

Feast of Ascension of our Lord



40th day or Sixth Thursday after resurrection is traditional day of ascension. Christianity is founded on the confession of five cardinal faith doctrines namely 1, Incarnation of the Logos (Virgin birth of the Lord), 2, Crucifixion, 3, Resurrection from the dead, 4, Ascension into heaven and 5, Blessed hope of Second Coming. “After the Lord had spoken to them He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God,” Mark 16:19. “He was parted from them and carried up into heaven,” Luke 24:51. “He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight,” Acts 1:9. Thus Gospel of Mark, Luke and Acts show slight variance of ascension details. Promise of the Second Coming by the Angel is seen in Acts only. Scholars are of the opinion that Acts of Apostles is an extension of Luke’s Gospel. Probably he might have felt it necessary to give more details of ascension. Ascension and Second Advent are always considered together. We are not sure why Mathew and John left out such important events of

ascension and the promise of Second Coming. However, we recollect that Jesus had predicted His ascension, the purpose of ascension and Second Coming. “I will come again and receive you to myself,” John 14:3-4. “Then they will see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory,” Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27, Mat 24:30 and 26:64.

Old Testament Shadows: Elijah’s translation into heaven bears much semblance to the ascension of our Lord, 1K 2:11-13. A chariot of fire and horse of fire came down from heaven and he was carried up in his earthly body in a whirlwind. Elisha witnessed the great event of Elijah’s translation. He received Elijah’s mantle and his spirit and continued the mission. The disciples received the Lord’s blessing. Angel appeared and encouraged the gazed disciples with the blessed assurance of His Second Coming, which imbued joy in the hearts of disciples.

Prophecy of ascension: Psalm 24 is prophecy concerning ascension of our Lord. “Lift up your heads O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty... The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory,” v 7-10. This is a dialogue between the legions of angels, while one legion utter the cry of welcome to the king the other host asks who is the king and the other answers, He is the king of glory, etc. The references to “glory, strong and mighty” are indicative of His victory over, sin, Satan, hell and death during His earthly ministry, crucifixion and resurrection.

Apostles’ conviction: Apostles firmly believed and attested the ascension and promise of the Second Coming. “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes,” 1 Cor 11:26. “He will appear for a second time,” Heb 9:28. Paul closes his first epistle to Corinthians with fervent plea to Lord to come soon (*maran atha*), 16:22. He exhorted Philippians to conduct themselves righteously and wait hopefully considering the imminent advent of Christ, v 4:5. “Who has gone to heaven and is at the right hand of God,” 1 Pe 2:22. Stephen testified, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God,” Acts 7:56. The common usage is, “sat or sits at the right hand” instead of “standing” as in Acts 7:56 and Rev 5:6 that says of a “stood a Lamb.” “Behold, I am coming quickly,” Jesus Himself assured, Rev 22:12. One explanation is that Jesus stood up to receive Stephen.

The term “sat” indicates the completion of the work of atonement. It is also symbolic reference to the position of authority. Executive orders are often signed or directed in sitting position. The term “right hand” indicates the place of honor and favor from God the Father. St Paul says, “Being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death on the cross and therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him name which is above every name and that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth, Phil 2:8-10. This in turn teaches us a lesson that exaltation comes only to those who humble themselves and obey the Lord’s precepts.

Apostles had the notion and taught that Jesus would return in their lifetime. “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,” 1 Thes 4:15,17.

Arguments against: Also there were people who discredited or doubted the apostles. For this reason Peter admonished them saying, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,” 2 Peter 3:9. Peter also said that God’s

timeframe is different from human standards because as said in Psalm 90:4, “With the Lord one day is a thousand years and a thousand years as one day,” v 3:8. We are thus reminded of our duty to eagerly wait and urged of the exigency to be vigilant and shun evil ways to receive the Lord whenever He comes.

How He will come again? 1, He will appear in His glorified body for He resurrected and ascended with the glorified body. 2, It will be visible, “Every eye shall see him, even they who pierced Him,” Rev 1:7. 3, He will come gloriously in dazzling brightness as in transfiguration accompanied by hosts of angels, blazing fire, saints, and trumpet of God and voice of archangel. 4, He will come triumphant over the foes. He will avenge the infidels casting them in eternal fire where fire will never quench and worms will never die. 5, Second Coming shall be unpredictable and shall be like a thief, 2 Pe 3:10. Preparedness of the believer is highly imperative.

Two-fold effect: This is the grace age, all are given chance to obey the Gospel. The Second coming is for judgment. To reward according to what one has done in this life. It will be a day of exceeding joy to the believers who will reign with the Lord and wailing to the opponents of Gospel. His foes will be ashamed and shall weep as they are thrown into the lake of fire.

There shall be numerous signs of Second coming, 2 Tim 3:1-9.

Objections: However there are certain objections about ascension. They say that the Jews and early Christians believed that earth was flat and the heaven was a place above earth. The ascension story is said under a notion that is now out-dated and hence needs be ignored. It could have be an acted parable to convince the disciples that the post-resurrection appearances were over and the Holy Spirit is replaced in the Church. Though physically away from the earthly time and space frame the risen Lord is spiritually present in all Christian gatherings, etc.

The purpose of ascension: 1, He has gone to prepare place for us, “I go to prepare a place for you,” John 14:2. 2, He advocates for our frailty, 1 John 2:1. 3, He intercedes on our behalf, Rom 8:34, Heb 7:25. 4, He ministers our needs as High priest, Heb 8:1-2. 5, He is the Mediator of the new Covenant, Heb 9:15.

Why delay? He is waiting to come again until all his enemies are subdued so as to establish Kingdom of God, 1 Cor 15:24-26.

Universality of the Church: Our Lord’s earthly stay was centered on a particular locality. The Church assumed universal dimension because the Lord ascended into heaven above.

Implication to us: Jesus Christ is the head and the Church is His body. We, the members of the Church, which is the body of Christ, are also entitled to sit where Christ sits. Because he sits at the right hand of God the Father we have also bold entry into the presence of God, Eph 2:6.

Creed: Venerable fathers of the Church firmly believed and taught and handed down to us the very same true and undefiled faith of the apostles. Thus we read in the Nicene Creed, “The third day He rose again as He willed and ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of His Father and He shall come again with great glory to judge both the living and the dead.”

Misinterpretations: However, many overzealous and selfish people misinterpreted and twisted the Word of God for their benefits, arrived at various wrong conclusions and misled many who are unstable and untaught. Apostles sternly warn that they are destined for damnation.

The doctrine of Second Advent of our Lord is our foundational faith and blessed hope. We truly believe and confess it. It is neither a myth nor a soothsaying but basis of Christian existence. It is not simply a condition of mind or a wishful thinking or an illusion but a reality on which we heavily rely on. We express our hope and declare our readiness to receive the Lord in every Holy Eucharist, Johnachen, Suloke, 5/29/03.