

Revelation 12:

“12 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. 2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. 5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.”

He Was Received Up Into Heaven

With our various responsive readings and our text from Revelation 12, we have covered most of the major references to the Ascension of Jesus that we have in the New Testament. As we celebrate Ascension Sunday in the Church Calendar we should again review why this is so important and how it should impact our lives. We should remember, the Church calendar, not unlike those verses and chapters that we discussed a couple of weeks ago, is not inspired but simply a tool to help us relate the ministry and work of Jesus to our lives. We review this calendar often and we do so for us and our children to understand and appreciate what it means.

- It is not something that we should simply take for granted!

Just as Christmas reminds us of the incarnation of Christ where Jesus is born of a woman with real flesh and blood, or Easter reminds us of the power of His bodily resurrection...

- We now come to Ascension Sunday where we remember His bodily ascension of Jesus to His Father’s right hand...
- Next week we celebrate Pentecost when, as promised, God the Holy Spirit was poured out as our Comforter and guide.
- Then we begin ordinary time in the Church calendar with Trinity Sunday remembering the nature of our Triune God and all it means to us in our lives and witness.

Each year we move from Advent to Pentecost remembering all that God has done for us and then from Trinity Sunday back to Advent we count the Sundays of ordinary, or normal time, remembering what Jesus said to His disciples, “If you love me, keep my commandments.”

As I bring messages this year I will try & aim them primarily at the children, as we consider the reality of the Ascension, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the Trinity. We are charged with raising our covenant children in the fear and admonition of the Lord:

- An important part of this is a proper understanding of the church calendar and what we celebrate on these various Sundays as they come around each year.
- We cannot just assume they pick it up over the years, so at times we should focus on the fundamentals from the pulpit!
- AND you as families need to be faithful in making sure the children understand what we are doing & learning. *[use the orders of worship!]*

And of course, just as is the case whenever we faithfully instruct our children, we are often the ones who also learn some important lessons!

So what is the ascension of Jesus and why do we celebrate and focus on it each and every year?

- The ascension was the particular time and place in history where Jesus who had come in the flesh, ascended in bodily form to the throne of His Father in heaven.

It was described by Luke in his Gospel account & the Book of Acts from the perspective of those here on the earth: The disciples watched as Jesus was taken up by the clouds...

- In the Revelation given to John, the same event is described from the perspective of those who were in heaven.

Something Daniel saw in his vision long before:

Daniel 7:13 "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed."

As this unfolds in Revelation 5, one of the angels tells John, "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." Then John looks and sees in heaven "a Lamb as though it had been slain." The Savior who was promised had come to earth & accomplished the work for which He was sent: He has sacrificed Himself as the Lamb of God to save His people from their sins.

- He is now seated as the reigning King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

The text that I read this morning from Revelation chapter twelve gives a summary of all these events. *[The children's version? And mention danger of putting it in the future?]*

The writer of Hebrews summarizes how we should respond to this grand truth in chapter 12:

"1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, & has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

- So children how would you answer someone who asked: "Where is Jesus Today?"
- He is seated at God's right hand in heaven!

This is a glorious truth and one that we must take very seriously!

Now we must also be prepared for a tough follow-up question...

- Is Jesus only in heaven?

Don't we believe and teach that Jesus is God and as God don't we believe and teach that He is everywhere, being all knowing, all powerful and eternal?

- Yes we do! Asking & answering that question brings us to one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith.

The two natures of Jesus which the Apostle Paul clearly presents at the beginning of the Book of Romans: 1:1 " Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

- Jesus is truly man, born of the seed of David with a real human mother, Mary.
- Jesus is also declared to be the Word, who was with God and who is God.

Jesus was not a man who acted 'god-like' and Jesus was not God acting 'man-like.'

- Jesus is the eternal Son of God who truly came in the flesh, born as a man!

