

The Kingdom: “Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?”

Theme

In the Divine Liturgy we enter into heaven which is the Kingdom of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is made possible by Christ’s defeat of death upon the Cross as proclaimed in the Gospel. Therefore we all face East in anticipation of his Glorious Appearing.

Outline

Orientation and Ascent

Cross and Gospel

The Holy Trinity

Scripture References

Genesis 2.8

Psalm 22.5 (23.5)¹

Psalm 23.3 (24.3)

Baruch 4.36–5.9

Matthew 4.23

Matthew 16.17

Matthew 24.27

Matthew 28.16–20

Luke 4.16–30

Scripture References Continued

John 10.11

2 Timothy 1.3–14

1 John 3.16–18

Glossary

Orient: To build or place something to face eastwards. By extension, to align something to the points of a compass or another specific direction.

Quote

Why does [the opening blessing] glorify the three-fold nature of God and not his unity?...It is because it was through the Incarnation of the Lord that mankind first learned God was three Persons, and the Mystery which is being performed is centered in the Incarnation of the Lord, so that from the very beginning [of the Divine Liturgy] the Trinity must shine forth and be proclaimed.

— St Nicholas Cabasilas *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*

Resources

Commentary on the Divine Liturgy; St Nicholas Cabasilas

Arise O God: The Gospel of Christ’s Defeat of Demons, Sin, and Death; Fr Andrew S Damick

The Divine Liturgy: A Commentary in Light of the Fathers; Priestmonk Gregorios

The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy; Fr Emmanuel Hatzidakis

¹ References from the Greek Bible; differing Hebrew Bible references are noted in parentheses.

The Opening Proclamation

Lifting his orarion [stole] with the three fingers of his right hand, the deacon says aloud:

Deacon: Bless, Master.

The priest kisses the Gospel Book, lifts it with both hands, and lowers it, making with it the sign of the cross over the antiminsion [altar cloth] and saying with the fear of God:

Priest: Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
now and ever and unto ages of ages.

People: Amen.

The priest replaces the Gospel Book on the antiminsion.

Extended Edition E-mail

Scriptures References

*Genesis 2.8 NETS*²

And the Lord God planted an orchard in Eden toward the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Psalms 22.5 (23.5) NETS

You prepared a table before me over against those that afflict me;
you anointed my head with oil,
and your cup was supremely intoxicating.

A different text than the version we're familiar with from the Masoretic Hebrew. Compare the 'sober inebriation' of St Gregory of Nyssa and other Fathers. See Ephesians passage below.

Psalms 23.3 (24.3) NETS

Who shall ascend onto the mountain of the Lord?

And who shall stand in the place of his sanctity?³

One who is guiltless in hand and clean in heart;

he who did not occupy his soul with what is vain
and did not swear deceitfully to his fellow.

Baruch 4.36-5.9 NETS

Look around toward the east, O Jerusalem,

and see the merriment that is coming to you from God.

Behold, your sons are coming, whom you sent away;

they are coming, gathered from east until west,

at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing in the glory of God.

Take off your robe of mourning and affliction, O Jerusalem,

and put on the dignity of the glory from God forever.

Put on the double-cloak of the righteousness that is from God;

put on your head the headband of the glory of the Everlasting.

For God will show your splendor in the all that is beneath heaven

For your name will be called by God forever,

"Peace of righteousness and glory of piety."

Arise, O Jerusalem, and stand upon the height,

and look around toward the east,

² New English Translation of the Septuagint (proper names standardized.)

³ Other texts "his holy place".

and see your children gathered from the setting of the sun until its rising
at the word of the Holy One,
rejoicing at God's remembering.
For they went out from you on foot,
led away by enemies,
but God will bring them to you,
taken up with glory, as on a royal throne.
For God has instructed that every high mountain
and the everlasting mounds be made low
and the valleys be filled to make level the ground
so that Israel may walk safely by the glory of God.
And even the woods and every fragrant tree
have shaded Israel at God's ordinance.
For God will lead Israel with merriment,
by the light of his glory,
together with the mercy and righteousness that is from him.

Matthew 4.23 ESV⁴

And he [Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and
proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction
among the people.

Matthew 16.13–20 ESV

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples,
"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist,
others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But
who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the
living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and
blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you
are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail
against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on
earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in
heaven." Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Matthew 24.27 ESV

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the
coming of the Son of Man.

⁴ English Standard Version

Matthew 28.16–20 ESV

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Luke 4.16–30 ESV

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news⁵ to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Physician, heal yourself.” What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.

⁵ Or “preach the Gospel”.

Luke 22:24–30 ESV

This dispute arose just after the Lord instituted the Eucharist in the preceding paragraph (Luke 22.14–23)!

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

“You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, *and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom* and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

John 10.11 ESV

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

1 Corinthians 2.6–8 ESV

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age⁶ understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Ephesians 5.15–21 ESV

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

2 Timothy 1.3–14 ESV

I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in

⁶ Not the flesh and blood rulers, but the demonic powers behind the thrones. See Daniel 10.13 & 20, also Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, *who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

1 John 3.16–18 ESV

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Revelation 14.6–7 ESV

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

The Gospel is a warning to those who are aligned with the enemies of God.

