

My Beloved Ones,

This past January, I was blessed to spend time with a group of pilgrims as we traveled to the Holy Land. Of the many sacred places we were able to visit, one of the most spiritually uplifting experiences was celebrating the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Tomb of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Several months before, in November of 2017, there was a momentous discovery during the site's ongoing restoration, when the stone of the tomb was indeed confirmed to have originated in the 4th Century, when St. Constantine the Great built the shrine that now surrounds the burial bed of our Lord.

While not all of us have yet had the opportunity to venerate the place in which our Lord rested after His Passion and Crucifixion, each and every one of us has experienced, and will soon, once again experience the great joy that is the Resurrection of Christ. Together, we will gather with our families and fellow parishioners, and we shall relive the experience of His disciples. As they dwelt in darkness on that great Sabbath, so will all the lights of our churches be extinguished. Like those faithful myrrh-bearing women, we too have come to venerate the body of our Lord. And yet, what do we find instead?

As the women are greeted by the joyous proclamations of the Angel, so we who wait in darkness receive the Light which is eternal and cannot be dimmed even by death. As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, *“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”* We know, as St. John Chrysostom writes in his Paschal Homily, that we should *“let no one fear death, for the Saviour's death has set us free.”*

This is my most fervent wish for all of you, my dear children: that no matter where you are—whether in our God-Protected Metropolis of Atlanta or elsewhere—your hearts be opened to experiencing the miracle of the Resurrection with the same joy and awe that the disciples felt, as if living it for the very first time. Only with this joy, this forgiveness, this love for all living things, shall we truly be able to appreciate the miraculous deed the Lord undertook to reconcile His creation to our Father. I therefore send you that most beautiful greeting of all:

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ! Christ is Risen!

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta

