

The Ascension of Jesus Christ

And our Ascension

Luke 24:50-53, Rev 3:21

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When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (*Luke 24:50-53, NIV*)

Luke's short description of the ascension of Jesus in his gospel is enclosed by two sentences about *blessings*. Luke begins by saying that Jesus lifted up his hands to bless the disciples, and it ends with the disciples blessing God. In both cases, the same Greek word is used for *blessing*, namely the verb that had led to our word *eulogy*. That verb literally means: *to speak good words about someone*.

Jesus blesses us, and we bless God. This sounds somewhat strange in our ears: It sounds almost as if we are equals with God and Christ. We are blessing one another! Is there not a great qualitative difference between these blessings?

What is this event of the ascension? The Evangelist John, in his gospel, records a prayer of Jesus:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:
"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son

may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. (*John 17:1-5, NIV*)

This prayer shows that the ascension of Jesus was in fact his *glorification*. Jesus had glorified his Father through his life on earth, and now the Father glorified Jesus. In the prayer of Jesus (John 17:5) we see that Jesus in fact returned to the glory that He had enjoyed with the Father before he had come to earth.

Before Jesus had come to earth, as the Son of God He had lived in eternal bliss with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity enjoyed the purest fellowship, and love, and joy in His own Being.

No wonder that the disciples, when the Lord Jesus Christ blessed them, after his resurrection and while He ascended into heaven, prostrated before Him, worshipping Him. The Lord was in the process of returning to his former glory, and this led the disciples to worship. He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, who even conquered death.

Ascension Day is the day on which Jesus regained his former glory, that is, the day of his enthronement. He returned to the Father and the Holy Spirit, to fully participate in the life of the Trinity again.

But something then changed in the Trinity. The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is eternally God, but He also became a true man at Christmas, born from the Virgin Mary. After his resurrection, Jesus no longer had a physical body, but even then, the wounds could be seen in his hands and feet. And the Evangelist John, in the book of Revelation, describes Jesus in heaven, after his ascension, as ‘a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain’. (*Rev. 5:6, NIV*) When Jesus ascended to be seated on his throne, God thereby adopted *something human* into the eternal and perfect life of the Trinity.

Why did all this happen? It was for our redemption. John describes that in his letter:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. (*1 John 1:1-4, NIV*)

Listen carefully to what the Evangelist describes. He uses terms like *eternal life, fellowship, and joy*, qualities of life that are part of parcel of the inner life of the Holy Trinity. But now these life qualities have been made available to us! They have been made available to those who by faith have fellowship with God.

John unpacks this idea in the book of Revelation. He says to the church in Laodicea:

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (*Rev 3:21*, NIV)

This is the grand finale of the ascension of Jesus Christ. He returned to the throne of God, to the intimate life in the Trinity, but He also draws us up into the eternal fellowship and joy of the Holy Trinity. That is our destiny, the goal of our redemption: It is participation in the community of the Holy Trinity. And participation in that life means that He blesses us, as we bless Him. That is the ultimate love-relationship.

What does this mean for us today?

In our daily life, his ascension most certainly leads us to recognizing his Lordship. It is also clear that our Trinitarian view of God is not an add-on to the Christian faith, but it is the heart of our faith. And as God adopted humanity into himself, we also hold a very high view of each person we meet with.

Finally, I think it is clear that we must wholeheartedly reject the individualism that is so rampant in our society. God made us for eternal communion with Him; He draws us into his own communal life, and so we cannot avoid to also living in communion with one another in his Church.

The community of the saints is where we get a foretaste of life in God; in the community with one another we experience a little bit of that, as if a small down payment of what is to come.