

**Ascension Day: Jesus enthroned**  
**Ps 47; Dan 7:9-14; Luke 24:50-53 & Acts 1:1-11**

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The ascension of our Lord Jesus was considered so important by the ancient Church that all historic creeds mention it: 'He ascended into heaven and he sits at the right hand of the Father.'

Why was it so important?

### **Up and down**

St Luke describes how Jesus took his disciples to a place outside Jerusalem, to the Mount of Olives, and from there he disappeared. Jesus was taken up before the eyes of the Apostles, and then a cloud hid him from their eyes. This vision of Jesus going up in a cloud reflects the vision that the prophet Daniel had, a few hundred years earlier.

Daniel was allowed to have a view into heaven, and while there, he saw the 'Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven' and entering into the splendid throne hall of God. This term, *Son of Man* is a term Jesus often used for himself. Daniel predicted the ascension of our Lord.

So, seeing the event from the perspective of the disciples, the Son of Man ascended upwards with the clouds. From the perspective of heaven, he came from down below – with the clouds.

Does this mean that we believe God and heaven are up there, above us? This is surely how the church for many centuries spoke about the abode of God, until the Christian scientists of Europe proved that the

earth is not the center of the universe and that heaven is not 'up there'.

The Bible speaks in terms that we, normal people, are used to. It is not a scientific handbook. The disciples saw him go up, and then he was gone, surrounded by a cloud. No wonder they spoke, in human terms, of his ascension.

Jesus returned to be with his Father. Nowadays, if we are in a philosophical mood, we might maybe use language like: 'he entered into the dimension of eternity', or 'he entered into the fourth dimension', or language of that sort.

But why should we *not* use the language used in Scripture? It describes perfectly well the impact of what happened, it has stood the test of time for 2,000 years, and it is descriptive of what the Apostles saw happen before their own eyes. They were eyewitnesses.

Jesus himself also uses this language of *going up*. In the Gospel of John (6:38) he says:

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

In the same chapter, Jesus also predicts that he will 'ascend to where he was before'. (6:62) Jesus had come down from God, and now, on Ascension Day, he returned to God in heaven.

## **Jesus is Lord**

Daniel saw in his vision that the Son of Man entered into heaven. And there, in Dan 7:14 we read:

[The Son of Man] was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This is what happened on that first Ascension Day. These are incomprehensible words. Our Lord Jesus Christ received authority, and glory, and sovereign power, and his dominion - his rule - is eternal.

We all know that words like authority, and glory, sovereign power and eternity are name-tags *for God only*. No one but God has eternal power and glory.

But at the ascension of our Lord Jesus, we see that he has exactly the same name-tags. His ascension took him back to the place where he had come from before he became a baby with Christmas. He went back into his throne, where he rules again with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, three persons.

That Jesus is truly divine can also be assessed from the words of Daniel that all peoples, nations and men of every language *worshipped* him when he entered into heaven. They worshipped the Son of Man. St John, in his book of Revelation, describes a similar vision: Read Rev 7:9-10:

I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb." (Rev 7:9-10)

Only God is to be worshiped; this is what our Bible and our religion emphatically teach. Our Lord Jesus Christ is so similar to God in nature, that he also receives worship.

St Luke, in his brief description of the ascension of Jesus in his Gospel, says that the disciples afterwards *worshiped* Jesus. They saw his divinity before their own eyes.

They then returned to Jerusalem *with great joy*. Those words of Luke about their joy are a reminder of Psalm 47:5, where we read: 'God has ascended amid shouts of joy'.

Ascension Day is an occasion for worship and joy; Jesus, our Lord and our God, rules the universe! He is in the throne! This is the first important lesson of Ascension Day. Relax a bit if life today seems chaotic and full of problems - because in the end, our Lord rules.

## **Reconciling God and Man**

For many people, the idea that God rules the universe is a thought that scares them. If God is on the throne of all there is, then we are in deep trouble, is their idea.

