

***THE ASCENSION***  
**The Second Coming**  
**A Man Rules Heaven**

**The Ascension**  
**May 28, 2020**  
**Revision B**

**Gospel:        Luke 24:36-53**  
**Epistle:       Acts 1:1-12**

The Feast Day of the Ascension is one of the twelve Major Feast Days of the Church Year and commemorates the last day of the physical presence of the risen Christ among His disciples. In the Orthodox Church, Ascension Day is always on a Thursday, forty days after Pascha. In the West, Ascension Day is sometimes the Seventh Sunday after Easter (or the Sunday before Pentecost.)

Today’s Gospel and Epistle lesson both address the Ascension: the Gospel lesson ends with the Ascension and the Epistle lesson begins with the Ascension. Both accounts were written by the Evangelist Luke and addressed to “most excellent Theophilus” (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1) who had been instructed in the Faith (Luke 1:4) and who was a governor in Antioch according to tradition (Unger, Bible Dictionary, p. 1088.) Luke was also from Antioch. In the account read from Acts then, Luke picked up where he left off a few years earlier in his chronicle for Theophilus. Both of these readings are commonly used in the West for Ascension Day also.

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**Parables of the Ascension from the Old Testament**

Three Old Testament readings are included in the readings for Vespers of the Ascension. These readings give us additional insight into the Ascension and its relation to the Second Coming:

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## **Isaiah 2:2-3 - The Mountain of the Lord**

In this reading, the House of the Lord is referred to as a mountain and all nations will stream to it. This mountain is raised above all the other hills and many people will say, “Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths” (v.3).

At this time “the Law will go forth from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations and will reprove many peoples. And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation and never again will they learn war” (vv.3-5).

The above clearly refers to conditions that are put in place after the Second Coming. Yet the “House of the Lord” is the Church (1 Timothy 3:15) and we have a foretaste of this mountain now. In the Church, the Lord “teaches us concerning His ways that we might walk in His paths” (v.3). From this perspective, the Church is “a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden” (Matthew

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5:14), and the Church is raised above all the other hills (v.2). For more discussion of this, see the Gospel lesson for the Sunday of the First Six Ecumenical Councils (July).

## **Isaiah 62:10-63:9 - The Second Coming**

As the Lord’s disciples stood on the Mount of Olives gazing toward heaven watching the Lord being taken up by a cloud, two angels said to them, “This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11). In this reading from Isaiah, the Lord’s return is described. Some details mentioned are:

- He comes as a King, majestic in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength (63:1; see also Revelation 19:11, 12, 16).
- His clothing is stained red from treading the wine trough of His anger against His enemies (63:2, 3; see also Revelation 19:13-18).
- Everyone clears the way as He enters Jerusalem (62:10).
- He brings rewards with Him (62:11).
- His people are called “the holy people”, “the redeemed of the Lord”, and “a city not forsaken” (62:12).

At this time, the Lord’s compassion for His people was remembered; His people praised Him for:

- His great goodness toward the House of Israel (v.7)
- Their affliction where He was afflicted also (v.9; see also Matthew 25:31-45)
- The angel of His Presence who saved them and redeemed them (v.9)
- How He lifted them and carried them all the days of old (v.9).

## **Zechariah 14:1-11 - The Living Waters**

This reading also speaks of the Second Coming and how the Lord will stand on the Mount of Olives at His arrival. On Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, (Mark 11:1-11) He gave us a prelude to the Second Coming. Knowing the above prophecies, the people very easily misinterpreted His actions. The Mount of Olives will be split by a valley running East-to-West, and people will flee as they did during the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah (vv.4-5, Amos 1:1). The Apostle John gave more details regarding this great earthquake saying that the great men of the earth will try to hide in caves from the face of Him Who sits on the Throne (Revelation 6:12-17). In those days, “the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations (who plunder Jerusalem), as when He fights on a day of battle” (Zechariah 14:3, Revelation 19:11-19). Then Jerusalem will dwell in security (v.11).

Following the battle, the Lord will be King over all the earth (v.9, Revelation 11:15, 20:6, 22:5). All the land will be changed into a plain except for Jerusalem which will rise and remain on its site (v.10). The dimensions given to John were a height of about 1300 miles (Revelation 21:16).

Living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half toward the “eastern sea” (probably the Persian Gulf) and half toward the “western sea” i.e. the Mediterranean Sea (v.8). These living waters are also described as a river proceeding from the Throne of God, and the Tree of Life is described as being on either side of the river bearing twelve fruits, one every month (Revelation 22:1-2). Yet this is not necessarily just physical water, since there is no longer any sea (Revelation 21:1). The living water was referred to by the Lord as the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39), and thus the exact meaning of all these illustrations is a mystery that still needs to be revealed (Revelation 10:7). In keeping with this, the Matins service and Liturgy are filled with allusions to the Spirit, the Comforter, that the Lord promised to send (Luke 24:49, John 14:26, 15:26). The Ascension is then the prelude to Pentecost.

### **Epistle: Acts 1:1-12**

The Ascension demonstrates the acceptance by God the Father of the Son’s work on earth. The Resurrection was the first sign of this acceptance and Pentecost will be the conclusion. As the Son rises and is received by a cloud, we are reminded of the ascending of the smoke of the sacrifice from the altar of God. In this case the sacrifice is accepted and the victim is admitted to God’s Presence, behind the veil (Hebrews 9:12). His position in light of the Ascension is at the Right Hand of Power, as mentioned by Deacon Stephen just before his death (Acts 7:55-60).

## **The Right Hand of Power**

At His trial, the Lord had told His accusers, “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the Right Hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:62). The High Priest considered this blasphemy and asked for the death sentence (Matthew 26:65, Mark 14:62). At His Ascension, the two angels told the disciples, “This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). As

He ascended, “a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). Daniel spoke of Him coming on the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13), and the Lord confirmed this to His disciples (Matthew 24:30).

Coming on the clouds is reminiscent of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22, 14:24). Other encounters with the cloud:

- Moses ascending Mt. Sinai into the cloud to receive the Law (Exodus 24:16-18)
- The pillar of cloud stood at the entrance to the Tabernacle to speak to Moses (Exodus 33:9)
- When the Ark entered Solomon’s Temple, the cloud filled the house and the priests could not stand to serve (1 Kings 8:10-11; see also Exodus 40:35)
- At the end of time, smoke similarly fills the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony in heaven (Revelation 15:5-8)

The term Right Hand of Power comes primarily from the Psalms. For example, the Lord’s Right Hand:

- Is exalted and victorious (Psalm 89:13, 98:1, 118:15)
- Saved David, the anointed king (Psalm 20:6, 60:5, 108:6, 138:7)
- Possessed the Promised Land (Psalm 44:3, 78:54)
- Is majestic in power (Exodus 15:6)
- Seeks out and swallows enemies (Psalm 21:8, Exodus 15:12)
- Went at the right hand of Moses (Isaiah 63:12)

Yet there are other things associated with the Lord’s Right Hand:

- It spread out the heavens (Isaiah 48:13)
- It plants vines; i.e. Churches (Psalm 80:15-17)
- It is full of righteousness (Psalm 48:10)
- It teaches us awesome things (Psalm 45:4)
- It provides support (Psalm 18:35, 63:8, 139:10; Isaiah 41:10)
- It is a place of refuge (Psalm 17:7)
- The Queen Mother sits there (Psalm 45:9; 1 Kings 2:19)

The Lord told His disciples when He met them in Galilee, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-19). In the Epistle lesson, He said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Thus, just as “His Glorious Arm went at the right hand of Moses” (Isaiah 63:12), so it did with the Apostles after Pentecost. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is also called “The Helper” (i.e., one called alongside to help, John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), and Jesus had told His disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit at the Last Supper (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit in us is a key element in the coming together of “the city with solid foundations whose craftsman and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). With the Holy Spirit at work in us, we are described as containing treasure in earthenware vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7).

## The Proof of the Resurrection

Luke wrote, “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the Apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:1-3).

The proofs of Christ’s appearances recorded in the Scriptures in order are:

- To Mary Magdalene Mark 16:9-11, John 20:11-18
- To the other women Matthew 28:9-10
- To Luke and Cleopas on Road to Emmaus Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-35
- To Peter Luke 24:34
- To Ten Apostles without Thomas Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-25
- To Eleven Apostles including Thomas John 20:26-31
- To Seven Apostles by the Sea of Galilee John 21:1-25
- To 500 at once in Galilee 1 Corinthians 15:6
- To James His brother 1 Corinthians 15:7

But just appearances are not all the proofs. John Chrysostom stated<sup>1</sup> that all the predictions that Christ had made in the Gospels now come to fruition among the Twelve Apostles as Jesus prepares them to go abroad. The prime motivator among them was the Resurrection of Christ, which they saw firsthand for themselves. The Book of Acts was in fact a Demonstration of the Resurrection. Once this was believed, the rest would come in due course.

