

## **72// HERE BEGINNETH NEXT THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD**

**T**he Ascension of our Lord Jesu Christ was the fortieth day after his resurrection; for which to declare, seven things be to be considered. First then, he ascended. Secondly, why he ascended not anon after his resurrection. Thirdly, how he ascended. Fourthly, what company ascended with him. Fifthly, by what merit he ascended. Sixthly, where he ascended, and seventhly, wherefore he ascended.

### **HE ASCENDED FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES**

**A**s to the first he ascended from the mount of Olives by Bethany; the which mountain, by another relation, is said the mountain of three lights. For by night on the side of the west it is lighted of the fire that burneth in the Temple, which never is put out ne quenched. On the morning it is light of the orient, for she hath first the rays of the sun before it shineth in the city, and also it hath great abundance of oil that nourisheth the light, and therefore it is said the hill of three lights.

Unto this hill Jesu Christ commanded his disciples that they should go. For on the day of his Ascension he appeared two times, one time to eleven disciples that ate in the hall where they had supped with him. All the apostles and the disciples and also the women, abode in that part of Jerusalem which is called Mello, in the mountain of Sion, where David had made his palace. And there was the great hall arrayed and ordained for to sup, whereas Jesu Christ commanded that they should make ready for to eat the Paschal Lamb, and in this place the eleven apostles abode, and the other disciples, and the women abode in divers mansions there about.

And when they had eaten in this hall, our Lord appeared to them and reproved them of their incredulity. And when he had eaten with them, and had commanded them that they should go to the Mount of Olivet on the side by Bethany, he appeared again to them, and answered to them of the demands that they made to him indiscreetly, and with his hands lifted he blessed them; and anon before them he ascended unto heaven.

Of the place of this ascension saith Sulpicius, Bishop of Jerusalem, and it is in the *Gloss*. For there was edified a church in the place where were made the signs of his ascension. Never sith [afterwards] might be set there any pavement, it could not be laid ne set but anon it issued out, and the stones of the marble sprang into the visages of them that set it. And that is a sign that they be stones on which Christ passed upon, which lie in the powder and dust, and abide for a token and sign certain.

## WHEREFORE HE ASCENDED NOT ANON AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

As to the second point, wherefore he ascended not anon after his resurrection, but abode forty days, that was for three reasons.

### To Prove His Resurrection

First, for the certification of his resurrection. And more strong it was to prove his resurrection than his passion, for from the first unto the third the passion might be well proved, but to prove the very resurrection it required more days, and therefore a greater time was required between the resurrection and the ascension than between the passion and resurrection. And hereof saith Leo the Pope, in a sermon of the ascension:

This day the number of forty days is complete and dispensed by right holy ordinance and to the profit of our enseignment and teaching, to the end that in the space of his presence corporal the faith of teaching was necessary. And we ought to give thankings to the divine dispensation for the tardy creance of holy fathers to us necessary; for they doubted of that which we doubt not.

### For the Consolation of the Apostles

Secondly, he abode for the consolation of the apostles. For the consolations divine surmount the tribulations temporal. And the time of the passion was the time of tribulation to the apostles, and therefore there ought to be more days unto the ascension than for the resurrection.

### For the Mystery of Comparation

Thirdly, for the mystery of the comparation, for to give to understand that the consolations divine be compared to tribulations as the day unto an hour, and the year unto a day. And that this be true it appeareth by the writing of the prophet Isaiah [61:2]: "I shall preach a year pleasant to our Lord, and a day of vengeance to God. Lo! for one day of tribulation, he rendereth a year of consolation." And that is by comparison as the day to an hour. It appeareth by that, that our Lord was dead and lay in the sepulchre forty hours, which was the time of tribulation. And by forty days after his resurrection he appeared to his disciples, which was the time of consolation. And this saith the *Gloss*: Because that he was forty hours dead, after, he was forty days living ere he ascended in to heaven.

## HOW HE ASCENDED

### Mightily

As to the third point, how he ascended, it appeareth how that he ascended mightily. For by his puissance and virtue saith Isaiah, he ascended into heaven, Isaiah xliii. [Isaiah 63:1: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."]

And also St. John [3:13] saith: No man ascendeth into heaven by his own puissance and might, but the Son of Man that is in heaven.

And how be it that he ascended in a cloud, he had none need, but because that he would show that every creature is ready to serve his creator, he ascended in his proper virtue. And in this is the difference, after that *Scholastica Historia* saith, of Jesu Christ, of Enoch and Elijah. For Enoch was translated, Elijah was borne, but Jesu Christ by his own might is ascended into heaven. After St. Gregory, the first, that is to wit Enoch, was engendered of a man, and he was engendering. The second, that is to say Elijah, was engendered and not engendering. The third, that is to wit Jesu Christ, he was born, not engendered of a man ne engendering.

