

Scripture Reading:

Daniel 7: 9 "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; 10 A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. 11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. 13 "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed."

'Ascended Into Heaven'

We come once again to three Sundays in the church calendar that we highlight here at Church of the King each year as a continual reminder of God's work in our lives and the history of His Church & the world! We have been studying some grand truths in just the introduction of Ephesians & just as each of those have encouraged us as we learn about them, these high points of the Church calendar should instruct and encourage us as well year after year.

- With Ascension Sunday we are reminded that we serve the ruling and reigning Savior Jesus, Who is seated at God's Right Hand.
- With Pentecost we remember the coming of our Comforter, sent to convict the world of sin and to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.
- And with Trinity Sunday we are reminded that the Nature of our Triune God gives purpose and understanding to all of His Creation.

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

- This week Ascension Sunday reminds us about the bodily ascension of Jesus to the Father's right hand...

Often these markers in the Church calendar have lined up nicely with where we are moving through a book of the Bible exegetically, as we are with Ephesians.

- But in other years we have done topical messages to focus on these particular Sundays.

Such will be the case this year as we consider the reality of the Ascension, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the Nature of the Trinity.

- Such a focus is a very important part of our responsibility in raising our covenant children in the fear and admonition of the Lord!

We cannot just assume they pick these grand truths up over the years, so at times we should focus on the fundamentals from the pulpit!

- AND as families we need to be faithful in making sure the children understand what we are doing and learning.

And of course, just as is the case whenever we faithfully instruct our children, we are often the ones who really learn the lessons! *[talk about family devotions or meal times]*

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

With our responsive readings and my text from Daniel we have reviewed all of the major Scriptures that give us the account of the ascension of Jesus!

- If we want to understand the details of the ascension of Jesus, these are the texts that we should be studying!
- The ascension was the particular time and place in history where Jesus who had come in the flesh, ascended in bodily form to the throne of His Father in heaven.

It was described by Luke in both his Gospel account and the Book of Acts from the perspective of those here on the earth and it is seen from the perspective of those who were in heaven in the Revelation given to John along with our morning text from Daniel.

Now we do not really have any common life experiences to relate this to that could help us understand those two perspectives, so perhaps a Star Trek theme could help... Remember that famous line, beam me up Scotty? Yes, they had a fancy machine that could transmit a person's body from a planet up to the space ship and that could be seen from both perspectives. From the planet the person would be taken up and out of their sight. The folks in the ship overhead would be the witnesses who would suddenly see that person was now on board.

Luke tells us what happened from the perspective of the Disciples who were with Jesus at the time here on earth. Jesus finished His teachings and then ascended in bodily form on the clouds and was taken up into heaven. The disciples kept looking up because they could not tell where Jesus had gone, just as we would lose sight of the person who was beamed up.

Daniel's vision and Revelation chapter five tell us about the very same event only from the perspective of those in heaven in God's throne room. In Revelation, as they lament the need for someone to open God's book of judgment, one of the angels tells John, "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." Then John looks and sees "a Lamb as though it had been slain." The Savior who was promised had come to earth and accomplished the work for which He was sent: He has sacrificed Himself as the Lamb of God to save His people from their sins.

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

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

- So if someone were to ask : "Where is Jesus Today?"
- We can rightly say He is seated at God's right hand in heaven!

This is a glorious truth and one that we take very seriously, especially when we are discussing the presence of Jesus at the Lord's Table!

With that in mind there is a tough follow-up question that could be asked, especially by the children, because kids tend to ask the 'tough' questions!

- Is Jesus only in heaven?

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

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

The two natures of Jesus which the Apostle Paul clearly presents at the beginning of the Book of Romans:

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

- **Jesus is truly man, born of the seed of David with a real human mother, Mary.**
- **Jesus is also revealed as the Word, Who was with God and Who is God: Declared to be the Son of God with power.**

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

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

It is VERY important that we get this right because it is clearly what the Bible teaches, AND because almost all of the major errors and heresies which have burdened the Church down through the ages have started by getting this truth wrong in some way.

Mormons want us to believe they are Biblical Christians and sadly many Christians will uncritically go along for the sake of so-called love or unity. BUT here is an example of why we must clearly show the difference because one cannot be saved IF one does not know the REAL Jesus!

- **Mormons clearly teach and believe that Jesus was a man, just like us, who became a god just as His father did before him.**
- **The Bible teaches that Jesus is the one true eternal God who was born as a man at His incarnation, while never ceasing to be the Son of God.**

Yes, that is a mystery we will never fully understand, but it is NOT a mystery kept from us as a secret!

