

Saint Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia the Wonderworker (in the world Eleutherius), was born in the year 1292 (or according to another source, 1304) at Moscow into the family of the noble Theodore Byakont, a descendant of the Chernigov princely line. The Lord revealed to the future saint his lofty destiny from early childhood. At twelve years of age Eleutherius went to a field and set nets to ensnare birds. He dozed off and suddenly he heard a voice: “Alexis! Why do you toil in vain? You are to be a catcher of people.” From this day on the boy abandoned childish games and spent much time in solitude. He frequently visited church, and when he was fifteen he decided to become a monk. In 1320, he entered Moscow’s Theophany monastery, where he spent more than twelve years in strict monastic struggles. The renowned ascetics of the monastery, the Elders Gerontius and Saint Stephen (July 14), brother of Saint Sergius of Radonezh, were guides for him and his companions.

Metropolitan Theognostus, who had taken notice of the virtuous life and spiritual gifts of Saint Alexis, bade the future saint to leave the monastery and manage the ecclesiastical courts. The saint fulfilled this office for twelve years. Towards the end of 1350, Metropolitan Theognostus had Alexis consecrated as Bishop of Vladimir. After the death of the metropolitan, he became his successor in the year 1354. During this period the Russian Church was torn by great rifts and quarrels, in part because of the pretensions of Metropolitan Romanus of Lithuania and Volhynia. In 1356, in order to put an end to the troubles and disturbances, the saint went to Constantinople to the Ecumenical Patriarch. Patriarch Callistus gave Saint Alexis the right to both be called and to consider himself Archbishop of Kiev and Great Russia with the title, “All-Venerable Metropolitan and Exarch.” On the return journey, during a storm at sea, the ship was in danger of shipwreck. Saint Alexis prayed and vowed to build a temple to the saint of that day on which the ship should come to shore. The storm subsided, and the ship arrived on August 16. Moscow delightedly came out to meet the saint. In spite of problems on every side, Saint Alexis devoted himself to his flock: he appointed bishops, he established cenobitic monasteries (on the model of the Trinity Lavra, founded by Saint Sergius), and he brought order to Russian relations with the Khans of the Horde. The saint journeyed more than once to the Golden Horde. In 1357 the Khan told the Great Prince that the saint should come to him and heal the blindness of Taidulla, his wife.

“This is beyond my powers,” said Saint Alexis, “but I believe that God, Who gave sight to the blind, will also aid me.” Through his prayer, and after being sprinkled with holy water, the wife of the Khan was healed. When Great Prince Ioann died, his young son Demetrius (the future saint), still a minor, was taken under the saint’s guardianship. The holy bishop had much toil in reconciling and appeasing princes obstinately refusing to accept the authority of Moscow. Nor did the metropolitan neglect the work of organizing new monasteries. In 1361 he founded the Icon of the Savior Not-Made-by-Hands monastery at the Yauza in Moscow (Andronikov, the disciple of Saint Sergius, was the first igumen of the monastery), fulfilling the vow he had made on his return journey from Constantinople, when the ship was in danger. He also founded the Chudov monastery in the Moscow Kremlin. Ancient monasteries were restored: the Annunciation monastery at Nizhni-Novgorod, and Saints Constantine and Helen at Vladimir. In 1361 a women’s cenobitic monastery was named for him (the Alekseev). Saint Alexis reached the advanced age of seventy-eight, having spent twenty-four years upon the metropolitan cathedra. He reposed on February 12, 1378 and was buried in accord with his last wishes at the Chudov monastery. His relics were uncovered in a miraculous manner fifty years later, after which the memory of the great holy hierarch and man of prayer began to be celebrated. (OCA Lives of the Saints)