

Notes from the Edge of the World

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Easter 2012



Above: Valley of kings and saints- a monument in Tbilisi, Georgia, highlighting Georgia's Christian heritage

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" - Luke 24:5

There is a day after Easter in the Orthodox world, what we might term "Easter Monday", in which people flock to the cemeteries. It is called the "Blessing of the Bones" day. Quite often people even go to the cemetery on Easter Day itself and forego any services in the church. As we rejoice in Christ's resurrection in our Easter afterglow, this different tradition caused me to pause for reflection. My friends here in the Lutheran congregations see this tradition as a distraction from the real celebration of Easter. I asked, "Could the intention be appropriately symbolic, though, that these bones of believers lying in the grave will be reunited to a new, glorified body on the Last Day?" If that was the focus of the celebration, then

certainly, they replied. But too often in Eastern Europe where Orthodoxy is prevalent, the traditions take on greater power than the Message of the Resurrection itself. It becomes a day for placing Easter eggs on graves, a day of symbolism where the original meaning has been long forgotten or shunted to the background. Paganism is always one short step away from Christianity in the Old World.

Martin Luther's Small Catechism in Georgian

Of course, we in the Western world are not immune to such distractions from the power of the Gospel message. I thought about this when I heard old public school



friends reflect upon Easter traditions (new suits and haircuts for the boys, white dresses for the girls) and chocolate rabbits. Too often we place these earthly traditions above the “real reason for the season”, to coin an old phrase often uttered when speaking about Christmas.

In our Lutheran congregations and Bible study groups in Georgia, Easter is celebrated twice, according to the Western calendar and Eastern Orthodox calendar. So we get a double dose of the Good News! This year Easter coincided with the publication of Martin Luther's Small Catechism in Georgian. This was a wonderful example of teamwork within The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The Lutheran Heritage Foundation did the translation work and our

mission printed the catechisms. Now not only can we celebrate the most important day in Christendom, rejoicing that our Lord Jesus conquered death and the grave for us!! We can also continue on in the church year as we follow our Lord's admonition “... **teaching and observing all that I have commanded you**” (Matthew 28:20).



Above: Second Easter service in Kutaisi, Georgia

Prayer Requests: Please pray for the Lord's blessings upon the Lutheran mission in Georgia. Please pray for wisdom as we contemplate how to make this mission self-funding.

Pray for the Lord's blessings upon my upcoming travels to Berlin, Warsaw (meeting with my boss) and St. Petersburg (where I will teach Romans at the seminary).

Thank the Lord for blessing my cousin Shawn Nunnink and pray for His continued healing of her cancer. The reports of her healing continue to be positive, for which we praise our God!

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To support my work financially, you can send a tax-deductible gift to:
LCMS World Mission; Missionary Support; PO Box 790089; St. Louis, MO 63179-0089 -----**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 Thank you and may His Easter joy enfold you!



Above: Parishioners receive Luther's Catechism in their native Georgian