“The predictions which in the Gospels Christ utters, here we may see these actually come to pass; and note in the very facts the bright evidence of Truth which shines in them, and the mighty change which is taking place in the disciples now that the Spirit has come upon them. For example, they heard Christ say, ‘he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father’ (John 14:12): and again, when He foretold to the disciples, that they should be brought before rulers and kings, and in their synagogues they should scourge them, and that they should suffer grievous things, and overcome all (Matthew 10:18): and that the Gospel should be preached in all the world (Matthew 24:14): now all this, how it came to pass exactly as it was said, may be seen in the Book of Acts, and more besides, which He told them while yet with them. Here again you will see the Apostles themselves, speeding their way as on wings over land and sea; and those same men, once so timid and void of understanding, all of a sudden become quite other than they were; men despising wealth, and raised above glory and passion and concupiscence, and in short all such affections; moreover, what unanimity there is among them now. Nowhere is there any envying as there was before or any of the old hankerings after the preeminence, but all virtue brought in them to its last finish, and shining through all, with surpassing luster. Then there is that love, concerning which the Lord had given so

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<sup>1</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 1-2.

many charges saying, ‘By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another’” (John 13:35).

“Never mind the Jews; even the disciples often upon hearing the more sublime doctrines were troubled and offended! Therefore Jesus told them, ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now’ (John 16:12). If those could not, who had been so long time with Him, and had been admitted to so many secrets, and had seen so many wonders, how was it to be expected that men, but newly dragged away from altars, idols, sacrifices, cats, crocodiles (for such did the Gentiles worship), and from the rest of their evil ways, should all at once receive the more sublime matters of doctrine? How in particular should Jews, hearing as they did every day of their lives, and having it ever sounded in their ears, ‘The Lord our God is one Lord, and beside Him is none other’ (Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 46:9); who also had seen Him hanging nailed on the Cross. Actually they had themselves crucified and buried Him, and had not seen Him risen; when they were told that this same person was God and equal with the Father, how should they, of all men, be otherwise than shocked and revolted? Therefore it is that gently and little by little the Apostles carry them on, with much consideration and forbearance letting themselves down to their low attainments, themselves all the while enjoying in more plentiful measure the grace of the Spirit, and doing greater works in Christ’s name than Christ Himself did. The Apostles needed to be raised up from their groveling apprehensions, and confirmed in the saying, that Christ was raised from the dead. For this, in fact, is just what the Book of Acts is: a Demonstration of the Resurrection. This being once believed, the rest would come in due course.”

Chrysostom pointed out<sup>2</sup> that Christ gave to the Apostles commandments, through the Holy Spirit, during the 40 days after the Resurrection. These were spiritual commandments, and they are not written down anywhere; but we know about them from the writings of others, since the Apostles did speak what they heard.

“These were spiritual words that He spoke to them, nothing human. Do you observe in what low terms Luke still speaks of Christ, as in fact Christ had spoken of Himself? ‘But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Matthew 12:28); for indeed the Holy Spirit worked in that Temple. Well, what did He command? ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19-20). This is a great accolade for the Apostles; to have such a charge entrusted to them, I mean, the salvation of the world! These are words full of the Spirit! This Luke hints at in the expression, ‘through the Holy Spirit’ and John adds, ‘The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life’ (John 6:63). This leads the hearer on to a desire of learning what the commands were, and establishing the authority of the Apostles, seeing it is the words of the Spirit they are about to speak, and the commandments of Christ. ‘After He had given commandments, He was taken up’ (Acts 1:2, 9). Luke does not say, ‘ascended’; he still speaks as concerning a man. It appears then that Jesus also taught the Disciples after His resurrection, but of this space of time no one has related to us the whole

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<sup>2</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 1-2.

in detail. John and Luke dwell at greater length on this subject than the others; but none has clearly related everything, for they hurried to something else. However, we have learned these things through the Apostles, for what they heard, that did they tell.”

Chrysostom also pointed out<sup>3</sup> that prior to the Resurrection no one asked anything in Christ’s Name. After the Resurrection, because of the Holy Spirit, Christ was able to speak plainly with the Apostles.

‘Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full’ (John 16:24). Christ showed it to be good that He should depart, if until now they had asked nothing, and if then they should receive all things whatever they should ask. ‘For do not suppose, because I shall no longer be with you, that you are deserted; My Name shall give you greater boldness’. Since then the words which He had used had been veiled, Christ said, ‘These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father’ (John 16:25). ‘There shall be a time when you shall know all things clearly’. Here Christ speaks of the time of the Resurrection. ‘Then, I shall tell you plainly about the Father’. For Christ was with them, and talked with them forty days, being assembled with them, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3, 4). ‘Because now being in fear, you pay no attention to My words. But then when you see Me risen again, and converse with Me, you will be able to learn all things plainly, for the Father Himself will love you, when your faith in Me hath been made firm’”.

John Cassian recorded<sup>4</sup> the words of the Desert Fathers regarding what Christ taught the Apostles. True spiritual knowledge cannot be taught by men. Only those who are perfected not by the words of others but by their own actions can attain it. We need to prepare a tabernacle in our hearts by purging ourselves from the stain of sins and ridding ourselves of worldly cares. Being a teacher can result in pride and arrogance; we need to be very careful about that. It is one thing to be able to teach well, and quite another to penetrate into the heart of heavenly utterances and to gaze with pure eye of the soul on profound and hidden mysteries. This can be gained by no learning of man’s, or condition of this world; only by purity of soul, by means of the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

“If you are anxious to attain to the light of spiritual knowledge, not wrongly for an idle boast but for the sake of being made better men, you are first inflamed with the longing for that blessedness, of which we read: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). You may also attain to that of which the angel said to Daniel: ‘Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever’ (Daniel 12:3). Keeping up that diligence in reading; endeavor with all eagerness to gain in the first place a thorough grasp of practical, i.e., ethical knowledge. Without this that theoretical purity of which we have spoken cannot be obtained, which those only who are perfected not by the words of others who

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<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXIX, 2.

<sup>4</sup> John Cassian, 1<sup>st</sup> Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xiv, 9.

teach them, but by the excellence of their own actions, can after much expenditure of effort and toil attain as a reward for it. As they gain their knowledge not from meditation on the law but from the fruit of their labor, they sing with the Psalmist: 'Through Your precepts I understand' (Psalm 119:104). Having overcome all their passions, they say with confidence: 'I will sing praises. I will behave wisely in a perfect way' (Psalm 101:1-2). For he who is striving in an undefiled way in the course of a pure heart, as he sings the Psalm, understands the words which are chanted. Therefore if you would prepare in your heart a holy tabernacle of spiritual knowledge, purge yourselves from the stain of all sins, and rid yourselves of the cares of this world. It is an impossibility for the soul which is taken up even to a small extent with worldly troubles, to gain the gift of knowledge or to become an author of spiritual interpretation, and diligent in reading holy things. Be careful therefore in the first place, that you may enjoin absolute silence on your lips, in order that your zeal for reading and the efforts of your purpose may not be destroyed by vain pride. This is the first practical step towards learning, to receive the regulations and opinions of all the Elders with an earnest heart, and with lips that are dumb; and diligently to lay them up in your heart, and endeavor rather to perform than to teach them. From teaching comes the dangerous arrogance of vainglory, but from performing, the fruit of spiritual knowledge will flourish. So you should never venture to say anything unless some ignorance that might be injurious or a matter which it is important to know leads you to ask a question. Some who are puffed up with vainglory, pretend that they ask, in order really to show off the knowledge which they perfectly possess. It is impossible for one, who takes to the pursuit of reading with the purpose of gaining the praise of men, to be rewarded with the gift of true knowledge. One, who is bound by the chain of this passion, is sure to be also in bondage to other faults, and especially to that of pride. If he is baffled by his encounter with practical and ethical knowledge, he will certainly not attain that spiritual knowledge which springs from it. Be then in all things 'let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath' (James 1:19), lest there come upon you that which is noted by Solomon: 'Do you see a man hasty in his words? *There is* more hope for a fool than for him' (Proverbs 29:20); and do not presume to teach anyone in words what you have not already performed in deed. Our Lord taught us by His own example that we ought to keep to this order, as of Him it is said: 'what Jesus began to do and to teach' (Acts 1:1). Take care then that you do not rush into teaching before doing, and so be reckoned among the number of those of whom the Lord speaks in the Gospel to the disciples: 'whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers' (Matthew 23:3-4). For if he who shall 'break one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:19), it follows that one who has dared to despise many and greater commands and to teach men so, shall certainly be considered not least in the kingdom of heaven, but greatest in the punishment of hell. Therefore you must be careful not to be led on to teach by the example of those who have attained some skill in discussion and readiness in speech and because they can discourse on what



they please elegantly and fully. They are imagined to possess spiritual knowledge, by those who do not know how to distinguish its real force and character. It is one thing to have a ready tongue and elegant language, and quite another to penetrate into the very heart and marrow of heavenly utterances and to gaze with pure eye of the soul on profound and hidden mysteries. This can be gained by no learning of man's, or condition of this world; only by purity of soul, by means of the illumination of the Holy Spirit.”

