

## The Divine Glory & Human Joy

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**Gospel:** Luke 24:36-53: *And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*

"And returned to Jerusalem with great joy"

(Luke 24:52)

The Gospel passage we heard is at the end of the Gospel of Luke. It tells us about the last appearance of Christ to His Disciples. In this appearance, Christ went out with His disciples to the Mount of Olives, and there He ascended to the heavens. This was the last appearance and last earthly event for Him with the disciples.

The scene immediately suggests sadness, because Christ was leaving His disciples. But the Gospel tells us that the disciples returned with great joy! What are the reasons behind this joy?

The Troparion of the feast talks about the joy of the disciples. Christ has caused his disciples to rejoice by His promise of the Holy Spirit. They also understood by Grace that He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. The promise of the Holy Spirit and Grace gave them great joy and strengthened their belief in the divinity of Christ and His glory. So this was another reason for rejoicing.

The passage, however, contains many other reasons that sparked indescribable joy in the heart of the disciples. The event of Christ going out with His disciples to Bethany and to the Mount of Olives held in it many great blessings. Mount of Olives is mentioned many times in the Old Testament. At every event in which it is mentioned, God gave many new spiritual blessings, and renewed His relationship with His people in a spiritual way. This Mount is a Mount full of blessings and renewal. The event of Christ opening His hands and blessing them sparks a lot of joy. This

movement has in itself many new deep meanings. When we understand them, we will know the reasons of the disciples' great joy.

The Ascension of Jesus in front of His disciples was similar to the ascension of Elijah to the heavens. At that event, Elijah's servant, Elisha, followed him and asked him that a double portion of his spirit fall on him (the portion of the elder son). Elijah told him, "If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee" (2 Kings 2:10). So Elisha "saw" his master being taken away and he received his spirit and power, and took up his mission.

The same event happened here with the disciples. The Book of Acts written by St. Luke clarified this more by saying that they "saw" him ascending. So if the disciples "saw" the Lord ascending, then this means that they will certainly receive His Holy Spirit, and that He blessed them in order to bestow on them His power and give them His mission in the world. And what greater joy there is for a person than to be a witness of Jesus Christ going from Jerusalem to the whole world.

This is the feast of Ascension. It is the feast of the last transfiguration of God's glory and divinity on earth. It is also the feast of delivering the mission to all the disciples. We do not receive this mission as orphans, but we also receive with it the promise of the Holy Spirit. In the Acts of the Apostles, the passage of the Ascension ends with some words from the angels saying, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven...." (Acts 1:11) to judge the world.

These angelic words turned the disciples from the amazement of joy to the work of the Gospel. The joy of a disciple is to be in the service of his God's glory. The Ascension reveals the truth of the present. This truth is that we are in a blessed time to work for the Lord.

According to the principles of Iconography, the internal composition and characteristics of movements of both the icon of Ascension and the icon of the Second Coming are the same. The time in between these two events (the Ascension and the Second Coming) reveals the truth, value, and joy of the present life.

The Feast of the Ascension is the feast of the great joy in receiving the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus left us in His body so that He may be with us more powerfully in the Holy Spirit. The Lord said in the Gospel of John, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me..." (John 15:26-27). The true joy of the disciple is the glory of his Master. Our joy is to become disciples and servants of the Word. Our true joy is that the "lot of service" falls on us, so that we may become witnesses with the disciples to the Resurrection of the Lord, and be also counted with the twelve Apostles.

In the Ascension, the Lord departs in body to be with us always in the Holy Spirit. The Lord opens to us the world so that we may go to it instead of Him. He ascends from us, not that we may be sad, but to worship Him with great joy.

Amen.

