

The King, the Cross, and the Ascension

May 17, 2021 Scott Gunn

1. *See the Conqueror mounts in triumph;
see the King in royal state,
riding on the clouds, his chariot,
to his heavenly palace gate!
Hark! the choirs of angel voices
joyful alleluias sing,
and the portals high are lifted
to receive their heavenly King.*
2. *He who on the cross did suffer,
he who from the grave arose,
he has vanquished sin and Satan;
he by death has spoiled his foes.
While he lifts his hands in blessing,
he is parted from his friends;
while their eager eyes behold him,
he upon the clouds ascends.*
3. *Thou has raised our human nature
on the clouds to God's right hand;
there we sit in heavenly places,
there with thee in glory stand.
Jesus reigns, adored by angels;
Man with God is on the throne;
mighty Lord, in thine ascension
we by faith behold our own.*
Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885)

This week's Musical Monday is cheating a bit because I wanted to squeeze in an Ascension Day hymn. So even though Ascension Day was last Thursday, today offers something to help you celebrate Christ's ascension. Here is St. John's, Detroit singing this text paired with In Babilone (Dutch Traditional Melody, Oude en Nieuwe Hollantse... Contradanseu, Amsterdam, c. 1710). They sing it at a glorious, stately tempo.

I love that this hymn opens and closes with a mystical vision of the Ascension. The imagery is wondrously refulgent. But then right at the end, it all connects to us. In our awe at this feast day, we are meant by faith to behold our own union with God one day. The middle verse is why I really love this hymn though. The Paschal Mystery is indeed the center of our faith. Christ's self-offering on the cross is what makes possible everything else. Death is defeated, and now Jesus is able to bless his followers to carry on his life-giving ministry.

To celebrate Christ's ascension, we really need to see it in the light of his death and resurrection. And, of course, the cross only makes sense if we gaze at it and then look beyond to see Christ's triumph. These events in our salvation history are all tied together.

Christ having ascended into heaven means that we can be confident we will one day dwell in heaven. Death is defeated, and human nature is lifted up. But Christ sitting at the Father's right hand also means that we have now, a mediator and advocate with Almighty God. In other words, Christ's ascension is a comfort to us in our earthly journey.