

6-6-19 Jesus Christ Ascends Bodily to Heaven

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Remember, we're waiting. In our prayers beginning last night, we are no longer liturgically saying Christ is risen, we are not praying the prayer, oh, heavenly king oh comforter at the beginning of our prayers, both of those occurring at the same place, but we are simply being quiet and entering into the anticipation that the apostles had between ascension and Pentecost, where in faith, Christ being gone from their midst. He was gone in the tomb for three days earlier, but now he is going to be gone for 10 days before the Holy Spirit comes, and then Christ himself separated from them until he returns again in glory.

The orthodox Christian faith keeps both the sense of missing Christ, but being thankful for the presence of the Holy Spirit, and he says plainly to the disciples, if I don't go, the Holy Spirit can't come. You should have joy that I am going for the comforter is coming to you. We also live in the anticipation of his returning to us in glory at his glorious and awesome second coming when the whole world will realize who he really is. When as it says in Revelations, the nations will mourn. They will mourn that they have rejected him for so long when he comes in glory.

The importance of the ascension is very interesting. Actually I would like all of the students in this area to stand quietly and look around the room. Look around the room at everybody that's here. Turn. Turn your bodies, I know it's embarrassing. Sit down again. Now that you're sitting down, look around the room again, same places that you looked before. Now stand up, and look around again. Look around, look at stuff. Look at stuff. Did you look at things? Sit down and look at those things again. You just ascended and descended several times, and when we ascend and we descend, it changes not our nature or who we are, but it changes our perspective on things.

Even when we go up and we stand in the choir area on the risers, or we stand over where the reliquaries are. Just that little bit of elevation change, changes the way everything looks although nothing around us has actually changed. Some of you might know that if you're in your yards and you just climb a tree a little bit and look around, everything looks different. I like going up on to the roof of my house. It's only about 40 feet higher than everything else, but everything looks different. I have a picture that was taken by someone who climbed way, way up in a tree in my yard, and it's amazing and beautiful to see everything that's familiar to me, but from a different perspective, from very high and it's different and it's beautiful.

When we ascend, it changes our relationship with everything around us even though those things themselves and us have not changed, and it's very important, you all know... when did God descend to be with us? When did he come down? When he was born as a man, remember. In a very simple way we can think about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were in heaven together and the Son descends down to be with human beings. When he is incarnate in the tummy of the mother of God, and it's like a tunnel has been created from where God is, where everything is divine, all the way down to where human beings are, so now there's a way for God to get down to be with human beings in a way he never was before.

God is everywhere, present and fills all things, but he wasn't connected to human beings his own creature that he made like he was connected to people once he became man himself, the Son, the Logos, and now by ascending back into heaven, it's like a different tunnel is created.

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This tunnel isn't for God to get down to us. This tunnel is for us to get up to heaven where God is and not only just into heaven, but to really be with God, to be connected with God in a way that could never happen before for a human being, and so the ascension is crucial.

Spiritually, the ascension is incredibly wonderful because by enduring separation from Christ physically, we are given the gift of communion with the Holy Spirit spiritually, mystically in a very unique way, in an image of the relationship of the mother of God to her son the Holy Spirit is now not only in dwelling in the Theotokos who gave birth to the Christ by in dwelling in all of us.

We are all in a certain sense impregnated with the Holy Spirit and that seed that has been put into us particularly at our Chrismation is intended to be grown in a way that is symbolically similar to Christ's growing in the womb of the Theotokos. It is to come... that seed of the Holy Spirit is to come through fruition, we are to give birth to great grace by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but our nearness to God, the fullness of our newness to God would not have been accomplished only by his descension to us and the incarnation in the mother's womb. That opened the doorway to God coming down and communing with man in an inherent way that didn't exist before, but when Christ ascends to the Father in his physical body, never separated from the Father in his divinity but now reunited with the Father in his humanity and there's never... I love pointing this out, there's never been a body in the presence of the Holy Spirit... I mean in the presence of the Holy Trinity before.

When Christ ascended to the Father and sat at his right hand, it was the first time that in the presence of the Holy Spirit, someone had sat down. I like reminding the children in the midst of the Holy Trinity, there had never been a bottom before. No one ever sat down because they didn't have a body. There was no physical body there and now there is. The angels formed the throne that Christ sits on physically because there is now a human body in the presence of the Holy Trinity and that would not have been accomplished. The fullness of our connection with God, our participation in his energies would not have been accomplished if the ascension had not occurred, and so the ascension is the end of the fulfillment of the incarnation and we give glory to God for it. We are singing last night and this morning that the ascension brings joy into our hearts because now the Holy Spirit is going to come and dwell in us individually, personally, all of us. The Holy Spirit is now able to be incarnate in every person, not just the mother of God.

In an internal, in an intimate way that was never experienced before. We do not know and witness the Holy Spirit only anymore, but he is present in us and so it brings great joy and it's a mystical and shocking revelation. It's not an accident that we read today from the gospel of Luke for the gospel reading and Acts for the epistle reading, which is the extension of the gospel of Luke. We heard two readings from Luke this morning and Luke remember is not one of the 12, he has come a little bit later. He's an apostle of the apostles, and the duty that he serves being both a physician and an artist is noticing particularly for the gentiles who will hear these stories, noticing the details of what's going on.

In the gospel of Luke which is written first we hear that Christ ascended into heaven, and then about five years later, Luke is writing the book of Acts, which is an extension of his gospel, and he realizes he needs to add some more detail. He's learned some more things since becoming an

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apostle himself, so then in the book of Acts we get the details that when Christ ascended that the apostles stood there and watched. He didn't disappear like he had before from their midst. He physically ascended, he was caught up and he gets smaller and smaller and smaller as he raises up into the sky.

Imagine something, an airplane going out of sight, a rocket ship going up until you can't see it anymore. He physically ascends and disappears from their sight and the event is so captivating, Luke has learned that not only do they stand there staring at the sky, but they are so mystified by what they've seen that in God's providence it requires angels to come and tell them to stop staring. Think about that, right. The angels appear to them and say, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here? You've got work to do. Christ has made a promise. He has revealed your apostleship. You have work to do. You have to spread the word of the gospel and you have to wait patiently for the coming of the Holy Spirit."

In your humanity, you're standing here mesmerized. It's like in the gospel reading, Luke says, when Christ appeared in their midst they were... what was the word? They were not shocked... you weren't listening either, were you? They were.. no, I don't think it was amazed. They were scared. It said they were something and they were frightened, they were startled. Thank you for your patience. They were startled and they were frightened when he appears in their midst, another detail of humanity, right. They're not waiting for him to arrive, they're not expecting for him to arrive. When he arrives, they are startled. It scares them. They're frightened. They think that a ghost is in their presence, right.

This is their humanity and in their humanity as well, when he ascends, they are stuck there, they are mesmerized by the event and the angels have to come and tell them, go on with your life. Do what you've been called to do. Escape the weakness of your humanity and profit in the strength of the gifts of God that have been given to you. We have joy in this time because spiritually, the Holy Spirit has been given to us personally and we have mystically been invited to travel up that tunnel now. The man, Jesus made his way to heaven first on our behalf and now humanity can ascend to the presence of the Holy Spirit because a man, the perfect man has gone before us.

The door has been open to us, literally, there is a path now for us to follow to come into the presence of the Holy Trinity. He has gone before us, so let's continue as Christians, as followers of Christ, to not only live in his likeness to the best of our ability, but to also ascend to the Father, following him. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.