## The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Luke records, “And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which’, *He said*, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4-5).

As thousands of years of Old Testament history prepared the people of God for Pentecost, the three year public ministry of Jesus prepared His followers for Pentecost, as did the ten days of fasting and prayer in the upper room by the 120 (Acts 1:13-14). At the time of the Ascension, the Apostles and others were waiting for the Day of Pentecost and preparing themselves for this event.

The Day of Pentecost occurred on<sup>5</sup> either the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, or 7<sup>th</sup> of Sivan depending on the sighting of the new moon to mark the beginning of the month. In the year 30 AD, this occurred on a Sunday, the first day of the week. Thus there were back-to-back Sabbaths; the weekly Sabbath followed by the Feast of Pentecost, which was also a Sabbath.

Gathered together at this time were the Twelve, most of the Seventy<sup>6</sup>, the Women plus others totaling about 120 (Acts 1:15). They had been meeting in the upper room where the Twelve had eaten the Passover and Last Supper (Mark 14:15, Acts 1:13). Continuing in prayer and supplication, they were all with one accord in one place (Acts 1:14, 2:1).

Thus, the people we know were involved in the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost were:

- The Twelve Apostles
- The Seventy Lesser Apostles
- The Eight Myrrh-Bearing Women

This leaves 30 others unaccounted for. Probably included among the unnamed 30 were:

- Joseph of Arimathea
- Nicodemus
- Simon the Leper
- Lazarus
- Simon of Cyrene and his sons Rufus and Alexander
- Zaccheus

All of these 120 people (Acts 1:15) were filled with the Holy Spirit. And all 120 received languages as of fire that were distributed and sat on each one of them. We don't normally think of the Virgin Mary as receiving this gift of languages, but she was there also. For more details about the Feast Day of Pentecost, see the Study for that event.

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<sup>5</sup> A month could have either 29 or 30 days. If both Nisan and Iyyar had 29 days, Pentecost fell on the 5th of Sivan. If both Nisan and Iyyar had 30 days, Pentecost was the 7th of Sivan. If one had 29, the other 30 days, Pentecost was the 6th of Sivan. See Merrill Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p.356.

<sup>6</sup> Apollos, one of the Seventy, was absent since he didn't hear about the Holy Spirit until over 20 years later (Acts 18:25).

John Chrysostom spoke<sup>7</sup> of the reasons why Christ ascended first, before the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles clung to Christ so tightly and could not bear to part with Him; so He needed to give them a longing desire for the Spirit, since the Spirit would do the greater amount of teaching. As a result of the Coming of the Spirit, it became abundantly obvious that the Spirit is not inferior to Christ.

“Why had the Holy Spirit not yet come before the Ascension? It was fitting that the Apostles should first be brought to have a longing desire for that event, and so receive the grace. For this reason Christ Himself departed, and then the Spirit descended. Had He Himself been there, they would not have expected the Spirit so earnestly as they did. On this account neither did He come immediately after Christ’s Ascension, but after eight or nine days. It is the same with us also; for our desires towards God are then most raised, when we stand in need. Accordingly, John the Baptist chose that time to send his disciples to Christ when they were likely to feel their need of Jesus, during his own imprisonment. Besides, it was fit that our nature should be seen in heaven, and that the reconciliation should be perfected, and then the Spirit should come, and the joy should be unalloyed. For, if the Spirit had already come, and Christ had then departed, but the Spirit remained; the consolation would not have been so great as it was. For in fact the Apostles clung to Him, and could not bear to part with Him; to comfort them He said, ‘It is to your advantage that I go away’ (John 16:7). On this account He also waited during those intermediate days, that they might first despond for a while, and be made to feel their need of Him; then they could reap a full and unalloyed delight. But if the Spirit were inferior to the Son, the consolation would not have been adequate; and how could He have said, ‘It is expedient for you?’ For this reason the greater matters of teaching were reserved for the Spirit, that the disciples might not imagine Him inferior.”

“Consider also how necessary He made it for them to stay in Jerusalem, by promising that the Spirit should be granted them. Lest they should flee away after His Ascension, by this expectation, as by a bond, He keeps them in that spot. But having said, ‘Wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard from Me’ (Acts 1:4), He then adds, ‘For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’ (Acts 1:5). Now He allows them to see the difference there was between Him and John, plainly, and not as before in obscure hints. He had spoken very obscurely, when He said, ‘Among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he’ (Luke 7:28); but now He says plainly, ‘John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’. He no longer uses the testimony, but merely adverts to the person of John, reminding the disciples of what he had said, and shows them that they have now become greater than John; seeing they too are to baptize with the Spirit.”

Cyril of Jerusalem compared<sup>8</sup> the coming of the Holy Spirit to iron placed in a fire. The iron does not become fire, but it gets hot and glows like it was fire. Similarly our human nature,

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<sup>7</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 14-15.

with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit does not become God, but it takes on the characteristics of Divinity as much as humanity can.

“Christ came down to clothe the Apostles with power and to baptize them; for the Lord says, you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now (Acts 1:5). This grace was not in part, but His power was in full perfection; for as he who plunges into the waters and is baptized is encompassed on all sides by the waters, so were they also baptized completely by the Holy Spirit. The water however flows around the outside only, but the Spirit baptizes also the soul within and that completely. Why do you wonder? Take an example from matter. Fire passing in through the mass of the iron makes the whole of it like fire, so that what was cold becomes burning and what was black is made bright. If fire which is a body thus penetrates and works without hindrance in iron which is also a body, why do we wonder that the Holy Spirit enters into the very inmost recesses of the soul?”

“Lest men should be ignorant of the greatness of the mighty gift coming down to them, there sounded as it were a heavenly trumpet. ‘For suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind’, signifying the presence of Him who was to grant power to men to seize with violence the kingdom of God; that both their eyes might see the fiery tongues, and their ears hear the sound. ‘And it filled the entire house where they were sitting’ (Acts 2:2); for the house became the vessel of the spiritual water; as the disciples sat within, the whole house was filled. Thus they were entirely baptized according to the promise, and invested soul and body with a divine robe of salvation (Isaiah 61:10 LXX). And there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). They partook of fire, not of burning but of saving fire; of fire which consumes the thorns of sins, but gives luster to the soul.”

John Chrysostom spoke<sup>9</sup> of the benefits of having the Gift of the Holy Spirit, but also the penalty for despising so great a Grace. People seeking good positions with the government prepare themselves their whole life long, yet we Christians don’t do enough preparation for our roles in the Kingdom. Fasting, prayer, sobriety and watchfulness would help us a lot.