### Openly

Secondly, he ascended openly, for seeing his disciples he ascended. Whereof it is said *Johannis xvi.*, *Vado ad eum qui me misit, etc.* [John 16:5]: “I go to my father, and none of you demandeth ‘whither goest thou?’” the *Gloss* saith: “I go so openly that no man demanded of that they saw at the eye.” And therefore he would ascend in their presence, because they might bear witness, and that they should enjoy of that they saw nature human ascend to heaven, and that they should desire to follow him.

### Joyously

Thirdly, he ascended joyously, for the angels singing and enjoying, “he ascended into heaven in gladness” [Ps. 46:6 (47:5)]. Whereof saith St. Austin: *Adscendente Christo paves, etc.*: Jesu Christ ascending, the heaven abashed, the stars marvelled, the company of heaven enjoyed, the trump sounded, and all the sieges of the pleasant place made melody.

### Lightly

Fourthly, he ascended lightly. Whereof David saith [Ps. 18:6 (19:5)]: “He styed [climbed] up as a giant with a great pace.”

And much hastily and lightly he ascended when he passed so great a space in a moment. Rabbi Moses [Maimonides], which was a great philosopher, rehearseth that every circle, or every heaven of each planet, hath the thickness and the way of five hundred years. That is to say as one may go in a plain way in five hundred years. And that is the distance between heaven and heaven, and between circle and circle, after that which is said so great. And as there be seven heavens, after his saying, from the centre of the earth unto the concavity of the heaven of Saturn, which is the seventh way of seven thousand years; and unto the concavity of the eighth heaven seven thousand and seven hundred years, that is as much space as one could go in plain way in seven thousand and seven hundred years if a man might live so long, and that every year be of three hundred and sixtyfive days, and the way of every day be of forty miles, and every mile be of two thousand paces or cubits. And this said Rabbi Moses, which was a great philosopher. If it be truth or no God knoweth, for he that all hath made and created in certain number, in certain poise and weight, and in certain measure, he knoweth all.

Then this leap or springing was great that Jesu Christ made from the earth to heaven. Of this leap, and divers others leaps of Jesu Christ, St. Ambrose saith: Jesu Christ came into this world to make a leap. He was with God the Father, he came into the Virgin Mary, and from the Virgin Mary into the crib or rack. He descended into flom [river] Jordan, he ascended upon the cross, he descended into his tomb. From the tomb he arose, and after ascended up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.

### WITH WHOM HE ASCENDED

As to the fourth point, it is with whom he ascended. He ascended with a great prey [catch] of men and great multitude of angels. And that he ascended up with the prey of men, it appeareth by this that David saith [Ps. 67:19 (68:18)]: *Ascendisti in altum, cepisti captivitatem, etc.*: “Lord, thou hast ascended on high and hast taken them that were captives imprisoned, and the servitude thou hast affranchised.”

And also that he ascended with a great multitude of angels, it appeareth by the interrogations that the angels made of the deputations to them beneath. When Jesu Christ ascended into heaven as Isaiah recordeth, Isaiah lxiii.[Isaiah 63:1]: *Quis est iste qui venit de Edom, etc.*: “Who is he that cometh from Edom with his clothes dyed,” whereas saith the *Gloss* that some of the angels that knew not plainly the mystery of the incarnation, of his passion and of his resurrection, that saw our Lord ascend with all a great multitude of angels and of saints by his own virtue, marvelled, and said to the angels that accompanied him: “Who is this that cometh from Edom?” And yet they said: “Who is this king of glory, etc.”

St. Denis [Dionysius] in the book of *The Hierarchy Of Holy Angels* in the seventh chapter saith, [or] thus seemeth it that he said, that three questions were made to the angels when that Jesus ascended. The first were to themselves, the second were the principals to Jesu Christ that ascended, the third were the less to the greatest. Of which they demanded among them: “who is this that cometh from Edom, his clothes dyed of Bosra?” This word *Edom* is as much to say as “full of blood,” and this word *Bosra* is to say “anguish and tribulation.” Thus as they would have said: “Who is this that cometh from the world full of blood by the sin of the world and of malice against God?”

And our Lord answered: “I am He that speaketh in justice.”

And St. Denis saith thus, that he said: “I am he that disputeth justice and righteousness of health in the redemption of human lineage.” He [Christ] was justice, inasmuch as he that was creator brought again his creatures from the strange jurisdiction, and he was righteousness, inasmuch as the enemy which had assailed us he put and cast out of the domination that he had in the human lineage.