It is VERY important that we get this right, not only because it is clearly what the Bible teaches, but because almost all of the major errors and heresies which have burdened the Church down through the ages have started by getting this truth wrong in some way.

- The Bible teaches that Jesus is the one true eternal God who was born as a man at His incarnation, while never ceasing to be the Son of God.

Yes, that is a mystery we will never fully understand, but it is NOT a mystery kept from us like a secret! One of the reasons that groups like the Mormons or Jehovah's witnesses are so popular is because they try to give simplistic answers to all of the great truths given to us in the Bible:

[We will see this again when we consider the truth of the Trinity in two weeks.]

Now there are simple truths in the Bible that any child can believe: For example, God is the creator of all that exists as the Children's catechism teaches or Jesus loves me and saved me from my sins as they learn in Jesus Loves Me, This I Know!

- BUT even these simple & foundational truths are profound & mysterious.
- It is simply beyond our ability as mere creatures to fully understand how God created all matter out of nothing or how God became a man to save us from our sins.
- BOTH of these simple facts are true, & understandable: They are believed with child-like faith, but they are mysterious as well. *[not unlike gravity]*

So the proper answer to the question where is Jesus today is given as a two-fold answer:

- Jesus the Son of God is everywhere present and eternal.
- Jesus the Son of man who became flesh is seated at God's throne in heaven.

This two-fold answer is the answer that the Bible gives and the answer that we must affirm and believe.

- So what does all of this mean for us today?

A few years ago, our good friend Pastor Steve Wilkins shared some important thoughts about the Ascension of Jesus and how we remember it:

“Today is Ascension Day, the day on which the Church commemorates the ascension of our Savior in glory to the right hand of His Father as the ruler of all creation, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This, coupled with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was the climax of Jesus' work . . . and yet it is almost completely ignored by the world and even by most Christians. Why so? Some have suggested that contrary to Christmas and Easter, Ascension is difficult to sentimentalize. At Christmas, we can focus upon a baby born to a poor, homeless couple in the middle of winter. And at Easter, we can turn our thoughts to "new beginnings" and "second chances" -- But Ascension simply tells us, and tells us bluntly, that *Jesus is Lord*. That's unsettling and offensive to a world that has been trained to think of itself as its own "lord." You don't have to be a discerning theologian to understand that if the ascension really happened, if in fact Jesus is the Lord of all lords and the King of kings -- then He is the Judge of all the earth, and you can't safely (or sanely) ignore Him. If Jesus is Lord, no matter how independent you might imagine yourself to be, you are not out from under His authority. You actually have an obligation to obey Him and you are accountable to Him for your disobedience and unbelief, for every word that proceeds out of your mouth and for every deed you do. If Jesus is Lord and King, then you have an obligation to worship and serve Him and if you don't, you're going to be in big trouble. This is a BIG DEAL. Jesus is Lord. Not the government. Not your conscience. Not your feelings. Not the experts. Not the power-brokers, or the wealthy, or the influential. All men, all nations, all institutions, all areas of life, *all of it*, is under the authority of Jesus and all are accountable to Him.”

So our various texts and Pastor Wilkins clearly show us that we serve the risen and reigning Christ!

He is seated at the right hand of God

- **Do we look to Him for our guidance and our orders?
Or do we trust the latest fads or the wisdom of science or the influence of Hollywood?**
- **Do we orient our lives to reflect this truth? Or do we worry about what others will say or do?"**

As we approach ordinary time in the Church calendar our focus will be on applications so we should ask:

- **What does it mean that Jesus is Lord?**

**It is certainly not what we often hear: -- example of "putting Christ on the throne of your life":
Jesus is Lord whether you acknowledge Him or not! -- example in politics of Christians wanting a
seat at the table : The Bible says that the nations are seated at His Table!**

It is also not some future event because Jesus is seated NOW!

