

MYSTIC LIGHT

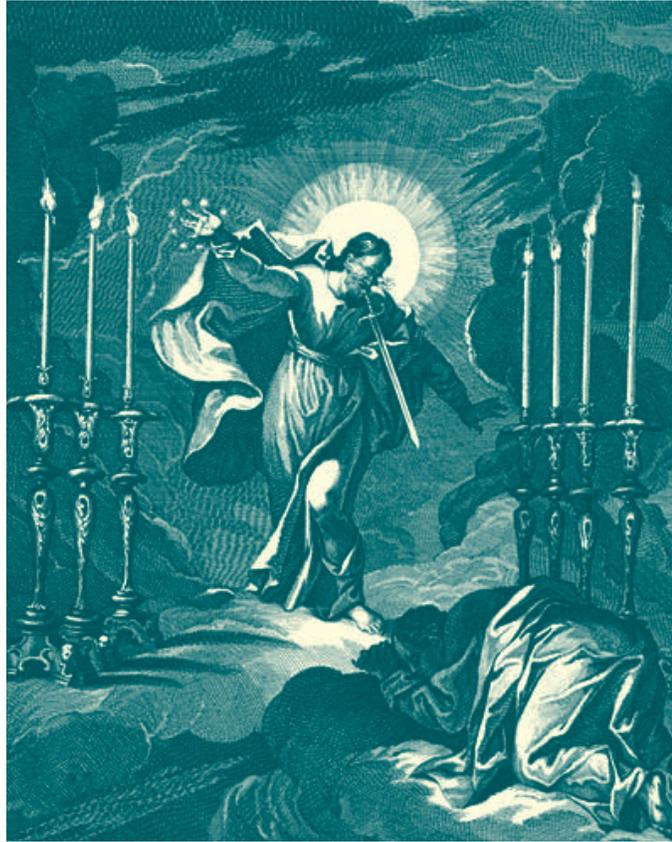
Meditation: The Ascension

THE RISEN CHRIST appears in three ways in the New Testament. He appears first in the way in which He reveals Himself to the disciples between Easter and Ascension. Here John's Gospel is especially important. It tells us most circumstantially and impressively of the Risen One. No one ought to let the seasons of Easter and Whitsuntide pass without letting these accounts act upon him. Over them is spread a fragrance and beauty, as of spring in Elysium. To breathe this spirit of the resurrection in these stories awakes a man himself to a new life.

A second kind of resurrection occurrence is described in that which happened at Damascus, when Paul met the Risen One. We have earlier indicated the organic connection of this appearance with the experience at the baptism in Jordan and with the revelation to Stephen. All these can help us if we wish to reach an impression of the Risen One. These stories are meant for that purpose.

But here, for our meditation, we would point especially to the last and greatest revelation of the Risen Christ in the Apocalypse of John (Rev. 1). As nowhere else we can really get to know the Risen One in this picture, live ourselves into Him, and thus ourselves arise. This picture is the most powerful meditation upon the resurrection.

Step by step we can call this Christ up before us, and if at first the picture is strange to us, because we study such pictures from a too outward, too



Copper engraving. Caspar Luiken, 1672-1708

One Like a Son of Man Appears Before John

The living Christ of John's Revelation cannot be adequately portrayed. It represents the third and ultimate manifestation of Christ in His Resurrection phase, prior to the Ascension.

materialistically painted standpoint, are too little able to read and bring to life within us the language of the spirit which is spoken there, we must let such pictures become more living and vivid than we are accustomed to receive pictures to-day. Then we live ourselves ever more strongly into them.

The head shining in pure light, as if itself created out of purest light, wisdom, and holiness in one! Out of it the eyes shine forth, "as the sun shineth in his strength." Thus the head is surrounded from without with cosmic divine light and at the same time, in the eyes, filled from within with the essence of divine light: outward and inward meet. The garment with the golden girdle is the same that

This is the twelfth in a series of articles taken from Friedrich Rittelmeyer's Meditation, Guidance of the Inner Life, published by Floris Books, Edinburgh. Reprinted with permission.

we have recognized in these studies as divine peace, the divine support which proceeds from super-earthly cosmic harmony. That this peace is no rest apart, but the strongest cosmic force, we recognize from the voice which comes forth from the breast, which is as the rushing of mighty waters; which acts like a two-edged sword of judgment. Again we see this peace more inwardly in the garment with the golden girdle, and more directed towards the world in the mighty cosmic word.

And the love of which we first spoke is shown in the picture to us in the feet, which are formed out of earth-force, out of brass, but heavenly fire glows through them; and in the hands, in which live the powers of the stars. Again, a more personal side of love is depicted in the feet, and the side turned towards the world is depicted in the hands.

