

# Saint Innocent Veniaminov

## Equal to the Apostles and Evangelizer of North America

**2** He began reading during the services at a very early age.

**3** After his ordination, he was assigned pastor of Irkutsk's Annunciation Church.

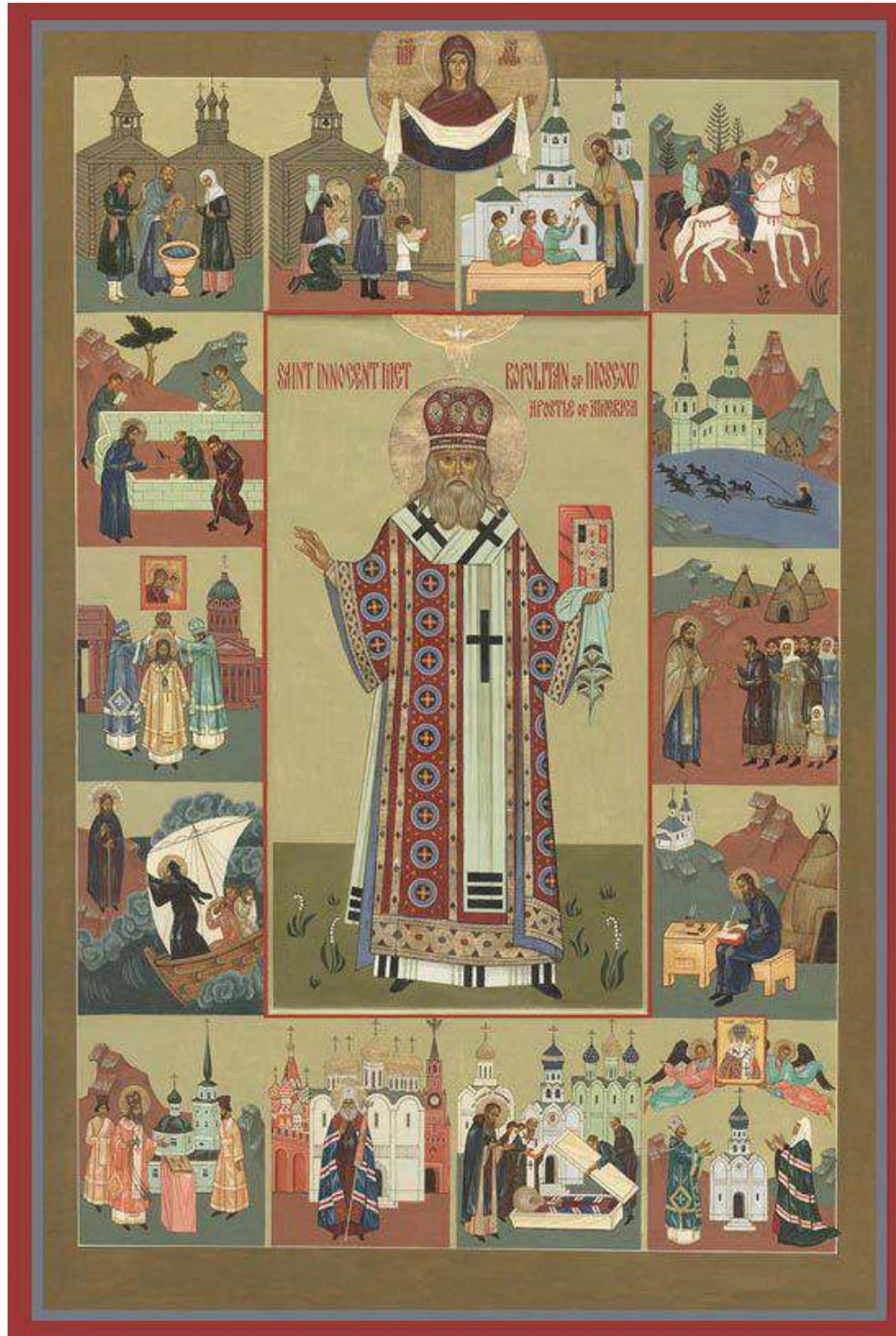
**1** Born John Evseyevich Popov-Veniaminov near Irkutsk, Russia, St. Innocent was baptized in his family's parish church.

