

## **I Believe in Jesus who Ascended into Heaven (LD 18)**

**Readings:** John 16:5-16; Acts 1:1-11

"When is Christmas Day this year?" I am sure every person here knows it is December 25.

"When is Ascension Day this year?" I doubt if most of you know the answer to this question.  
(21<sup>st</sup> May, this year).

We pay lots of attention to how Christ entered the world.

We certainly do not pay the same amount of attention to how Christ went out of this world.

We all celebrate Christmas but not all of us celebrate Ascension Day.

"He ascended into heaven," says our Creed.

I want to remind you that in the Apostles' Creed we have the essentials of the Christian faith.

The ascension, in other words, is part of true faith;

it is part of saving faith;

it is part of comforted faith.

In order to be saved, washed, cleansed, and comforted by the blood of Jesus, I need to believe that Jesus' body ascended into heaven.

Do you believe this?

I want to tell you this evening that you need to believe this...

that the ascension is essential to your salvation and redemption as children of God.

We are basically going to focus on Q&A 46 and 49.

I will skip over 47 & 48.

Those questions, to our ears seem a little bit nitpicky.

Majoring in minors.

Spending a little too much detail with something that isn't that important.

In the time the Catechism was written, however, this was a major thing.

In fact, those next two questions are probably the catalyst for the whole Catechism to be written at all.

The doctrine that they were fighting about was called "Ubiquity" which teaches that Christ is omnipresent (or everywhere) in both his human and divine natures.

It was really important in understanding the Lord's Supper which was a huge dividing point between the reforming churches.

Martin Luther argued for Ubiquity – that Christ is present with us Bodily – especially in the elements of the Supper.

Not in the way that the Roman Catholics practice...but in a way that is similar.

The problem with the doctrine of Ubiquity is that it ignores everything about the ascension.

Where the question posed to us is “Isn't Christ with us?”

We would respond “Isn't Christ at the Right hand of God...”

The answer that developed in the reformed tradition was to say no to Ubiquity and instead replace it with a more Biblical and theologically sound concept, drawn out of the understanding of Jesus Ascension into heaven..

Tonight we're going to just consider the fact of his ascension and the benefits of His ascension.

The other questions I may deal with in another place or setting.

When we talk about the virgin birth we confess that "the eternal Son of God ... took to himself ... a truly human nature" (Q & A 35).

In talking about the ascension we confess that it is this human nature of Christ which entered heaven.

Christ entered heaven with the same body in which He had been born, suffered, died, and rose.

It was a real human body which ascended into heaven and sits at God's right hand.

It is our flesh and blood that ascended into heaven,  
sits at God's right hand, and now intercedes for us.

There was a recent survey done in which most respondents did NOT believe that what went to heaven on Ascension Day was our flesh and blood.

They did NOT believe that Jesus is in heaven in the flesh.

The reason: they want to emphasize the divinity, majesty, glory, and power of Jesus but they do so at the expense of His present humanity.

We know that Christ physically ascended into heaven because His disciples were witnesses to

this fact (Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9,10).

It is as much a historical event as the death of Jesus or the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We must see and believe that this evening.

In the ascension, something happened in Christ's life and something happened *to* Him.

We know that after Jesus arose from the dead He remained in the earthly realm for forty days.

During those forty days He appeared to His disciples, giving them instruction concerning His leaving and preparing them for their future work when He would no longer be around in human nature.

Even before his death Jesus spoke plainly of his ascension.

The verses we read from John 16 point to it.

Though at the time they didn't understand.

So when the time came for Jesus to go, he gathered his disciples around him, on the Mount of Olives, near Bethany.

This was to be a witnessed event.

That is why our Catechism says that Christ, *in the sight of His disciples*, was taken up from earth into heaven.

The Lord saw to it that there would be eyewitnesses of the ascension,  
just as there were witnesses to His resurrection.

The Bible writer Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, found the ascension so important and necessary for Christians to know that he wrote of it twice.

He recorded it at the end of his gospel account.

And he recorded it again at the beginning of the book of Acts.

And he recorded it with great simplicity and plainness.

But he also wrote about it to reveal the *power* and the *fruit* of that event in the lives of the disciples as we have it here in the end of Luke:

"Then they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were continually at the temple, praising God."

That is the fruit of the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven.

As Luke tells us of the account in Acts 1, we no doubt would have done the same thing...

Staring intently upwards...with mouths wide open.

What a sight that must have been.

What curiosity must have filled their minds.

But the Lord dispatched two angels to the disciples to tell them not to keep gazing up into heaven, because their earthly eyes could not penetrate into the heavenly anyway, and because they had obligations here on the earth. One of those was to wait, wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit.

That, very simply, was the event - a transfer of place for Christ from this earth into heaven.

When you read the accounts of it in the Scriptures, it seems so plain, so insignificant, so inglorious.

Yet it is anything but that.

This was exaltation.

This was glorification for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember who it is who ascended that day.

It is the Son of Man, the Son of Man who had clothed Himself with our humanity,  
had covered Himself with shame and humiliation,  
had died in such shame and humility,  
but was now raised up in glory and honor.

He goes up to another stage of His exaltation to receive more honour and more glory.

But He has not just gone up for Himself.

That is the wonder of the ascension, too.

He has gone up on high for *us*, for His church, for all of His people, for all Christians.

There is a *precious* advantage in His ascension for us.

That brings us to the other point we need to consider today: what comfort is there for us in the fact that Christ is absent from us as far as His human nature is concerned?

Wouldn't it be better for us if we could visit with Him,  
ask Him our questions,  
bring our sick to Him?

