

The Ascension of Our Lord (Observed), May 29, 2022

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*delivered by Dave Farabaugh, Elder***A Man on Heaven's Throne**

Luke 24:44–53

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

Our text, from the Gospel of Luke: **Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God** (vv 50–53).

Who expected this from the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger? After all, Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem and raised in the sticks of Galilee. His mother was young and poor. Her husband was a blue-collar worker. The best this child could expect was to follow in Joseph's footsteps, learn his trade, and then work until He died. But He didn't even have it that good. His life got tough from the moment He stepped into the Jordan River with sinners. He was tempted by the devil in every way like we are—though without sin. He lived in poverty and contempt. He suffered terribly, was mocked, whipped, spat upon, abandoned by friends, forsaken by God, crucified like a criminal, and buried in haste. He knows the worst of what it's like to be human. He knows what it's like to be frail flesh and blood. He knows the depths of sin and of life under the shadow of death. He has the scars to prove it. Jesus came down to be one of us. He's from this neck of the woods. He's our brother.

Considering where Jesus came from and what He went through, no one could have guessed where He'd end up. It wasn't the grave. He rose! But that's not even the last surprise. His disciples had no idea. They set their sights too low. Their wildest dreams were of Jesus sitting on an earthly throne, ruling Israel, and giving them a good life. But forty days after Easter, Jesus does something more. He ascends to heaven and sits on the throne of God. Why? So that He might give them—give us!—His own unending life. It's the greatest rags-to-riches story the world has ever seen, and we know the guy! We're not talking about the exaltation of a stranger. This is our Jesus. There's hope for us, because

JESUS, OUR BROTHER, IS ON HEAVEN'S THRONE!

I.

But how did He get there? Jesus “**was taken up into heaven**” (Mk 16:19) in His body right before the disciples’ eyes. As Elisha saw Elijah swept up by a chariot of fire, so the disciples saw Jesus ascend as a man. There’s nothing imaginary, pretend, or ghostly about it. First Jesus went up, then a cloud hid Him from sight and they saw Him no more. But don’t confuse what He did with the latest NASA lift off. He didn’t propel up and away like a rocket ship, to infinity and beyond. He drift off into the sky like a lost balloon, becoming smaller and smaller until it can’t be seen from earth. His ascension wasn’t like that. He didn’t go to some distant place in the galaxy or a far corner of the universe.

Instead, Jesus entered a cloud, and there He became invisible to His disciples. The cloud isn’t an interesting detail about the weather. Rather, it was in a pillar of cloud that the Lord Himself brought Israel out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land (Exod 13:17–22). The cloud was the visible sign of God’s presence among His people. Later, when the tabernacle was completed, “**the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled**” it (Exod 40:34). Jesus was taken up into that cloud. He entered as a human being into the glory of the Lord, the divine majesty, so that He now fills both heaven and earth. He went beyond the universe, no longer subject to the limits of space, and He stepped outside of time into eternity. Jesus, our brother, is now always and everywhere.

That’s why the ascension was, and still is, the furthest thing from a going away party for Jesus. There’s no farewell, no tearful “goodbye.” Instead, His last words are, “**Lo, I’m with you always, even to the end of the age**” (Mt 28:20). Afterwards, the disciples “**returned to Jerusalem with great joy**” (v 53). They weren’t being left alone. Jesus is forever with His Church. He ascended for that very purpose — that He might be with His Church in all times and in all places, from first-century Judea to twenty-first century Westminster. He ascended so that He might be here today with you, so that He might serve you with His gifts, with His forgiveness and eternal life. Though we cannot see Him, He is really present in this place. And because He’s here, “**this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven**” (Gen 29:17).

When Jesus was taken up into heaven, He was in the act of blessing the disciples. His hands were raised up. His arms were stretched out like a roof over His people or like a hen shielding her chicks with her wings. “**He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you will find refuge**” (Ps 91:4). The time since His ascension has been one long continuous benediction, a never-ending blessing. His posture towards you hasn’t changed. He still blesses you and keeps you. His face still shines on you. He still

looks at you with His favor, holds His arms above you, and gives you His peace. And so it is in the Church until He comes again, when every eye will see Him, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord of all.

II.

Jesus ascended and “**sat down at the right hand of God**” (v 16:19). We confess this in the present-tense: He *sits* at the right hand of God the Father almighty. This isn’t a physical location. It’s not as if Jesus has a permanent address somewhere in heaven. It refers to the throne and power of God. He is seated upon the cherubim. Our Lord’s seat proclaims that “**all authority in heaven and on earth**” has been given to Him (Mt 28:18). Jesus is coregent, joint ruler with the Father. “**Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns**” (Rev 19:6). He is truly Christ the King, “**far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come**” and “**all things [are] under His feet**” and He is given as “**head over all things to the Church**” (Eph 1:21–22).

And yet—this is the wonder of it all!—Jesus is still our brother according to the flesh. It’s not every day that you hear about a man sitting on heaven’s throne, much less a member of your own family. So we haven’t been left to fend for ourselves. We aren’t struggling alone here below, trying to make our own way in the fight against the world, the devil, and our sinful flesh. Instead, we have an ally, an advocate, a defender on heaven’s throne. The high King of heaven has sympathy for us. He has experienced what we’re going through. “**We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous**” (1 Jn 2:1). Because “**we don’t have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,**” we can “**with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need**” (Heb 4:15–16). As one who “**learned obedience through what He suffered,**” He can “**deal gently with the ignorant and wayward**” (Heb 5:8, 2). In Jesus, you’ve got a friend on the throne, and He’s set up a direct line for you. When we pray in His name, we can be certain that our prayers are heard and that the Lord will answer in the way that is best for us.

III.

Mark tells us that, following Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of the Father, the disciples “**went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs**” (Mk 16:20). Clearly, the Lord remains at work, in and through the words and deeds of the apostles. He’s not distant or dead. He’s alive and active. Jesus speaks in all their preaching and teaching, telling of His own death and resurrection. Jesus does the washing of regeneration and renewal through the Holy Spirit in every baptism. Jesus breaks the bread in His Church and

distributes it as His own body and blood. Jesus hears and responds to the prayers of His people. In His name and by His authority sins are forgiven, demons are driven off, and life and salvation are granted. He ascended on high to give gifts to mankind, to us, through His Word and Sacrament. He has poured out the Spirit on His Church.

We know neither the day nor the hour of His return, but we do know this: “**Now is the favorable time; now is the day of salvation**” (1 Cor 6:2). However long it takes, it’s for our benefit and for the benefit of other lost sinners. Jesus ascended not just for Himself. He ascended in order to make us partakers of His divine life. His ascension reveals your future. You aren’t defined by your past, by your birth, life, sin, shame, or death, but by the life He gives you and has for you. Our brother has gone before us. He has prepared the way. We will be taken up with Him. Behold, “**the dwelling place of God is with man**” (Rev 21:3). For now, we wait, rejoicing that Jesus is present in our midst and longing for Him to be unveiled before our eyes. Our brother’s kingdom shall have no end, and “**He shall reign forever and ever**” (Rev 11:15).

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7

Revised from a sermon preached by Pastor Gregory for the Ascension at Our Savior on May 17, 2015.