**5** In 1825-1826, Fr. John guided the local faithful in constructing Unalaska's Holy Ascension Church.

**7** After the death of his wife, he was consecrated in Russia to serve as Alaska's first resident Bishop in 1840.

**9** During a storm at sea, Bishop Innocent prayed to St. Herman for help, and the storm subsided.

**11** In 1848, Bishop Innocent consecrated the cathedral of St. Michael in New Archangel [Sitka]. Again, he used his building skills to design and construct the cathedral – a landmark to this day.



**4** In 1823, after all other clergy refused, Fr. John accepted assignment to Unalaska, Alaska. The journey took 14 months.

**6** He visited his flock across Unalaska and the Fox and Pribilof Islands by dogsled and canoe.

**8** Returning to Alaska, he continued his travels, preaching in terms people could easily understand.

**10** He used his linguistic talents to learn and translate Scripture and other works into local languages.

**14** He was glorified by the Orthodox Church in Russia in 1977 and is honored by faithful there and in America as "Equal to the Apostles" for his deep devotion to the evangelistic ministry.

**12** In 1848, he was elected Metropolitan of Moscow in the Kremlin's historic Dormition Cathedral. He worked very hard to build up the Church and its clergy.

**13** St. Innocent fell asleep in the Lord on March 31, 1879 and was buried in the Church of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra near Moscow.

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John Evseyevich Popov-Veniaminov was born August 8, 1797 in the village of Anginsoye in Irkutsk, Russia. His baptism took place in the local church [1]. His father was a church server, so it was natural that John began reading the Epistle during services at an early age [2].

When John was only six years old, his father died. Four years later, John entered the Irkutsk Theological Seminary. In 1817, he married, was ordained to the diaconate, and was assigned to serve at the Annunciation Church in Irkutsk. After his ordination to the priesthood in 1821, he taught catechism to children while serving the parish as its priest [3].

In 1823, Father John embarked on a great adventure. The Bishop of Irkutsk had been instructed to send a priest to Unalaska in Alaska's Aleutian Islands. The clergy all refused to go – all, that is, except Father John. In May 1823, he and his wife, their infant son Innocent, and his mother and brother Stefan began the perilous journey. Fourteen months later they arrived on Unalaska Island [4] where he and his family lived in an earthen hut they had constructed themselves. A multi-talented man, he trained a group of local faithful in construction techniques and helped them build Holy Ascension Church, which they completed in 1826 [5].



Father John made numerous missionary journeys around Unalaska and the neighboring Fox and Pribilof Islands. He frequently traveled by dogsled or canoe, his tiny craft buffeted by storms in the Gulf of Alaska [6]. In 1834, he was transferred to New Archangel, later renamed Sitka, where he dedicated himself to ministering to the Tlingits. He studied their language and customs and produced scholarly notes and a dictionary. Among his other journeys was that he undertook in 1836, when he visited Fort Ross north of San Francisco and northern California's Spanish missions.

In 1838, Father John returned to Russia to report on his missionary efforts. While there, he received the sad news that his wife had died. After some time, he decided to enter monastic orders with the name Innocent, in honor of the sainted missionary Bishop of Irkutsk. Two years later, he was consecrated Bishop of Kamchatka and the Kurile Islands and the Aleutian Islands at the Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Saint Petersburg [7]. After his return to Alaska as the first resident Bishop in America, Bishop Innocent continued his missionary journeys, during which he proclaimed the Gospel in ways the people could easily understand and remember [8].

During one of his missionary journeys, Bishop Innocent encountered dangerously rough waters off Kodiak Island. Turning in the direction of Spruce Island, where Saint Herman of Alaska lived and was buried, he fervently entreated Saint Herman pray to God for assistance. Within minutes, the waters became calm [9]. His ongoing travels helped him to master local languages and dialects. He also developed alphabets for previously unwritten languages and translated Scripture and other works into Unagan and Yakut [10].

In 1848, Bishop Innocent had the joy of consecrating Saint Michael Cathedral in Sitka, which he used his talents to design and build [11]. The cathedral still serves as the main cathedral for the Diocese of Alaska. In recognition of his exceptional ministry, he was elevated to the dignity of Archbishop in 1850.

Archbishop Innocent was elected Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna in 1868 [12]. As Metropolitan, he worked diligently to uplift the faithful spiritually and improve the living conditions of the clergy. He fell asleep in the Lord on March 31, 1879 and was buried in the Church of the Holy Spirit at the Trinity-Saint Sergius Lavra in Sergeiv Posad, near Moscow [13]. He was canonized in 1977 by the Church of Russia during the tenure of Patriarch Pimen of Moscow [14].

O Holy Father Innocent, pray to God for us! ■