

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✝ Jesus!

Yes, we continue to cry out the Easter acclamation — the Festival of the Ascension takes place in the midst of the Easter season, forty days after Jesus' resurrection. But in some ways, it seems better paired with Christmas. The Ascension may be thought of as the bookend to Jesus' Nativity. At Christmas we celebrate the Son of God come "down from heaven," as we say in the Nicene Creed, clothed in our flesh, "incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary." "From heaven above to earth I come," we sang in December (LSB358:1). At Jesus' ascension, the direction is the other way. Jesus is "*lifted up*," carried back up to heaven from earth. "Up through endless ranks of angels, ... To His heav'nly throne ascending," we just sang (LSB491:1).

Jesus' ascension is more important than many in the church today show. We know it because of its place in the ancient creeds — it's there in all three: "He ascended into heaven" (Apostles'), "and ascended into heaven" (Nicene), "ascended into heaven" (Athanasian). Probably more significantly, we know how important it is because the angels are there proclaiming it. They're at all the major events in Jesus' life: His birth, His resurrection, and here at His ascension — all times of great celebration!

But you might be wondering why the Ascension of our Lord is such a time of celebration. It's clear that Christmas is — the only Son of God came into our flesh to be our Savior. And so we sing in celebration: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come; Let ... heav'n and nature sing" (LSB387:1). It's clear that Easter is — Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the world, rose triumphant o'er the grave. The Father put His seal of approval on this sacrifice. Our atonement is complete. And so we sing in celebration: "Adoring praises now we bring And with the heavenly blessed sing: 'Christ has triumphed! He is living! ... All the glory, never ending' be to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But the ascension? Jesus isn't coming to be with us; He's departing and returning to heaven. It seems not like a time to celebrate; but that's just what the disciples did: after "*[Jesus] parted from them and was carried up into heaven,*" ... "*they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.*"

For the disciples finally understood. Jesus had been sent from the Father with a purpose. Jesus had now accomplished that purpose. He had done the Father's will. He had drunk the bitter cup of our sins. He had drunk it to the dregs, and He did it that His bride might taste her salvation, that her lips might taste the nectar

that flows from His wounds and fills the cup from which we now drink: forgiveness in His blood, life, and salvation.

For Jesus has accomplished His work of love — to be sure it was a work that cost Him His own life's blood, a work that required Him to pass through death and Hades for you, enduring these for you. But with this work accomplished, He returned to heaven as conqueror, not amidst whirlwind and fire, but with the clouds as His chariot. Jesus returned to heaven to take up His rightful place at the Father's right hand, crowned as King over heaven and earth.

We might be sad at such a departure except that Jesus leaves with promises on His lips. He's ascending into heaven, yet He promises to *"be with [us] always."* And so He is in His body, the Church, of which He is the head. With the promise of the Father, namely, the Spirit whom Jesus would send not just to His disciples on Pentecost, but to His Church, Jesus would actually not be so far away at all, but near in the proclamation of Him who fulfills the Scriptures, in the proclamation of Him who suffered and on the third day rose from the dead, in the proclamation of repentance in His name and the forgiveness of sins. The same promise empowers Christian baptism, fills it with forgiveness, and unites the baptized to Jesus. And, of course, with the words of Christ that the Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance, spoken over bread and wine, we participate with His body and His blood in the Holy Supper. Yes, Jesus is ever near by word and sacrament.

More than that, we have the promise proclaimed by angels that Jesus will come back one day in the way that He departed. And for us, Jesus' return in glory will not be frightful but eagerly anticipated. In that hour, the angels will flank Jesus and will trumpet the good news. Rise up from your slumber, O saints. Put on incorruption; put on immortality. Now is the consummation of your triumph in Christ's. Rise from the dead and receive your life everlasting.

This is what is signaled by Jesus' ascension, which is why the disciples rejoiced and worshiped God at His ascension and why His church gathers on this festival of His ascension — to *"shout to God with loud songs of joy ... God has gone up with a shout"* (Ps. 47:1, 5) — to proclaim *"surely Christ will come again to take us unto Himself"* (John 14:3) — to confess as those who have been given *"the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of [our] hearts enlightened,"* who *"know what is the hope to which he has called [us], what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints"* that we have awaiting us the crown of everlasting life.

So, yes, contrary to common sense, we celebrate, with Christmas and Easter, Jesus' ascension, and we will sing it yet more tonight: "Be now our joy on earth, O

Ascension, Too, Is a Time of Celebration — Luke 24:44-53

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The Ascension of our Lord

Pastor Douglas Punke

Lord, And be our future great reward. Alleluia, ... Then, throned with You forever, we Shall praise Your name eternally. Alleluia! (LSB490:5).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!