“Our fathers held Baptism to be just the proper curb upon evil concupiscence, and a powerful lesson for teaching us to be sober-minded even in a time of delights. It’s as if we are banqueting with Christ Himself, and partaking of His table; let us do nothing at random, but let us pass our time in fasting, prayer, and much sobriety of mind. A man who is destined to enter upon some temporal government, prepares himself all his life long, and that he may obtain some dignity, lays out his money, spends his time, and submits to endless troubles. What shall we deserve, who draw near to the kingdom of heaven with such negligence, and both show no earnestness before we have received, and after having received are again negligent? This is the reason why we are negligent after having received: we did not watch before we received. Therefore many, after they have received, immediately have returned to their former vomit, have become more wicked, and drawn upon themselves a more severe punishment. Having been delivered from

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<sup>9</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 4-5.

their former sins, they have more grievously provoked the Judge, that having been delivered from so great a disease, still they did not learn sobriety. What has happened to them, Christ threatened to the paralytic man, saying, 'See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you' (John 5:14); He also predicted this of the Jews. 'Then the demon goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation' (Matthew 12:45). For *if*, said He, showing that by their ingratitude they should bring upon them the worst of evils, 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin' (John 15:22). The guilt of sins committed after these benefits is doubled and quadrupled, in that, after the honor put upon us, we show ourselves ungrateful and wicked. As a consequence, the Laver of Baptism doesn't help at all to procure for us a milder punishment. Consider: a man has committed grievous sins by committing murder or adultery, or some other crime; *these* were remitted through Baptism. For there is no sin, no impiety, which does not yield and give place to this gift; for the Grace is Divine. A man has again committed adultery and murder; the former adultery is indeed done away, the murder forgiven, and not brought up again to his charge, 'For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable' (Romans 11:29). But for those committed after Baptism he suffers a punishment as great as he would if both the former sins were brought up again, and many worse than these. For the guilt is no longer simply equal, but doubled and tripled. For proof that the penalty of these sins is greater, listen to what Paul says: 'Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?' (Hebrews 10:28, 29)

## **Restoring the Kingdom to Israel**

Luke wrote, "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority'" (Acts 1:6-7).

The question Jesus' disciples asked just before He ascended about restoring the kingdom to Israel is very timely. The answer was no; the city's not ready yet! The treasure in the earthenware vessels still needs some work. By using the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, and by confessing Christ before men, the treasure gets refined and the city gets ready. But Christ did not address that. The Lord's answer was, 'It is not for us to know the times or seasons.

Instead of predicting the exact moment of His Second Coming, the Lord instead focused the attention of His disciples on things coming up soon. First, they were to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Second, they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

A few weeks earlier, the Lord had been sitting with His disciples on the same Mount of Olives that He ascended from, teaching them about what to expect prior to the Second Coming. They had asked, “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3)

He said that first:

- Many will come in His Name, claiming to be the Messiah (Matthew 24:5, 23, 26).
- There will be wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6)
- Nation will rise against nation; there will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes (Matthew 24:7)
- His disciples will be persecuted, hated and killed by all nations for His Name’s sake (Matthew 24:9)
- Many false prophets will come and deceive many (Matthew 24:11, 24)
- Lawlessness will abound; the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:12)
- The Gospel will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations before the end (Matthew 24:14)
- Just prior to the end will occur the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel. What this really means will not be clear until it happens (Matthew 24:15, Daniel 9:27)
- A persecution unprecedented in human history will take place (Matthew 24:16-22)
- The Lord’s coming will be like the lightning that comes from the East and flashes to the West, and all will be gathered to Him as eagles gather to a carcass (Matthew 24:27, 28).

All of the above Jesus spoke to His disciples while sitting with them on the Mount of Olives during Holy Week just prior to His Crucifixion. At the Ascension, about 44 days later, when they asked Him about restoring the kingdom to Israel, there was another aspect to His answer. He had already told them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). They had witnessed His incredible miracles for three years capped by His victory over death itself. Following His Resurrection, they had seen and touched His glorified, but still human body and had witnessed Him pass through solid walls (John 20:19-26) and teleport Himself at will (Luke 24:31). What more could there be? This was what the Prophets had spoken about: The Son of David reigning on His father’s throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16, Luke 1:32, Isaiah 9:7).

Yet the Lord deflected their inquiry with: “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His Own authority” (Acts 1:7). The times and seasons that the Lord was inaugurating were the times of the Gentiles (Romans 9, 10). The kingdom was not to be restored to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles came (Romans 11:25). For the disciples present at the Ascension, this would have been very difficult for them to hear. Even later on, many had difficulty accepting Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18), Peter had to be rebuked in Antioch (Galatians 2:7-16) and a Church Council had to be called regarding Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 15). John Chrysostom stated<sup>10</sup> that they were asking for things greater than their capacity.

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<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, v. 7.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>11</sup> that Jesus was intentionally putting His disciples off for their own good. They didn't need to know<sup>12</sup> the exact day of the Lord's Second Coming. Jesus knew that, but He didn't want them to ask about it because it would distract them from the business at hand. Instead He gave us many descriptions regarding what it was to be like then.

“‘But of that day and hour knows no man, not the angels of Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father’ (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32). By saying, not the angels, He stopped their mouths that they should not seek to learn what these angels don't know. By saying, ‘neither the Son’, He forbids them not only to learn, but even to inquire. For proof that He said this for this reason, notice after His resurrection, when He saw they were becoming overly curious, how He stopped their mouths more decidedly. He had mentioned infallible signs, many and endless; but then He said merely, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons’. And then that they might not say, we are driven to perplexity, we are utterly scorned, we are not held worthy so much as of this, He said, ‘which the Father had put in His own power’ (Acts 1:7). He did this because He was exceedingly careful to honor them, and to conceal nothing from them. Therefore He refers it to His Father, both to make the thing awesome, and to exclude that of which He had spoken from their inquiry. If this was not the case, but He is ignorant of it, when will He know it? Will it be together with us? But who would say this? The Father He knows clearly, even as clearly as the Father knows the Son; and of the day is He ignorant? Moreover, ‘the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God’ (1 Corinthians 2:10), and does not He know so much as the time of the judgment? How He ought to judge He knows, and of the secrets of each He had a full perception; and what is far more common than that, of this could He be ignorant? How, if ‘all things were made through Him, and without Him was not even one thing made’ (John 1:3), was He ignorant of the day? For He who made the worlds, it is quite plain that He made the times also; and if the times, even that day. How then is He ignorant of that which He made?”

“The Son is not ignorant of the day, but is even in full certainty thereof. For this cause, I say when He had told all things, both the times and the seasons, and had brought it to the very doors. ‘Learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near -- at the doors!’ (Matthew 24:32-33) For if you seek after the day and hour, you shall not hear them of me, He said; but if of times and preludes, without hiding anything, I will tell you all exactly. For that indeed I am not ignorant of it, I have shown by many things. He mentioned intervals, and all the things that are to occur, and how short from this present time until the day itself (for this did the parable of the fig tree indicate). He leads us to the very vestibule; and if He does not open the doors to us, this also He does for our good.”

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<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVII, 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> To emphasize this, Paul wrote, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2).

Chrysostom also stated<sup>13</sup> that when the Apostles asked Christ about the restored Kingdom, they knew that He had merely declined to tell them earlier. And they weren't satisfied with that answer. Since they knew that they were about to receive the Holy Spirit, they felt worthy to know now. However, they didn't know what the Kingdom of God was all about, and they weren't ready to face danger yet. They were totally impressed with Christ following the Resurrection, but Christ said that it was beyond their capacity to know these things.

“When the Apostles intend to ask anything, they approach Christ together, that by dint of numbers they may abash Him into compliance. They well knew that in what He had said previously, ‘But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only’ (Matthew 24:36), He had merely declined telling them; therefore they again drew near, and put the question. They would not have asked had they been truly satisfied with that answer. For having heard that they were about to receive the Holy Spirit, they, as being now worthy of instruction, desired to learn. Also they were quite ready for freedom; for they had no mind to address themselves to danger. What they wished was to breathe freely again; what had happened to them were no light matters, and the utmost peril was still hanging over them. Without saying anything to Him of the Holy Spirit, they put this question: ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6) They did not ask, ‘when?’, but whether ‘at this time’. So eager were they for that day. To me it appears that they had no clear notion of the nature of that kingdom; for the Spirit had not yet instructed them. They do not say, ‘When shall these things be?’, but they approach Him with greater honor, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6), since Israel was now fallen<sup>14</sup>. They were still affected towards sensible objects, seeing they had not yet become better than those who were before them. We note, however, that they have high conceptions concerning Christ. Since then their minds are elevated, He spoke to them in a higher strain. He no longer tells them, ‘Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’ (Mark 13:32); but He says, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). You ask things greater than your capacity, He would say.”

Chrysostom noted<sup>15</sup> that this time the disciples asked Christ about the Kingdom, not about the end of the age. But Christ did not speak with them at great length about this after the Resurrection. Christ had shown by His parables that the end was not near, so He directed their attention to the things at hand.

“Just before the Ascension, the disciples asked Jesus, ‘Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6) They so well knew his mildness, that after His Passion also they asked Him, ‘Will you restore?’ He had said to them before, ‘You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet’ (Matthew 24:6), nor shall Jerusalem be taken just yet. But now they ask Him about the kingdom, not about the end. And besides, Christ did not speak at great length with them after the

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<sup>13</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, vv. 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Israel was at that time ruled by a non-Hebrew (Herod Antipas), for the first time since the Babylon Captivity.

