

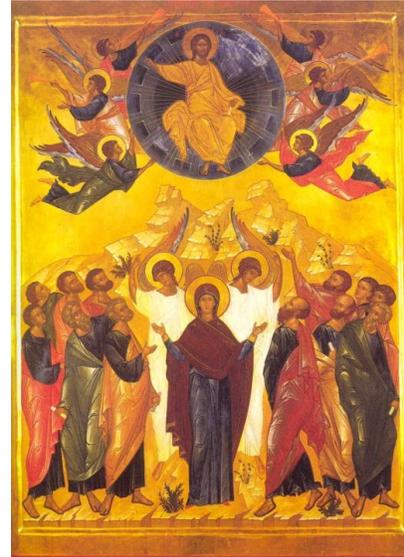
My Beloved Ones,

***ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!** Christ is Risen!*

This coming Wednesday, the Orthodox Church will conclude the 40 day Paschal period. We shall cease singing Christos Anesti and we shall replace the Epitaphios—which has remained on the Holy Altar as a sign of the burial cloth in the empty tomb—until next year.

However, this “leave-taking” of Pascha is not a somber affair, for just as Christ’s sacrifice and Resurrection were necessary to redeem humanity’s fallen nature, so too was it necessary for him to ascend to His father. As He told His disciples, *“In my Father’s house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:1).

Therefore, though Christ departs from this earth on this coming Thursday’s feast of the Ascension, He leaves His disciples with a sense of anticipation, and a mission.



First, Christ entrusts the growth of His Church to the disciples, but He does not abandon them. Indeed, He not only promises to always be with them and us, but instructs them to remain in Jerusalem until the day when the Paraclete, the Helper, arrives. In this way, the Feast of Ascension points us toward the Feast of Pentecost, ten days later.

However, just as all the events of the liturgical calendar take place in the present, perhaps the most important aspect of the Ascension is the Great Commission. Christ’s final earthly instruction to His disciples is not some historical event, but a present reality. As followers of Christ and His Church, we too are asked to be *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”* (Matthew 28:19-20)

In this modern era, where so much of the world has already encountered or been touched by Christianity, it would be easy to dismiss our Lord’s exhortation as a command that has been fulfilled. However, our understanding of Christ and His Church is not a static one, but dynamic. We are not asked to live out our faith as a private matter, but to demonstrate the will and love of Christ in every word and action we undertake. In this way, we can witness our faith in the Risen and Ascended Christ to all our neighbors, whether Christian or otherwise.

In the Ascension account contained in the *Acts of the Apostles*, after Jesus has been taken up, the amazed disciples are greeted by two men in white robes who ask, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11). The Evangelist does his utmost to remind us that Christ will return in all His power and glory, solidifying our need to be vigilant and fulfill the Evangelistic Commission.

I shall take the opportunity to wish you once more a resounding ***ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!*** as well as a blessed Feast of the Ascension.

**+ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta