

# HEAVEN AND EARTH COLLIDE

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**ACTS 1:1-11**

**LUKE 24:22-53**

**ASCENSION SUNDAY 2017**

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## **THIS PAST THURSDAY WAS THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD.**

**Although an oft- neglected event in the life of Jesus, the  
Ascension is nonetheless an important one.**

Mary Elizabeth's Father, The Reverend John A. Ricks, Jr., believed it to be a critical event, one that must not be forgotten. Luke agrees, underscoring its importance by placing it both at the end of his *Gospel* and at the beginning of *Acts of the Apostles*. The Ascension of Jesus marks a great hinge in God's plan to save His creation. Jesus, of course, is at the very center of the history of salvation. In fact Luke understands this history to have three distinct eras. The Time of Israel, The Time of Jesus, and The Time of the Church. The ascension of Jesus closes the door on the Time of Jesus and swings open the door to the Time of the Church.

**IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ASCENSION, IT IS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND THE STORY OF WHICH IT IS A KEY PART.**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. And everything God made was good, flowing as it did from his sacred and holy love. To tend and till the earth, thereby extending God’s love to its ends, God created man, male and female. But we human beings got stuck on loving ourselves instead, and on using God’s good creation for our own selfish ends. In so doing we have nearly destroyed what God’s love had made.

God, however, refused to permit our sinful actions and their consequences to have the final word. He vowed to liberate His creation and restore us to the loving and caring creatures He intended us to be.

**GOD’S WAY OF SO DOING SEEMS ODD TO US, PERHAPS EVEN FOOLISH.**

God would create a nation whose task it was to bear the divine blessing to the world. This blessing would in turn purge and purify, redeem and restore His Creation. The Patriarch of this nation was Abraham, to whom God said, “Through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed”. God’s plan was to give this nation a detailed manual on how to live in communities composed

of men and women made in God's image. Their style of life would so impress the rest of the world, that the nations would be drawn to God's special people, learn their secret, and imitate it. These communities would proliferate to the ends of the earth and thereby extend God's love throughout the world.

But Israel failed to live by Torah. She got stuck on loving herself, on seeing herself as the master of creation rather than its servant. And so once again God's plan to extend His love to the ends of the earth was frustrated. Time and time again God sent His prophets to remind His people who they were and what they were to be about. But Israel's ears grew dull and her heart turned to stone. God's redeeming people now found itself in need of redemption.

### **THIS BRINGS US TO LUKE'S GOSPEL**

It opens with Zechariah entering the Temple. While there, he encounters Gabriel announcing the birth of his son John. When Zechariah doubts the angel's word, he is struck dumb, and so when he comes out of the Temple to the people he cannot deliver the customary blessing. This is a sign, pointing to Israel's failure to deliver the blessing which Abraham's offspring were to deliver to the world. No doubt Zechariah felt frustrated and thereby mirrored God's frustration.

## **GOD, HOWEVER, WILL NOT BE FRUSTRATED FOREVER.**

He sends our world the ultimate offspring of Abraham, His own son Jesus. Thus a scruffy bunch of shepherds hear the most important announcement ever made: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord". Unlike Israel, Jesus embodies Torah all throughout his life. He goes about extending God's love to all whose lives he touches. And so the critical step is taken to put God's creation back on track. Once again mankind tried to de-rail God's plan by crucifying His son. But the Resurrection revealed the cross to be not a defeat but a victory. Creation's liberation has begun in earnest.

## **FORTY DAYS AFTER HIS RESURRECTION, JESUS LEADS HIS DISCIPLES TO BETHANY.**

He takes them to the very spot from which the not-so-grand Palm Sunday Parade began. Luke tells us what happened next:

*Lifting up his hands, he blessed them. And while he was blessing them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.*

This is the blessing Zechariah could not give at the Temple that afternoon. This is the blessing that Israel as a nation could not deliver to the nations. And so God fulfills his promise to Abraham through this son of Abraham, Jesus: all the nations in the world have now been blessed.

### **THERE IS MORE TO THE STORY.**

Luke's genealogy of Jesus goes back beyond Abraham. Luke traces Jesus back to Adam. There is a strange phrase in his genealogy. Listen to how it ends: Jesus is "...the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God." I always understood the genealogy to be saying that Jesus is the son of God. But that is not what it says. Seth is the son of Adam and it is Adam who is the son of God. Adam was God's first son. Adam was made in God's image and likeness and was set into the world to rule the world on God's behalf...to rule as God would rule. Adam failed to do it. Jesus, as the son of God, succeeded.

## **NOW WE ARE IN A POSITION TO UNDERSTAND THE ASCENSION MORE FULLY.**

- It is the proclamation that Jesus as the true son of Abraham has brought the blessing to creation which will ultimately set us free from sin and death.
- It is the proclamation that Jesus as the true son of God has done what humans were supposed to do...extend the rule of God to the earth as it is in heaven.
- The Ascension of Jesus is a sign pointing to the final reality: one day God will rule on earth as he does in heaven. The king has been crowned and we await his coming.

## **OF THIS, YOU AND I ARE CALLED TO BE WITNESSES.**

And we are charged to form and/or be part of communities around the world which live out in some way the truth that God is King of the World. That it is to God we owe our ultimate loyalty. That it is God's will rather than the will of others no matter how powerful or influential that we must obey.

In our country, so dominated as it is by the entertainment industry, we must refuse to allow our values to be warped by it. We must refuse to glorify violence, idolize wealth, and deify sex.

We certainly must refuse to crown any celebrity as the most important figure in our lives.

- Humans were charged by God to extend His creative and providential love to the ends of the earth.
- Israel was charged with living lives which showed that love so that the nations would stream to Zion and learn of her God.
- You and I are charged with bearing witness to God's love revealed in Jesus Christ and to proclaim our faith and hope in the power of that love to redeem and recreate the world.