<sup>15</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, Recapitulation.

Resurrection. They address then this question, as thinking that they themselves would be in high honor, if this should come to pass. Christ did not say that this restoration was not to be; He didn't openly declare this; for why would they need to learn this? Hence they do not again ask, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' (Matthew 24:3) They are afraid to say that. But they asked, 'Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6), for they thought there was such a kingdom. But He, both in parables, had shown that the time was not near, and here where they asked, He answered, 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come<sup>16</sup> upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8). They had heard these things before, and He now reminds them of them just before He was taken up. As He went up into heaven, and a cloud received Him, we note that 'He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet' (Psalm 18:9); also, 'Clouds and darkness surround Him' (Psalm 97:2). This is declared by the expression, 'And a cloud received Him out of their sight' (Acts 1:9); the Lord of heaven, it means. For as a king is shown by the royal chariot, so was the royal chariot sent for Him."

Chrysostom further stated<sup>17</sup> that we really don't need to know when the Last Days will be. The day of our own death is much more important to focus on. If we did know this, our knowledge will not affect unbelievers, since they won't even accept that there will be an end.

"What would be the advantage for us knowing when the Last Day will be? Let us suppose that the end would be after twenty, thirty or a hundred years, what is this to us? Is not the end of our own life the consummation to every individual? Why are we curious, why do we get worked up about the general end? The case is the same with us in this, as in other things. As in other things, leaving our own private concerns, we are anxious about things in general, saying, 'Such an one is a fornicator', 'such an one an adulterer', 'that man has robbed', another has been injurious; no one takes account of what is his own, but each thinks of anything rather than his own private concerns. So here also, each omitting to take thought about his own end, we are anxious to hear about the general dissolution. Now what concern is that of ours? If we make our own a good end, we will suffer no harm from the other; be it far off, or be it near. This is nothing to us."

"For this reason Christ did not tell it, because it was not expedient. How, you say, was it not expedient? He who also concealed it knows why it was not expedient. Listen to Him saying to His Apostles, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority' (Acts 1:7). Why are you curious? Peter, the chief of the Apostles, and his fellows, heard this said, as if they were seeking things too great for them to know. True, you say; but it were possible to stop the mouths of the Greeks in this way. How? Tell me! Because they say, that this world is a God; if we knew the period of its dissolution, we should have stopped their mouths. Why, is this what will stop their mouths, to know when it

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<sup>16</sup> Chrysostom noted here "Note that Luke wrote 'Is come upon you', not, 'is sent', to shew the Spirit's coequal Majesty."

<sup>17</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Thessalonians, IX, vv. 1-2.



will be destroyed, or to know that it will be destroyed? Tell them this, that it will have an end. If they do not believe this, neither will they believe the other.”

Hilary of Poitiers stated<sup>18</sup> that the Son knows everything the Father knows due to their Unity of Nature. When Jesus said He didn’t know the hour of the Second Coming, He was speaking from His human nature. The Twelve Apostles picked up on this, since they asked Him the same question again after the Resurrection as if He did know. They perceived in the mystery of His ignorance a divine Plan of silence.

“The Son is ignorant of nothing which the Father knows, and it doesn’t follow that because the Father alone knows, that the Son does not know. Father and Son abide in unity of nature, and the ignorance of the Son belongs to the divine Plan of silence seeing that in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The Lord Himself testified this, when He answered the question of the Apostles concerning the times, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). The knowledge is denied them, and not only that, but the anxiety to learn is forbidden, because it is not theirs to know these times. Yet now that He is risen, they ask again, though their question on the former occasion had been met with the reply, that not even the Son knew. They cannot possibly have understood literally that the Son did not know, for they ask Him again as though He did know. They perceived in the mystery of His ignorance a divine Plan of silence, and now, after His resurrection, they renew the question, thinking that the time has come to speak. The Son no longer denies that He knows, but tells them that it is not theirs to know, because the Father has set it within His own authority. If then, the Apostles attributed it to the divine Plan, and not to weakness, that the Son did not know the day, shall we say that the Son knew not the day for the simple reason that He was not God? No way! Remember, God the Father set the day within His authority, that it might not come to the knowledge of man; and the Son, when asked before, replied that He did not know; but now, no longer denying His knowledge, replies that it is theirs not to know, for the Father has set the times not in His own knowledge, but in His own authority. The day and the moment are included in the word ‘times’; can it be, then, that He, Who was to restore Israel to its kingdom, did not Himself know the day and the moment of that restoration? He instructs us to see evidence of His birth in this exclusive prerogative of the Father, yet He does not deny that He knows. While He proclaims that the possession of this knowledge is withheld from us, He asserts that it belongs to the mystery of the Father’s authority.”

“We must not therefore think, because He said He did not know the day and the moment that the Son did not know. As man He wept, slept and sorrowed, but God is incapable of tears, fear or sleep. According to the weakness of His flesh He shed tears, slept, hungered, thirsted, was weary and feared, yet without impairing the reality of His Only-begotten nature; equally so we must refer to His human nature, the words that He knew not the day or the hour.”

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<sup>18</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, IX, 75.

Basil the Great stated<sup>19</sup> that at the Resurrection, we will go from material comprehension to immaterial comprehension, which is true knowledge of God. While we are bound to this life, we are mingled with clay and limited in our ability. When Christ said, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons”, He meant that this is beyond our ability due to the limits of this life.

“When we no longer know God in mirrors and not immediately, but approach Him as one and alone, then we shall know even the ultimate end. For all material knowledge is said to be the kingdom of Christ; while immaterial knowledge, and the knowledge of actual Godhead, is that of God the Father. But our Lord is also Himself the end and the ultimate blessedness according to the purpose of the Word; for what does He say in the Gospel? ‘I will raise him up at the last day’ (John 6:40). He calls the transition from material knowledge to immaterial contemplation a resurrection, speaking of that knowledge after which there is no other, as the last day. Our intelligence is raised up and roused to a height of blessedness at the time when it contemplates the Oneness and Unity of the Word. But since our intelligence is made dense and bound to earth, it is both mingled with clay and incapable of gazing intently in pure contemplation, being led through adornments related to its own body. It considers the operations of the Creator, and to the end that growing little by little it may one day grow strong enough to approach even the actual unveiled Godhead. This is the meaning, I think, of the words ‘my Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28), and also of the statement, ‘To sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father’ (Matthew 20:23). This too is what is meant by Christ’s ‘delivering up the kingdom to God the Father’ (1 Corinthians 15:24). According to the denser doctrine which is regarded relatively to us and not to the Son Himself, He is not the end but the first fruits. It is in accordance with this view that when His disciples asked Him again, ‘When will you restore the kingdom of Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). That is to say, the knowledge of such a kingdom is not for them that are bound in flesh and blood. This contemplation the Father had put away in His own power, meaning by ‘power’ those that are empowered, and by ‘His own’ those who are not held down by the ignorance of things below. Do not, I beg you, have in mind times and seasons of sense but certain distinctions of knowledge apprehended by mental perception. For our Lord’s Prayer must be carried out. It is Jesus Who prayed ‘Grant that they may be one in us just as We are one’ (John 17:21-22). When God, Who is one, is in each, number is lost in the indwelling of Unity.”

Athanasius of Alexandria stated<sup>20</sup> that Christ did know when the End would be prior to the Crucifixion in His Divinity, but not in His humanity. After the Resurrection, when the Twelve asked again, Jesus couldn’t answer from just His humanity, because it was now deified from the Resurrection. So He just told them not to ask. If they did know when the End would be, many people would put off care for their souls until that Day approaches.

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<sup>19</sup> Basil the Great, Letter to the Caesareans, VIII, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxviii, 48-49.