And after this maketh St. Denis a question: “Sith [since] the principal angels be nigh to God and be without moyen [mediation] illumined of God, wherefore, demanded they one of the other like as that they would have learned each of other?” But he saith, that giveth this solution, that in that they demand each of other, as it sheweth that they desire to know, and in that first among them they had collation [conversation], it showed that they durst not advance them tofore

the divine progression. And for this first, they ought to ask each one other, because that peradventure their interrogation were not over-hasty upon the illumination that they had received of God without moyen.

The second question is that which the first and sovereign angel made to Jesu Christ saying: “Why is thy clothing red, and thy vestments as trodden or fulled in a press?” Our Lord hath his clothing and his body red, all covered with blood, because that yet when he ascended he had his wounds in his body, after this that Bede saith:

He must keep his wounds in his body for five reasons, and he said, thus our Lord keepeth his wounds. And to the day of judgment he shall keep them, to the end [1] that it confirm his resurrection. And [2] for to pray the Father for us, he presenteth them. To the end [3] that the good see the great mercy by which he hath redeemed them, and [4] that the wicked people may know that righteously they be damned, and [5] that eternally he bears with him the signs of his glorious victory perpetual.

And to this question answered our Lord: *Torcular calcavi, etc.* [Isaiah 63:1] “The [wine]press I have turned and fouled [trod] all alone, and of all men there was not one that would help me.” The press is the cross, in the which he was pressed in such wise that the blood sprang out. Thus Jesu Christ called the enemy the presser, which that thus had wrapped the human lineage with cords of sin, and quenched him so clean that he had nothing spiritual, but that it was without expressed, and only he showed it in the Virgin Mary. But our champion fought so strongly, and defouled the presser so foul, that he brake the bonds of sin and ascended into heaven. And after this he opened the tavern of heaven and poured out the wine of the Holy Ghost.

The third question is that which the lesser angels made to the greater and more, in saying: “Who is this king of glory?” They answered and said: “The lord of virtues, he is the king of glory.” And of this question of the angels, and of the answer of the other saith St. Austin:

All the air is hallowed in the company divine, and all the tourbe [throng] of devils flying in the air fled backward when Jesu Christ ascended, to whom the angels that were in the company of God ran and demanded: “Who is this king of glory?” And they answered, “this is he that was white and coloured as a rose, the which was seen without colour and without beauty; sick in the tree, strong in his despoil; foul reputed in his body, well-armed in the battle; stinging in his death, fair in his resurrection; white, born of the Virgin, red in the cross; pale in reproof and clear in heaven.”

## **BY WHAT MERIT HE ASCENDED**

**A**s to the fifth, it is for what merit he ascended; and we ought to understand that he ascended in treble merit. Whereof saith St. Jerome:

Jesu Christ ascended [1] in merit of truth, for that which he had promised by prophets; [2] he fulfilled in merit of humility and debonairly, for like as he was sacrificed like a lamb for the life of the people; [3] in merit of justice, [for] not only by puissance [power] but “by justice and by right thou hast delivered man, and I have withholden of thy puissance, and thy virtue shall bring thee to heaven” [Cf. Ps. 44:5 (45:4)]. This said God the Father to the Son.

## WHITHER HE ASCENDED

As to the sixth, that is whither he ascended, it ought to be known that he ascended above all the heavens, as the apostle saith *ad Ephesios quarto* [Ephesians 4:8-10]: “He that descended from heaven, that is he that ascended above all the heavens because he fulfilled all things.” He said above all the heavens because there be many heavens above which he ascended. There is a heaven material, a heaven rational, a heaven intellectual and a heaven substantial.

### Heaven Material

There be many heavens material. The heaven of the air, which is called *æreum*; one other called *ethereum*; another *olimpium*; another *igneum*; another *siderum*; another *crystallinum*; and another *empyreum*.

### Heaven Reasonable

The heaven reasonable is the man just, which is said just because of the divine habitation. For like as heaven is the seat of God as the prophet Isaiah saith [66:1]: *Cælum mihi sedes est*. Our Lord saith that the heaven is his seat, right so is the soul of a righteous man. Like as Solomon saith: “The soul of a righteous man is the seat of sapience” [Cf. Wisdom 10:10], by reason of the holy conversation. For the saints by holy conversation and desire dwell in heaven. As saith St. Paul: “Our conversation is in heaven” because of continual operation in virtue. For like as the heavens move continually without resting, in such manner the saints move always by good works.