John the Seer tells us of himself that, when he had seen this Christ, he fell to earth as one dead. We always appear dead near Him. We experience the great grave, the earthly world, and the little grave, our earthly body....Thus we look upon Christ and receive out of Him true humanity. Yes, we can now see, summed up in this Christ, the whole construction of these our exercises in life, as far as they refer to character. That which is brought about through the *foot-washing* we see here in the earthly feet, through which the fire glows—earth power united to the spirit of love. That which the *scourging* brought, comes back in perfection in the flowing garment with the golden girdle. That which the *crowning with thorns* awoke in us, the standing for that which is sacred in us, earthly life raised to heavenly wisdom, shines forth from the eyes. In the noblest thing which the earth can bring forth, in the human eye, shines the power of the sun itself.

And now follow the three higher exercises also. That to which the *Cross* led us, the becoming one with cosmic love, lives as creative power in the pierced hands which hold the stars. The last judgment of the world into which the *descent into hell* led us, lives in might in the divine voice. And the *resurrection* itself, the awakening to a new being, is woven around the head as a heavenly fullness of light. We may think of these details, or have the whole before us: this is the Risen One, as He appeared to His beloved disciple. So He would

draw all men up to Him. Before Him all prayer becomes worship.

Where today is a pure worship of Christ to be found? It would be the noblest prayer. Through Christ we worship the World-Father “in Christ’s name.” What might not humanity become if the picture of the Risen One did not remain in the grave of the Bible, but arose in souls themselves? What unheard-of development would men bring forth from within? With deepest reverence man, as he is, would look towards man, as he ought to become. He shines forth from Christ as the “Divine Son.”

Let him who cannot yet honestly connect this picture of Revelation with a Christ alive today, think of it all at first as his own higher ego, or as the ideal for man. One day it will become clear to him that he has there before him not only a thought picture of his own making.

With all this we are now already in the midst of the *Ascension*. One feels the whole contradiction of our time when one merely speaks this word. Men who live among machines, ought they to sink themselves into the resurrection of Christ? But from quite another side comes a consideration. We read in the before-mentioned lectures of Rudolf Steiner on the Gospel of John “The seventh feeling cannot be expressed in words: he alone could describe it who was able to think without using the instrument of the human brain; and for this there is no language, because our language has expressions only for the physical plane. Therefore one can only give indication at this level. It surpasses all which man can represent to himself. One calls it the ‘ascent into heaven,’ or ‘the complete absorption into the spiritual world.’”

According to such words we shall retain in our consciousness that there are experiences which lie high above all that we are able personally to reach. It is good in our last meditation to carry this quite clearly in our soul. And yet we must not pass by the highest. Not only because to the descent into hell of which we speak, an ascent into heaven alone can bring the balancing compensation, if we wish to have all correctly balanced—just as the death on the Cross corresponds to the resurrection—but because it is just the man of the present day who must come to feel again most strongly

that he belongs to the divine world, if he is to oppose to the strong outward life the strongest contrary force.

Here also we shall walk most surely and may be protected from all dangers, if we follow the indications of the Bible itself.

Immediately before His Ascension, Christ instituted Baptism: “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!” Baptism, also, may be experienced on the most differing levels. When, starting from the picture of Christ which we have described, a man seeks to mount personally to where he plunges his whole thinking, the whole being of his head, into the Holy Ghost, to where he plunges his whole feeling, his whole “middle man” which lives in heart and blood and lungs, into the Divine Son, to where he plunges his whole will, which lives in our acts and in our walk, into the Divine Father, then he mounts into the region where man himself is an image of the Divine Trinity; then the thrice holy Divine Name, which is above all the heavens, echoes wonderfully in man; then he becomes *one* with the life of the primal Divinity, which rules all the worlds, and is raised above all the powers of evil; then he is in his highest heavenly fatherland. Like a victor, crowned with light, he returns back to his earthly tasks. All the heavens are gathered within him and yet holier heavens will open to him in prospect.

A man can seem to himself to be transfigured in heaven. But he must not sink down into unconsciousness, which was the danger of the mystics, but in his awakened ego the heavens themselves will awake. It is the highest perfection of man, which we build up above the child in a sacramental action when we baptize it. Nothing must be in my thinking but that which is the Holy Ghost. Nothing must live in my feeling, but that which is the Divine Son. Nothing must act in my will, but that which is the will of the Father of the world, Who is over all that exists. One can experience this meditation as a sealing with a divine seal.

