

# The Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord

Bulletin

Audio

*'And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.'*

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It is a difficult thing to understand exactly why the disciples would be rejoicing at the departure of their Lord at first glance. If I were to say that, after your leaving a dinner party, the rest of us went into town with great joy, you would likely find it insulting.

The disciples have been through too great a trial to be glad at this, it would seem. Having followed this man, and given up all, even their livelihoods and reputations, to follow this man, He revealed their faithlessness and hollow souls in the crucifixion, where none could follow Him, but all abandoned Him, frightened, like young children lost in a shopping mall, or a bird before a curious and bored cat. Their despair was perfect: having lost hope in their Messiah, and having lost all dignity in themselves; perhaps Judas was the only good one among their lot, for at least he had the honor to answer his shame like a man, and dispatch his life by his own hand.

Yet their despair was turned first to disbelieving hope, to a true and ecstatic joy when they, with their own eyes, saw the face of the Lord, and with their own hands, touched the wounds of the lamb, and the blood of the redemption.

But now what. He leaves again, after only a short time. His return was for barely more than a moon, and now again He will forsake His sheep, even as He did the first time, speaking some nonsense about returning to the Father and being with them no more, promising them that in their loss they will receive some Comforter, some Advocate; but what could comfort them more than the presence of their

Lord and God?

It seems that there is no place to rejoice, and yet it is written: *they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.*

We do not understand the reaction of the disciples because, unlike them, we do not understand the Scriptures, the milk of their youth, and the food of their manhood.

I have spoken about this before, that the final purpose and cause of man, the very reason for which he was made, and the goal for which he was destined by Almighty God was not merely to live in paradise, innocent, and happy; nor was it to fall by the tree, only to be raised back up by the cross.

Man was made to be the image, the likeness of God. Like a *clay pot* was he formed from the earth to carry within him the Spirit of God, poured out upon him, to fill him, glorify him, and make him as God. To be united to God, and dwell with, and in, and through God forever. You see, this is the hope that the witness of the prophets foresees, what Adam forsook, what Abraham had faith in, and what Christ fulfilled.

For God became man, not only that He might shed His blood for us. God became man, that man might become God, as all the Holy Fathers and our dear Lutheran Reformers taught. God became man to complete the mission once given to Adam, that man grow into the image of God, fulfill the creation in himself, become the king and the likeness of God in and over the world, and rule it as Lord. Were these not the words spoken to Adam? Now they are the words fulfilled in Him whom Pontius Pilate cried out to Jews, saying '*Ecce homo.*' '*Behold, the man.*' '*Behold, Adam.*'

On this day, this Holy Feast, the disciples see the completion of all our human nature come to pass. For God has been married to our form, He has been united to it; and in our Lord's Ascension into heaven, one of us, a man, a human being, born of the flesh of Mary, who has bled like us, and eaten like us, and suffered like us; now one, like a Son of Man rises in glory to take His rightful place within the heart of the Father; that mankind now might rule over the angels.

For this is what has been fulfilled when it was written, '*sit in the place of honor, at my right hand, until I humble your enemies, and make a footstool under your*

*feet.* For now He ascends to the heavenly feast, celebrating His victory, and reigns from the right hand of the Father Almighty, and what was once His enemy, our fallen human nature, that enemy which He prayed for, and which He loved, He has now humbled and made obedient, obedient *even to death upon a cross*, and so has made it a resting place for His feet, that standing upon the foundation of our humanity, He might command all things in heaven, and on earth, and beneath the earth.

Therefore the Fathers speak, saying: 'To God the Word, all creatures are subjected as to an omnipotent King. This person has assumed man, after He arose from the dead, and has put this man as Lord over all principalities, authorities, powers, and dominions. Therefore, all angels who have the command to adore this Man, and who know that He is united to God the Word because He is at the right hand of the divine majesty, even these are subject to Him.'

Now see that the Lord does not leave the mass of humanity, but in Himself carries all of humanity into the Godhead, as a High Priest entering into the Holy of Holies, before the Mercy Seat of the Ark; or Holy Moses, who spoke to God upon Sinai.

Dear Christian, our Lord Jesus Christ does not leave us. He only walks before us, as He did to Galilee of the Gentiles, for *where he is, there shall we be also*. How could it be otherwise? For He is but a man; though man as He was meant to be.

Now as the man Jesus Christ ascends into the heavens, the word of the Psalm is fulfilled, even as He told us:

*'God has gone up with a shout; God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne;*

*For the shields of the earth belong to God.*

*Exalted is he.'*

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*Preached by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon Texts: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53.*