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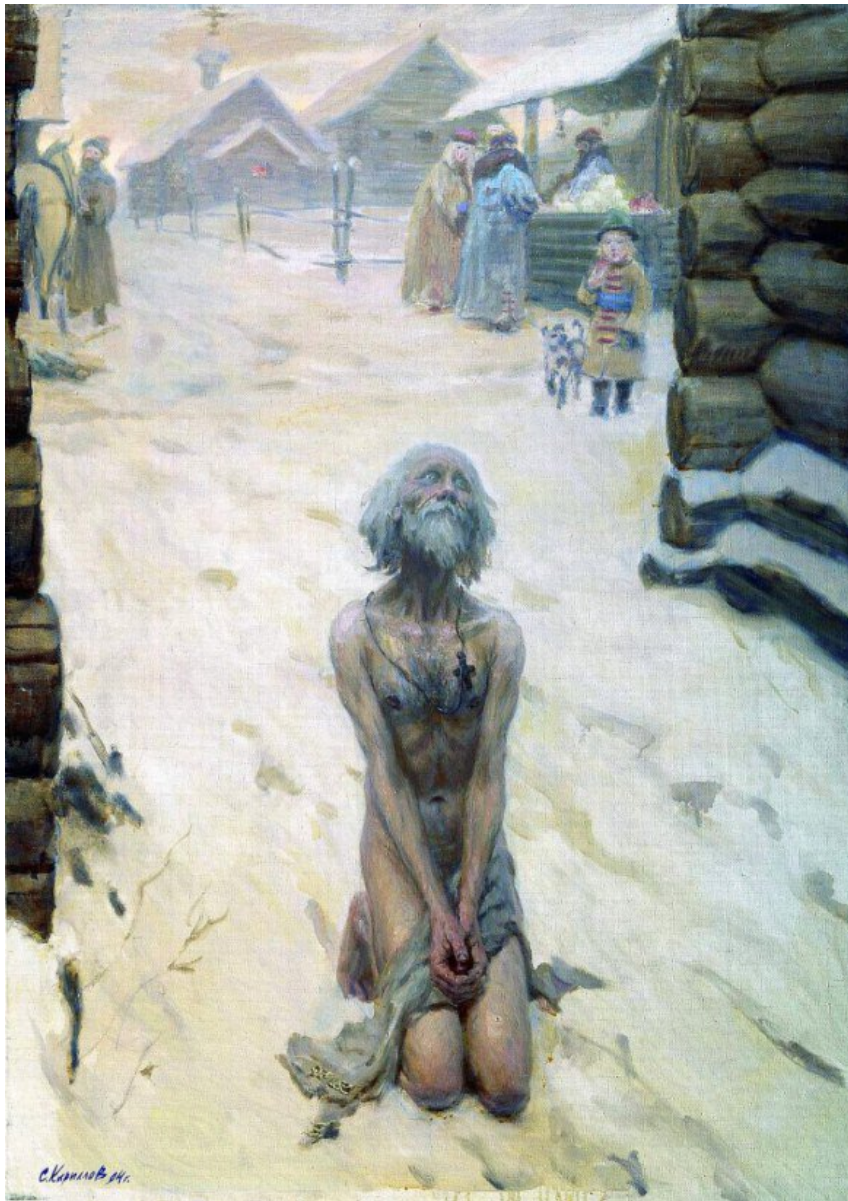
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Moscow's famous St. Basil's Cathedral is named for a Russian-Orthodox saint known as "Basil the Blessed." Sergei Kirillov created this painting of "St Basil at Prayer" as the third panel of his Triptych "Holy Rus." Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

One of the most famous churches in the world, St. Basil's Cathedral is located in Moscow. (First mention of that town, now one of the world's most important cities, was in 1147 when Yuri Dolgorukiy established an outpost on the hill by the river).

