

The Ascension of Jesus

The Ascension of Jesus is celebrated this year on Sunday, May 29. It commemorates the Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven on the fortieth day after His Resurrection. The next Sunday we Celebrate Pentecost on June 5, 2022. The Feast of the Ascension ranks with Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost in the highlights of its observance among Christians. The Ascension is recorded in the Gospel of Luke chapter 24, verses 50-53, “When Jesus had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted 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.”

The account of the Ascension of Jesus like His birth, miracles, and resurrection borders on the unexplainable. A nun, Sister Marie was teaching the Biblical story of the Ascension of Jesus to a class of elementary children. Fascinated by the story, one boy in the class asked Sister Marie, “How fast was Jesus traveling when He ascended into the heavens?” Startled at first, Sister Marie caught her breath and replied, “Well, let’s see. We know that He was not traveling faster than the speed of sound, because the Bible says that He spoke words of blessing to the disciples as he parted from them.” But the young boy was more a child of the Space Age than was Sister Marie, and so he quickly calculated and then came back, saying: “Well Then, In That Case, He’s Not There Yet! because sound is slow! We laugh but wrapping our minds around where Christ has ascended is beyond our finite minds.

To understand what it means to say that Jesus Ascended into Heaven, we must understand that the truth of that language is not spatial, but spiritual. At the trial of Galileo, one of the lawyers for the defense said some profound words which it would have done us Christians well to remember over the centuries. He said, “One does not read the Bible to find out how the heavens go, but how to go to heaven.” The church and many Christians might have been saved a lot of embarrassing moments if we had only remembered that. The Biblical stories are to be read theologically, not scientifically. Theologically the Ascension of Jesus means something deeper, and something far more profound than time or space. In the Bible, UP is used metaphorically to refer to closeness to God. UP denotes majesty, glory, dominion, and power. “I saw the Lord high and lifted up,” said the prophet Isaiah when he experienced God’s presence in the Temple. Such metaphorical use of language ought not to bother us; we use language that way all the time. We say that the sun rises and sets, but in our reflective moments we know that it does no such thing. We speak of feeling up and feeling down, and we understand what we mean. What we need to ask is, what is the truth that the idea of Ascension is trying to express? And the answer is that for those early Christians, these words were a glorious affirmation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They proclaimed the good news that Christ is one with God in the governance of this universe. They were not trying to say something about cosmology, but something about Christology. They were saying that Christ is truly the Lord of the Universe. Jesus’ followers proclaimed that while the world looked far from redeemed, it had a Redeemer! Jesus now sits at the right hand of God the Father. Now, because Jesus had gone to be with God, they believed, He reigns with God over the universe.

The First Letter of Peter says that “Jesus has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.” (I Peter 3:22) That is to say that, because of the Ascension, everything that has domination over our lives is ultimately in Christ’s hands. The Ascension, you see, proclaims that Christ is Lord over everything. There is no sphere of life in which Christ has no rights and no sphere in which Christians have no responsibilities. The Ascension says, Christ is Lord of all! The world fails to know it yet; there are even parts of the church which have not yet gotten the message. “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father and will come again to judge the living and the dead!” You see God has a plan for the world. All of history will come out at Christ because history is His story. Just as the first book of the Bible says, “In the beginning, God created all things!” so the last book says, “In the end, Christ declares, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” As E. Stanley Jones once said so poetically, “All of life will end up at Jesus feet.” It will. The question is where will we be? Will we be there humbled before Him declaring Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Will we be kneeling at His feet? Are we now? When all is said and done, it’s the only place to be. For He is, indeed, King of kings and Lord of lords. He is Lord of all...and Lord of us all. I pray He is your Lord and Savior. Amen.