

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Lord has ascended to where He was before. As the Psalmist prophesied, so is it fulfilled: “The Lord said to My Lord, sit Thou at my Right Hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.” St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke record the Lord using these Words of David to manifest His Divinity to the Pharisees. David’s Son could only be David’s Lord if He were God Enfleshed. And St. Peter used the same Words of the Psalmist in his Pentecost sermon to prove that not David, but David’s Son and David’s Lord, Jesus Christ, had ascended into heaven.

This evening we find ourselves a bit like the Apostles, staring up into heaven, unable to fully understand the Mystery and miracle of the Ascension of our Lord. St. Mark and St. Luke describe it for us. St. Luke places the Ascension near Bethany outside of Jerusalem, recording that our Lord ascended while He lifted up His hands and blessed the Eleven.

Although the Lord had foretold it, St. Luke’s account written in the Book of Acts makes it clear that at the Ascension, the Eleven weren’t sure what to do. Truth be told, neither are we. We celebrate the miracle. We believe it. We confess it. We gather this night to commemorate it, and to receive the Gifts of our Ascended Lord, who is at the Right Hand of God the Father, but with us here in His Word and Sacraments.

Still we find ourselves staring up into heaven, a bit bewildered. And in one way the Christian life is lived out in exactly that way: eyes fixed on heaven, awaiting the promised return of our Lord. For just as in His resurrection we are promised our resurrection, with His coming in glory comes the Judgment, and our ascension to be with Him where He is. That He has promised.

The Lord Himself taught the Eleven that while He was leaving, they were not to leave. They were to wait in Jerusalem for the Promise of the Father that they had heard from Him. That Promise was not the Ascension, but rather the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. So the Ascension cannot be separated from Pentecost, for if the Son hadn’t ascended the Comforter could not have come. Nor can the Ascension be separated from the Resurrection, for it must be the Risen Incarnate Lord, David’s Son and David’s Lord, who ascends.

While we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord as a unique event, and it is a unique event, unique in all time and eternity, perhaps it would be more accurate to think about His Ascension as one miracle interwoven with several others, in all of them God the Son working for our salvation.

The Ascension, like the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection, are individual parts of one great Event: the Christ Event. And it is because of the Christ Event that the Holy Spirit comes. So we find ourselves, as His Church, enveloped in Christ and His Gifts, still staring up into heaven awaiting our Lord.

The physician Evangelist details the continuum of Christ’s miraculous redemption of man in this way: he recounts the acts and teachings of our Lord until the day of His Ascension, which occurred after He had given commands by the Holy Spirit to His Apostles, to whom He had presented Himself alive by many proofs, after His sufferings.

The Christ Event is comprised of inseparable, individual, unique, miraculous acts in a salvific stream of Divine Mysteries that transcend our understanding, and yet reconcile us to God. Man is time-bound, living out his few bitter years in a serial chronology. God is eternal, not bound to time, His salvific acts extending from before the beginning, into the world without end. The Ascension isn't an end or an event unto itself. It is a miraculous, pivotal event in a continuum that leads to eternity, that leads each of us who believe in Him to eternity with Him.

We employ anthropomorphisms to contextualize Divine Mysteries. We think of the Baptism of our Lord as His Installation, the Holy Spirit lighting and remaining on the Christ, the Anointed One, as He begins His "earthly ministry". So we think of the Ascension as His Coronation, the session of God the Son at the Right Hand of God the Father, His State of Humiliation fulfilled, the Lord crowned with many crowns, the Lamb now upon His throne, His State of Exaltation marked for eternity by His retaking of His rightful Divine Throne.

So the eleven stood drop-jawed staring up into heaven at an eternal Mystery: the Christ was taken up into heaven. Just as Mary was greeted at the empty tomb by two angels who explained to her what the Lord had done; so at the Ascension, to quell their confusion, two angelic figures appeared to explain to them what their Lord had done, and what He would do.

But as we struggle to see through our fleshly veils into the Divine Truths of Christ's Ascension, the Scriptures remind us that the Ascension is more than a doctrinal, dogmatic Truth, although it is that. It is also quite personal, personal for you who believe in Him. For this night we celebrate the Truth that there is a Man in heaven, a Man who took on Flesh to redeem flesh, a Man who died that your sins be forgiven, a Man who conquered death to give you life, a Man who ascended into heaven to reign over heaven and earth, a Man who ascended into heaven to open heaven to you.

So see with the eyes of faith. The Lord is ascended. See, the Conqueror mounts in triumph, see the King in Royal State. Your Lord is victorious. Your Lord reigns. Your Lord has redeemed you, He has justified you, He has sanctified you, and reigning above He takes His rightful place also on bread and wine and makes Himself your Meal. So take and eat, take and drink, and join the Apostolic Church in praying *Marana Tha*, "Come, Lord", for He has promised to take you to be with Him where He is.

The candle is extinguished, but the Light of Christ still enlightens the world.

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