The building we see today was not Ivan's original church. His first idea - eight individual churches each commemorating a separate feast day - did not turn out the way Ivan envisioned, so he had them torn down. After that aborted effort, the Tsar had the architect Postnik Yakovlev design the Moscow marvel.

Postnik created one church with eight small chapels around a central chapel. Its eight domes, of different shapes and colors, are linked by an elevated gallery. (Yakovlev, it is said, also had a key assistant, Barma, although many historians believe "Barma" - which means "the Mumbler" - was simply Yakovlev's nickname.)

How did the cathedral get its name? Legends about Vasily Blazhenny - known later as St. Basil the Blessed - have been part of Russian culture for centuries. His most widely known characteristic was the gift of prophecy.

Predicting deaths (including that of Ivan the Terrible) and events (including the 1547 fire of Moscow), Vasily was known as a Moscow miracle worker even in his own lifetime. He was one of few people who could bluntly warn the Tsar about his unacceptable behavior.

After he died (on August 15, 1557), Vasily's body was interred near the church which was being built (between 1555 and 1561) to commemorate Ivan's victory over Kazan. An architectural wonder for more than four centuries, the church was originally known as "Cathedral of the Intercession of the Virgin," since it was on that Orthodox feast day Ivan and his Muscovites began their winning assault on Kazan.

In 1568, a chapel was built over Vasily's remains; on August 15, 1588 he was canonized as St. Basil the Blessed. After his sainthood, people often prayed at his grave. The phrase, "praying at St. Basil's," soon gave the Cathedral its more popular name.

The cathedral itself is deceiving. Although it looks spacious from the outside, it is fairly small - and cramped - inside.

Today it is not a church but a museum containing details about its history (although services - featuring beautiful Russian music - are sometime held there). Let's examine it more closely:

- The Cathedral is in Red Square, just outside the Kremlin's walls.
- Inside, and out, one sees decorative work on ceilings and walls.
- The cathedral's colors are vibrant, including yellow on blue.
- Icons, important to Russians for centuries, even appear on doors.
- A close-up of the outside porch shows the cathedral is aging.

Originally, St. Basil's white stone exterior and its domes did not include the color we see today. Those decorations were added during the next two hundred years.

For more than four hundred years, the building has survived fires, natural disasters and enemy invasions. It even survived a potential assault by Stalin whose associate, Lazar Kaganovich, once recommended that the cathedral be torn down to make more room in Red Square.

One legend about St. Basil's has persisted throughout the centuries. It is said that when Ivan the Terrible gazed on the completed cathedral, he was overwhelmed with its beauty. To be sure Postnik Yakovlev never created anything so magnificent again, the Tsar ordered that he be blinded.

The story may be a legend, but such was Ivan Grozny's way.

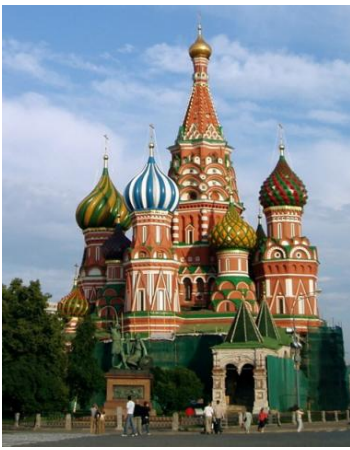
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Media Stream



St. Basil's Cathedral - Moscow's Basilica

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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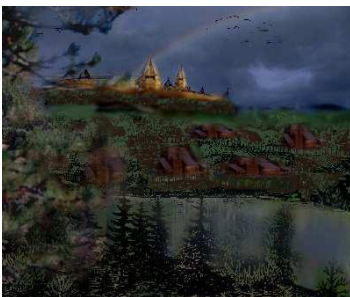


Yuri Dolgorukiy - Founder of Moscow, Russia

Image online, courtesy Russian-language Wikipedia.

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Yuri Dolgorukiy's Moscow Outpost in 1147

Image online, courtesy Russian-language Wikipedia.