Many people have great fear of the idea of a God who is almighty, all-knowing and all-seeing. If he is almighty, then I am not free to do as I please. God restricts my freedom, is their worry.

Many people do not want to believe in a God in the throne who rules them and who sees them because they do not want to be seen, because there is much darkness in their life – so many *deny God altogether*. Sure, put your head in the sand!

We are not afraid of God and his rule - because we know him through Jesus Christ. It is exactly our Christian view of God as a *Trinity* that makes us *worship him and rejoice*.

In the throne is our Lord Jesus. Rejoice! He lived a human life on earth, he suffered and died, and he was resurrected, and in that manner he revealed the character of the God who rules the universe.

What did Jesus show us? That God wants to reconcile people to him. God loves mankind, and wants all people to be brought into a relationship with him.

That is the very reason why the Son of God had become a human being. God, who rules on his throne, is the one who reconciled us to himself at his own expense, by his own life and death on earth. When God took Jesus back into heaven, this meant: 'Mission accomplished!'

On the cross, Jesus said: 'It is finished.' By raising him from the dead and drawing Jesus up into heaven, God in heaven underlined: 'Yes, it is finished.'

This is the second important lesson of Ascension Day: It proves conclusively that the redeeming work of Jesus had been accomplished. God and man have been reconciled.

## **Participate in the divine nature**

Jesus ascended into heaven, 40 days after he had risen from the dead. During the 40 days after his resurrection he was able to eat and drink and laugh and speak with his disciples. Jesus was not some sort of ghost, but he still had a human body. A glorified human body, indeed, but he was still a man. And this person, both God *and* man, ascended into heaven.

Humankind had been created by God, and there has always been a sharp distinction between the Creator and creation. But in a mysterious manner, God had lifted the perfect representative of humanity up into himself. This means that the ascension of Jesus has effected an enormous change in the universe.

Dr. J.I. Packer, the great Anglican theologian, says that the ascension, meant the 'restoration of the glory that the Son had before the Incarnation'. But it also meant, 'the glorifying of human nature in a way that never happened before.' (J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), p. 127.)

Jesus Christ was the first *man* to be fully with God, much more than Adam and Eve before the Fall ever were.

And the great mercy of God is: As followers of Jesus, as believers in him, we are eternally connected with him. When he entered into the throne hall of God, he also lifted us up to be with him in his throne forever.

Yes, in *eternity* we will be with our Lord. But man is able, *even today*, to experience a foretaste of eternity with God. We can already com-

mune intimately with the Creator of heaven and earth; we do this in our prayers, in reading his Word, in celebrating our Christian communion, and in the Holy Eucharist.

As Christians we participate in a unique and mysterious manner *in the life of the Trinity*. God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, lives eternally in love and peace and joy in one being... and through faith in Jesus Christ we participate in this relationship of love, peace and joy. St Peter calls this our ‘participation in the divine nature’. (2 Pet 1:4)

Wow.... Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and you, and I... Together connected in love.

This is lesson three to remember: Jesus has brought us, human beings, into communion with God. We participate in the community of God.

Does *this* faith in God *limit* our freedom? Not at all. It makes us freer than anyone can imagine! The King is almighty, and we are children of the King! This does not shackle us, but it liberates!

When Jesus went to heaven, the last view the Apostles had of him was that he was blessing them, with his hands lifted up. He has made all things well between God and us.

### **Our response**

No wonder the Apostles, after having witnessed the return of our Lord to his throne in heaven, were joyful. And we should rejoice as well. Ascension Day is a great feast, on which we celebrate that our Lord Jesus rules with his Father and the Holy Spirit.

And we rejoice because he reconciled us with God, even drawing us, human beings, into the everlasting relationship of love, peace and joy within the Trinity.

We who rejoice in this Gospel, we are also called to be his witnesses. 'You shall be my witnesses', is what Jesus commanded his Apostles immediately before he returned to his heavenly throne. He did not have to tell them. They were so full of their great Lord and his Good News; they *wanted* to speak about it. And we also, we just cannot be silent about it.

**+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**