

Week Four:

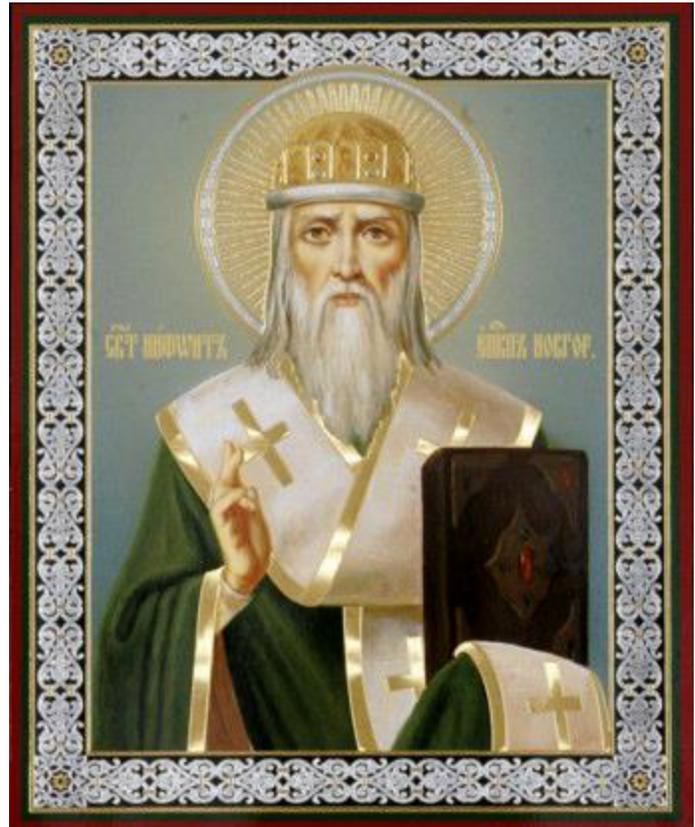
## Saint Niphon, Bishop of Novgorod

Saint Niphon was a monk of the Kiev Caves who lived in the tenth century. He served as the Bishop of Novgorod, located in northwestern Russia. Novgorod is Russia's oldest city.

The bishop knew how important it is for people to have a place of worship that is close to their homes and also beautiful, so as to glorify God. He had a new stone church built in the center of Novgorod, so that all the members of his flock could gather for services. He extended his efforts to oversee the construction and repair of churches in many places beyond Novgorod—it was one of the things he became known for.

Though building churches can be a fairly peaceful activity, it was not the only thing Saint Niphon was called on to do because Novgorod was not always peaceful. When war broke out between Kiev and Novgorod, he was able to step in and get the two cities to cease fighting. His ability to be a peacemaker was important to the citizens of both places. Civilians, those who are not directly involved in a war that is conducted in the place where they live, are always hurt and damaged by that war.

It was not only between Russian cities that the bishop found himself in the middle of conflict. He had to denounce a prince of Novgorod who wanted to enter into a marriage that was not according to the canons of the Church. Saint Niphon didn't pay with his life, as Saint John the Baptist did for denouncing the marriage of Herod to his brother's wife.



But it is never comfortable, and is always risky, for clergy to be forced into the position of having to oppose powerful rulers. They must be willing to stand for the teachings and rules of the Church no matter how much it costs them personally.

Saint Niphon's willingness to stand up for the Church was tested by another situation as well. He refused to serve with a monk who was consecrated to become the Metropolitan of Novgorod without the blessing of the Patriarch of Constantinople. This violated the tradition of the Church, but Saint Niphon was not able to convince the authorities that the consecration shouldn't take place. The Metropolitan, named Clement, was allowed to take his position. He was so furious with Bishop Niphon that he had him put under house arrest.

In spite of all these troubles, Saint Niphon was able to return to the Kiev Caves Monastery to spend the last years of his life. He had a dream of Saint Theodosius, who is called the Father of Russian Monasticism, telling him his death would come soon. This kind of dream is considered a great gift, because it gives the dying person time to repent and to make peace with everything and everyone.

The saint's end was indeed peaceful, and came in April of the year 1156.

**Read Luke 7: 1-5.** In this passage, the elders of the Jews encourage Jesus to help a centurion. What do they say makes him worthy of Jesus' help? What does he have in common with Saint Niphon? *(The Jewish elders say he is worthy of help because "he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue." This centurion built a place of worship, just as Saint Niphon built and repaired many. The Church has always honored builders and caretakers of churches.)*

Andrew Gould is a church architect and has worked on Orthodox churches and monasteries. He wrote about what an Orthodox church should be like in a pamphlet distributed by the Holy Cross Monastery in West Virginia:

"When we are in church, it should be as though we dwell in the Kingdom of God. We have icons so that we might see the saints who praise God alongside us. We have music so that we might hear the angels sing too. We have incense so that we might smell the fragrance of Heaven all around us.

But the Kingdome of Heaven is more than that. At its heart it is a splendid city, the New Jerusalem, And the saints in Heaven worship God amidst gemstone walls, gates of pearl, and streets of gold. A proper temple is an icon of that heavenly city. It must be a place so beautiful that it is fitting to worship the creator of beauty there. Without a temple it is as though the church worships God in exile, as did the Jews of old; it is as though the Kingdom of Heaven were not already at hand."

**How do these words reflect on the importance of building beautiful churches?**

**How might these words help you explain to a visitor to the Orthodox Church why it looks, sounds, smells and feels the way it does?**