

My Beloved Ones,

This coming Tuesday we are blessed to celebrate another Ecclesiastical New Year. Even in these unique circumstances of the current pandemic, we should continue to offer thanks to Almighty God for safeguarding us to see this new year.

Although the observance of September 1<sup>st</sup> as the Ecclesiastical New Year is kept by our Ecumenical Patriarchate, many Orthodox Christians might wonder ‘why this date?’ Why not January 1<sup>st</sup>?

The tradition begins with the Roman Emperors, who from the time of Caesar Augustus in 3 BC instituted a new yearly tax to be paid for a period of fifteen years (this was also the length of time for a Roman soldier to serve in the army). This order or, in Latin, “indiction” was proclaimed before every winter season.

After the Fall of the City in 1453, our Ecumenical Patriarch continued the Constantinopolitan tradition, writing the Indiction on September 1<sup>st</sup>, marking the harvest, and so, the passing of the old year into the preparation for the new. (The later Papal Indiction made the Western New Year, January 1<sup>st</sup>, but September 1<sup>st</sup> continues to be our Ecclesiastical marker.)

On a liturgical level, the Church honors this date with a Gospel reading that is full of salvific meaning. Our Lord enters the Synagogue at Nazareth, and taking the scroll of Isaiah he reads the prophecy that concerns Himself: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”* (Luke 4:18-19)

My beloved, even amid difficulties and struggles, we must never forget that the reality of the Church means that all our feasts and celebrations are taking place *now*, even as they have already historically happened. This means that on September 1<sup>st</sup>, we shall once again experience the announcement that this is now *“...the year of the Lord's favor.”* Even if this calendar year does not seem favorable to our human understanding, we should use this opportunity as a new beginning: maintaining a positive, grateful spirit, continuing to pray to God not only *“For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth”*, but also for *“for peaceful times”*.

**+ALEXIOS**

Metropolitan of Atlanta

