

What does it look like when heaven and earth join together?

Acts 1:1–11

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

Today is a very special day in the life of the Church: We gather and celebrate Ascension Day. Churches throughout the world are taking time to recognize and celebrate the Ascension of our Lord. What I want to focus on this evening is the relationship of heaven and earth.

What does it look like when heaven and earth join together? Did you ever wish that God would show up and physically be with you like He did with the prophets and a few select people in the Old Testament? How many of them actually “saw” God? God did not even permit Elijah to look upon His face.

Do you wish you could be in the physical presence of Christ surrounded by saints like Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration? Only three of the disciples experienced this. Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew and the rest of them all learned of this event the same way you did. They heard it from the eye witnesses of the event.

There are a few times in Scripture when this joining together of heaven and earth is obvious. When Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the

70 elders of Israel met with God on Mt. Sinai to ratify God's covenant with the people, they prepared a feast; they ate and they drank; and heaven and earth joined together. God appeared to them and under His feet was what looked like a pavement of sapphire stone, and is described as being "like the very heaven for clearness" [Ex. 24:10]. And they were amazed that they could look upon the Lord and live. And they saw God, and they ate and they drank.

At Jesus' Baptism, heaven and earth join together as the Spirit descends in the form of a dove and God the Father's voice thunders down from on high. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus and Peter, James, and John join in the heavenly conversation with Moses and Elijah. Heaven and earth had joined together.

What would it look like if heaven and earth were joined together here? If I asked you to imagine in your mind what that would look like, what sort of images of bliss and glory and delight would you describe? Don't answer that. The mistake that we make far too often is that we think about God descending on occasion and interacting with people in Old Testament times, and Jesus certainly descending to be born of Mary. "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come."

We make the mistake of seeing Christ as active on earth until the day of Ascension. And heaven and earth will not join together until He returns

as He promised. What we so often fail to realize is that the mission of the church, the life of the church is grounded in the belief that heaven and earth have actually come together in several highly significant ways.

Yes, of course, we await the time when our Lord will return in all His glory and there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and heaven and earth will come together in a new way for all eternity. But we sell ourselves short when we imagine that the two have not already come together through Christ, within Christ's Church, in the here and now.

We read the book of Acts – short for “The Acts of the Apostles.” What is the book about? It is all about Jesus. But He ascends into heaven in these first 11 verses, and then we hear how the apostles carry the Gospel throughout the entire Roman world – how can you say it is all about Jesus?

Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, tells us in the opening verses: “In the first book, O Theophilus (the first book being the Gospel of Luke), I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day when he was taken up.” If Jesus, birth, life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection were what Jesus began to do and to teach, it would imply that His work will continue – and it has.

Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit as He promised, working in and through the church, and He has established His kingdom in the world – His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Before Jesus sends His spirit, and before He

ascends into heaven, He appeared to the disciples throughout these 40 days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God.

It is important to understand that in Scripture, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are fairly interchangeable. Also, it is important to understand that the kingdom of God is not a place. If you can draw it on a map, you are not describing the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of God is not simply some far-away, spiritual, heavenly place that we go when we die. The kingdom of God, and kingdom of heaven is where Christ, the King, reigns.

Jesus stretches beyond the borders of the universe, yet we can hold Him in our hand and take Him into our mouths as we gather with angels and arch-angels and all the company of heaven. Do you want to know what it looks like when heaven and earth join together? It looks like the saints on earth gathering with the saints and angels in heaven as they come together to laud and magnify God's glorious name and gather around the body and blood of our resurrected Lord and Savior.

Do you want to know what it looks like when heaven and earth join together? In a few minutes, not only will you see, but you will join with angels, arch-angels and all the saints who are waiting and watching for our resurrected and ascended Lord to return. Amen.