### Heaven Intellectual

The heaven intellectual be the angels, and the angels be called heaven by reason of dignity and of their understanding. Whereof saith St. Denis [Dionysus] in *The Book Of Divine Names*, in the fourth chapter: The divine spirits and the angels be above the creatures which be, and live above all things that live and understand, and know above all other wits and reasons, and more than all other things that be in being, they desire well and good of which they been participant, that is God.

Secondly, they be right fair because of their nature and of their glory. Of which beauty saith St. Denis in the book before alleged: The angel is the manifestation of deeds and will of God by whom they be showed, and he is the clearness of dark light, he is a mirror pure and right clear without receiving of any filth or spot in him, if it be lawful to say, he is the beauty and the conformity of the bounty of God.

Thirdly, they be right strong because of their virtue and might, of which strength saith John Damascene in his second book, the eighth chapter, where he saith: *Fortes sunt et parati, etc.*: “The angels of God be strong and always ready to fulfil the will of God, and they be found always anon where God will have them.”

The heaven hath three conditions. It is right high, right fair, and right strong. Of the two first saith Solomon, *Ecclesiastici xliii.* [Ecclesiasticus 43:1]: “The firmament is the beauty of the height, and the beauty of heaven is in the sight of glory.”

### Heaven Substantial

The heaven [that] is substantial, that is the [e]quality of the divine excellence of which Jesu Christ came, and after this he ascended. Whereof David saith [Ps. 18:7 (19:6)]: *A summo cælo egressio ejus, etc.*: “From the high and sovereign heaven the Son of God descended and ascended again unto the sovereign height,” the quality of the divine excellence.

And that he ascended above all the heavens material David said it clearly which said [Ps. 8:2 (8:1)], *Elevata est magnificentia tua super cælos*, “Lord God thy magnificence is lift up and elevate above all the heavens material.” He ascended unto the heaven where God the Father sitteth, not like unto Elijah which ascended in a chariot of fire unto a high region, from whence he was translated into a paradise terrestrial. He went no further, but Jesu Christ ascended in the highest heaven that is called *cælum empyreum*, which is the proper habitation of God, of the angels, and of the saints.

And this habitation properly appertaineth to dwellers, for this heaven, above all other heavens, hath excellence in divinity, in priority, in situation and circumference. And therefore it is convenient of Jesu Christ, which all the heavens of intelligence and reason surmounteth in divinity, in eternity, in situation of immobility, and in circumference of puissance. Semblably it is the habitation of saints of good congruity. For that heaven is without deformity, unmeasurable, of perfect light, and of capacity without measure; and rightfully it appertaineth unto angels and unto saints, which were all one in operation, immovable in dilection, shining in the faith and in knowledge, of great capacity in receiving the Holy Ghost, it appeareth by this Scripture that saith in the Canticles [Song of Solomon 2:8]: “Lo! this is he that cometh leaping in the mountains and overpassing the hills.” And who that ascended above all the heavens of intelligence, that is to say above the angels, appeareth by David, that saith: “He ascended above the cherubin” [Ps. 17:11 (18:10)] which is as much as to say as the plenitude of science, “and flew upon the pens [wings] of the wind” [Ps. 103:3 (104:3)].

And who ascended above unto the heaven substantial, that is, to the equality of God the Father, it appeareth by the gospel of Mark [16:19], *Marci ultimo: Et Dominus quidem, Jesus, etc.* “Sith that our Lord had spoken to his disciples, he was set in heaven on the right side of God.” Whereof saith St. Bernard: “To my Lord Jesus Christ it is said singularly, and given of my Lord God the Father, that he sit on the right side of his glory in glory, in essence consubstantial by generation, semblable of majesty and nothing-unlike, and of eternity semblable.”



## FOUR MANNERS OF HEIGHT

Now may we say that Jesus in his ascension was right high of four manners of height, that is to wit of place, of remuneration, of reward, of knowledge, and of virtuality or strength.

Of the first said the apostle *ad Ephesios* [Ephesians 4:10]: “He that descended hither down, that is he that ascended above all the heavens.”

Of the second, *ad Ephesios secundo* [Philippians 2:8-9]: “He was made obedient unto death,” when St. Austin saith: The humility of clearness is the merit, and the clearness of meekness is the meed or reward. Meekness is the merit of clearness, and clearness is the reward of meekness.

Of the third saith David [Ps. 17:11 (18:10)]: *Adscendit super cherubim*, “He ascended above cherubim,” that is above the plenitude of science and of knowledge.

Of the fourth it appeareth, for as it is written [Ephesians 3:19]: “He ascended above *Seraphim*,” which is interpreted “the strength of God.”