Quotes

Thus [from Holy Tradition] we all look to the East at our prayers, but few of us know that we are seeking our own old country, Paradise, which God planted in Eden in the East. [Genesis 2.8] We pray standing, on the first day of the week, but we do not all know the reason. On the day of the resurrection [or "standing again" Grk. ἀνάστασις] we remind ourselves of the grace given to us by standing at prayer, not only because we rose with Christ, and are bound to "seek those things which are above," [Colossians 3.1] but because the day seems to us to be in some sense an image of the age which we expect, wherefore, though it is the beginning of days, it is not called by Moses *first*, but

one⁷. For he says “There was evening, and there was morning, one day,” [Genesis 1.5] as though the same day often recurred. Now “one” and “eighth” are the same, in itself distinctly indicating that really “one” and “eighth” of which the Psalmist makes mention in certain titles of the Psalms [6 & 11 LXX]⁸, the state which follows after this present time, the day which knows no waning or eventide, and no successor, that age which ends not or grows old. Of necessity, then, the church teaches her own foster children to offer their prayers on that day standing, to the end that through continual reminder of the endless life we may not neglect to make provision for our removal there. Moreover all Pentecost is a reminder of the resurrection expected in the age to come. For that one and first day, if seven times multiplied by seven, completes the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost; for, beginning at the first, Pentecost ends with the same, making fifty revolutions through the like intervening days. And so it is a likeness of eternity, beginning as it does and ending, as in a circling course, at the same point. On this day the rules of the church have educated us to prefer the upright attitude of prayer, for by their plain reminder they, as it were, make our mind to dwell no longer in the present but in the future. Moreover every time we fall upon our knees and rise from off them we show by the very deed that by our sin we fell down to earth, and by the loving kindness of our Creator were called back to heaven.

— St Basil the Great *On the Holy Spirit* 27.26

In every circumstance he [King David in Psalm 22] instructs the Church because you must first be a sheep belonging to the good Shepherd through instruction in the good to keep the divine laws of doctrine and be led to the fountain. In this way you may be buried with him [cf. Romans 6.3-4] through baptism in death and not fear such death. This is not death itself but its shadow and symbol. “If I walk in the midst of the shadow of death I will not fear evil because you are with me” [Psalm 22.4]. Then the Spirit consoles with a rod (for the Spirit is the comforter) and *sets a mystic table before the demons who afflict men through idolatry*. The table of the Spirit is inimical to theirs. The Spirit next anoints the head with oil and offers wine to gladden the heart [cf. Psalm 103.15] *with that sober inebriation for the soul, situating our thoughts in eternity instead of temporal concerns*. A taste of inebriation brings an abrupt halt to life's incompleteness through sudden death and extends our residence in God's house to the length of days.

— St Gregory of Nyssa *Homily on the Ascension*

⁷ This is especially clear in the Greek translation of Genesis, but is also true in the Hebrew; the relevant word is often translated ‘first’ in English.

⁸ I’ll admit to not fully grasping St Basil’s flow of thought here and how these Psalms apply. But in finding the next quote, I came across a reference to St Gregory of Nyssa’s *Commentary on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, alas it is out of print.

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath given rise to the light of knowledge in the world; for they that worshipped the stars did learn therefrom to worship Thee, O Sun of Justice, and to know that from the east of the Highest Thou didst come. O Lord, glory to Thee.

— Apolytikion of the Nativity of Christ

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, worship of the Trinity wast made manifest; for the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the likeness of a dove confirmed the truth of His word. O Christ our God, Who hast appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee.

— Apolytikion of Theophany, the Baptism of Christ

In the Divine Liturgy, *then* becomes *now*, and *there* becomes *here*.

—Fr Gabriel as recollected from a conversation

Praying toward the east means going to meet the coming Christ. The liturgy, turned toward the east, effects entry, so to speak, into the procession of history toward the future, the New Heaven and the New Earth, which we encounter in Christ. It is a prayer of hope, the prayer of the pilgrim as he walks in the direction shown us by the life, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ.... Now the priest [in the Liturgical reforms following Vatican II] becomes the real point of reference for the whole liturgy. Everything depends on him. We have to see him, to respond to him, to be involved in what he is doing.... Less and less is God in the picture. More and more important is what is done by the human beings who meet here and do not want to subject themselves to a “pre-determined pattern.” The turning of the priest toward the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form, it no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself.

—Roman Pope Benedict XVI *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

This week I followed a rabbit trail deep into a warren discussing *ad orientem* and *versus populum* worship in the Roman Communion after Vatican II. Before that council Mass was generally served with the priest facing east, but the option to face the people was opened up after that council. The wikipedia pages on the two Latin terms serve as entrances if you also want to get lost in a labyrinthine rabbit warren.

More Resources

On the Holy Spirit; St Basil the Great

Hymns of Repentance; St Romanos the Melodist

The Whole Counsel of God; Blog by Fr Stephen De Young. (Just started in Genesis this past week)