

### The Ascension of Christ



The world is full of stories of people who leave home, have a number of adventures, and in the end return home. It is usually a joyous occasion, with the Welcome home, the telling of Stories, and the Joy of the homecoming.

Today we celebrate just that—a joyous and wonderful homecoming—called the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. We in the Church celebrate it with a mixture of joy and loss. We, you see, have been left behind.

33 years before, at that First Christmas, the angels celebrated the Birth of Jesus into this world. We learned soon that He was the Son of God, visiting this planet with a purpose in mind. He had come to bring us all back into a new relationship with the Father. And his 33 years were filled with adventures—all told in the 4 Gospels—culminating in His Sacrifice on the Cross for our forgiveness, and His Resurrection 3 days later—you can't keep a good man down, right? God just won't stand for it. And then Jesus returned to Heaven. We call that wonderful Event, the Ascension of Christ.

This morning, I want to look at the Ascension in 3 different ways: its Historic Meaning; its Spiritual Meaning; and its Future Meaning.

#### *Historic Meaning:*

History confirms that after His Resurrection (witnessed by the disciples), Jesus remained with us for a length of time, usually spoken of as 40 days. In that time, Jesus finished teaching His disciples what they needed to know about Him. No need to question someone who has Risen from the dead, and is now teaching you face to face, right? Then, history tells us that, in the presence of about 500 people, outside Jerusalem, on a hillside, Jesus said Goodbye, gave them His last Command “Go forth into all the world, preaching the Gospel, baptising all nations, and teaching them to obey all that I have told you; and lo I am with you always”, Blessed them, and then vanished from their sight. As they described it later, “a cloud received Him from our sight.” Now in Jewish theology, this kind of “cloud” is a symbol for the Presence of God, and it was called a “shekinah.” It was not an H<sub>2</sub>O cloud. Put in our terminology, as they watched, Jesus's outline seemed to grow hazy, He seemed to be a centre of brilliant light, and then He had gone from their sight.

Using the understanding of their day, they assumed that heaven was UP, so they continued to look UP, until He had disappeared. Today, we would say that Jesus stepped from this 3-dimensional world into the Heavenly dimension and could no longer be seen by us humans who are confined to a 3 dimensional world. Still we call that the Ascension

of Christ, simply because that title is 2000 years old, and it is simple, and covers the usual facts.

### *Spiritual Meaning:*

The Spiritual Meaning of the Ascension is a result of the Historical Meaning of the Ascension. The Gospels show us the Ascension from our human point of view—He's leaving us—but looked at from Heaven's point of view, Jesus was Coming Home. Can you imagine the joy and wonder and praise going on in the Kingdom of Heaven when they know He is Coming home? All the Saints and Angels would be agog with wonder—the Son of God had finished His work on earth and was returning home to the Father. He was coming home for 2 things—first, to stand before the Father and offer the Perfect Sacrifice of Himself for the Forgiveness of all human sin and restoration of humanity to the Father—and second, to take His rightful place as the Eternal Judge of all humanity, because all things are now placed in His hands. If Jesus put aside His rightful divinity to enter human existence (as St. Paul rightly says: "...He emptied Himself—put aside the marks of His divinity so that He could be born as a slave ..."), now He takes up His rightful divinity again, and now stands before the Father not only as the Son of God but as the representative human being. He and only He can offer His Perfect Sacrifice of Himself for us all, since He is both perfect God and fully human. And the Father accepts this Sacrifice from His Son, thus breaking the barrier between God and man, opening the way to Eternal Life for us. What a joyous and wonderful moment in Heaven! Sin is defeated, and the way is now open for us to return to the Father. That's the Spiritual Meaning of the Ascension.

### *Future Meaning:*

Yet we can look at the Ascension in one more way—the Future Meaning for us. And it's this:

**HE'S COMING BACK!**

As we say in the mass all together: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

That's right. As He said while He was with us, the Son of God will be returning at the end of time, to begin His judgement. And it will happen—we don't know when. It could be today, tomorrow, next week, or a million years from now. No one knows, so don't listen to anyone who thinks they can tell you. As Jesus said: "No one knows the day or the hour, not even the Son of Man ..." So, if even Jesus didn't know, why should we waste our time speculating?

BUT, and this is important, we have been given time to build the Kingdom of God, as Jesus commanded. Blessed will be the man or woman who is found working at building the Kingdom when He returns. There is no time to waste, for when He returns, we will need to give an account of our stewardship. That's the Future Meaning of the Ascension.

Now just to end on a note of humour, let me tell you a story:

The Welcome Home celebration was over in Heaven, and the Angel Gabriel was chatting quietly with Jesus.

“Tell me Lord,” said Gabriel, “how will your work for the Kingdom of God continue, now that you are back Home?”

“Well,” said Jesus, “I have left 12 men, whom I trained for 3 years, given to them the Holy Spirit, and a command to go to all the world to spread the Good News, to baptise all into the Holy Catholic Church, and to bring all humanity back to the Father.”

“That’s a nice Plan A,” said Gabriel. “But what will you do if Plan A doesn’t work? What’s your Plan B?”

“There is no Plan B,” said Jesus.

There is no Plan B—we and we alone, filled with the Grace of Christ from the Sacraments, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, are it. Christ is counting on us. I hope that doesn’t scare you, because it scares me.

Today, as we come to offer the Holy Sacrifice of Jesus to the Father at the Altar, don’t forget the things we have learned about the Ascension:

- Jesus left the Here and Now for the Everywhere. Wherever we go, we will find Him there before us.

- Jesus left Time for the Eternal. There is never a time that He cannot be with us.

- Jesus left the First Century so He could be with us in all Centuries, in all Places, at all times.

This morning, we receive the same Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood that the first century disciples did. And we receive the same Blessed Sacrament as our brothers and sisters in Christ will receive in the Future. God grant that this will be so, until He returns to take us Home with Him. Alleluia.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.