

My Beloved Ones,

On this the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent, our Church encourages us to celebrate St. John Climacus, whose work The Ladder of Divine Ascent demonstrates each of “the steps” necessary to achieve *theosis*. However, this Sunday is a celebration of another special feast, the Annunciation. In this meeting of the Virgin Mary and Archangel Gabriel, we see the model of how a human being accepts the will of God—before us, during our lifetime, and after us, until the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For this reason, this Sunday, the Church forgoes the usual reading of the Fifth Sunday, in order to focus on the Gospel of the Annunciation, and on the figure of our Lady, the Ever-Virgin Mary. Through her demonstration of humility, she gives her whole life to her Creator, in devotion and affection. The Fathers of our Church stress that the reconciliation between humanity and God was made possible through the Virgin Mary, who accepted to become the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. Without her, the Son could never have taken on our flesh, and we would not have the opportunity achieve *theosis*, and be raised up with Him.

Her willingness, her loving sacrifice, is not only beyond human understanding, but even the understanding of the angels and archangels. By giving the *Logos* flesh, she becomes a witness to the first steps of the world’s salvation. Of course the person of the Theotokos is someone who cannot be separated from her humanity, for she is the most pure example of a human who has ever been offered to God. The Troparion of Christmas proclaims, “...*The angels offer Thee a hymn; the heavens a star; the earth, its cave... and we offer Thee the Theotokos...*” Nine months before, the Appolytikion of the Annunciation also reinforces this message: “*Today marks the crowning of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery before all ages. For the Son of God becomes the son of the Virgin, and Gabriel proclaims the grace. Wherefore, we also cry out with him, ‘Hail, O full of grace, the Lord is with you.’*”

The Archangel announces this Good News, that “...*you will conceive in your womb and bear a son...He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High...and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end*” (Luke 1:31-33) The Virgin Mary does not remain silent, but gives an answer; which comes from a place of deep humility: “*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38). This is why the Fathers of our Church call Mary “The Second Eve.” Just as Christ is “the Second Adam” for faithfully obeying the Will of His Father, Mary’s humble acceptance was the opposite of Eve’s disobedience. The first Eve brought her descendants death, but the Second Eve, the Virgin Mary, brings us new life. Through the deep devotion and the obedience of the Ever-Virgin Mary, and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the doors of Paradise are once again open, and all of creation is given the opportunity to reconcile ourselves to God.

For the Hellenes, this Sunday, March 25<sup>th</sup> also marks a special historical event, where in 1821, after 400 years of slavery under the Ottoman Turks, the Greeks declared their independence, beginning the Revolution in the city of Kalavryta. From there the, Revolution spread out from the Peloponnese, into the cities and villages; from across the sea of Corinth and into southern Greece. The fathers of the modern nation of Greece did not choose this date randomly, but did so with the fear of God, believing in the power and protection of the Panagia. May we, as free Greek-Americans, call upon the Virgin Mary to intercede on our behalf, in the same spirit of humility and devotion she demonstrated to all humankind.

**+ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta

