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## Happy (Ecclesiastical) New Year! (Evangelos Sotiropoulos, political scientist, freelance columnist)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



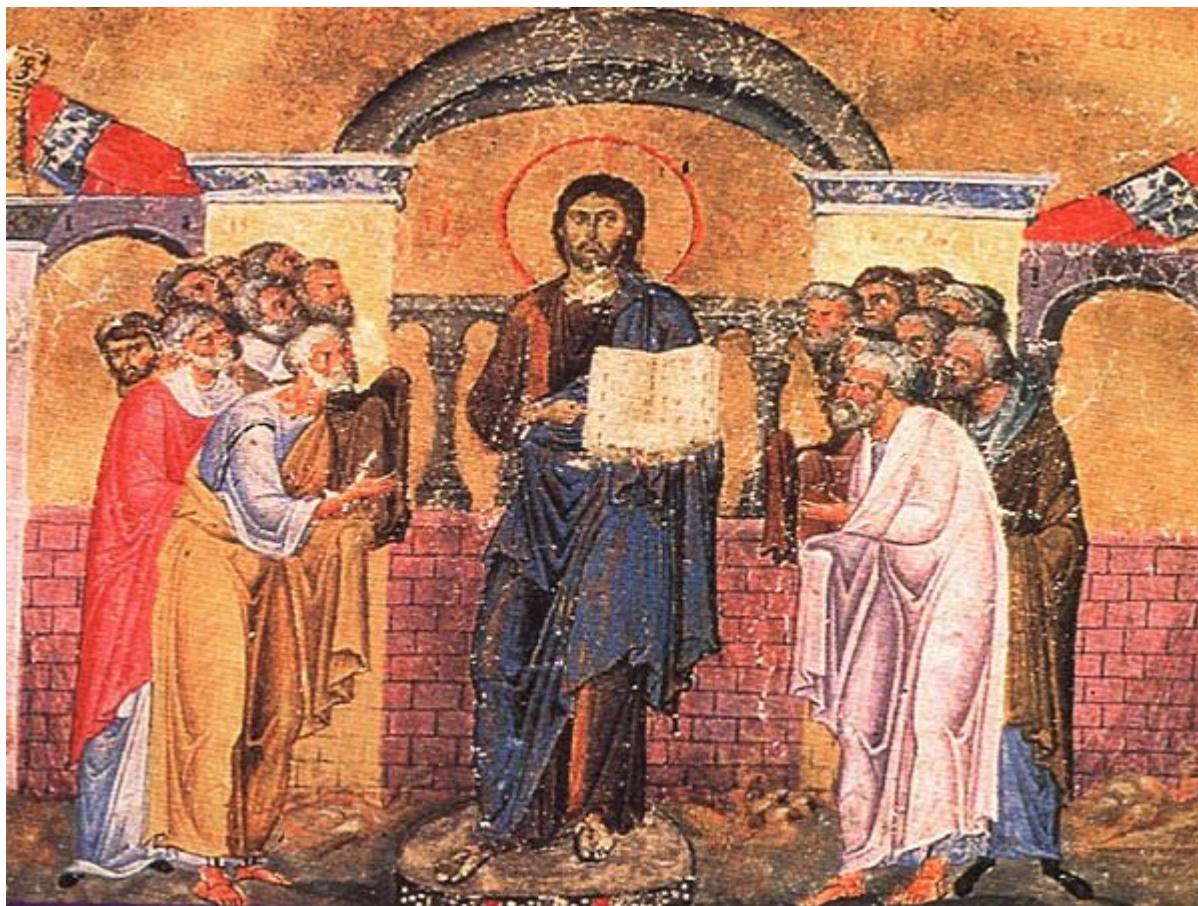
On September 1st, the Orthodox Church commemorates the Beginning of the Indiction, that is, the Ecclesiastical New Year.

