



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

306 W. Main Street Emmitsburg,
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Christ is ascended! In glory!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

" So, then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen" (Mark 16:19-20)

I will always begin my meditation on the Great Feast of the Ascension with these words. They are remarkable! Along with those that we heard today from the Acts of the Apostles. "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven?" This Jesus will return the same way He left, and furthermore, get to it. Go back to your lives; preach the Gospel of salvation; and bring people to Him now! In this life! In the midst of all that is ordinary and normal! For He is working with you in whatsoever you do in His name!

There are some religions, and even some expressions of Christianity, that wrongly seek to help people turn away from the life that God has given them in this world. Some religious traditions

seek to find ways for people to escape the physical, to transcend the body. For them, anything resembling salvation is entirely based on one's works to subjugate the body and to allow the spirit to be set free from it. The so-called "spiritual" traditions attempt this. Just as Plato recounts in his masterpiece, the "Phaedo," where he records Socrates' attempt to see good in his own death, there are those who teach something similar: That we must denigrate the body and allow the spirit to fly away into heaven unencumbered.

This is not Christianity. All of the accounts of the Lord's Ascension in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles make it very clear indeed that Jesus did not ascend to the right hand of the Father spiritually, but bodily. He ascended with His body and His soul – once again reunited after His resurrection. We do not denigrate the physical in the Orthodox Church; nor, do we see salvation as something that is to be earned by our efforts or kept alive as a promise for the future. The future is now; salvation is now. Yes, it extends into the future when we will pass from glory unto glory; but it is not a ghostly reality that we look forward to, but a reunion of our souls to our bodies, bodies that we give over to the care of our Lord even now in our lives in this world.

The ascension of our Lord proclaims boldly that the world and all that is in it, fallen though it is, is nevertheless good, and that it is ripe for transformation. If there is one word that characterizes the Orthodox Christian ethos, it is the word "transformation." We see signs of it in many actions and miracles of our Lord, and it is a centerpiece of St. Paul's and St. John's entire theologies. And it is shown clearly by the fact that our Lord does not denigrate the ordinary, the physical, the bodies that He has created and that when He ascends, He does not ascend like a ghost, but like a man – a man Who is the very symbol and image of that transformation for which we all yearn and for which, to use the words of St. Paul, all of creation waits with eager longing.

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Fr. Elias

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