“Christ has made known what comes before the end, that, as He said Himself, we might not be startled or scared, when they happen, but from them may expect the end after them. Concerning the day and the hour He was not willing to say according to His divine nature, ‘I know’ (Acts 1:6-7) but after the flesh, ‘I don’t know’ (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32), for the sake of the flesh which was ignorant; lest they should ask Him further, and then either He should have to pain the disciples by not speaking, or by speaking might act to the prejudice of them and us all. Whatever He does, He does for our sakes, since also for us ‘the Word became flesh’ (John 1:14). For us therefore He said ‘No, I don’t know’. Neither was He untrue in thus saying, for He said humanly, as man, ‘I don’t know’, nor did He allow the disciples to force Him to speak, for by saying ‘I know not’ He stopped their inquiries. So in the Acts of the Apostles it is written, when He went upon the Angels, ascending as man, and carrying up to heaven the flesh which He bore, on the disciples seeing this, and again asking, ‘When shall the end be, and when will You be present?’ He said to them more clearly, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). And He did not then say, ‘No, I don’t know,’ as He said before humanly (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32), but, ‘It is not for you to know.’ For now the flesh had risen and put off its mortality and been deified. No longer did it become Him to answer after the flesh when He was going into the heavens; but henceforth to teach after a divine manner, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father had put in His own power; but ye shall receive Power’ (Acts 1:8). What is that Power of the Father but the Son? Christ is ‘God’s Power and God’s Wisdom’” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

“The Son then did know, as being the Word; for He implied this in what He said. ‘I know but it is not for you to know’ for it was for your sakes that sitting also on the mount I said according to the flesh, ‘No, the Son doesn’t know’ (Matthew 24:36), for the profit of you and all. It is profitable to you to hear so much both of the Angels and of the Son, because of the deceivers which shall be afterwards. Though demons should be transfigured as Angels, and should attempt to speak concerning the end, you should not believe, since they are ignorant. If Antichrist too, disguising himself, should say, ‘I am Christ,’ and should try in his turn to speak of that day and end, to deceive the hearers, you, having these words from Me, ‘No, not the Son,’ may disbelieve him also. Further, not to know when the end is, or when the day of the end, is expedient for man, lest knowing, they might become negligent of the time between, awaiting the days near the end; for they will argue that then only must they attend to themselves. Therefore He had been silent of the time when each shall die, lest men, being elated on the ground of knowledge, should neglect themselves for the greater part of their time.”

Cyril of Jerusalem exhorted<sup>21</sup> his catechumens to pay attention to what is happening. Jesus gave us signs of the Second Coming to look for so that we aren’t led astray by heretics. We don’t need to know the Day and the Hour if we know the signs of the times. Some of the signs have already come in part at various times.

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<sup>21</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 4-5.

“The things then which are seen shall pass away, and there shall come the things which we are looking for, things fairer than the present; but as to the time let no one be curious. ‘It is not for you’, He says, ‘to know times or seasons, which the Father has put in His own authority’ (Acts 1:7). Don’t venture to declare when these things shall be, nor on the other hand fall asleep so as not to notice. He said, ‘Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming’ (Matthew 24:42). But since we needed to know the signs of the end, and since we are looking for Christ, therefore, that we may not die deceived and be led astray by that false Antichrist, the Apostles, moved by the divine will, addressed themselves by a providential arrangement to the True Teacher, and said, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ (Matthew 24:3) We look for You to come again, but Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); put us therefore on our guard, that we may not worship another instead of You. Christ, opening His divine and blessed mouth, said, ‘Take heed that no one deceives you’ (Matthew 24:4). You also, my listeners, as seeing Him now with the eyes of your mind, hear Him saying the same things to you; pay attention that no man mislead you. This word exhorts you all to pay attention to what is spoken; for it is not a history of things gone by, but a prophecy of things future, and which will surely come. Not that we prophesy, for we are unworthy; but that the things which are written will be set before us, and the signs declared. Observe which of them have already come to pass, and which yet remain; and make yourself safe.”

“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many’ (Matthew 24:4-5). This has happened in part: for already Simon Magus has said this, and Menander, and some others of the godless leaders of heresy; and others will say it in our days, or after us.”

## **The Mission to the Ends of the Earth**

Luke stated, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

John Chrysostom noted<sup>22</sup> that the Apostles first preached the Gospel at the place where they were most afraid to do so; that is, in Jerusalem.

“Notice that the Apostles did preach and fulfill the Gospel! For great was the gift that the Spirit had bestowed on them. In the very place where they were most afraid, that is, in Jerusalem, there they preached first, and afterwards to the uttermost part of the earth. Then for assurance of what He had said, ‘While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight’ (Acts 1:9). Not ‘while they beheld’ did He rise from the dead, but ‘while they beheld, He was taken up’. The sight of their eyes here was not all-sufficient; for in the Resurrection they saw the end, but not the beginning, and in the Ascension they saw the

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<sup>22</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, v. 9.

beginning, but not the end. At the Resurrection it was superfluous to have seen the beginning; the Lord Himself Who spoke these things was present to show that He had risen, and the sepulcher showed clearly that He was not there. But at the Ascension, they needed to be informed of the sequel by the word of others. Since their eyes do not suffice to show them the height of heaven, nor to inform them whether He had actually gone up into heaven, notice what follows. That it was Jesus Himself who ascended, they knew from the fact that He had been speaking with them. Had they seen only from a distance, they could not have recognized Him by sight. But that He was taken up all the way into Heaven itself, the Angels had to inform them.”

Chrysostom also compared<sup>23</sup> the sending out of the Twelve to the ends of the earth to the Lord’s parable of the Wedding Feast. Things happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> century just as Christ had described in the Parable of the Wedding Feast. God was extraordinarily long-suffering in delaying His wrath for all the grief He was getting from His people. Even at the Ascension, Christ still asked the Apostles to go to the Jews first; but when they had been driven away, then they went to the Gentiles.

“In order that they (the Jewish leaders) may not say, ‘He is an adversary of God, and therefore we do not come’, listen to who is asking them to come; it is the Father who is making the marriage, and it is Christ who is asking them to come.”

“What then did the Father do after these things? Since they were not willing to come, and also killed those that came to them; He burned up their cities, and sent His armies and slew them.”

“These things Christ said, declaring beforehand the things that took place under Vespasian and Titus (66 to 70 AD), and that they provoked the Father also, by not believing in Him; it is the father at any rate who was avenging. For this reason let me add, not immediately after Christ was slain did the capture of Jerusalem take place, but after forty years, that He might show His long suffering. It came when they had slain Stephen, when they had put James to death, when they had spitefully treated the Apostles.”

“Notice the truth of the event, and its quickness! While John was yet living, and many others of them that were with Christ, these things came to pass, and they that had heard these words were witnesses of the events.”

“Notice His extensive care for them! He had planted a vineyard; He had done all things, and finished; when His servants had been put to death, He sent other servants; when those had been slain, He sent the Son; and when He was put to death, He still asks them to come to the marriage. They still would not come; so after this He sent other servants, and they slew these also.”

“Then upon this He slays them, as being incurably diseased. That they were incurably diseased was proven not by their acts only, but by the fact, that even when harlots and tax collectors had believed (Matthew 21:31-32), they did these things. So that, not by their own crimes alone, but also from what others were able to do rightly, these men are condemned.”

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<sup>23</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXIX, 1.

“If anyone should say that the Gentiles were not called by Christ, when the apostles had been beaten and had suffered ten thousand things, immediately after the resurrection, Jesus said to them, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ (Matthew 28:19). We would say that both before the crucifixion, and after the crucifixion, they addressed themselves to the Jews first. For both before the crucifixion, Jesus said to them, ‘Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 10:6); and after the crucifixion, so far from forbidding, He even commanded them to address themselves to the Jews. Though He said, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ (Matthew 28:19), yet when on the point of ascending into Heaven, He declared that to the Jews first they were to address themselves. For, ‘you shall receive power, said He, ‘when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). Paul said again, ‘He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles’ (Galatians 2:8). Therefore the apostles also went first to the Jews, and when they had waited a long time in Jerusalem, and then had been driven away by them, in this way they were scattered abroad to the Gentiles.”

## Christ’s Ascension

Luke wrote, “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11).

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>24</sup> some details about the Ascension that might not be readily apparent. Christ was received by a cloud as an indication of Divinity being received into heaven as One Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind (Psalm 104:3). By contrast, Elijah went up in a fiery chariot, and Moses went into the cloud, but the cloud was not there because of Moses. After the Ascension, angels appear as men out of cheerfulness, since Christ had already told His disciples that this was going to happen. The angels did not let the disciples wait around for no reason, since they needed to prepare to receive the Holy Spirit.

