

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."

"Where is Jesus Today?"

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

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

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

Often these markers in the Church calendar have lined up nicely with where we are moving through a book of the Bible exegetically, as Psalm Sunday and Easter did this year.

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

Such will be the case this year and I will try and aim them primarily at the children, as we consider the reality of the Ascension, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the Trinity this year.

As we raise our covenant children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, having them learn a proper understanding of the church calendar and what we celebrate on these various Sundays as they come around each year is critically important.

- We cannot just assume they pick it up over the years, so at times we should focus on the fundamentals from the pulpit!
- AND you as families need to be faithful in making sure the children understand what we are doing 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!

- So children, listen carefully because I may ask you all some questions during lunch this week!

So what is the ascension of Jesus and why do we celebrate and focus on it each and every year? With our responsive readings and my text this morning we have covered all of the major Scriptures that address the ascension of Jesus! If we want to understand the ascension and answer the question asked in my sermon title: **This is where we go!** 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 and the Book of Acts from the perspective of those here on the earth and by the Revelation given to John and our morning text from Daniel from the perspective of those who were in heaven. To help us imagine both perspectives, I am going to use Theron as an example, imagining that he has been given some special Avenger type powers so he does not have to actually fly up with the airplane when it takes off: He is now able to move from someplace here on the ground up into an airplane that is flying overhead.

If he were to do that this morning, we would be witnesses here on earth as he rose up and went out one of the windows or the back door on his way to the plane. The folks who were flying in the plane overhead would be the witnesses who would suddenly see that a new pilot was now on board the plane. 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 was then taken up in bodily form on the clouds and 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 Theron.

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. As they all 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 what is the answer to the question I have asked in my sermon title: "Where is Jesus Today?"
- He is seated at God's right hand in heaven!

This is a glorious truth and one that we take very seriously! *[IF this were an adult sermon, I would discuss the Catholic error in the Mass that resulted from getting this wrong.]*

Now I hope some are now asking yourselves a good follow-up question... *[kids do 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: 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.

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

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

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

I have made the point that the impending nomination of a Mormon by the Republican Party is going to open up a lot of discussions, this subject being one of the most important. 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 is 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.*]

Now there are simple truths in the Bible: For example, God is the creator of all that exists or Jesus loves me and saved me from my sins. BUT even these simple & foundational truths are profound & mysterious.

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

So the proper answer to the question that I have asked 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.

[*now a quick word for the older children*]

In two weeks we will read as a congregation the Athanasian Creed:

- This foundational creed was adopted by the early Church to affirm and defend these great truths.
- 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!

I want to go through the portion that teaches about the nature of Jesus this morning so that our children and all of us can take it more seriously when we read it together in the service...

- **The first part of this great creed deals with the Biblical truth of the Trinity which we will consider in two weeks. It also addresses the second mystery that must be properly understood as faithful Christians: The person of Jesus.**
- **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]***

When speaking of Jesus, the creed begins: "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.**
- **The creed 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.**

The creed goes on to say, "and 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 and 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. For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. 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. At His coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire."

- **This is a creed I would encourage all of our young people to memorize while memorization is easy!**

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

And it ends right where we should as we answer the question I have asked and remember the importance of the Ascension of Jesus to the Father's right hand where He reigns today.

Our good friend Pastor Steve Wilkins put it well in his blog post this past week and I will close with his thoughts, because I am not sure I can say it any better...

- **And to tease the interest of those who have not yet made a firm commitment to come and enjoy his teaching at our family camp this year!**

Writing this past Thursday, Steve said, "Today is Ascension Day, the day on which the Church commemorates the ascension of our Savior in glory to the right hand of His Father as the ruler of all creation, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This, coupled with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was the climax of Jesus' work . . . and yet it is almost completely ignored by the world and even by most Christians. Why so? Some have suggested that contrary to Christmas and Easter, Ascension is difficult to sentimentalize. At Christmas, we can focus upon a baby born to a poor, homeless couple in the middle of winter. And at Easter, we can turn our thoughts to "new beginnings" and "second chances" -- But Ascension simply tells us, and tells us bluntly, that *Jesus is Lord*. That's unsettling and offensive to a world that has been trained to think of itself as its own "lord."

You don't have to be a discerning theologian to understand that if the ascension really happened, if in fact Jesus is the Lord of all lords and the King of kings -- then He is the Judge of all the earth, and you can't safely (or sanely) ignore Him. If Jesus is Lord, no matter how independent you might imagine yourself to be, you are not out from under His authority. You actually have an obligation to obey Him and you are accountable to Him for your disobedience and unbelief, for every word that proceeds out of your mouth and for every deed you do.

- If Jesus is Lord and King, then you have an obligation to worship and serve Him and if you don't, you're going to be in big trouble.

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

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

The ascension means that you have only one Lord whom you must please -- Jesus. It means that you have only one opinion that matters. It means you have only one word that is *the* rule of right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error -- Jesus' word. The ascension means you have only One who has the authority to judge you *and* is fully and completely qualified to do so -- Jesus. 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. The ascension is a big deal. And this makes the ascension a problem for the world -- a *big* problem -- so, it is much safer to ignore it altogether. But if the world ignores it, that means that Christians ought to make today (and this coming Sunday) a day of jollification and celebration that is rivaled only by Christmas and Easter. We need to hold us a genuine wingding and a proper whoop-te-do to rejoice over the reality that Jesus is Lord. If the world doesn't want to hear about it, so much the worse for them -- but that doesn't change the reality: Jesus is Lord. He reigns.

Don't fight it. Don't ignore it. Don't deny it. The only proper response is to kiss the Son (Psalm 2).

- And join us in our merry celebration, because Jesus *is* Lord.

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."