Before the Greek (or Constantinopolitan) Indiction was introduced by St. Constantine the Great in 312 and decreed by the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (325 A.D.), the day of Indiction varied based on local tradition.

The word *Indiction* is birthed from the Latin word meaning *to proclaim*. It established the annual land tax to support the needs of the empire and its armed forces and was issued for 15-year cycles.

It was the month of September when the harvest was gathered and thanksgiving offered to God (see Exodus 23:16), a festival connected to the Saviour's entry into the synagogue in Nazareth whose passage from the Gospel of St. Luke (4:16-22) is read on September 1st.

It was also the month of September when St. Constantine, through the power of the Holy Cross, defeated Maxentius and granted Christians freedom of confession.



Today, the month of September continues to be the time of harvest for farmers, in addition to ushering in the start of the school year.

The Biblical-based traditions and Church customs regarding the Ecclesiastical New Year continue to be honoured, especially by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Each year, on September 1st, members of the [Holy and Sacred Synod](#), led by the Ecumenical Patriarch (currently His All-Holiness, Bartholomew), gather at the Patriarchal Church of St. George the Great Martyr in the Phanar to concelebrate the Divine Liturgy, venerate the Holy Panagia Pammakaristos Icon and proclaim the New Year. They also sign the Patriarchal and Synodal *Tome for the Indictus*, an ancient practice dating back to the time of Constantine the Great (+337).

More recently, the entire Orthodox Church, led by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, has declared September 1st as a day of prayer for the preservation of God's creation and the protection of the natural environment.

The ecclesiastical calendar, and in particular the Orthodox Church's cycle of feasts, is rich and wondrous.

For starters, the liturgical books used are a treasure of hymns and prayers

composed by the Fathers of the Church which sustain the annual cycle of feasts, as well as the daily liturgical services. Some of them are well known, like the Epistle and, of course, Gospel Book, but all of them, such as the Psalter, Horologion and Triodion, are sacred and without comparability in all of Christendom.

The Orthodox commemoration and celebration of saints is also without parallel.

To begin with, each day of the week has been assigned a special theme, beginning, naturally, with the Lord's Day:

- **Sunday:** *Glorious Resurrection of Christ*
- **Monday:** *Angelic Powers*
- **Tuesday:** *Holy and Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John*
- **Wednesday:** *Holy Cross and the Mother of God*
- **Thursday:** *Holy Apostles and Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra*
- **Friday:** *Holy Cross*
- **Saturday:** *All the Saints and Souls of the Departed*

The Church has also identified the [Twelve Great Feasts](#) (*Dodekaorton*, in Greek) with Pascha being first without equal.

The day-to-day riches of the ecclesiastical calendar, which are not well known outside Orthodoxy, are the celebrations of saints, be they apostles, prophets, martyrs, hierarchs or monastics. Each day, the Church commemorates the memory and lives of different saints, as catalogued and described in the *Synaxaristes*, which abound with examples of spirituality and virtue such as ceaseless prayer, fasting, humility, patient endurance, sacrifice, chastity and martyrdom, all of them woven together by love, the greatest of virtues: love for man and love for Christ.

Saints provide the faithful courage and hope; their lives serve as guideposts with directions and instructions for believers. The martyrs of the Church — beginning with the first male (St. Stephen the Archdeacon, celebrated December 27) and the first female (St. Thekla, celebrated September 24) martyrs, to the Christians martyred throughout the Middle East and across the world each and every day — hold a particular honour and serve as a reminder that the material goods of the earth are temporary and that this life is fleeting, while the life to come is eternal.

The daily cycle of feasts connect us to all the saints, to the Ever-Virgin Mary and above all, to Jesus Christ our God. The Ecclesiastical New Year reminds us to recalibrate our lives and centre our schedules as much as possible around the Church for, as St. Cyprian the Hieromartyr (+258) says, "A person cannot have God

as his Father if he does not have the Church as his Mother.”

Source: Huffington Post