“Why did ‘clouds receive Christ’ at the Ascension? This was a sure sign that He went up to Heaven. Not fire, as in the case of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11-12), nor fiery chariot but ‘a cloud received Him’; which was a symbol of Heaven, as the Prophet says; ‘Who makes the clouds His chariot’ (Psalm 104:3); it is of the Father Himself that this is said. Therefore he says, ‘on a cloud’; in the symbol, he would say, of the Divine power, for no other Power is seen to appear on a cloud. Listen to what another Prophet says: ‘The Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst’ (Isaiah 19:1). This happened while they were listening with great attention to what He was saying; this was in answer to a very interesting question,

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<sup>24</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, II, vv. 10-11.

and with their minds fully aroused and quite awake, that this thing took place. On Mount Sinai the cloud was because of Him; Moses entered into the darkness, but the cloud there was not because of Moses. Christ did not merely say, 'I go', lest they should again grieve, but He said, 'I will send the Spirit'. 'But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you (John 16:5-7); and that He was going away into heaven they saw with their eyes. What a sight they were granted! 'And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus<sup>25</sup>, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven' (Acts 1:10-11). Again, the outward appearance is cheering [in white apparel]. They were Angels, in the form of men. They showed themselves to be trusted by the disciples, by saying, 'You men of Galilee'. By their appearance also they attracted their attention, and showed that they were from heaven. Why doesn't Christ Himself tell them these things, instead of the Angels? He had beforehand told them all things; 'What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?' (John 6:62). Moreover the Angels did not say, 'whom you have seen taken up,' but, 'going into heaven'; ascension is the word, not assumption; the expression 'taken up', belongs to the flesh. For the same reason the angels said, 'He who was taken up from you into heaven which is taken up from you will so come in like manner' (Acts 1:11), not, 'shall be sent', but, 'shall come'. 'He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things' (Ephesians 4:10). The expression, 'a cloud received Him' notes that He Himself mounted upon the cloud. Of the expressions, some are adapted to the conceptions of the disciples, some are agreeable with the Divine Majesty. Now, as they behold, their conceptions are elevated: He has given them no slight hint of the nature of His Second Coming. For this, 'will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11), means, with the body; which they desired to hear; and, that he shall come again to judgment 'thus' upon a cloud. 'And, behold, two men stood by them'. Why is it said, 'men?' Because the angels fashioned themselves as men, that the beholders might not be overpowered. The angels' words moreover were calculated for soothing: 'Why do you stand gazing up into heaven?' The angels would not let them wait there any longer for Him. Here again, these tell what is greater, and leave the less unsaid. That 'He will thus come', they say, and that 'you must look for Him from heaven'. The angels called the disciples away from that spectacle not because they could not see Him; but because He would be present before they were aware. For the disciples said on a former occasion, 'Where are You going?' (John 13:36). Much more would they have said it now."

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<sup>25</sup> They used the expression "This" demonstratively, saying, "this Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall thus" — demonstratively, "in this way"

Leo the Great stated<sup>26</sup> that angels have always accompanied the Son of God wherever He goes. Thus it is to no one's surprise that they are there at the Ascension testifying to the faithful that Christ will return in the same manner as He ascended.

“But when the disciples eyes followed the ascending Lord to heaven with upward gaze of earnest wonder, two angels stood by them in clothing shining with wondrous brightness, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ (Acts 1:11). By which words all the sons of the Church were taught to believe that Jesus Christ will come visibly in the same Flesh wherewith He ascended. They were also taught not to doubt that all things are subject to Him on Whom the ministry of angels had waited from the first beginning of His Birth. Just as an angel announced to the blessed Virgin that Christ should be conceived by the Holy Spirit, so the voice of heavenly beings sang of His being born of the Virgin to the shepherds. As messengers from above were the first to attest His having risen from the dead, so the service of angels was employed to foretell His coming in very Flesh to judge the world. The point was that we might understand what great powers will come with Him as Judge, when such great ones ministered to Him even during the judgment.”

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>27</sup> how angels are everywhere helping us in our salvation, not just assisting the Son of God in His work. This is their purpose, since it is an angelic work to do everything for the salvation of the brethren. Many examples of their work are included.

“Why marvel if angels minister to the Son (Hebrews 1:14), when they minister even to our salvation? Notice how he lifts their minds, and shows the great honor which God has for us, since He has assigned to Angels who are above us this ministration on our behalf. As if one should say, for this purpose He employs them; this is the office of Angels, to minister to God for our salvation. It is an angelical work, to do everything for the salvation of the brethren; or rather it is the work of Christ Himself, for He indeed saves as Lord, but they as servants. And we are Angels' fellow-servants! The angels said to the Apostles, ‘Why do you gaze so earnestly on the Angels (Acts 1:11)? They are servants of the Son of God, and are sent many ways for our sakes, and minister to our salvation. And so they are partners in service with us.’”

“Consider how Paul ascribes no great difference to the kinds of creatures. And yet the space between angels and men is great; nevertheless he brings them down near to us, all but saying, ‘For us they labor, for our sake they run to and fro; on us, they wait’. This is their ministry, for our sake to be sent every way.”

“The Old Testament is full of these examples, and the New. Angels brought glad tidings to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-15), to Mary (Luke 1:28-38), to Joseph (Matthew 1:20). They sat at the sepulcher (Matthew 28:1-2, Mark 16:5); they were sent to say to the disciples, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?’ (Acts 1:11). They released Peter out of the prison (Acts 12:5-12); they spoke with Philip (Acts 8:26-27)! Consider how great the honor is; when God sends His Angels for ministers as to friends; when to Cornelius an Angel appears

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<sup>26</sup> Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Sermons on the Ascension, LXXIV, 4.

<sup>27</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, III, 4.



(Acts 10:3-7), when an Angel brings forth all the apostles from the prison, and says, ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life’ (Acts 5:20); and to Paul himself also an Angel appears (Acts 16:6-10). Do you see that they minister to us on God’s behalf, and that they minister to us in the greatest matters? Paul said, ‘All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come -- all are yours’ (1 Corinthians 3:22). Well then the Son also was sent, but not as a servant, nor as a minister, but as a Son, and Only-Begotten, and desiring the same things with the Father.”

Chrysostom also stated<sup>28</sup> that the Ascension involved the ascent of Christ with His real fleshly body. When Paul said that we don’t know Christ after the flesh anymore, he did not mean that Christ had flesh no longer, but that we have a different relationship with Him now.

“If everyone died and rose again according to the tyranny of sin that condemned them; but rose again ‘through the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit’ (Titus 3:5 ), Paul said with reason, ‘regard no one’ of the faithful ‘according to the flesh’ (2 Corinthians 5:16). What if they are in the flesh? That fleshly life is destroyed, and we are born again by the Spirit, and have learned another deportment, rule, life and condition, namely, in the heavens. Paul shows Christ to be the Author of this. Therefore Paul added, ‘Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer” (2 Corinthians 5:16).

“Did Christ abandon the flesh after the Resurrection, and is He now not with that body? Away with the thought, for He is even now clothed in flesh; for ‘this *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ (Acts 1:11). How? In flesh, with His body! How then does he say, ‘We regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer’ (2 Corinthians 5:16). To us ‘after the flesh’ means being in sins and ‘not after the flesh’ means not being in sins. But to Christ, ‘after the flesh’ means His being subject to the affections of nature, such as to thirst, to hunger, to weariness, to sleep. For ‘He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’ (1 Peter 2:22). Therefore He had said, ‘Which of you convicts Me of sin?’ (John 8:46) and again, ‘The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me’ (John 14:30). ‘Not after the flesh’ is being forever freed from these things, not the being without flesh. With this flesh Jesus comes to judge the world, His being impassable and pure. We also shall advance to this state when ‘our lowly body’ had been ‘conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

## **The Early Church in Jerusalem**

Luke wrote, “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey.<sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew

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<sup>28</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XI, 3.

and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Jude *the brother* of James.<sup>14</sup> These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:12-14).

Cyprian of Carthage described<sup>29</sup> the spirit of the new believers after Pentecost as one of peacemakers. Because they were of one heart and one soul, their prayers were effective.

If we are fellow-heirs with Christ, let us abide in the peace of Christ; if we are sons of God, we ought to be peacemakers. ‘Blessed’, says He, ‘are the peacemakers; for they shall be called sons of God’ (Matthew 5:9). It behooves the sons of God to be peacemakers, gentle in heart, simple in speech, agreeing in affection, faithfully linked to one another in the bonds of unanimity.

This unanimity formerly prevailed among the Apostles; and thus the new assembly of believers, keeping the Lord’s commandments, maintained its love for mankind. Divine Scripture proves this, when it says, ‘Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul’ (Acts 4:32). And again: ‘These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers’ (Acts 1:14). And thus they prayed with effective prayers; thus they were able with confidence to obtain whatever they asked from the Lord’s mercy.

