

The Feast of the Nativity in South Ossetia

His Grace, Bishop Ambrose, since 2011 *Locum Tenens* of the Orthodox Church of South Ossetia (the Holy Diocese of Alania), travelled to this tiny country in the Caucasus to celebrate the Nativity Feast on December 25, 2012 (i.e., January 7, 2013, on the civil calendar). South Ossetia has been inhabited by Christians since very early Christian times. In the tenth century, the Byzantines helped establish a formal Church body that is now claimed by both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Patriarchate of Georgia. It has been under the jurisdiction of the Holy Synod in Resistance only since 2003.



Nativity services were celebrated at the ancient Cathedral of the Nativity of the *Theotokos* in the capital city of Tskhinvali (*see below*), originally built in the 900s. Present for the All-Night Vigil and Liturgy, as well as the procession in the snow-covered streets during the early hours of the Nativity Feast, was the new South Ossetian President, Leonid Tibilov (Тыбылты Харитъоны фырт Леон, in Ossetic). *See, left to right, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose and Mr. Tibilov in the photograph immediately above.*



At the literal risk of life and limb in an explosive region where ecclesiastical and political powers are closely aligned, His Grace has faithfully served his spiritual children in South Ossetia in a period of immense social and economic turmoil and political uncertainty. A tribute to His Grace's dedication and courage is the fact that hundreds of the faithful communed at the Nativity Liturgy, after proper preparation.