

My Beloved Ones,

This coming Sunday, we are blessed to commemorate a feast which is especially important to the life of our Metropolis.

During the Iconoclastic period, in the year 829, a devout young nobleman resisted his Emperor Theophilos's command to destroy the Holy Images by taking into safety an Icon of the Theotokos painted by St. Luke the Evangelist. Understanding the danger in which he had placed himself and the Icon, he fled from the city of Proussa (which is near Constantinople) to Greece, where the Iconoclast persecutions were not as severe as they were in the Imperial City.

However, in spite of his devotion, the young man was sorrowful when he lost the icon as he came near the city of Gallipoli, believing that, *"The Lady Theotokos left me because of my sins."* However, the young man was not going to turn back and live among the Iconoclasts. Instead, he settled and lived in Peloponnese.



Time passed, and one day the nobleman was surprised to learn of a miracle which had taken place in Aitola. This small region of Greece was so mountainous that only a few shepherds were able to live in the caves, though it was a safe space for those supporters of Icons to hide during times of persecution. This unlivable place seemed unlikely to contain a miracle, and yet a child of one of the shepherds reported being woken in the night by beautiful chanting as he slept near his father's flock. He saw light coming from one of the caves, and as he entered, he heard both the chanting, and saw the great light. Afraid, he ran to his father, who dismissed his talk as imaginary, telling his son not to fear things that were not real. The next night however, the young boy took his father to the same cave, where both saw the vision. Afraid to enter, the shepherd brought more to confirm the vision the next night. Together, they entered the cave and found the Icon of the Theotokos, which they venerated, and protected.

Learning of this great miracle, the young nobleman hurried to see the Icon he had thought lost. Venerating it, he gave great gifts to the shepherds, and then arranged to resume his journey with the Icon. The shepherds were saddened to be deprived of the Icon, but the nobleman explained that not only did he give them gifts to repay them, but this area was not easily accessible to pilgrims. On his journey, the nobleman and his party became tired, and so stopped to rest. On waking and discovering that the Icon had disappeared, he suspected the pilgrims had come and stolen it as he slept. Turning back, and coming to a river, the young man was the only member of his party to hear a voice tell him, *"Oh young man, be saved, go in peace and do not toil anymore. I am pleased*

*to remain here in this rugged wilderness with the shepherds and peasants and not to be in the cities with people who preach heresies: and if you wish to stay with me come where you had found me. This will be good for you.”*

Obedient to our Lady, the nobleman dismissed his servants, gave away all his possessions, and, together with the one servant who chose to remain, established a chapel in the cave. The nobleman was tonsured with the name of Demetrios, and his former servant became Timothy. Demetrios built a cell away from the chapel to have peace from the pilgrims who came to venerate the Icon, and eventually, he reposed in the cave. After his burial, his Disciple Timothy began the Monastery of the Panagia Prousa (or Prousiotissa), which, even one thousand years later, still welcomes pilgrims to the cave on the days between the Dormition (the 15<sup>th</sup>) & the feast of Panagia Prousiotissa (the 22<sup>nd</sup>).

Veneration of this miracle-working icon was passed through the generations, and so our Metropolis was blessed, not only to name one of its five monasteries after the Icon of Panagia Prousiotissa, but also to receive one of the only copies of the Holy Icon, which now resides in the Monastery.

In honor of this blessed day, I wish a sincere and blessed to the sisterhood of Panagia Prousiotissa, to all those pilgrims who shall visit the Monastery in North Carolina, and to all those who hold the Icon in their hearts as a symbol of pride and faith.

**+ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta