

## Pastoral Visit to South Ossetia

**F**or the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methone, *locum tenens* of the Holy Diocese of Alania and Director of Missions for the Holy Synod, once again travelled to our Church in South Ossetia, in the Caucasus, by way of Moscow.

- In the region, following his reception at the Cathedral Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos in the capital city of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali, His Grace undertook a trip, on Thursday, August 12/25, 2011, to the ancient Tigva Monastery, dating to the twelfth century, near the village of Znauri. Though reconstruction scaffolding remains in the interior of the Monastery Church, this work does not seem to be progressing. At the monastery, His Grace celebrated a Service of Supplication (Παράκλησις). In Znauri, property has been prepared for the placement of a pre-fabricated wooden Church that was ordered from Russia; however it has not yet arrived. On the same afternoon, in the Church of the Holy Dormition in the village of Tsunari (Khetagurovo), Vespers and Matins were celebrated and the faithful were confessed.

- On Friday, August 13/26, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose celebrated the Divine Liturgy with Fathers Jacov Khetagourov and George Tzoev at the Church of the Holy Dormition in Tsunari, with some forty faithful in attendance.

Later in the afternoon, at the Church of the Holy Dormition, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose and the two Priests, Fathers Jacov and George, performed, in a large font, the Baptism of about 100 catechumens, the



majority of them children. Despite the exhaustion and the tumult associated with such a large group, the event occasioned a great blessing.

- On Saturday, August, 14/27, a visit was made to the a monastery on a hill just outside the capital city, the Church of which dates to the thirteenth century, with beautiful Icon murals on the walls, though in need of restoration which would entail immense cost. In a dwelling adjacent to the Church there now lives a single nun.

In the afternoon, at the Cathedral Church in Tskhinvali, the Services of Vespers and Matins for the great Feast of the Mother of God, and a large number of faithful availed themselves of the Mystery of Confession.

- On Sunday, August 15/28, the Dormition of the Theotokos, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose celebrated Liturgy with Fathers Jakov and George at the Cathedral Church, with the prayerful participation of a large number of faithful, the majority of whom communed of the Holy Mysteries.



Following this, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose and the two Priests went to the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, in a nearby village, where they chanted an Akathist Service (the Salutations to the *Panagia* [Mother of God]) together with the Pastor of the Church, Father Alexis Aristinov and took part in the procession with the *Epitaphios* (Burial Shroud) of the *Panagia* around the Church.

- On Monday, August 16/29, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose visited at the village of Tser, in the Caucasus Mountains, the Church of St. George, a popular place of pilgrimage, where he celebrated a Service of Supplication.

- On Tuesday, August 17/30, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose took part in the Service of the Lamentations of the *Panagia* at the Cathedral Church and the procession with the *Epitaphios* around the Cathedral. Later in the afternoon, he travelled to a suburb of Tskhinvali, where he celebrated a Service of Supplication to the *Panagia Portaitissa* in a

parish dedicated to this famous Icon of the Mother of God.

Later on, His Grace visited the Red Cross Center in Tskhinvali, where he had a discussion with the center's director, an Orthodox Christian from Switzerland, who informed His Grace about the organization's aid program and about the provisions given to the poor, and especially the homeless.



- The next day, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose began his return trip, with stopovers in Vladikavkaz, in North Ossetia, and Moscow, arriving at last, by air in Athens on Friday, August 20/ September 2, 2011, with gratitude to the *Panagia* for her protection and blessing in this difficult and dangerous pastoral mission.

