



# Notes from the Edge of the World

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April 2010

Since my arrival in Kyrgyzstan a few weeks ago, I have been occasionally awakened by the call to prayer at 5:40 in the morning.

It is a not loud but a low, mournful wail, encapsulating within its sorrow the heavy burden of man's sinfulness. Islam is considered the faith of the vast majority of Kyrgyz. (Russians now make up a minority in this country as many have repatriated to Russia proper). But since I flew here from Tbilisi on the first day of Spring, I also had the chance to note the popularity of Norouz in Central Asia. To put it bluntly, it is a holiday awash in pagan ritualism, celebrating the coming of Spring. I saw an old woman take some burning twigs and blow the smoke into the air, cleansing it of evil spirits. (Look at the big poster above which illustrates what I saw, covering part of a large department store in downtown Bishkek). One of my students told me that Muslims have basically incorporated this pagan ritual into their own celebrations without commentary. When I asked another student if any of our Lutherans celebrated Norouz, he assured me "Oh, no." But then with a slight grin, he added, "Not unless they want to drink." Ah, yes, I nodded knowingly.

## **A Growing faith in an Inhospitable Climate**



Meanwhile, the faith continues to grow in a land not terribly hospitable to Christianity. In the villages more Bible study groups are being added and they are predominantly attended by Kyrgyz. The bishop can't keep them filled with leaders. Even in the area where our church is located, I noted from my various walks that there was an Orthodox Church, a Korean Presbyterian Church (*see picture at left*) as well as a Baptist Prayer House, all within a one mile radius. Remember, this isn't Tennessee but

Kyrgyzstan, so there has been progress in bringing the Gospel to the people of this former Soviet Republic.

There are also attempts by our Kyrgyz bishop to gather Evangelical leaders in Kyrgyzstan and discuss how to do outreach among the Kyrgyz. He has thought and prayed about this for some time and is getting ready to begin a dialogue with other Christians who also have a heart for the Kyrgyz people to know about Jesus.

## **Easter in Central Asia**

The joyful shouts of Kristos Voskres! (Christ is Risen!) echoed throughout the newly built Lutheran Church in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on Easter Sunday. Close to 90 people crowded in to hear Pastor Mansur Kurmanbakeev reflect upon the hope we proclaim in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Russians and Kyrgyz mingled together in a beautiful symbolism of the fact that Christ did not come to save one particular people group. (In my class these past few weeks, we spoke about how in his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul proclaimed a message of salvation in Christ for all people). It was my first Easter in Kyrgyzstan and I can't help but be thrilled by how God has blessed the work of LCMS World Mission here. The faithfulness of our recently retired missionaries, the Pfeils and Nickels, is reflected in the many faces of the people who are hearing the Easter message of hope in Jesus Christ. The people and congregations who helped build this Church and education center, not to mention social ministry, are to be commended. I am most grateful, though, that this is an active church. I have been reading in the Daily Telegraph, my favorite online news source about Britain, that the Church of England is thinking up ways to connect their churches to the surrounding community. Whether one accepts using a church as a post office

is a debate for another time, but the church in Bishkek is helping people with vision problems by distributing free eyeglasses. It is showing that it serves the local community in the right and left hand kingdoms of God which Martin Luther explained so beautifully in his day.

***Picture: Easter brunch in the church lobby***



## **Future Travels**

My time here is now coming to an end and it's off to the next teaching session, this time in Mongolia. Unfortunately, I have to fly through a few countries to get to a country virtually next door, but there is no easier option. So my flight on April 12 will take me through Kazakhstan, South Korea and finally into Mongolia. I get to add a few more countries to my list. Up to 34 now. I am just grateful to our "do-it-all

everyman" at LCMS World Mission, Travis Torblaa, who worked out the arrangements for me. He makes things happen!

***Left: He who holds the most Easter eggs gets to be bishop!***



***Prayer Requests:***

Please continue to keep in prayer our Eurasian business manager, Karen Roemer, fighting cancer; Boris Chuprov, a Russian seminary student fighting HIV/AIDS; and Kyrgyz Lutheran believer Aima, who has just come out of a coma but is still hospitalized. After seeing the conditions in her hospital, I ask you to please pray for her recovery and safe return home to her family in the village of Vorontsovka.

Thank the Lord for safe travels and for continued safety as I fly to Mongolia on April 12 and back to the country of Georgia on April 26.

Please pray for a fruitful teaching time in Ulan Bator and the Gobi Desert region of Mongolia.

**Mail Issues**---A few notes about the mailing address--- It appears that my mailing address in Russia is no longer accessible. Since I only get to Moscow three times a year now, it is probably best for anyone wanting to mail anything to use my parents' address in Michigan. I get there twice a year and it is more reliable than the Moscow address. Since I am in a different country every month, I hope you understand that I simply cannot regularly access "snail-mail". Thanks!

**E-mail: [matveih@yahoo.com](mailto:matveih@yahoo.com) --- New Mailing address- 26650 Woodshire, Dearborn Hgts., MI., 48127. To support my work financially, you can send a tax-deductible gift to: LCMS World Mission, 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, MO 63122-7295. Make checks payable to LCMS World Mission. Mark checks "Support of Matthew Heise."** If you would like to partner with me in my ministry with ongoing support as an individual or congregation, please contact Debra Feenstra for information on Together in Mission or Mission Senders at 1-800-248-1930 Ext. 1651 or [Debra.Feenstra@lcms.org](mailto:Debra.Feenstra@lcms.org) Thank you and may the risen Christ bless you!