoxToys.Etsy.com>