Here we should remember how Jesus summarizes our role in the battle which He won against Satan:

- **"He who is not with Me is against Me and he who does not gather with Me scatters."**
- **There is no neutrality in the Christian life: You are either for Christ or against Christ:
You either gather the harvest or scatter the harvest.**

Now this can quickly turn into ugly theological battles, taking up sides or teams like the Saints at Corinth.

- **The question WE want to ask in the flesh, is are you with US or against US when it comes to
our local ministry or doctrinal distinctives?**
- **The PROPER focus is being with Jesus or against Jesus... Helping Jesus to gather or
working against Jesus by scattering.**

**How do we know which camp we are in? The answer comes from Jesus just a few moments later in
Luke chapter 11: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God & keep it!"**

Do you believe that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings seated at God's right hand in heaven?

- **Then you will keep His commandments!**

So think about that the other way around Are you keeping the commands of Jesus?

- **Do you set aside one day in six for the Lord's Day and give God His tithe from your first fruits?**
- **Do you faithfully attend worship and study God's Word and approach His throne of grace in
prayer on a regular basis?**
- **Do you seek His wisdom & instruction in ALL areas of life?**

**Yes, being baptized puts someone in the covenant BUT that does not mean that they are "for Jesus"
or can't be "against Jesus." Judas was circumcised, sat under the teaching of Jesus for over three
years, performed miracles under His command and partook of the Passover meals...**

- **Was Judas helping Jesus to gather or was he scattering things all over the place?**

**There can be NO neutrality in the Christian life... We must remember it is VERY practical: If you
love Jesus keep His commands:**

- **Husbands love your wives... But you don't know what my wife is like!**
- **Wives submit to you husbands in the Lord... But my husband is not serious about following Jesus!**
- **Children obey your parents... But I want to be my own man or woman someday and
REALLY follow Jesus!**

I could go on with examples from commerce or politics or education but I think you get the picture.

As the earthly ministry of Jesus drew to a close we know that He gave grave warnings to the religious leaders and those who refused to believe that He was the Son of God who had come as their Messiah. These were not addressed to Caesar or the Greek philosophers. They were not addressed to pagan temple prostitutes or wicked business men...

- **They were addressed to God's chosen people who had forgotten whose side they were on and the nature of the battle that was being waged!**

Jesus was addressing those who did not take seriously His claim to be the Son of God...

- **Today they address those who tell themselves they are doing OK based on looking at the lives of others: They should beware!**
- **Or they are addressed to children who might think all of this is what their parents believe and that when you grow up they will decide for themselves what side they are on: They should beware!**
- **Today they might address those who do not believe that Jesus came to bring conflict:**

Worrying that some folks might be upset when we share such truth: They should beware!

Jesus has come in power: He is going to save His people from their sins, establish His Church and fill the earth with His Kingdom! We are either with Him or against Him and this allegiance shows up in the little things...

- **IF God's priorities are not your priorities then don't tell me you are on His side.**

IF you tell me that you have no problems because you are not going out and doing anything "wrong" then you are a perfect candidate for some of those demons wandering in dry places, who Jesus said would come to the well-swept houses and bring many of their wicked friends!

The Christian faith is NOT a 'nice' affair: It is a battle and we are to be soldiers in this battle:

- **Christ has ascended in power and He rules in power: He has bound the strong man and expects us to help gather up His spoils!**

Paul rightly says that ALL are under the curse of sin, so the preaching of the Gospel puts us ALL to shame...

- **God's sheep respond with repentance and obedience**
- **Goats are hardened in their sin**
- **There is no third way!**

Yes, there is good reason that Psalm 110 is the most quoted passage in the Old Testament where we read: Psalm 110:1 "Jehovah said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." 2 Jehovah shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! 3 Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; [that is our role in God's story!] In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth."

Now if you think some, or all, of these applications or this type of obedience & vision are too difficult or even impossible, hang in there... Because next week we learn about how Jesus has sent the Comforter, the Holy Spirit Who alone can give us the inclination and power to live such lives & to have such vision!

Communion Meditation: Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.."