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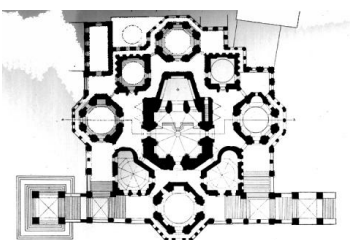
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St. Basil's Cathedral in 1802

"Red Square in Moscow," by Fedor Yakovlevich Alekseev (in 1801), is located at Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery. PD

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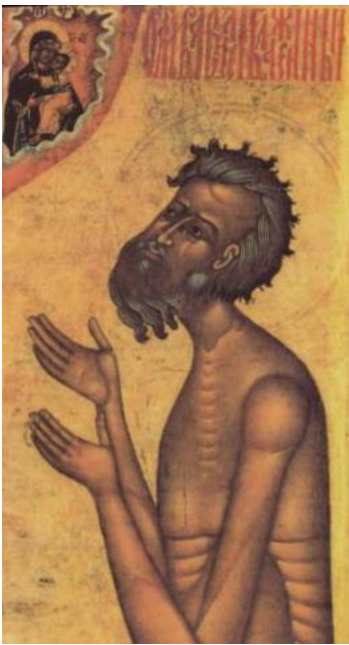


St. Basil's Floor Plan by Postnik Yakovlev

Image online, courtesy Russian-language Wikipedia.

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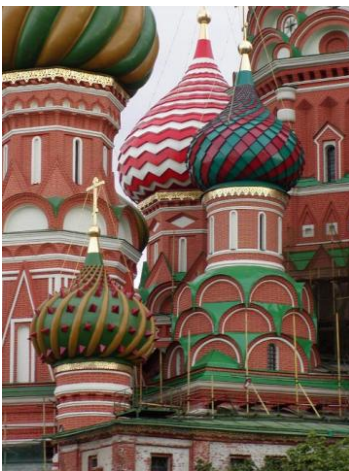
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St. Basil the Blessed

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Sanctuary of Basil the Blessed - St. Basil's Cathedral

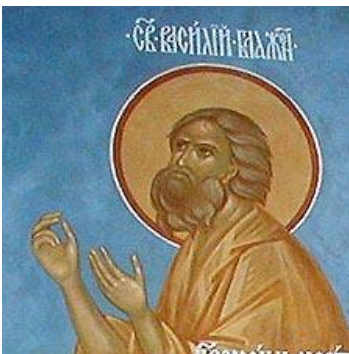
Photo of St. Basil's Cathedral, by Stan Shebs, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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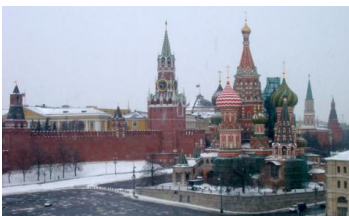


Vasily Blazhenny - St. Basil the Blessed

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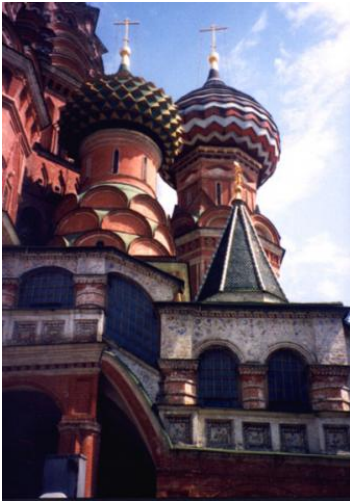


St. Basil's Cathedral - Wonder of Red Square

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Domes of St. Basil's Cathedral

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St. Basil's Interior Frescoes

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St. Basil's Cathedral - Interior View

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St. Basil the Blessed Cathedral at Red Square

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St. Basil's Deteriorating Facade

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St. Basil's Interior Motifs

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St. Basils Interior Floral Patterns

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Symbolic Doors in St. Basil's Cathedral

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