



## Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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### *Christ is Ascended! In Glory!* May 31, 2020

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is ascended! In glory!

*So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following! Amen. (Mark 16:19-20)*

These are closing words of the Gospel of St. Mark and of the Third Eothinon, or Resurrection Gospel, of Matins. I read them aloud roughly every eleven weeks or so as we pray Sunday Orthros or Matins in our little parish. I think they are vitally important, because they give us a vibrant glimpse into the mindset of the first century Christian community.

And yet, every time I do read them they give me “pause.” They take me by surprise even though I’ve read them hundreds of times. After all, they speak of how the disciples reacted following the Ascension of our Lord, His bodily departure from the realm of earth to the realm of heaven, where He reigns at the right hand of the Father, as we confess every Sunday in the creed. One would think that they would have been abjectly downcast, upset at His departure.

But that is not what the words of these closing verses impart, is it? They speak of the continuation of the mission, the work that the Lord had started and passed onto His Holy Apostles and Disciples, the proclamation of the Kingdom, the Saving Gospel of Grace and Salvation. Furthermore, they speak of the work of Discipleship going forward, not in some sort of stoic acceptance of the Lord's inevitable departure, but in joyous recognition of His presence, His working with them to gather all of mankind, as we will soon sing in the Troparion of Holy Pentecost, "into His net."

This, Brothers and Sisters, is what we must remember about the great feast of Holy Ascension. This is not a remembrance of His departure; it is not a recollection of sadness at His leaving. To the early Christian community it was an observance of His continued presence among them. The fullness of that message of course will be proclaimed on the Feast of Pentecost, when the Savior sent the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit, He that proceeds from the Father, upon all flesh. The work of the Body of Christ continues, even though He has ascended bodily to the throne of the Father. It continues, because the Lord is not gone, but continues to work with His people, the Church, to gather all of mankind into His net. We must not think that the Church is merely some sort of human organization for the good and edification of those who belong to her. The Church is the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself working in the world to proclaim and to live the good news of the saving grace of all mankind through the love of God, freely proffered to all flesh through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Yes, it is possible to reject what is freely given; but, the work of Christian discipleship in the Church is to continue to speak and to act in such a way that the Grace of salvation is made manifest and clear. And how true it is that actions speak louder than words! The world will judge the Lord by the actions of His disciples.

Soon it will be Pentecost. We will come to celebrate the outpouring of the Spirit. On Ascension, however, our task is to give glory to the Lord Jesus Christ, who ascends not to distance Himself from us, but to draw ever closer to us for the Life of the World!

***Christ is ascended! In Glory!***

Fr. Elias

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