Such a meditation will sanctify us, as nothing else can sanctify us. To have been in heaven—that gives one for life quite a different feeling towards the earth. Divinely ennobled we come back to it. But that is only possible when we have not sought



Photo: Antonio Quattrone

Fresco, detail, Masolino da Panicale(1383-1435), Baptistery, Castiglione Olona (Lombardy)

The Baptism of Christ

The Baptism of Christ Jesus prefigures the Ascension in that it introduces the Ego to the realms of Human Spirit (Holy Ghost), Life Spirit (the Son) and Divine Spirit (the Father).

to escape the Cross and hell. If we have received the divine seal, we learn to speak the word “man “ in quite a different way. We begin to feel that man himself is called to enter the ranks of the divine beings, and to feel what *his* being, when among them, will be in light, life and love. For these three words of John’s Gospel express the same thought, “Is it not written: Ye are Gods?” (John 10:34) Behold the Man! Behold the God!

But the Ascension, if we do not deny the spirit of Christ, must never betray us into wishing to remain in heaven, however strongly we should feel it as “blessedness.” The will of Christ leads straight from heaven to earth! Only then are we united to Christ, if this will itself is alive in us also.

Thus indeed it was at the Baptism of Christ Himself. It can be regarded as an actual ascent to heaven. The connection between the Ascension and Baptism, as we described it above, becomes in it fully clear. And so the consideration of the Baptism of Christ can help us to strengthen the meditation upon the Ascension by means of a picture drawn from the earth.

“The heavens were opened.” This experience of

Jesus at the Baptism in Jordan, was...the deepest experience that ever a man had upon the earth. In the bright dove which lighted upon His head, the Holy Ghost revealed itself. In the voice which sounded, "Thou art my well beloved Son, upon whom my revelation rests lovingly," the Divine Son is revealed.

In the opening of the heavens over Him and around Him, the Father of the worlds drew near. That which we here see before us was a passing through the three realms: Imagination, in the picture; Inspiration, in the sound; Intuition, in the receiving of life. By this event—the Baptism of Christ—our ascent to heaven may at the same time be anchored and remain fast held within the realm of earth. We will also remind ourselves how Christ returned back after His Baptism into earthly life and after the temptation in the wilderness—the severest temptations often come directly after the highest experiences—the humdrum activities of daily life began, through which thereafter the kingdom of heaven glowed from the background. "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" was henceforth His announcement. When through our earthly activities also there shines a kingdom of heaven in which we have been, then they contain their real beauty and true grandeur.

Resurrection and Ascension complete one another like breathing in and breathing out. The Resurrection is a going into heaven. The Ascension becomes a returning from heaven. The two belong together as the highest communion: The Resurrection is a last receiving of Christ's body. The Ascension fills us in the deepest sense with Christ's blood. The Lord's Supper is the preparation for this experience.

If we look back upon the whole course of the purification of our feeling, we find that we have twice passed through the realm of love, of peace, of holiness. Like a spiral movement our way proceeded upwards, since the second circuit lay above the first. Into love, which is our relationship to our fellow-men; into peace, which is our relationship to the earthly world around; into holiness, which is our relationship to the divine world—into this trinity we as men are wrought. Our earthly existence is so shaped that there is nothing which we would not have to lay hold of with these three basic,

human, and divine faculties of ours. In the Ascension they are all summed up.

And thus, at the same time, this path is the fulfilling of the second request in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come to us!" Usually in this request one thinks only of the kingdom that shall some day come from above. From this inadequate conception we are fully freed by our inward progress. We go the way of the Gospels themselves toward the divine kingdom: through death to resurrection. That is the way by which Christ Himself passed before us "into the kingdom." Through no outward door can one enter this kingdom, not through outward death alone. It is not a geographical kingdom, but a divine kingdom of the spirit. Strict conditions govern it: "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." (John 14: 4)

When Christ appeared to His disciples for the last time before His Ascension, He three times put to Peter the question: "Lovest thou Me?" One can feel, as one meditates upon this story, how this question each time penetrates more deeply into the soul, how, when it is received as a vital question, it melts the whole soul in a sacred fire. It is a unique means of self-transubstantiation which Christ there gave to Peter, the earthly-minded.

We may conclude our meditation upon the Ascension, and our whole series of meditations directed to the feelings, by experiencing as strongly as possible Christ standing there before us, asking this question. All that we experienced in the meditation upon the Resurrection is now in this Christ. And all that we gained in the meditation upon the Ascension and the Baptism is now in us. It is no presumption, but it is a fully-human appropriation of the Gospel story, if we, within this Christ, Who, radiant, encloses us like a figure which towers above us and enwraps us, receive into ourselves the question: "Lovest thou Me?" That is the question which always and everywhere sounds forth from His being, when we listen to Him. In the fire of this question, which has in it something heavenly which burns us, we are most fully re-created. With the highest heaven in our hearts, we then return to earth. "Father I will that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."—John 17:26 (Continued) □