

# A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



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*Glory be to Jesus Christ!      Glory be Forever!*



Volume 9 Issue 414

Feast of the Holy Ascension of Our Lord

Sunday, May 31, 2020



Forty days after His glorious resurrection, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ ascended in glory into heaven and sat at the right hand of God the Father. He did so as One Who is fully divine and fully human, One Person with two natures. He ascended with His glorified, resurrected body which still bore the wounds of His crucifix-

ion. The Ascension reminds us that through Him our humanity has come to participate by grace in the eternal life of the Holy Trinity. He has made us “partakers of the divine nature” who may share in His fulfillment of what it means to be a human person in God’s image and likeness.

The divine glory displayed in the Ascension of Christ’s is entirely different from the power and fame that people find so appealing in our fallen world. At some level, we all know how weak and insignificant we are in the larger scheme of things. That is why we so easily make false gods of just about anything that can distract us from recognizing the truth about ourselves. Putting our ultimate trust in people, politics, wealth or fame leads inevitably to idolatry, for it is a form of worshiping a false god.

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\*\*\* 7th Sunday of Pascha \*\*\*

\*Fathers 1st Ecumenical Council\*

Epistle: Acts: 1: 1-13  
Gospel: Luke 24:36-53

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity -  
Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

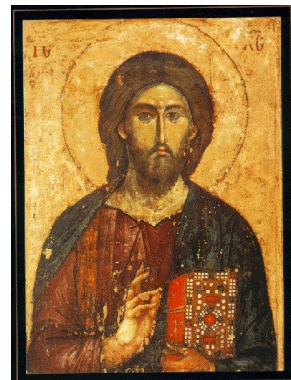
We are dedicated to living out Christ’s commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor,

please call  
Fr. Matthew  
at 607-280-  
1586

Glory be to  
Jesus Christ.  
Glory be  
Forever.



## The Glorious Ascension of Christ, by Fr. Zacharias Zacharu

‘God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet (Psalm 46.6).

The Ascension is the last event in Christ’s earthly life. Of course, Pentecost is the fulfillment of God’s dispensation, which is why is called ‘the last feast’. God the Father was well pleased to see man as he had conceived him before the foundation of the world and sent the Holy Spirit to the world to seal man’s reconciliation with God.

In the person of Jesus Christ, God received all mankind, the ‘middle wall of partition’ broke down and all divergences converged. This feast’s magnificent splendor rests in the fact that when Christ ascends to heaven, when Christ ascends to heaven, He lifts up to the throne of God’s glory this spotless and undefiled human nature which was bestowed upon Him by the Holy Virgin and in which the incomprehensible love of the Father without beginning

was also revealed.

Christ ‘descended first into the lower parts of the earth, then ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.’ The gifts of the Holy Spirit irrigated the earth like ‘gentle rain’. Thus the promise of the Lord was fulfilled that rivers of living water would flow from the heart of all of those who believed in His Name. The Church Fathers relate that the Lord did not ascend like lightning, but  
*(continued p.2)*



*Troparion to St. George*

As the deliverer  
of captives  
and defender  
of the poor,  
healer of the infirm  
and champion of kings,  
victorious great  
martyr George  
intercede with Christ  
our God  
for our souls  
salvation.

**News and Notes**

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

**Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)**

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

**Thoughts on the Feast of the Ascension**

The ascension of Jesus Christ is the return of the Son of God to the Father, in the triumph of fulfillment. Before He sits at the right hand of the Father, he offers for all time a single sacrifice for sins; "For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." (Heb. 10: 14.)

The Ascension is at once the fulfill-

ment of God's plan for salvation of mankind, and the promise of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, who will come to abide in all who call themselves by the name of Jesus Christ, by Holy Baptism. The specific work of the Messiah is accomplished; now He will work in us, dignifying us with the responsibility for bringing the people of the earth to the Father in His Name, through the Holy Spirit at work in our members. With the Ascension, then, all is accomplished.

We can never say that this world ascends through its own powers, nor does this world progresses automatically towards the better. But we do preach that God elevates the humans and their surrounding in His loving care. The world is elevated and does not ascend by itself. It struggles and God accepts it and pulls it up to Himself. He, who is sitting up on high in His Bright Body, opens up and embraces him who is longing for Him. After the Ascension of Christ, tomorrow the universe, in its turn, will be received up.

