

Jesus blessed them and parted from them and was carried up into heaven... (Luke 24:51)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The season of Easter is seven weeks long, the period of 49 days leading up to the Pentecost ('Pentecost' refers to the 50th day after Passover, when the Jews celebrated the "Feast of Weeks"). Easter, of course, is the climax of the Church year, because it's the celebration of Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil in his resurrection from the dead. Pentecost is another big Church holiday (May 28 this year), noticeable with the change of paraments to red (one of only two or three days in the year when we use it) and our readings and songs about the power of the Holy Spirit. What we often miss in between these two holidays, though, is no less important. On the fortieth day after Easter, we celebrate Ascension Day.

Ascension Day is a high feast day in the Christian calendar, but it's so often overlooked by many Christians. There are probably many reasons for this, including the fact that, since Jesus ascended 40 days after his resurrection, it falls on a Thursday. Who imagines coming to church on a Thursday?! But, it's also overlooked, I think, because the day itself doesn't seem to celebrate anything all that important. Jesus already claimed his victory on Easter. What does it matter that he ascended into heaven?

In fact, it matters a whole lot! Jesus' ascension means that he has taken his rightful place at the side of God the Father to reign over his kingdom forever and ever. That reign is more than just a theological confession. **First**, Jesus' ascension to reign in heaven has allowed him to send us the gift of his Holy Spirit. Jesus said, *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 go, I will send him to you* (John 16:7). This same Holy Spirit *will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you* (John 14:26) and is our peace (14:27) and the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to *be with us always, even to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). **Second**, Jesus' ascension into heaven means that, even now, Jesus intercedes for us as our high priest, having offered his blood as a once-for-all sacrifice for our sins. *We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man* (Hebrews 8:1–2). **Finally**, as we see with the disciples, Jesus' ascension leaves us with a promise. *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"* (Acts 1:10–11). Indeed, he *will* come again to make all things new and to take us to be with himself. So, this year, come celebrate Ascension with us and receive the good news of comfort that we have in Jesus Christ, ascended on high!

-Pastor Squire

"Now our heavenly Aaron enters with His blood within the veil; Joshua now is come to Canaan, and the kings before Him quail. Now He plants the tribes of Israel in their promised resting place; now our great Elijah offers double portion of His grace."

("See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph," *LSB* 494, v. 4)