One of the reasons that groups like the Mormons or Jehovah's witnesses are so popular is because they try to give simplistic answers to all of the great truths given to us in the Bible: [*We will see more of this when we consider the truth of the Trinity.*]

Most truths in the Bible can be stated simply: For example, God is the creator of all that exists or Jesus loves me and saved me from my sins.

While simply stated, these foundational truths are also profound & mysterious.

- **It is beyond our ability as mere creatures to fully understand how God created all matter out of nothing or how God became a man to save us from our sins.**
- **BOTH of these simple facts are true, & they are mysterious as well.**

So the proper answer to the question “where is Jesus today?” is really two-fold:

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

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

It is a grand truth expounded upon in the 2nd part of the Athanasian Creed:

- This foundational creed was adopted by the early Church to affirm and defend the great truths about the Triune Nature of God and the two Natures of Jesus.
- It is important that we remember that the early creeds clarified and defended what the Bible teaches... They did NOT change the basic teachings of the Bible!

The creed does express in very strong language the importance of knowing these truths!

When speaking of Jesus, the creed states: “For the right faith is, that we believe & confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man;”

- This is the simple truth that we must affirm: As Paul declared to the Romans, Jesus is BOTH born of a woman as a man and declared to be the eternal Son of God.

It is important to remember at this point that we are not saved by knowledge, nor can any of us have perfect knowledge of these mysteries...

- But we all must, at our own appropriate level have a right understanding.

[Mention children’s catechism or the example of electricity]

The Athanasian Creed then goes on to explain how we are to rightly understand this mystery...
Not exhaustively, but truly.

Jesus is, “God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds;”

Substance is what we would refer to as one’s nature:

We are human beings made in the image of God: Among us here this morning we have young and old or male and female, short or tall, strong and weak, but we are all of the same substance: Human.

- In the same way, the creed declares that Jesus is of the same substance as the Father when it comes to His Godhood or deity.

The creed goes on to say that Jesus is also , “man of the substance of his mother, born in the world;”

As John proclaimed in his Gospel, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. There is NO WAY to honestly read the Bible and then spiritualize the manhood of Jesus: He was truly human, of our substance, sin excepted! He was born of a woman, lived as a man with hunger and thirst & even exhaustion at times. He died a cruel death and was buried in a tomb. After three days He was raised in power: After which, He confirmed the reality of His flesh by allowing the disciples to touch Him and by eating and drinking in their presence.

Jesus is BOTH God and man and the creed goes on to declare that He is: “perfect God and perfect man, of a rational soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching His godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His manhood; who, although He is God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God; one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.” This is a creed I would encourage all of our young people to memorize while memorization is still easy!

- It is a powerful creed that has served the Church well for over fifteen hundred years.

And it affirms the importance of the Ascension of Jesus to the Father’s right hand where He reigns today, when it says, “He ascended into heaven, He sits at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the quick and the dead.”

Some years ago our good friend Pastor Steve Wilkins challenged us about the implications that Ascension Sunday has for us and the world and I will close by paraphrasing his thoughts and sharing a similar challenge from another dear friend who has gone on before us, Pastor David Chilton:

Pastor Wilkins points out that Church seasons like Christmas and Easter can become sentimental, but Ascension simply tells us, and tells us bluntly, that *Jesus is Lord*.

- That's unsettling and offensive to a world that has been trained to think of itself as its own "lord."

If Jesus is Lord, no matter how independent you might imagine yourself to be, you are not out from under His authority. You actually have an obligation to obey Him.

This is a BIG DEAL. Jesus is Lord. Not the government. Not your conscience. Not your feelings. Not the experts. Not the power-brokers, or the wealthy, or the influential.

- All men, all nations, all institutions, all areas of life, *all of it*, are under the authority of Jesus and all are accountable to Him.

The ascension means that all nations should acknowledge Jesus as their true king and ruler. It means that all laws ought to be conformed to His revealed will.

It means that all men ought to seek to please Him in their every endeavor, in every place, at all times.

And when that type of talk causes us to wonder how it could be true, we should remember the challenge that Pastor David Chilton gave to the Church many years ago: He is greatly missed in many quarters and by many friends!

"We must stop acting as if we are forever destined to be a sub-culture. We are destined for dominion; we should straighten up and start acting like it. Our life and worship should reflect our expectation of dominion and our increasing capacity for responsibility. We should not see ourselves as lonely outposts surrounded by an increasingly hostile world; that is to bear false witness against God. The truth is just the opposite of that. It is the devil who is on the run, it is paganism which is doomed to extinction. Christianity is ultimately the dominant culture, predestined to be the final and universal religion. The Church will fill the earth."

May it be so and may we be faithful servants as we labor in His fields!

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55

"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance."