

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

In his dream, the Patriarch Jacob saw a ladder set up on earth, the top of which reached heaven. On it he saw the holy angels ascending and descending. Over a millennium later, the true Israel, God's Son, Mary's Son, said to Nathaniel "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Jesus is Jacob's Ladder, the One who bridges heaven and earth.

So He rebuked the Pharisees, saying "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world." And so He taught His disciples "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?" And so He taught Pilate "My kingdom is not of this world." His teaching is clear. In Christ heaven descended to earth.

But fallen men could not understand. They saw Him only according to His Human Nature, as a Nazarene, the place from which no good can come. They saw Him as Joseph the carpenter's son. They rebuked and reviled Him. They mocked Him and sought to kill Him. Then they crucified Him. And they placed Him in the tomb. It seemed to be in direct contradiction with His assertion "I am from above", since a hole in the ground is about as low as it gets on earth.

"A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me", the Lord taught His disciples, "because I go to the Father." Even as those Divine Words were fulfilled, they could not understand. But then He who made Himself the lowest of all creatures proved Himself to be Who He always said He is – He rose from the dead.

No man can escape death. No man can conquer death. But the One who bridges heaven and earth, the One upon whom the holy angels ascend and descend, the One from above who humbled Himself to be born from below, the One whose Kingdom is not of this world shattered the bonds of death that envelop this world.

And then, forty days later, the One who fasted in the desert for forty days, the One who led Israel in the desert for forty years, did as He promised. Again a little while and they saw Him, and then He went to the Father. Like Enoch and Elijah, He was taken up. But unlike Enoch and Elijah, He was not a creature. He was begotten, not made. He is eternal. There was not when He was not. He was taken up to the place where He was before. His Ascension was for Him a homecoming. His Word is true. He is Who He always said He is – He is God. His rightful place is in heaven.

His throne is in the center of that celestial court. He is surrounded no longer by sinners and thieves and harlots and those seeking to take His life. He is surrounded by the holy angels, the archangels, the cherubim and seraphim, by the four living creatures, by the 24 elders, and by the gleaming white host of heaven that shines with His glory and with His righteousness.

He is seated at the Right Hand of the Father, for all time and eternity, the Living God of heaven and earth. As the sons of Korah sang in joy a millennium before "God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet!"

St. Luke testifies that you may believe. The Apostles watched Him being taken up into the clouds. What they could not see was His Divine coronation, the rejoicing of heaven, the unending joy of the Divine Service of the multitudes in white, as the Son of God filled again the throne rightly His. He ascended into heaven, as you so often confess. And now, as He prophesied, for a little while, you do not see Him. So tonight the Paschal Candle is dark.

You are not from above. You are from below. Your first father was the dust man, the one sentenced to return to the dust. The sinlessness of man, man's holiness, man's access to God, was forfeited because man, who was already like God, sinfully desired to be god. So your works, your words, your thoughts, your plotting and your desires, have not been holy. They have been fallen. They have been expressions of the darkness of your heart, the brokenness of your soul. They are from below.

You have been, as the Prophet confessed, a man of unclean lips from the midst of a people of unclean lips. And the defilement of your lips has a source – the sinfulness of your heart. When the Lord appeared to the Eleven as they sat at table, He upbraided them – He rebuked them – for their unbelief and their hardness of heart. He chastised them for not believing the report of those who had seen Him on the Day of His Resurrection.

But He died for them. He died for their unbelief and their hardness of heart. And He died for you. He died for your unbelief and for your hardness of heart. He died to take away the curse imposed on the dust man, that the curse be broken, dying for you that you be freed from it. And He rose from the dead that you be declared just, upright, and holy before God.

St. Mark records that at His Blessed Ascension, the Lord of the Church sent the Eleven out to be His witnesses in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. He finished His Work, theirs was just beginning. He would work through them. He instituted the Pastoral Office to bring Christ to the world, to bring the benefits of His precious death and His glorious resurrection to men dead in sin. And that Saving Gospel Word, those Holy Gifts of God, have saved you by the Spirit He promised. Just as His perfect Death was for you, just as His life-giving Resurrection was for you, so too His Glorious Ascension is for you.

Christ ascended into heaven, still God and Man. There is a Man in heaven. He opened heaven to men. He opened heaven to you. As He conquered death, so believing in Him you will never die. As He rose from the dead, so you will rise on the Last Day. And as He ascended into heaven, so too will He return to usher you in His gleaming heavenly train into the very presence of God.

Now, through the Ministry the Lord instituted, He gives you Saving Gifts. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. The Body of the Incarnate, Crucified, Risen and Ascended Lord He places with Bread for you to eat. The Blood shed on Calvary He makes your drink. You taste of the heaven He has won for you, you taste of the slain, risen and ascended Lamb enthroned in celestial glory, you join your worship to the unending worship around that throne, and you have hope, dear Christian. For as He is from above, so shall you be also.

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