John Chrysostom noted<sup>30</sup> the status of the disciples during the 10 days after the Ascension and before Pentecost. The Ascension occurred on a Sabbath and they immediately went back to the Upper Room where they had had the Last Supper (Mark 14:12-16), Jesus’ appearances (John 20:19-29) and many discussions since then. All the disciples (including the women) had been there out of fear of the Jewish leaders. All were there with one accord in prayer awaiting the Holy Spirit.

“When the disciples returned to Jerusalem after the Ascension, they could not have borne it, if the angel had not referred them to the Second Coming. It seems to me that it was also on a Sabbath that these things took place; for Luke would not thus have specified the distance, saying, ‘Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey’ (Acts 1:12), unless they were then going on the Sabbath a certain definite distance. ‘When they came back from the Ascension, they went up into the upper room, where they were making their abode’ (Acts 1:14); so they then remained in Jerusalem after the Resurrection. No longer are only Peter, James and John mentioned, but together with Peter: ‘Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Jude the brother of James’ (Acts 1:13). Luke has done well to mention the disciples: for since one had betrayed Christ, and another had been unbelieving, he thereby shows that, except the first, all of them were preserved.”

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers’ (Acts 1:14). For this is a powerful weapon in temptations; and for this they had been trained. As they

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<sup>29</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, I, 24-25.

<sup>30</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, III, vv. 12-14.

‘Continued with one accord’ the present temptation directed them to this upper room; for they exceedingly feared the Jews. They were together ‘With the women’, for Luke had said that they had followed Him, ‘and with Mary the mother of Jesus’ (Luke 23:55). How then is it said, that the Apostle John ‘took Mary to his own home’ (John 19:25-27) at that time? That happened, but then the Lord had brought them together again in the upper room. Also there were Jesus’ brethren<sup>31</sup>; some of these at some time before were unbelieving<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Jesus’ brethren included Jude Thaddaeus (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:16, Acts 1:13) of the Twelve and Joseph Barsabas (Acts 1:23, 15:22) and James (Galatians 1:19) of the Seventy.

<sup>32</sup> Of Jesus’ brothers, they were with Him at the Wedding Feast at Cana in early 27 AD as Jesus began His public ministry (John 2:11-12). In mid-28 AD, Jesus’ brothers were not all traveling with Him and there seems to be some differences between Jesus and them (Matthew 12:46-50). In September 29 AD, Jesus’ brothers did not believe in Him yet (John 7:2-6). However in about October 29 AD, two of Jesus’ brothers (Joseph, also called Barsabas in Acts 1: and James) were chosen to be numbered with the Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20). Jesus’ brother Jude was numbered with the Twelve Apostles from the beginning in 27 AD, so he may not be referred to as the “unbelieving” among Jesus’ brothers

## A Man Rules Heaven

May 28, 2020

### Gospel: Luke 24:36-53

Today's Gospel lesson is also used in the Orthodox Church as one of the eleven Gospels of the Resurrection that are read at Matins on a rotating basis. For a Special Feast Day, a different Matins Gospel may be read that pertains to that Feast Day. Thus, today's Gospel lesson is read often in the Orthodox Church.

The Gospel lesson begins with Jesus' first appearance to the Eleven (minus Thomas) after the Resurrection (v.36, John 20:19). At this point He had appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (John 20:11-18), to all the Myrrh-Bearing Women as they returned from the tomb (Matthew 28:9-10), to Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31), and to Peter (Luke 24:34). Having heard of His resurrection from numerous witnesses, the Eleven were undoubtedly aroused in their desire to see Him. But they expected to see Him as He was. When He appeared to them, passing through solid walls, their initial reaction was, "They were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit" (v.37). This was the same reaction they had when He came to them on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee, walking on the water at the fourth watch of the night, or 3:00 A.M. to 6:00 A.M. (Mark 6:48-49).

Jesus' words to them were first, "Peace to you" (v.36), and then, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (vv.38,39). Following this, Jesus asked for some food and ate a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb in their presence (vv.41, 42).

The foregoing outlines an enormously important aspect of the Resurrection that was distorted by the First Century Gnostics. They claimed that Christ was a Theophany and not a true human being. They denied the Incarnation and claimed that Jesus just assumed a human-like body as He did when He appeared to Abraham (Genesis 18) and to others.

Some examples of these Gnostic heretics are Nicholas, one of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:5), who later taught that physical things like food offered to idols and sexual immorality didn't matter (Revelation 2:6, 14-15). To him, all that mattered were spiritual things. Other Gnostics who distorted the Resurrection were Hymenaeus, Philetus and Alexander (2 Timothy 2:16-18, 1 Timothy 1:19-20, 2 Timothy 4:14). For more details about this, see the Epistle lessons for the 28th and 30th Sundays after Pentecost, and the Study "Simon Magus the Heresiarch".

Commenting on Christ's appearance, Cyril of Alexandria (4th-5th Century) said, "To convince them firmly and indubitably that He is the same Who suffered, He immediately shows that being God by nature, He knows what is hidden, and that the tumultuous thoughts within them do not escape Him; for He said, 'Why are you troubled?' And this is a very plain proof that He Whom they see before them is not some other person, but the very same Whom they had seen both suffering death upon the Cross and being laid in the tomb, even Him Who sees our insides and our heart and from Whom nothing that is in us is hid."

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“To prove both that death is conquered and that human nature has put off corruption in Him as the predecessor, He shows His hands and His feet and the holes of the nails and permits them to handle Him (Compare 1 John 1:1), and in every way convince themselves that the very body which had suffered was risen. Let no one cavil at the Resurrection; though you hear the Scripture say, ‘It is sown a natural (Greek: *psuchikos* = breathing, as in a fleshly body that breathes) body, it is raised a spiritual body’ (1 Corinthians 15:44), do not deny the return of human bodies to incorruption (1 Corinthians 15:42). For as the natural is subject to natural, that is to fleshly lusts, so also the spiritual is that which submits itself to the Will of the Holy Spirit. For after the Resurrection from the dead, there will be no longer the opportunity for carnal affection, but the goad of sin will be entirely powerless; that very body which has been brought down to the earth shall be clothed with incorruption” (Commentary on Luke, Chapter 24).

After eating the fish and honeycomb, Jesus began to “open their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (v.45). He began with the Crucifixion explaining “that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (v.44). He went on to say that “Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things” (vv.46-48).

The disciples seemed to understand Him now, whereas before the Crucifixion they didn’t understand and it was hidden from them (Luke 18:31-34). Before the Crucifixion when He told them about the Cross, they were exceedingly sorrowful (Matthew 17:23). Now, even after He was parted from them and carried up into heaven (v.51), they returned to Jerusalem with great joy (v.52). The Ascension was the Lord’s joy at having accomplished His mission. Now that His disciples understand this, their love for Him has increased so that they can rejoice in His joy.

In His Ascension, Jesus took His human body (of flesh and bones: v.39) to heaven. Enoch (Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:10-14) had already been taken to heaven with a human body; and Moses was there also, as evidenced by his transfiguration along with Jesus (Mark 9:4). But neither of these three saints had the resurrected, incorruptible body that Jesus had. Christ entered heaven with a resurrected and glorified humanity.

In this glorified body after the Resurrection, some people who knew Him well didn’t recognize Him at first. Some examples of this are Mary Magdalene at the tomb (John 20:11-17), Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-33) and the Apostles fishing on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-7). There was something different about His resurrected body, yet it was still recognizable on closer inspection. The nail holes were still there and were recognizable as nail holes (John 20:25, 27); the spear puncture wound was still there (John 19:34). But yet the mortal (i.e. His human nature) had put on immortality and thus was changed.

In this transcendent, immortal body, He ascended to His Father. And “with His Own blood, He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). This has significant implications for us in the Body of Christ, the Church. Paul wrote how Christ “raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). This takes place around the Lord’s Table at the Lord’s Supper, where He said, “This cup is

the New Covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25). How the bread and wine becomes His resurrected body and blood is a mystery just as how His glorified body passed through solid walls (John 20:19) is a mystery; and those who serve at the Altar are called stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). If we refuse to eat the Lord’s body and blood, we have no life in us; doing so, we have eternal life (John 6:53-58), for we partake of the New Covenant.

Thus by the man Christ entering heaven, He has opened the door to all humanity. His disciples understood this at the Ascension and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the Temple praising and blessing God (Luke 24:52, 53). At Pentecost, the Twelve even extended the invitation to the very people who had crucified their Lord saying, “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).