

THE ASCENSION OF THE PROPHET

He is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this *Feast of the Ascension*, 40 days after the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus the Christ:

*And it was, when they had crossed over, then Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." Then Elisha caused to say, "Let it be, I pray you, (a) double share in your spirit upon me."<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Today's Old Testament reading presents us with the Ascension of Elijah.

However important you shall discover that event to be, it does not overshadow the Ascension of Christ Jesus our Lord. Except for the coming Last Day, there have been only two people recorded to have ascended into heaven never to die mortal deaths. They are Enoch and Elijah. All other believers, even the most faithful recorded in the Old and New Testaments that all might know of their lives and deaths in the faith, all other people die and then see the Lord. That is true for faithful Abraham; David, the beloved friend of God; all the other prophets, including Elisha; and all the New Testament disciples and apostles. Mortal death before eternal blessed life even stands true for the greatest of God's human instruments of deliverance, Moses the Lawgiver. This day the Church's focus is on Elijah the preacher of repentance and prophet of salvation's ascension and moves us from his ascension to Christ's.

What that means is that the faithful are to grasp the reality that Elijah's ascension, as the ultimate prophet of YHWH in the Old Testament, prefigured the far

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 2:9.

superior Ascension of the ultimate Prophet, YHWH Himself, in the New Testament. Therefore, the Church is to discern similarities between Elijah's ascension and Jesus' ascension. And, we are to take note of, and give thanks for, the differences between Jesus' ascension and Elijah's ascension. Hear again of the long-ago Day of Elijah's Ascension:

*And it was, as they went on and spoke, behold, (a) chariot of fire, and horses of fire separated between (the) two men; and Elijah went up in (a) whirlwind (into) the heavens.<sup>2</sup>*

We have that account about the ascension of the prophet Elijah, because there were eye-witnesses who would later recount that event. The fire of God's cleansing and judgment was seen enveloping and emanating from the chariots and horsemen of Israel. A mighty wind rushed, and the prophet was taken up. No further direct word was heard from him. He was not seen again, though men searched, for centuries.

Only when the chosen disciples of Jesus saw Elijah conversing with Jesus and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration was his continued life in the Kingdom of the Heavens revealed to human witnesses. It is significant that that Great Old Testament prophet would be beheld conversing with the Lawgiver and the Great New Testament Prophet, Priest and King about the fiery trial and brutal death that was to come upon Jesus. As you have heard, all the prophets, the law, and the writings testify, sometimes very clearly, about the need for the Christ to suffer and die on account of sin, and to be raised because of our justification, before His ascension to the heavens.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 2:11.

How unlike Jesus' ascension did Elijah's actual departure from this mortal existence appear? Jesus, having blessed His eye-witnesses, simply ascended and was hidden by the clouds. There was no fire, chariots, and horsemen in a whirlwind as with the Old Covenant prophet. No flash and bang happened the day of Christ's ascension. It went quietly, with a blessing and God's promises. The first of those was spoken immediately at the Ascension of Jesus by the white robed men:

*This One, Jesus, having been taken up from all of you into the heavens, thus will return in the same manner as you saw Him going into the heavens.<sup>3</sup>*

That declares that the Ascension of Jesus brought with it the promise of the return of Jesus. This was not so with Elijah's ascension. He had more pomp and circumstance at the ascension, but Jesus will have more at His return. That day, the whirlwind, the chariots and horses of fire of Elijah's ascension will seem pale and insignificant when compared to the fully revealed glory of God descending on the clouds to complete the fiery cleansing of fallen creation for eternity! Jesus' Ascension came with Promise, Elijah's with a passing. Our Old Testament text continues:

*And [Elisha] caused to take up the mantle of Elijah which had fallen from him, and he returned and stood upon the bank of the Jordan.<sup>4</sup>*

The ascension of Elijah brought with it the passing on of the prophetic ministry. That is what the leaving and retrieving of Elijah's mantle symbolized. The prophet's mantle was the emblem of his office. Elijah needed it no longer - He had been taken up into the fullness of the glory of God's eternal kingdom. He had founded the

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 4:11.

schools of the prophets, and had been God's instrument to bring Elisha into the Office of the Ministry. It was to be, by God's ordination, that Elisha would take on the mantle of the prophet, and receive in that Office, according to recorded history, a greater quantity of miracle-working than his spiritual father Elijah. Elisha truly received the fulfillment of his request, *"Let it be, I pray you, (a) double share in your spirit upon me."*<sup>5</sup> It is because Elijah did not die that the doubling could be given. For no human, no matter how hard he may desire to, may pass on to his descendants more than he has or has paid for. Yet, in Elijah's glorious ascension Elisha discovered his calling as disciple and prophet established, as today's scripture declares:

*Then they caused to see him, the sons of the prophets, in Jericho opposite them, they caused to say, "The spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha!" And they caused to come to meet him, and caused to bow down to the earth to him.*<sup>6</sup>

The disciples of Elijah fell down before the Prophet Elisha. Their callings as disciples were also confirmed, for they recognized that the prophetic spirit had come upon Elisha. So they worshipped. This foreshadowed a greater time of worship, the time of the Promise, when the disciples of the Greatest Prophet to ever have lived, died and been raised from the dead,

*And they worshipping Him returned into Jerusalem with great joy, and they were through all things in the Temple blessing God.*<sup>7</sup>

Jesus, by the time of His Ascension, had already established the callings of His closest disciples as Apostles, sent ones. He had commissioned them to; as they went

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 2:13b.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Kings 2:9.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 2:15.

about their lives, proclaim repentance into the forgiveness of sins in His Name into all nations. That proclamation was sealed in the words of the Good News, namely, *that thus it had been written that the Christ was to suffer, and to be resurrected from the dead on the third day.*<sup>8</sup>

That Gospel is the mantle of the New Testament preachers of the Good News of Jesus. Our mantle of the Prophet is symbolized by the stole. Pieces of cloth such as this serve to remind all who understand that we preachers of the Gospel are the servants of Christ for the Church. It is our yoke, the stole, placed by human hands, which has been granted by God Himself so that His Good News might continue to be proclaimed. Why? To the end that sinners may be brought to repentance, from there into the forgiveness of sins, which will carry them into eternal blessed life.

From the life of repentance and forgiveness Jesus' call goes out to you, the ones who have not rejected the Savior's proclamation, to *make disciples of all the nations, baptizing...and teaching them to observe all things which [Jesus] commanded His first ascension disciples.*<sup>9</sup> As Christ has ascended, and rules in glory at the right hand of the Father, so He now rules in the Church through His Word. Dear ones in Christ, that Word has been given to you to teach, through such simple ways that even children may use them, namely:

*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord,*

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 24:53.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 24:46.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 28:19-20a.

*Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death,  
that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,  
just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.  
This is most certainly true.<sup>10</sup>*

That is it. The simple truths of the Catechism, the right and proper confession of the true Church of Christ visible on earth, are yours to share. Elijah's ascension foreshadowed the greater ascension of Christ. His Ascension you recall and teach every time you confess the ecumenical creeds, and recite the Catechism's teaching. May you so be blessed to recall them each day, that the Lord might use you, as you go, to make disciples for Christ, bringing them to His means of imparting His grace – the Water and the Word, and teaching them through simple ways all that Jesus commanded to His first Ascension Day disciples.

**Christ is Risen! Christ has Ascended! Christ will come again!**

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Ascension (LSB One-year series)

II Kings 2:5-15; Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:44-53

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*Pastor Michael H. Morehouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

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<sup>10</sup> *Dr. Luther's Small Catechism*, pp.16-17.