Dr. Zhivago: The Opening of the Novel

The novel opens in the Russian countryside in 1902
What’s the name of part 1?

Starts not with people tying to get on a tin, but with a funeral procession:
“they were walking, and walking…” in Russian: шли
Impersonal, communal, without a pronoun, anonymous…
Special singing in the sounds of feet and horses, or just an ordinary realistic story.
Anybody can be part of this procession.
Similarly, the novel is full of random characters, just passers by…

‘Zhivago’ is introduced as a communal name: “who’s being buried?” No difference.
Just a rich person. The name has a meaning: ‘Zhiv’-alive. They are burying the living person.

The words of the psalm are a motto for the book:
Although the book starts with a funeral, it’s entire tendency is to counteract the funeral.
Images of life and death are juxtaposed in the opening description. A ten-year-old “the living” climbs the mound of earth to mourn his mother.

Allegory: life mourns its own burial. The movement of this section is first toward, then away from the graveyard (‘eternal memory’ in the beginning vs. away from the graveyard).

Uncle, Vedenyapin (knowledge and guidance), a ‘priest unfrocked at this own request.’

Meaning: what guides the life away from death is knowledge, which is no longer the preserve of priests.

“Overcoming death and not making speeches”
Yuri and his uncle are at a monastery (within hearing of a railway); the blizzard attacks the new grave with snow; the boy again is seized by distress, and is led away by his uncle.

Memory: the times when the family was rich (images—crossing animal with vegetables), perceptually and emotionally precise; No conclusion is made—passages like this occur throughout the novel—a mosaic of prose poems.

Patterns of behavior
A year later, the boy is with his uncle at heir country estate where he’s overwhelmed by a heat- haze (vs. blizzard). He’s thinking about his mother. Death, recovery from it, and a state of unusual ‘lightness.’

-Now, overcoming death becomes a leitmotif accompanying Yuri: two unending preoccupations, meditating on death and always creating life.
“Not doing” is the first thing we see Yuri do (not making a speech at the funeral).
In the novel, speech-making is presented as something wrong, false and is connected with the “loss of personality in the 19th century.” Numerous examples throughout the novel: Tsar Nicholas omits “My Nation” when he arrives at the front, however, the journalists pour forth clichés such as “dawn of the future.” Similarly, in part 8, when Zhivago family arrived at Torfyanaya, and are astonished by the quietness of the provincial station, it becomes a ‘moment of clarity’ for Tonya. The author recounts the words the does not say, but bursts into tears instead.

Coincidences:
Millionaire’s death—huge coincidence and crossing of fate’s paths. In the novel, lot’s of coincidences: the widow, Tiversina, just a person in the crowd, turns out to be connected with the main characters; her son works with Antipov, whose son, in turn, will later marry Lara, with whom Yuri will fall in love. The lawyer at the same scene is Lara’s seducer.

“Boys and Girls,”—the original title.
Misha and Nika are assertive, militant boys, while Yuri is passive and receptive. He’s described by passive voice, intransitive verbs: he’s led from the grave; he’s helped; he weeps; when snow covers his mother’s grave, he longs to do something, but doesn’t know what.

The Dialogues are frequently just Quasi-monologues:
either two speakers are in complete agreement, or else, only one speaks, and the other’s disagreement is only eluded to.

There’s another type of dialogue: the rhythmic and purposeless talk of two minor characters.

Spiritual view of history (vs. Marxist views).
Marxism regards history as centuries of class struggle for the control of material goods. First expressed by Vedenyapin, truth is sought only by individuals. Inspired by the gospels, love, “free personality,” “life as a sacrifice.” In contrast, roadside deaths, first of the elder Zhivago, and much-much later, that of his son.

Pasternak believes in the “Kingdom of God,” and, in his own words, uses religious motifs “to give warmth to the book.”