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## Visit to the Orthodox Church

### Information and Worksheet

Today the Orthodox Church is the largest religious organisation in Russia, Eastern Europe and Greece. It is very well represented in France too. In Paris the Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky is an active centre of Orthodox worship and an excellent example of Orthodox church architecture. For our visit, we may visit the Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky where we can experience many of the ideas we have studied in Byzantine history.

### Visit to an Orthodox Cathedral

See if you can answer these questions during your visit to the Cathedral, make sure you listen carefully, perhaps you can ask the guide or teacher the answers to some of the questions.

Outside the Cathedral there are many things to see.

<p><b>1.</b> What shape is the roof?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p><b>2.</b> What can you see on the roof of the Cathedral?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>Inside, the Cathedral is separated into two parts, a main centre of worship upstairs and a crypt downstairs;</p> <p><b>3.</b> Upstairs there are very few windows, but many candles, can you find out why?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

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**4.**What different sorts of religious objects can you find upstairs? (describe each!)

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Downstairs in the crypt there are no windows at all, but there are many pictures.

**5.** What is the special name for these pictures?

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**6.** Why are the paintings in crypt different from ordinary pictures? (write a sentence.)

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In the crypt you can see a painted wooden wall with three doors.

**7.** What is it called?

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**8.** Who is allowed behind the wooden wall through the doors, just anybody?

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There are many paintings of Saints in an Orthodox Church, one of the most important is St Nicholas.

9. Who does he protect?

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### Background Reading

Today you are visiting the most impressive Russian Orthodox church in France - in the opinion of many people it rivals by its beauty even the famous church of Saint Basil in Moscow's Red Square just next to the Kremlin and the great church of Alexandra Nevsky Lavra in Saint Petersburg.



As you approach the cathedral (preferably by way la rue Pierre le Grand) the first things you will notice are the large hemispherical golden mosaic and the gilded onion domes. These domes, by the way, are purely Russian in style you will not see them on Greek Orthodox churches.



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Once you enter the cathedral you will be able to see things that all Orthodox churches have in common:-

- ❖ no stained glass windows as in western churches.
- ❖ no statues of Christ, the Virgin Mary or the saints.
- ❖ no benches or pews to sit on (the worshippers are obliged to stand unless they are old or ill - notice that there are several chairs by the walls).
- ❖ you cannot see the altar as you can in western churches.
- ❖ there is no organ or any other kind of musical instrument because in an Orthodox church the only music you will hear is that created by the human voice. (For music lovers Orthodox masses are really something to be experienced, whatever your religious beliefs).

You will certainly be immediately struck by the iconostasis immediately in front of you. This is the wooden screen with doors in the centre. This screen separates the worshippers from the altar and is covered with icons and for most of the time only the priests are allowed to pass through its doors.