



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy as we approach the end of the first week of Great Lent! In the coming days, we will observe two important celebrations: the Sunday of Orthodoxy, and on Monday March 25th, the Annunciation to the Theotokos.

From the beginning of creation God said, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*” (Genesis 1:26). Therefore, it is understandable that fallen Man would want the ways and means to see the divine, after we had to leave Paradise. Though the Second Commandment (“*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image*” [Exodus 20:4]) is what gives many Christians the mistaken belief that icons are idols, this year’s closeness of the Sunday of Orthodoxy & the Annunciation shows something important about icons and the Incarnation of Christ. When our Ever-Virgin Mary consented to become the Mother of God, she played an important part in fulfilling this spiritual desire. When she said yes

to God through the Archangel Gabriel, this meant that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity would walk & talk, would live & breathe among His people as the greatest of all living icons.

In this week’s Gospel, St. John writes of a meeting between Christ, His Disciple Philip, & Philip’s friend, Nathanael, from Cana in Galilee. Nathanael knew the Scriptures, and so when Philip told him, “*We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*” (John 1:45). Nathanael knew that the Messiah was to come from David’s city, Bethlehem. Disbelieving, he asked Philip, “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” Philip said to him, “*Come and see*” (John 1:46). When Philip brought Nathanael, Jesus greeted Him, “*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*” (John 1:47) Nathanael was curious: how could Jesus know Him, and what he was like?

Our Lord revealed Himself as the Son of God, when He told Nathanael, “*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you*” (John 1:48). Nathanael was astonished that Christ saw him. and it is for this reason that he proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel*” (John 1:49). Jesus then explained that “*Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man*” (John 1:51).

I pray that each of you shall join in this Sunday of Orthodoxy by bringing an icon of your patron, and proclaiming that icons are tools to teach the Faith, way to venerate our patron saints, and most of all, a means to witness our Lord and Savior in this earthly life. Offering proper veneration to God, as when our beloved Theotokos met Gabriel, we too may one day be blessed enough to see “*...the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man*’.”

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta