



## The Baptism of Russia

Missionaries penetrated into Russia during this period and the Russian Princess Olga was converted to Christianity in 955, although the effective Christianization of Russia actually received its greatest impetus with the conversion of Olga's grandson, Vladimir, in 988. According to Russian tradition. Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev decided that an official religion was necessary for his country and he was unsure which to choose: the Islam of the Volga Bulgars, the Judaism of the Khazars (on the lower Volga), the Latin Christianity of the Germans, or the Orthodox faith of the Greeks. Accordingly he sent envoys to the various regions to enquire of their faiths and to make a report to him.

The envoys fulfilled their appointed mission and then reported to Vladimir: When we journeyed among the Bulgarians (of the Volga region), we beheld how they worship in their temple, called a mosque, while they stand ungirt. The Bulgarian bows, sits down, looks hither and thither like one possessed, and there is no happiness among them, but instead only sorrow and a dreadful stench. Their religion is not good. Then we went among the Germans, and saw them performing many ceremonies in their temples; but we beheld no glory there. Then we went on to Greece, and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations.... (From the Russian Primary Chronicle).

After receiving the report of the envoys, Vladimir went to war with the Byzantine Empire and laid siege to the Greek city of Kherson. He promised to accept Christianity if he was successful in this campaign and after the capture of the city, he did, in fact, embrace Orthodoxy and was given in marriage Anna, the sister of the Byzantine Emperors Basil and Constantine. Returning to his capital of Kiev.



Vladimir ordered that all pagan idols be destroyed. The people were exhorted to renounce paganism whereupon they embraced the Orthodox faith and received Baptism in 988. From this date Russia became officially Christian.

With the conversion of Vladimir (later canonized by the Russian Church-commemorated July 15), Orthodoxy spread rapidly and already, within fifty years, the Russian Church had her first canonized Saints, the martyred brothers Boris and Gleb (1015-commemorated together on July 24). In 1051 the first Russian Monastery (The Monastery of the Caves) was founded in Kiev by St. Anthony (1073-commemorated July 10), later reorganized by St. Theodosius (1074-commemorated August 14; he and St. Anthony are commemorated together on September 2). In 1037, Theopemptos was consecrated Metropolitan of Kiev and all but two of the Metropolitans of this period were Greeks, appointed by Constantinople. (The first Russian Metropolitan was Hilarion in 1051, and the other Clement in 1147). To this day, the Russian Church still sings in Greek the greeting to a Bishop, *Eis polla eti, Despota*, in recognition of the debt owed by the Russian Church to Greek Byzantium

*Source: <http://www.orthodoxworld.ru/en/istoria/2/index.htm>*