## NINE FRUITS OF HIS ASCENSION

And we ought to know that of his ascension we have nine fruits profitable. The first is the habitation of the love of God, whereof is said in the gospel, *Johannis xvi.*: *Nisi enim abiero, etc.* [John 16:7]: “But if I shall go the Holy Ghost shall not come to you.” Where saith St. Austin: “If ye seek me by fleshly love ye may not comprehend the Holy Ghost which is spiritual love.”

The second is the more greater knowledge of God, whereof saith St. John in the gospel [14:28]: “If ye love me well ye shall have great joy, for I go to my Father, for he is greater than I am.” Where saith St. Austin: “I shall withdraw this form of humanity in which my Father is more greater than I, as to that ye may see God.”

The third point is the merit of the faith, of whom saith St. Leo the Pope in a sermon of the Ascension:

Then began the faith more certain to approach, which teacheth us the Son to be equal to the Father and semblable, and as to the body substantial of Jesu Christ, of which he is less than the Father, and whereof he had no need. And this vigour is of great courage, and firm without doubt, for to believe that which is not seen at eye, and to affix the desires that may not be beholden.

And St. Austin saith: “He ascended as a giant to run in his way, and tarried not, but he ran crying by voice, by words, by deeds, by death, by life, by descending and by ascending; in crying that we should return to him by good heart that we may find him.”

The fourth is our surety, therefor ascended Jesu Christ into heaven for to be our advocate to God the Father. And we ought to hold us well assured when we have such advocate to God the



Father, and this witnesseth us St. John, that saith in his canon [I John 2:1]: “We have advocate to the Father, Jesus Christ which is merciful to us for our sins.” And of this surety saith St. Bernard: “O man, saith he, we have a sure going or a coming to God the Father, where the Mother is before the Son, to whom she showeth her breast and her paps, and the Son showeth to the Father his side and his wounds. Then we may not be put away where we have so many signs of love and of charity.”

The fifth is our dignity. A great dignity have we gotten when our nature is lift up unto the right side of the Father, whereof the angels of heaven, considering that, defended for to be worshipped of man, *Apocalypsis xix* [Revelation 19:10]: St. John would have worshipped the angel that spake to him, and the angel defended him in saying: “Beware thee that thou do not so, for I am thy brother and thy servant.” Whereas the *Gloss* saith, that in the old law he defended not to be worshipped of man, but after the Ascension, when he saw man lift up above him.

And of this St. Leo saith in a sermon of the Ascension:

This day the nature of our humanity hath been borne above the height of all puissances unto where as God the Father sitteth, as that it should seem more marvellous when it is seen that it is much far from men, so much more show they the reverence and the honour that they have. And hereof the faith mistrusteth not, ne hope slacketh not, ne charity aminisheth not.

The sixth is the stedfastness and firmness of our faith, whereof saith St. Paul *ad Hebræos sexto* [Hebrew 6:18-19]: “To Jesu Christ we run for refuge, for to keep the hope that hath been delivered to us as an anchor which is firm to the soul and sure, which leadeth to within heaven, where Jesu Christ before us entered.” And St. Leo saith thus: “The ascension of Jesu Christ is our mounting and lifting up, and where the joy of our head is, there abideth the hope of our body.”

The seventh is the showing of the way of heaven, whereof saith Micah the prophet [2:13]: “He ascended to show us the way.” And St. Austin saith: “Thy Saviour hath made the way to thee, arise thou and go thither, for thou hast that thou intendest, be not now slothful.”

The eighth is the opening of the gate of heaven; for like as Adam opened the gate of hell, in likewise Jesu Christ opened the gate of heaven, as the Church singeth; “Lord God Jesu Christ, thou art he that hast overcome the prick of death,” that is the devil, “and hast opened the realm of heaven to them that believe in thee.”

The ninth is the preparation of the new place. Whereof Jesus saith in the Gospel of John [14:2]: “I go for to make ready your place in heaven.” And St. Austin saith: “Lord, array that thou hast made ready. Thou arrayest us Lord to thee, and thou arrayest thee to us, when thou makest ready the place, to the end that to thee in us, and in thee to us, may be the preparation of the place and the mansion of the everlasting health.” Amen.

The [iconography of the Ascension](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

Scanned by Robert Blackmon. [bob\\_blackmon@mindspring.com](mailto:bob_blackmon@mindspring.com).

This text was taken from the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

E-text © Paul Halsall, September 2000  
[halsall@fordham.edu](mailto:halsall@fordham.edu)

Reformatted with paragraphs, rubrics, italics, and explanatory insertions by Richard Stracke, [rstracke@aug.edu](mailto:rstracke@aug.edu), with assistance from William Granger Ryan's modern translation of Voragine (Princeton U.P., 0691001537).