

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

MAN ASCENDS TO GOD

Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:9-11; Ascension of Our Lord; May 29, 2025

Hear a “mash-up” of Luke and Acts on the Ascension: **Then [Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven... He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.” ...And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.**

Let us pray. Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The Collect for today mentions two ascensions: the ascension of Jesus Christ and our ascension. God the Father’s “only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so we [may] also ascend...and continually dwell there with Him, [the Son] who lives and reigns with [the Father] and the Holy Spirit, one God.” While the primary focus of our celebration today is the Ascension of our Lord, the other ascension, ours, reminds us that Christ’s ascension leads to ours. Because Jesus ascended to be with God in heaven, we will ascend to be with God in heaven.

[1. Christ Ascends]

As we consider Christ’s ascension, Luke notes that Jesus “**parted**” (διέστη) from His disciples on His way to heaven, not that Jesus had left them behind and was gone. That Jesus was “**carried up into heaven**” describes Him being with God, “at the right hand of God the Father almighty,” as we will confess a little later in the Nicene Creed. The emphasis is not so much Jesus parting from His apostles, but Him reigning with God in heaven. The significance of this is made clear when we answer the question, “Who ascended into heaven?”

You say, “The answer is simple. Jesus ascended into heaven.” And you would be correct. It is stating the obvious to say: “God is in heaven.” Or “Heaven is where God is.” Jesus ascended to God. We worship God, who is in heaven. Who is this ascended Jesus? He is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, whom we worship and adore with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But Jesus Christ is also true man, born of the virgin Mary. It is quite ordinary to say, “God is in heaven,” but it is an extraordinary thing to say, “Man is in heaven with God.”

After Luke tells us that Jesus Christ was “**carried up into heaven,**” he says that His disciples “**worshiped Him...with great joy.**” God alone is to be worshiped, not man. On Ascension Day, we worship God who is not gone away and far from us but remains near to us. Yet, the low worship attendance for the Ascension of Our Lord, a major Church festival, indicates that it is not appreciated as much as, say, Christmas or Easter. Would a better understanding of Ascension lead to joyful and better worship attendance?

Luke is the only Evangelist that gives details of both Jesus’ birth and ascension. When Jesus was born, what did the angel announcing it say to the shepherds? “**Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.**” Why “**great joy**” at Jesus’ birth? What had just happened? “**For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord.**” The baby born of the virgin and lying in the manger is the Lord, God Himself in human flesh. With great joy we celebrate at Christmas that God became man and dwelt among us to save us.

The disciples with **great joy** worshiped the ascended Christ. Why? Man had ascended to heaven to dwell with God. Jesus said in John three, “**No one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man**” (3:13). Paul wrote, “**In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the One who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things**” (Eph. 4:9-10).

[2. Man Ascends]

Man being with God has been our problem since Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan and sinned in the Garden Paradise. In shame, they tried to hide from God so He wouldn't see their sinfulness. You can't hide from God. They were kicked out of the Garden, forbidden from eating from the tree of life and could no longer walk with God in Paradise. They were dead men walking apart from God.

We are their children. Death, that grim reaper, stalks us our whole lives long until he gets us. Though our deaths bring to an end our suffering in this world, it is no friend, but an enemy, one we cannot defeat no matter how hard we try. When Jesus was arrested and crucified, His disciples were frightened and ran away. When He died and was buried, they were full of sorrow. If Jesus was dead and buried, then there is no forgiveness of sins and no being saved from death, they thought. Life loses its purpose if your Savior is dead. We will die and death will take everything we have in this world.

God's Son came from heaven to earth and become man to bear our sin and overcome our death by His dying and rising. God has blessed us with faith in the risen Christ, the man who has ascended into heaven. Like the disciples, because Jesus is risen and ascended, our fear is vanquished by the forgiveness of our sins and our sorrow at death is turned to joy. If the Son of Mary has ascended into heaven to be with God forever, so will we ascend to live there forever.

I came across an Ascension sermon by Leo [the Great], Bishop of Rome from 440-461 AD, who notes how the apostles' "**great joy**" at His ascension becomes our great joy. Leo highlights how the Son of God ascending to heaven as true man gives us great joy.

"It was certainly a great and indescribable source of joy when, in the sight of the heavenly multitudes, the nature of our human race ascended over the dignity of all heavenly creatures. It passed the angel orders and was raised beyond the heights of archangels. In its ascension, our human race did not stop at any other height until this same nature was received at the seat of the eternal Father. Our human nature, united with the divinity of the Son, was on the throne of His glory.

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

“The ascension of Christ is our elevation. Hope for the body is also invited where the glory of the Head [Jesus Christ] preceded us. Let us exult, dearly beloved, with worthy joy and be glad with a holy thanksgiving. Today we not only are established as possessors of paradise, but we have even penetrated the heights of the heavens in Christ. The indescribable grace of Christ, which we lost through the ‘will of the devil,’ prepared us more fully for the glory. Incorporated within Himself, those whom the violent enemy threw down from the happiness of our first dwelling, the Son of God placed at the right hand of the Father. The Son of God lives and reigns with God the Father almighty and with the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.”

(Sermon 73.3-4; FC 93:324-25; *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament III, Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just, Jr., InterVarsity Press, 2003, pp. 393, revised slightly)