



**Orthodox Church of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

**The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,
Rector**

<http://EntranceMission.org>

The Forgotten Feast: “For Our Salvation”
May 28, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is Ascended! In Glory!

Every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy the priest ends the service with the final blessing. That blessing almost always includes the phrase, “for our salvation....” May He who rose again from the dead “for our salvation”; May He who was born in a cave and laid in a manger “for our salvation....” And today, May He who ascended to the right hand of God the Father in heaven “for our salvation....”

Typically, this phrase needs no explanation, does it? We understand how He Who was born, incarnate Son of God, was born for us and for our salvation; we understand how the one eternal sacrifice, His Passion and Death, are “for our salvation....” we understand how His resurrection is a sign of our own resurrection is “for our salvation....” But in what sense is His ascension “for our salvation....”?

We may have a difficult time answering this question, because we think of His ascension only in terms of His exaltation. We think, now that His work on earth is over, He leaves us to go to His place of divine honor and glory. And we turn our attention to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, which difficult although it is to articulate, is typically more understandable “for our salvation....” than His ascension, at least when we think of it in terms of His divine exaltation.

It’s for this reason that the feast of the Holy Ascension has been referred to by Orthodox clergy as “the forgotten feast.” It takes place during the middle of the week, typically celebrated on a Wednesday evening or Thursday morning, depending on the parish’s situation. And it’s meaning as a sign and

symbol of our salvation is not as clear as it is for the other great feasts.

This is because we think of His ascension only in terms of His divine nature, not so much in terms of His human nature. And yet, this Feast is all about His human nature, and the exaltation of His humanity to the majesty of God the Father on high. In essence, it is about theosis. The Ascension of our Lord is the great feast of theosis, for the divine nature of our Lord never left the presence of the Father. Jesus Christ was and is always divine, even in those terrible moments of extreme humiliation upon the cross and in the tomb. But His ascension is not so much about His divine nature as it is about His human nature. It is His Jesus Christ in His physical humanity that ascended to the right hand of the Father.

Remember that when He came back to the Holy Apostles after His resurrection, He was physical. Changed, to be sure, different in some ways – St. John says He simply appeared to them out of nowhere as they sat in the upper room in frightened prayer. But He was nevertheless physical; Thomas could touch Him and probe His wounds with his own hands. Then He appeared to many people, physically, not as a spirit or a ghost, but as a man, the perfect man, purified, illumined and divine – yet human. When He ascended to the glory of God the Father on high, He ascended in His divinized humanity – physically – as a sign of our own ascent, our own purification, illumination and theosis. One of my favorite passages in all of scripture is the very last verse of the 16th chapter of St. Mark, where it says that Jesus blessed them as He ascended, and that they went back to Jerusalem to do His work, and that He worked with them. What an astounding thing to say! Gone in one way, present in another, through the blessing He gives in His Church, His presence in the Holy Mysteries, His forgiveness ever proffered “for our salvation....”

This feast should never be forgotten. It is a sign and symbol and “making present” of that which it signifies: Like the Lord, we will be raised from the dead – death will no longer have eternal dominion over us – but like Him also, we will be enabled by Him through the Grace of the Spirit He will send on Pentecost – to ascend ourselves, to go from “glory unto glory,” even as our own humanity is made ever more God-like. This is what the Ascension reminds us of – our own theosis – enabled by the One Who ascended in glory “for our salvation....”

To Him be all glory and honor forever! Amen.

Fr. Elias

Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 West Main Street

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

<https://EntranceMission.org>

717-817-0084