

This translation will be used by future generations!



"It is important that one of the first books in our language is a Bible portion. I have been especially interested in working on the translation because I know that it will be used by future generations," said Svetlana Zhovnitckaya. She has translated excerpts from Luke's Gospel into her native language, Nganasan. The book arrived from the printing house in June 2005.

The idea of translating into Nganasan was born eight years ago. During a trip to Siberia the Gothenburg photographer, Kjell Holmner, met Nganasan Svetlana, one of the few Christians in her ethnic group. Kjell passed on the contact to IBT and then inspired the Nordic Mission to the East to commit itself financially to the project, something they have done all these years.

All the reference works published up to 1994 stated that the Nganasan people did not have a written language. But since then the situation has changed – and it was Svetlana who was the author of the first alphabet book in Nganasan.

Translating Luke's Gospel into Nganasan was not easy. Since there was simply no other literature in the language, new expressions had to be coined for biblical words such as "the kingdom of God", "temple", "servant", etc – there were no such words in Nganasan. Sometimes things had to be paraphrased. "Despite all the difficulties the translation has been creative and fascinating work," Svetlana said. Now she is looking forward to using the new book of excerpts from Luke's Gospel in school, and there are even plans to broadcast the text on local radio.



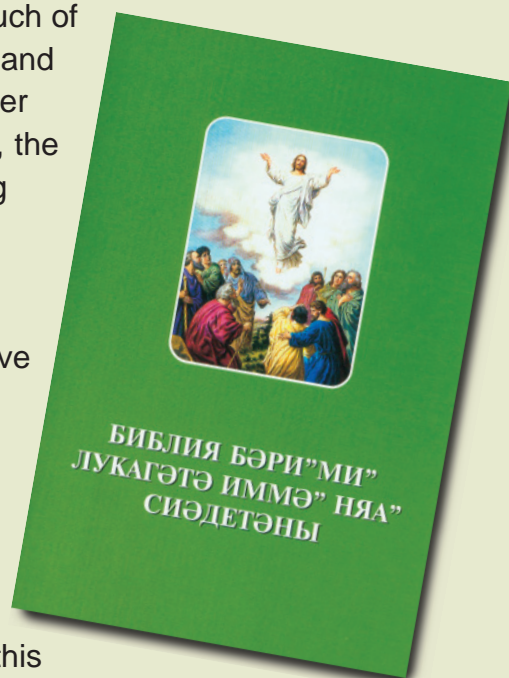
The Nganasan people live in the very north of the Russian Federation – on the Taymyr Peninsula in the north Arctic Ocean in north-west Siberia. They are the original inhabitants of the Taymyr. Their language belongs to the Samoyedic group. In earlier times the

Nganasans lived as nomads in the Siberian tundra. Not until the early 17th century did they come into contact with the Russians, through whom they gained access to weapons and alcohol. The Russians also brought diseases to which the nomadic people had not previously been exposed. These factors caused a rapid decline in the Nganasan population. At the end of the 17th century Russian Orthodox missionaries reached the Nganasan territory. Many were converted, but the results were superficial – shamanism remained strong even among the converts.



Because the Nganasans lived so remotely they escaped much of the devastation which other Siberian peoples had to suffer, and their traditional nomadic life continued even after the October Revolution. But when political “missionary work” developed, the Nganasan children were eventually forced to go to boarding schools to learn Russian – and forget their mother tongue. From the 1970’s the Nganasans could no longer avoid the changes which Soviet industrialisation brought. The entire economy of the Taymyr region was dominated by the massive installations built at Norilsk. The factories were damaging the environment and causing severe health problems and great infant mortality.

Today there are barely 1,000 Nganasans. Village life is tough, many are unemployed, alcoholism is widespread, and there is a great sense of futility. “But in the midst of all this there is still hope,” said Lena Shatilova, project coordinator for the Nganasan translation. “In one of these villages fifteen Nganasans have recently come to faith. The neighbours are wondering what’s happened when they see their changed lives – they’re no longer drinking, their families are healthy, and they’re taking good care of their children! Everyone I spoke to was thrilled to get a book of the Bible in Nganasan!”



Can you imagine a better reason for supporting Bible translation?

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