LD 18; John 16:7-11; Acts 1:6-11; He Ascended into Heaven I. The Nature of His Ascension II. The Nature of His Presence III. The Benefit of His Ascension

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, January is widely known as the most depressing month. One of the reasons- in addition to the cold and dark days- is the end of the festivities. In January, all of our loved ones go home. No more parties with family and friends. When we miss those whom we love, we might start longing to see them again. Having to say goodbye to ones we love is heard. It is this saying goodbye to someone we love that see today in our reading from Acts 1. The disciples stood there and watched their beloved master and teacher leave them. But why did Jesus leave them? Today we consider the next phrase in the AC- He ascended into heaven. We will look at this theme: Jesus Christ ascended into heaven for the good of His people. Perhaps to illustrate this event, you might compare the ascension of Jesus to a young husband going off to war. This husband will go to battle because he loves his country, and he loves his wife. He wants to protect his wife from the enemy. But you can be sure, once the battle is over, he will return home! Even when separated, his heart was with his beloved wife. In a similar way, Jesus ascended into heaven until his work is done there. He has not, however, gone to a place of war but rather to a place of blessing. He goes before us to make a place for us! To get our home ready. But even though we are now separated, he has not forgotten us! All of His work in heaven is for our good.

**I. The Nature of His Ascension**

In our first point, we consider the nature of His ascension. How did Jesus go up into heaven? Well, Jesus was raised up from the grave in the flesh and He was raised up from the earth into heaven in the flesh. Our reading from Acts 1 proves the physical, actual and literal nature of Jesus’ ascension. The very same Jesus who was able to walk, talk and eat with the disciples is the very one who led them out to the Mountain called Olivet. So Mt. Olives was the location where this event took place. The disciples were physically present when it happened. They saw it with their own eyes. As Acts 1:9 states, as they were looking on, He was lifted up from them. So Jesus was bodily and physically lifted up in the sight of the disciples. There is no room at the resurrection- and neither is there room here- for a spiritualization or rationalization of these events. Dr. Luke makes it abundantly clear. The literal, physical death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are firmly asserted and testified to by multiple witnesses. This truth is foundational for our faith. For 40 days, Jesus had been with his disciples teaching and instructing- giving them proof of His life and explaining their calling in this world. After these 40 days, Jesus was lifted up. As QA 46 says, while his disciples watched, Jesus was taken up from earth into heaven. So where did Jesus go? He left the earth and he entered heaven. Now heaven is not just an idea of beauty and bliss, it is clearly presented as a physical location where Jesus is to be found. As the disciples looked on, the body of Jesus was lifted up and then hidden from sight by a cloud. The word heaven is used in two separate ways here. The disciples were looking into heaven- that is the sky where the birds fly. And Jesus was taken up into heaven- that is the highest heavens where God is residing in His majesty. The angels in v. 11 then make it clear- Jesus was taken up from you into heaven. So heaven is a real place- a location where the body of Jesus is now located. Heaven is also called God’s throne room- as Jesus was also taken into glory. He entered the highest heavens as Heb. 9:24 puts it. Jesus was welcomed home- triumphant- having secured the victory. Here Jesus is living to this day. Jesus did not disappear because he ceased to exist. No, He is right now- this very day- in heaven! Sitting at His Father’s side- receiving the praise and adoration of the saints and angels. Now the disciples were looking up and away from earth- pointing to the fact that heaven is not now on earth. Heaven is a different place- perhaps a different dimension if you will. And although you cannot now see it with the eyes of the flesh, by faith we know that heaven is real, and Jesus is there! So Jesus is now separated from us. He is separated- if you will- removed from the earth and from His children who are now living on earth. Being separated from the one we love is rightly a sad event. We want to be where Jesus is- even as we want Jesus to come back to us! And that is the very thing that the angel’s promise in Acts 1:11. He will come back again! He will return to you- to this earth- just as you saw Him go. So although Jesus ascended into glory, the fact remains that He will one day descend and return! The ascension of Jesus was always designed to be temporary. This is a good reminder- particularly this time of year. It is right for us to celebrate the first coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas- but His first coming was one of humiliation. We are looking forward to His second coming- His return which will be one of glory, honor and exaltation! Yes, Jesus did ascend into heaven. But He will not stay away forever! He will return- coming back to us and coming down again to this earth! That is a proper desire- a right longing we have! Even as Rev. 22 concludes, the church cries out- Come Lord Jesus! Today heaven and earth are separated- one day heaven will come down to earth! We want Jesus to come back- we long to see our Savior face- the sign of the Son in the clouds of glory! But until that day, we know that Jesus is now in heaven.

