

## Ascension: Our Lord is with Us

*The Lord ascended to the heavens to send the Comforter into the world. Wherefore, the heavens made ready His throne, and the clouds His mount. The angels wonder as they see a man more exalted than they. The Father receiveth into His bosom Him Who is eternally with Him. The Holy Spirit commandeth all the angels, Lift your heads, O princes, and all ye nations, clap your hands; for Christ hath ascended whither He was before.*

— *Vesperal Stichera*

*The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." (Psalm 109.1 [110.1])*

"Christ is in our midst." "He is and ever shall be." It is peculiar that these words are first spoken at the Liturgy of the Ascension replacing the Paschal greeting. It is in the midst of us celebrating Christ ascent into heaven to take up his power and reign (Revelation 11.17), that we proclaim he is with us, in our midst.

Our Scripture, hymns, and iconography depict our Lord's Ascension as his enthronement at the right hand of God the Father. The Letter to the Hebrews says, "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1.3). The icon shows Christ seated upon a throne upheld by angels (see Ezekiel 1) who, the hymns tell us, are amazed to see a Man seated on the throne of God.

Yet, like much Christ's ministry, while this was celebrated and wondered at by the angels, it was obscure upon the earth. Only his mother and disciples were present at the Ascension. Likewise his birth was celebrated by a band of shepherds and magi, but not widely known. Jesus' transfiguration was seen by just three disciples. Even in his crucifixion, which was public, he was only recognized as the Son of God by a Roman centurion and a repentant thief. How is a Man enthroned in the heavens? Only through humility. Christ humbled himself even to an ignominious death, and God the Father exalts him by giving him the greatest name and putting all things under his authority (Phillipians 2.1-11).

Because Christ humbled himself and became human, humanity is exalted into the heavens. In the Incarnation, Christ forever united himself with us by taking on our nature, and the Incarnation is fulfilled in the Ascension. As the Doxasticon of the second day of the Ascension proclaims, "...the cherubic throne took Thee up in the flesh. O Lord, glory be to Thee." Because we are united to Christ in Baptism, we are with him in the heavens.

As we ascend the steps of the church, we participate in Christ's Ascension. The Letter to the Hebrews states we are come to the true Mount Zion and worship with the angels and the saints gone on before us (Chapter 12). We are united to Christ in the heavens and partake of the heavenly food, his flesh and blood. As we are thus united, let us unite ourselves to Christ. Indeed, "Christ is in our midst." "He is and ever shall be."

*O Son of God, Who didst rise from us in glory to the heavens, save us who sing to Thee. Alleluia*