**The Glorious Ascension of Christ, (cont'd from p. 1)**

slowly. Christ went up gradually to heaven, in order to sanctify the ether, as He sanctified all the earth through His presence, all the waters through His Baptism in the Jordan, and the nethermost parts of the earth by remaining 'in the belly of hell' for three days. The ether is full of evil spirits, so it needed to be sanctified by the Lord to smooth our passage from earth to heaven at the hour of our death. Thus we have the chance to make the journey without temptation and invulnerable to the demon's evil-doing.

While the Lord ascended and the disciples watched Him depart in wonder, two angels appeared in white garments and said: 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?' Of course, these citizens of heaven were not puzzled that the disciples were gazing upwards, for at such a moment their gaze could not have been cast down, but their words concealed a subtle admonition because they found the disciples caught in a state of inertia. Raising the gaze

towards heaven is not enough, if it is not accompanied by a burning heart. For joy and inspiration overflow as a



surging torrent when the life of man 'is hidden with Christ in God'.

By their words, the angels reminded the disciples about the Second Coming and intensified their expectation. God sent His angels to bestow an eschatological dimension upon the

apostles' thoughts, to explain that as He ascended, so, in the same way He will come again, so their hearts will remain full of peace, and the ineffable, incorruptible consolation of His Spirit.

In the event of the Ascension we observe three further important points. The first is that the Lord ascended, while He blessed. His blessing is the grace of heaven, that comes 'as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion'. He departed from His chosen disciples, in the same way that He will come on the day of the Last Judgment. The blessing of the Lord rested on the apostles and through them was extended 'upon all flesh'[16] and it remains as a precious inheritance within His Church imparted to all her members through her bishops and priests, until it reaches perfection at the Second Coming.

God formed the world out of love and never ceased to take care of man even in his rebellion. He bestowed  
(continued p. 4)

These false gods will also lead us to demonize our enemies, real and imagined, because it often makes us feel better about ourselves by comparison when we have someone else to condemn. That is surely one of the reasons that so many people in our culture have become slaves to anger and hatred toward those they view as their rivals or opponents in a zero-sum game for getting all the glory by being on the right side.

The glory of our ascended Lord is the complete opposite of such pathetic and perverse efforts to build ourselves up at the expense of others. Remember that He ascended only after descending, only after dying on the Cross, being buried in a tomb, and descending into Hades. He rose from the dead because He had humbled Himself to the point of accepting rejection, torture, and crucifixion as a blasphemer and a traitor. He was mocked as a failure and made a public example of what happened to people who dared to challenge the authority of Rome, even though His Kingdom is clearly not of this world. He completely repudiated earthly glory in order to make a way for us into the brilliant joy of heaven.

Christ endured all this, not simply as a religious teacher or virtuous person, but truly as the eternal Son of God Who spoke the universe into existence. Let that sink in for a moment, for the unfathomable humility of the Savior destroys our usual assumptions about what it means to be high and mighty. The divine glory revealed so powerfully at His ascension shines brilliantly in contrast to what passes for honor in a world that typically chooses to remain in the dark night of the tomb. If we dare to identify ourselves with Him, we must open the eyes of our souls to the light of His heavenly glory and refuse to wander in spiritual blindness. In order to celebrate the Ascension with integrity, we must ascend with Him into the eternal life of the Holy Trinity even as we live and breathe with our bodies in a world that remains very far from the fullness of His Kingdom.

By rising into heavenly glory as the God-Man, He has shared His gracious divine energies with us. He shows

us what it means to be truly human in the divine image and likeness. In order to unite ourselves to Him, we must reorient our desires for fulfillment, meaning, and joy to the One Who overcame the worst the darkened world could do in order to make us participants in the eternal day of His heavenly reign. The contrast between the heights of heaven and the mundane realities of our lives is obviously very great.

The point of division is not, however, that we are ordinary people with common problems who belong to a very small parish. It is, instead, that we have not united ourselves to Christ in holiness to the point that every dimension of our life in this world has become a brilliant icon of His salvation.

Of course, that is a very high goal which no one may claim to have fulfilled. God is infinitely holy and the journey to become perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect is truly eternal.

