



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy as we have begun the Lenten period which helps us on our journey toward the manger in Bethlehem and the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Having begun the Fast only a few days ago (November 15th), it is significant that within a week we celebrate the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple (November 21st). Its significance is understood because all our hopes can be found in this feast: for if Sts. Joachim and Anna had not dedicated their daughter Mary to the Temple, the Word of God could never have become incarnate, and dwelt among humanity. When we commemorate the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, we are celebrating the beginning of our salvation, as the Apolytikion of the Feast proclaims: *“Today is the prelude of God's pleasure and the proclamation of man's salvation. The Virgin is clearly made manifest in the temple of God and foretells Christ to all.”*

For example, we only have to look at the scriptural readings for Vespers of the Feast, to see how the prophecies of God's incarnation are fulfilled: *“Then the man brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one facing east, and it was shut. The Lord said to me, ‘This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered through it. The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the Lord...’”* (Ezekiel 44:1-3) Indeed, though many young women were dedicated to the Temple in Jerusalem, we can understand that this feast commemorates a great spiritual reality, rather than a simple historical event. Now, our Lady has become the Temple wherein only our Lord dwells, and we can understand that so many things—the sanctuary gate, the Ark of the Covenant, even the Burning Bush—were types of the Virgin Mary, showing us how God would save us, and reconcile us to Him.

Therefore, my beloved spiritual children, may we celebrate this as a feast of Thanksgiving: first, to God, who loves us and wants us to be saved; then, to Saints Joachim and Anna for offering their greatest gift to the Lord; and of course, to our Theotokos and Ever-Virgin, who lived by her parents' example, and said “Yes” to God, restoring Eve's fallen humanity.

May we use this Feast to examine our own hearts, asking how we too can live be their examples, whether through acts of charity, or even simple love and kindness. Only when we seek to emulate the sacrificial spirits of Joachim & Anna, and the Theotokos, will we truly be worthy to be called children of God ourselves.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta