BLESSED PRINCE ALEXANDER OF THE
Alexander Nevsky was born into a princely family. From his early years he accompanied his father on military campaigns, and was always being prepared by his elders to be a soldier who would fight to defend the Russian Church and the Russian Land.

In thirteenth-century Russia, there was a great deal to be defended, for the country was facing attacks on two fronts. From the east came a human whirlwind, the Mongols (Tatars), fierce warriors willing to destroy everything in their path, and with furnishings so splendid that they were called the "Golden Horde." These conquerors were brutal, but they did allow the Russians to practice their Orthodox faith, so long as monetary tribute was paid.

From the west came another kind of enemy - the Swedish Crusaders and the Teutonic Knights. Their leaders could see that the Mongol invasion had badly weakened Russia. Many of its cities were destroyed, fine young men had been lost in battle, and the people were in despair. These western armies were determined to take control of the ravaged land and to impose the Roman Catholic faith.

In 1240 the Swedes sent a convoy of ships to the Neva River. The Swedish ruler sent this message to Alexander: "Fight me if you have the courage, for I am already here and I am taking your land captive." Hearing this, Alexander, who was not yet twenty years old but already a leader, prayed for a long time in the Church of Saint Sophia. Then he and his father, with their forces, went out to face the much more numerous troops of the enemy. Alexander encouraged his soldiers by telling them, "The power of God is not in numbers, but in truth." He relied on God to help them defeat this "king of Roman faith from the midnight land."

The Russians won the battle, and because it took place on the Neva River, Alexander was called "Nevsky" from then on. But just two years later, in April of 1242, his courage was tested again when the Teutonic Knights attacked, intending to "make subjects of the whole Slavic nation." This time the battle took place on the frozen surface of Lake Chud. The deafening noise made by the crash of spears and swords, the spilled blood on the ice making the surface even more slippery, and the cries of wounded and dying soldiers were all terrifying. At one point, the exhausted Knights tried to rally in a corner of the lake and the ice cracked beneath them, drowning many.

Once again the Russian troops were victorious, in what was to be known in history as the Great Battle on the Ice. Alexander’s name became famous "through all the lands, from the Egyptian Sea to Mount Ararat, from both sides of the Varangian Sea to Great Rome." The western borders of the Russian land, and its Orthodox faith, were secured. Alexander and his father now turned to the Mongol threat in the east. They made a long, arduous journey to meet the ruling Khan and form an alliance with him, offering him the required tribute.

In the following years, after his father's death, Alexander would make two more such journeys. The travel was difficult enough, but the need to be careful in negotiations was equally demanding. The prince had to be respectful to the Khan, but still firm in protecting his country from invasion. As one observer said, this required "the
meekness of an angel and the wisdom of a snake." Alexander was successful, showing that he had not only the skills of a soldier but also those of a diplomat.

In a few years, Alexander became Great Prince of All Rus (the ancient name for Russia.) He spent the rest of his life fighting attacks from Germany, making peace with Norway, campaigning in Finland, and in general protecting Russia's borders. He also continued his peace efforts with the Mongols, and in 1261 a diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church was established in Sarai, the Mongol capital. Saint Alexander Nevsky's next diplomatic journey, to Sarai, was to be his last. He became gravely ill on the trip home, and was not able to reach his destination, Vladimir. He stopped at a monastery in Gorodets and died there on November 14, 1263. Metropolitan Cyril, his spiritual father and frequent companion, said at the funeral, "There will be no greater prince in the Russian land." The saint's body was taken to Vladimir and was buried in the Nativity Monastery. He was glorified at the Moscow Cathedral in 1547.

References


Troparion (Tone 4)

Christ revealed you, O Blessed Alexander, As a new and glorious worker of wonders; A man and a prince well pleasing to God And a divine treasure of the Russian Land. Today we assemble in faith and love To glorify God by joyously remembering you. He granted you the grace of healing, Therefore entreat Him to strengthen your suffering spiritual children, And to save all Orthodox Christians.

Kontakion (Tone 8)

We honor you as a most radiant spiritual star, Rising up from the east; going down in the west! As you enriched the Russian people with good works and miracles, So now enlighten us who remember you in faith, O blessed Alexander. Today as we celebrate your falling asleep, we ask you to beseech the Lord That He may strengthen His suffering servants and save all Orthodox Christians!
1. St. Alexander had to make long, exhausting trips to meet the khans, the Mongol rulers. Then he had to behave humbly, offering tribute and asking those rulers to be lenient with the Russian people. Which of these two things, the tiring trips or the humbling meetings, would be harder for you?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

2. What do you consider to be St. Alexander’s most important accomplishment? Why did you choose the thing you did?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

3. What specific difficulties did St. Alexander encounter as he tried to follow Christ?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

4. Do we encounter or see the same difficulties today?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

5. How would you respond in the face of these adversities?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

6. What lessons are there for us to learn from the life of St. Alexander Nevsky living in times of trouble?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

7. What guidance does the scripture offer us about handling difficult situations like this?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
St. Alexander Nevsky’s Travels
Crossword Puzzle
St. Alexander Nevsky

ACROSS
1. The place St. Alexander Nevsky was trying to reach on his final trip home from the Mongol capital
2. The home country of the crusading military order
3. The art of the name of a crusading military order
4. The title held by St. Alexander Nevsky
5. Another name for the Mongols

DOWN
2. A person who works for the good of his or her country by conducting dealings with other countries
3. What St. Alexander did before his great battles
4. The Mongol capital
5. St. Alexander said God's power is not in this word, but in truth
6. The art of the name given to the Mongol
7. A country that attacked Russia

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Unscramble the words in the Word Bank, then use them to fill in the blanks and complete the sentences. Read the story to find the answers.

1. From his early years, Saint Alexander was raised to be a ______________.

2. The Mongols had such rich furnishings that they were called the _______________ Horde.

3. Saint Alexander was called "Nevsky" because his battle was on the _______________ River.

4. Alexander’s victory over the Teutonic Knights was called the “Great _______________ on the Ice.”

5. Mongol rulers were given the title _______________.

6. It was said that in dealing with the Mongols, Alexander needed the _______________ of a snake.

7. He also needed the meekness of an _______________.

8. On his final journey home, Saint Alexander became ill. He stopped, and died, at a _______________.

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Word Bank

haKn, tetBal, sredilo, genla, delGon, eystanmor, dswmoi, avNe