No matter where we are on that path, we must all ask our ourselves quite seriously whether we are ascending with Him into greater holiness as we go about our daily lives, face whatever set of challenges we have, and respond to the constant barrage of temptations to put our trust elsewhere. It may be easy to attend services, sing in praise of the Ascension, and call ourselves Christians, but it is much more demanding to conform ourselves to Christ such that His radiant glory shines through us.

We ought to focus on taking the small steps that we are capable of right now in relation to the people around us and the circumstances with which we are familiar. That means humbling ourselves to put the needs

of others before our own preferences in our families, friendships, and workplaces, as well as in our parish.

Christ prayed to the Father that His followers “may be one, even as We are one.” The Church is one and we are members of Christ’s Body together. He ascended with His body and we will too by serving Him in the Church as we do what needs to be done for the flourishing of our small parish. We ascend into the heavenly Kingdom whenever we “lay aside all earthly cares” in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. He has already ascended. Let us go up with Him together.



*(The Glorious Ascension of Christ, from p.2)*

duration upon man out of His lovingkindness, so it might be a time of repentance and redemption, sealing all this life with the sign of His blessing. This seal marks him out as chosen so the angels may recognize him on the day of the Second Coming. The fact that He ascended 'while blessing them' begets a great hope that on that awesome Day, His judgement will be mingled with His love and mercy.

A second characteristic of the Ascension is the glorious way in which He went up. From beginning to end, Holy Scripture speaks about the glory of God, which is often described as a luminous cloud. In the Old Testament they saw this glory, but not the Lord. In the New Testament, when the Lord came in the flesh, He concealed His glory within 'our lowly body', so as to not to terrify His fallen creature by appearing unshielded. Men saw the humble, meek Lord as a 'lamb led to the slaughter', but they were not able to discern His glory, which is the reason that many did not recognize Him as the Messiah.

However, those with a good disposition believed and received the grace to be regenerated. Those who accepted His word and believed in His Name, received the power to be called children of God and 'passed from death unto life'. Now, at the end of His earthly life, Christ appears openly as the Son of God manifest in His glory. On the day of His glorious Appearing, the Lord will come again 'in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory'. The Ascension is thus a prophetic event, and the Lord Himself becomes a Prophet of His Second Coming.

His glory, which will be like lightning during that eminent Day, will protect those who bear the seal of His blessing from any spirit of delusion spread by the pseudo-prophets that preach in each era: 'Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there' so as 'to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect'. In other words, the Lord warned them not to pay attention to alien, false voices that would exhort them to cut themselves off from the Church and go astray like those who have their gaze stuck to the earth and their heart weighed down with the cares of this world. By contrast, those who have their gaze raised high and 'set their affection on things above', will not become deluded but will await with great endurance the true sign of the Lord's

presence.

The coming of the Lord will be encompassed by glory and for us the most glorious way to expect Him is to await Him in Jerusalem, that is, as active and committed members within His Church and her Mysteries, attributing to Him praise and thanksgiving.

The third characteristic that we observe in the Ascension is the suddenness and unexpectedness of the event. The Second Coming will also be sudden and unexpected. On many occasions, the Lord warned us: 'Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is... And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.' Confidence in salvation cannot be based on human calculations. The

Apostle Peter exhorts us: 'Wherefore seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless'. Thus the only thing that we can do is offer continual repentance to God and a contrite heart, so as to taste before the end the peace of reconciliation and to transform the time of our life on earth into the time of the Lord's goodness.

It avails nothing to search out times and seasons, but it is essential to continually search out our heart, to purify it and not allow anything foreign to enter into this place which above all belongs to God. If we do this, we will be vouchsafed to stand and meet the humble and meek gaze of the Almighty Jesus. The Day of the Lord must come as a surprise, because in this way our heart will be tried as in a furnace.

The true eschatological expectation protects us from the gloomy sleep of despondency, that infests the children of this age and clouds the mind. At the same time, it transforms this transient life into the fervent anticipation of the incorruptible and unshakeable; obliterating the temptation to deny the Final Judgement with the thought: 'Where is the promise of his coming?' for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

The longing for the coming of the Lord lends our life a spirit of 'mad love', as the Fathers say, that overcomes every other yearning and false desire of this world that passes away. 'One thing is needful' the grace of Heaven, the flame of the Comforter, that will indelibly seal us so that the Lord may know us as His own on that Day, when He comes to take everyone to abide with Him unto all ages.

