Although Easter Sunday is not until April 16, perhaps the most important moment in this year’s Christian calendar is Wednesday, March 22.

For this is the day on which the restored Edicule -- the structure housing the Tomb of Christ -- was opened to the public with a celebration that included key representatives of both the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The celebration does not commemorate a religious or spiritual event, but an achievement of engineering, architectural restoration and art historical conservation.

The restoration was undertaken not by celibate priests or monks, but by a team of academics, scientists and specially trained engineers and construction workers who have worked diligently for the last year to complete the work before this Easter. The team was led by Antonia Moropoulou and came from the National Technical University of Athens, where she is the vice rector of academic affairs and an expert in the restoration of ancient monuments.

The cost of the project was more than $4 million and was funded by people and organizations from different religious and nonreligious backgrounds. The New York-based World Monuments Fund (WMF) took the lead, but money was donated by King Abdullah of Jordan and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (both Muslims); each of the three Christian churches who control the tomb -- Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Armenian Orthodox -- as well as WMF Trustee Mica Ertegun, the widow of the founder of Atlantic Records.

To state the point bluntly, the restoration of the Edicule over Jesus’ tomb came about through the cooperative efforts of Christians, Muslims, and secular organizations and individuals. And, the participation of all was necessary for its successful completion.

The present Church of the Holy Sepulchre goes back to the Crusader church built in the 12th century. The Edicule over Christ’s tomb is known from that time, although it was rebuilt several times since then.

The present Edicule was built in 1810, incorporating remains from the previous one that had been damaged in a fire in 1808. It was fine for about a century and was then damaged by an earthquake. It became increasingly unsafe. When the three churches in charge of it could not agree upon repairs, the British Mandate government stepped in and erected a structure of metal girders and cables around it to prevent it from falling down. It was quite ugly, but allowed pilgrims to continue to enter the tomb’s shrine within the Edicule.

And, so, the Edicule remained. Even when the entire Church of the Holy Sepulchre underwent restoration a decade ago, the Edicule remained untouched. But, when the Israel Antiquities Authority ordered it temporarily closed in 2015 for safety reasons, something had to be done to protect the worshippers.

That was when the current project got underway. After a study of the structure in March 2016, work began that May and was announced as completed just this past week.

Pilgrims primarily concern themselves with spiritual matters, but someone needs to ensure their physical safety. It took international and multireligious cooperation to ensure that. And, in the end, it was mundane engineering and scientific expertise that restored this site of holiness and prayer to its former, safe magnificence.