Jesus told His disciples (and so told us too) that "it is for your good (advantage) that I am going away" (Jn 16:7).

Jesus explained how it is better for us that he's absent in human form.

Jesus said:

"Unless I go away, the counselor will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you." (7)

Yet Jesus' point was **not** that the Holy Spirit is more important for us than Christ Himself.

The point is rather that Jesus can *do more for us from out of heaven, through the Spirit*, than if He stayed with us on earth.

What can He do for us from out of heaven?

The Catechism mentions three benefits in A 49.

**First**, that He is our Advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven.

He pleads our cause.

An *advocate*... is a biblical concept.

1 John 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the father in our defense- Jesus Christ, the righteous one.”

The one who pleads, is the counselor, the comforter, the paraclete.

But it literally is the idea of "one who is called to your side."

Called to your side to speak words of comfort and peace.

That is Jesus.

That is His Spirit to us through the Word.

But here, now, is the idea that we have a paraclete or an advocate or a comforter in heaven for our interest.

Jesus is there called, now, not to our side but to His heavenly Father's side, that He may represent us for the Father.

That is the idea.

Because that word "advocate" also has the idea of legal action.

You have heard of an advocate in a court of law.

A "JAG" in the military is a Judge Advocate General.

An advocate, really a defense attorney.

The idea is that Jesus is our Advocate in heaven before the Father in the sense of being our Judge Advocate General who represents us and defends us before the Father.

I trust that we know why we need such an advocate before the Father.

It is because we are still sinners.

But Jesus as our Advocate in heaven pleads with the Father on our behalf, reminds God that He gave His blood for our sins so that for Jesus' sake we're righteous.

What a great encouragement and comfort that is for us!

We have no right to appear in heaven with our prayers,

no right to appear in worship before God. Not in ourselves!  
no right to any comfort or any word of peace;  
no right to the word of forgiveness in ourselves.

But Christ's presence with the Father means that we have access to God, freely and all the time.

And the one who pleads with God for us is as human as we are, of like nature with us, and so one who understands the temptations of this life and the way we grapple with the challenges of life.

**Secondly**, the Catechism says that Christ is in heaven as a guarantee that He will bring us there, too.

That is the goal of our salvation, is it not?

The goal of our salvation is to be where Jesus is and where the Father is.

The end of our covenant life here is unending, perfect, glorious fellowship and friendship with God in the heavenly realms.

That is our hope.

And we know that the Lord Jesus Christ secured that heavenly hope for us by His work on earth.

Jesus went to heaven to make sure that this happens.

That is what He promised in John 14.

The **third** benefit is just as exciting and comforting as the first two.

The ascended Christ has sent us his Holy Spirit!

The thing is this.

While Jesus was on earth, He was restricted –true man that He was–  
to being in one place at a time only.

When He was in Bethany, He could not be in Capernaum.

More, all the time He lived on earth, He never visited the children of God who lived in, say, Ephesus or Rome.

If anyone wanted to hear Jesus of Nazareth, if anyone wanted encouragement from Him, he first had to find out where Jesus was, and then go to Him.

But now Christ has ascended into heaven; He's left us.

Yet we are not the poorer because of it;

we're rather richer as a result of His ascension.

For exactly because He is in heaven with His human nature can His divine nature be everywhere.

Specifically, through His Holy Spirit the Son of God is present everywhere with His divinity, majesty and grace.

It is not so that we today need to go to, say, Sydney in order to find Jesus, talk to Him, receive encouragement from Him.

Rather, He is "with us always", wherever we are on the face of this earth –  
no matter the situation,  
no matter how distant we are from other people,  
no matter whether we see or notice Him around us.

So what does the Holy Spirit do?  
He *keeps prompting us to look to the Christ* who works for us in heaven.

You see, it's so very human to fix our attention to this earth –  
Whether that is pleasures and riches *or* its troubles and worries.

If we fix them on pleasure and riches our minds become preoccupied with earthly things like car, house, job, children, holidays.

If we fix our attention on the troubles of life...  
We get caught in our grudges, gossip, our pain and struggles.

Our focus is earth bound.  
But Christ our Savior is in heaven, and so our focus should be heavenward.

So the Spirit helps us to focus...  
by his power on the things above where Christ is seated, at the right hand of God.

### **Conclusion**

AS we finish we need to remember that the ascension is an indispensable part of our Christian faith.

It needs to be believed...and not casually passed over.

We focus, as we ought to, on the death of Jesus Christ as full atonement for our sins.  
We focus on His resurrection from the dead, obviously because of that wonder of grace for us.

But I think we sometimes forget the importance of the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven.

We need to understand the importance of this event.

We need to remember that each and every day we live in the blessedness of this event.

We have, and we want, the hope of heaven.

We have, and we want, access to God in prayer.

We have, and we are blessed by, the Holy Spirit and His gifts.

We want a Savior who is sovereign, who reigns over all for our salvation and for His return.

Remember that all of those things that I just mentioned are a reality only because Jesus Christ is ascended into heaven.

Without that, we have none of these benefits –

no hope of heaven,

no access to God in prayer,

no Holy Spirit with His gifts.

And no sovereign Lord who reigns over all and who is coming back again.

This is a crucial truth to our faith.

This is necessary for *me* to believe, this is necessary for *you* to believe, because without believing in this Jesus who ascended into heaven, *you* and *I*, have no hope of heaven.

*I*, and you with me, have no access to God in prayer.

*I*, and you with me, have no Holy Spirit and His gifts

*I*, and you with me, have no sovereign Lord who reigns over all and who is coming back.

*We* must believe this truth.