**II. The Nature of His Presence**

But this fact- the fact that Jesus is not now on earth- raising an important question. If Jesus is not now on earth, has He abandoned us? Has He forgotten us- left us alone- to fend for ourselves. Even more than that, has Jesus broken His promise! You will remember that He said in John 14, I will not leave you as orphans. But isn’t that what Jesus did? Hasn’t our husband left us, His bride? He went off to some place that we cannot see- He has been removed from our presence. So has Jesus left us alone? The answer to this question is no- Jesus has not abandoned us. There are two proofs given why Jesus has not abandoned us. First of all, as John 14:18 says, Jesus will not leave us as orphans. He promises to come to us. And later on John 14:26, Jesus promises that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in His name. Back in our reading from Acts 1:5- Jesus told the disciples to remain in Jerusalem because they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. In other words, the way in which Jesus has not abandoned us is found in the person of the Holy Spirit. Ascension day was followed 10 days later with Pentecost! The lifting up and removal of Jesus was followed by the gifting and sending of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not only called the comforter, He is called the Spirit of Christ. So the first way in which Jesus has not abandoned us is by His sending of the Holy Spirit to dwell with the church and within our hearts. The second way in which Jesus is still with us is by way of His deity. As QA 47 and 48 grapple with, Jesus is both fully God and fully man. At His ascension, Jesus did really and truly ascend into heaven with His body. The nature of His presence on earth is not physical. However, because Jesus is and remains true God. He is able to be everywhere present. So by His deity- QA 47 says- Jesus is never absent from us. And again in QA 48- the divinity of Christ is beyond the bonds of His humanity. We can draw parallels here with the Lord’s Supper. Jesus is not physically present in the bread and wine- His body remains in heaven. But that does not mean that Jesus is absent- not at all! By His Spirit and divinity Jesus is really present- feeding us the elements and working in us by His Spirit. Jesus said that He would not leave us alone- that He would never forsake us- and He keeps His word! So to summarize this point- we need to be clear when we speak of Christ’s presence. In Mt. 28 Jesus said, I will be with you always, to the end of the age. But then again, Jesus said in Matthew 26- you will not always have me with you. Which is it? Is Jesus always with us or is He not with us? The answer is found in the Ascension and in Pentecost. Not with us in the flesh- but always with in by His Spirit and deity. We deny the teaching of the Lutherans here- the body of Jesus did not take on divine traits so as to be present everywhere. No- the body of Jesus remains a real and true human body- albeit glorified. In this way, Jesus will never be away from us and yet He is also now seated on the throne in glory.

**III. The Benefit of His Ascension**

Now that we understand the manner of Jesus presence- in our last point we look at the benefit. What is the comfort of having a Savior who has ascended? In fact, as we read in John 16, Jesus says that it is for our good that He leaves. It is for your benefit that I go to heaven. Now most of us would not think that having our loved one leave us would be for our good. We do say that absence makes the heart grow fonder, but most married couples do not enjoy long periods of time spent apart. But Jesus says that His departure is for our benefit! It is advantageous for us to have Jesus in heaven while we remain on earth. Why? Well, QA 49 gives us 3 clear benefits. First, we have the benefit of Jesus acting as our advocate in heaven. Jesus is interceding for us from the Father’s right hand- He has the Father’s ear if you will. Jesus continues to pour out His blessings upon us from the very fountain and source of everything good. Second, the ascension of Jesus brings our very flesh into heaven. When Jesus rose and ascended, He took our flesh to new heights! At this very time, you have your elder brother who is one like us in every way- who has also now received the name above every name! The King of kings is a fellow man- the judge of the world is the one who has been judged on your behalf! This is incredibly comforting! There is great benefit and blessing found here! Jesus is the first fruit- the guarantee of our future blessing! His very presence is a pledge that our future will be where He is. Perhaps I can illustrate this point. Imagine a young couple wanting to start a new life in the wild frontier. The husband goes out first- alone- to trailblaze the path. The husband first clears the land, plants the crops and then builds the home. He is making a place ready so that the bride would find a comfortable place to call home. As soon as the house is ready, he will send for his bride. This is what Jesus is doing- getting our home ready for us. But in the meantime, the husband continues to send gifts back to his bride. The husband still supports and encourages his bride with letters and money while they are still apart. His love does not grow cold- the husband sends gifts to his loved one even while they are apart. This is what Jesus is also doing today. The third benefit of the ascension is that Jesus sends His grace and Spirit to us from heaven. He is supporting us and assuring us of His love even while we are apart! By His Spirit we are strengthened for the journey ahead- as we look up and look forward to the time when our husband returns to take us to the home He has built! Such is the love- such is the work of our resurrected and ascended Savior!

To conclude, the ascension of Jesus enables us to see how Jesus is with us- and yet not now on earth. As I said before, the separation that we now experience will one day be ended. As Jesus once went up to heaven in the flesh, He will one day return to this earth! This return will be seen by all- and no cloud will hide His coming. So we rightly pray for the day saying- Come Lord Jesus. But until then, rest assured that Jesus continues His work in heaven and on earth! For us and in us! Jesus Christ ascended into heaven for the good of His people. Let everyone be ready for the return of the master!