

May 2011 Sister Antonina, Brother Agnis

This Sunday's Bible readings from the *Bible Companion* include Philemon and there's an MP3 about these chapters at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/philemon.mp3>

The true Gospel continues to spread in Riga, and we're delighted to report the baptism of brother AGNIS at the Riga Bible Center. We look forward to the soon arrival of our campaigners for our Campaign June 15-22 God willing and welcome any last minuters!

We report many baptisms, but each of them has a unique story. ANTONINA is an elderly woman living in a small town in southern Ukraine, where she lives up 10 flights of steps on the top floor of an apartment block which has no lift, with her daughter and 7 year old spastic grandson, who cannot walk and has to be carried up and down all those flights of stairs. She was baptized earlier this week. She came to the Truth through a woman who had learnt of our faith from sister Raisa, originally from Kazakhstan. And it 'so happened' that there is a small group of sisters living in her very town there in Ukraine, with whom she has been meeting and studying for three years, resulting in her baptism. But how did Raisa come to Christ? Duncan takes over the story:

"Moscow, 1990. Gorbachev's glasnost had opened the USSR to the West, and the first McDonalds restaurant opened in Pushkinskaya in central Moscow. I was amongst the crowds who waited in huge lines to get in there; some people had come far from the provinces of Russia to go there. The lines were in total about 2 km. long. I stood in line for a while, looking around me, and noticed the tall grey building opposite with "Izvestiya" written on it; one of the largest newspapers in the USSR. If glasnost means McDonalds, maybe it means newspapers accept advertisements about the Bible? I gave up waiting for a Big Mac and the speculations about whether we would find real Americans behind the counters inside there, and walked over to that tall building. After a long debate, they took my US\$ and I scribbled out the text of an advert. And it was published, and hundreds of replies came in from throughout the USSR. One was from a man, Stanislav, in a place called Kokchetau in Kazakhstan. By 1993 he was ready for baptism, and I went there and baptized him. Walking around the town I distributed a few leaflets, with my address in Vilnius, Lithuania. I received a total of two replies. One from Ludmila Kuritsyna, who was to go on to convert a few hundred people in Kazakhstan; and another from an old man called Valentin. He told me he collected stamps and would like to get a package from Lithuania with our new Lithuanian stamps on. After independence from the USSR in 1991, we no longer had USSR postage stamps but our own new ones. I sent Ludmila her *Bible Basics* but I did nothing with Valentin's request; but something made me send it after a while. After all, when had the Truth ever got into Kazakhstan, I thought. I received a letter from him, thrilled with the stamps, and saying that he had also read the book and it was all he had been looking for about God. In 1994 I went there again, baptized Ludmila and walked from her block to the bus station and got the last bus out to Taynsha, the small town far out in the steppe where Valentin lived. I arrived late, after dark, and the few people on the bus soon disappeared and the bus station closed. The town was poor, dirt poor. There were no cars nor taxis driving around and few people on the streets. There were no street signs. And this was before the days of cell phones. I walked around and round, asking people where Proletarskaya street was ['street of the Proletariat', a typical Communist era street name]. People were aggressive and wary of a stranger, and there were many wild dogs roaming the streets; and I'm scared of dogs. There was no hotel, no shops open. And it was cold. I walked and walked, gangs of Kazakh youths noticing me and coming up to me and talking in Kazakh. I asked where the Police station was, but after an hour's walk with vague directions I couldn't find even that. I thought to sleep on the street, literally, but the gangs of youths were worrying. I cried to God as I had no idea what I would do that night; everyone I

asked seemed so aggressive and surely wouldn't let a stranger sleep in their home. There was a big grain elevator which was lit up in the distance, and I decided I would walk there and ask if I could just sit in there until morning. I also decided for sure that I would be getting the first bus back to Kokshetav in the morning- if I got through that night in one piece. The gangs of youths were now following me closely. I did think my number had finally come up. And what a desolate place to get it. I had long since given up any hope of finding Valentin, all I wanted was to get to that grain elevator whose rumble I could hear and find sanctuary there. At my most desperate, I noticed a faded street sign fixed to a house: "Proletarskaya 103". I wanted Proletarskaya 105. And there it was, next door. It took me a while to wake up Valentin, and I had to show him my passport before he believed who I was, carefully analyzing it at the gate of his yard by torchlight. I slept at the home and baptized him in the morning. Great was our mutual joy. Raisa his wife looked on but wasn't baptized- until some time later. Valentin now sleeps in the Lord, but Raisa, her three children, her sister and many of her grandchildren and other relatives are now baptized. Her friend whom she taught the Truth to was never baptized but emigrated to the relative safety of Ukraine (Kazakhstan is not a nice place for Russians these days). And there, her friend told Antonina about the Truth, Antonina studied *Bible Basics* , met with the local sisters, and what a significant moment it was to meet her and baptize her".

There are too many 'chance' events here to deny that the hand of providence is actively at work, too many things just noticed out of the corner of the eye, a newspaper office, a leaflet lying around, a street name. There is a God in the earth, eagerly working through what small efforts we make to bring people to His Kingdom and witness to the Gospel. As cotton wool clouds drift across the sky, God may seem distant and inactive, willing only to open the books at the last day and consider us. But not so. Man is not alone. God is in search of man as well as man searching for God, and in the process of their meeting in repentance and acknowledgment of each other in Christ, there's an amazing 'flash' moment, the 'click', brought about by the overpowering synergy between God and man which we may call 'providence'. Hence all the Angels of Heaven rejoice at each baptism. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and His eyes are constantly running to and fro to show Himself strong for those many people whom He seeks to save and preserve in their walk to His Kingdom.

Photos: Sisters Valya and Nana after the breaking of bread meeting in their ecclesia of sisters; group photo after the baptism. Antonina is in the center:



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With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks