



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Sunday After Ascension, May 4th, 2008

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. AMEN** ✠

Today we are celebrating our Lord Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven – at least some of us are. There is, you see, a growing body of people who find the business of such feast days Christmas, Easter and Ascension just a tad embarrassing. They bring us face-to-face with the miraculous, you see. And if there's one thing folks don't like in this day-and-age, it's miracles.

Indeed, many folks regard the miracle stories as sheer superstitions because they defy the laws of nature. And certainly miracles do indeed defy the laws of nature. It's what makes them miraculous: There is no natural way to explain them.

Of course, not all events that are difficult to explain are miracles. For example, if a hunk of pie vanishes from the icebox, it doesn't make sense to assume immediately that its disappearance was miraculous. It would be far wiser to assume the kids, or the dog, or, or even the cat, got to the hunk of pie before you did.

But the fact that most such events have natural explanations is no reason to doubt the miracles recorded in Holy Scripture. It's silly to assume that God is confined by the same laws of nature of nature he laid down for us. If God is all that we say he is – all mighty, all powerful, all knowing, etc. – logic dictates he is free to break the laws of nature whenever he so chooses.

That said, many of the miracles in the Bible actually conform to the laws of nature.

It was an earthquake that dried up the River Jordan and let Joshua and the children of Israel to cross dry shod to fight the battle of Jericho. And the after-shocks of that quake made Jericho's walls come tumbling down.

Furthermore, oceanographers explain that when the wind on the Red Sea blows in the way that Exodus describes, the waters divide in precisely manner recorded in the Bible. In other words, it was a natural phenomenon that allowed Moses and the Children of Israel escape Pharaoh. This in no way alters the fact that these events were miracles. The miracles lie not in the physical phenomenon, but in the timing.

But while God often works miracles by natural processes rather than supernatural ones, he by no means does so all the time. God can suspend, change, even reverse, his laws of nature whenever he sees fit. He did so when he created the universe. The very act of creation violated laws we claim are immutable.

Another example of the purely miraculous is found in the 9th Chapter of St. John's Gospel. It describes the healing of a man born blind. Everyone who witnessed it was puzzled by it – the man, his parents, and the Pharisee on-lookers.

John quotes the man's parents as saying: "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not . . ." When the Pharisees declared Jesus a sinner because he healed on the Sabbath, the healed man replied: "I don't know whether he's a sinner or not, But one thing I do know: Once I was blind, but now I see."

The reason for their puzzlement is that there is no natural explanation for the cure Jesus performed. The man suffered from a congenital sight defect that could not be cured by hypnosis, autosuggestion, or shock therapy -- concepts all well known to doctors in First Century Judea.

John tells us that – echoing the creation of man – Jesus made a paste of clay and spittle, smeared it on the blind man's eyes and told him wash it off at the Pool of

Siloam. Immediately the man did so his sight was restored. There is no natural explanation for this. By means entirely outside natural law, Jesus knit together severed optical nerves, repaired the deformed cornea, remade the damaged retina – not just of one eye, but of two. How it was done puzzles us today every bit as much as the folks who witnessed it 2000 years ago.

The Virgin Birth, Resurrection and Ascension are similarly supernatural. There is no way to explain them in the laws of nature. There's no natural way to create a baby without the male seed. We can't instill life into a dead body. We can't elevate a body into heaven; a place that, as far as we can tell, doesn't exist on this plane.

Miracles confronts us with the reality of dependence on God. They confront us with the fact that there is an intelligence at work in the universe that is infinitely greater than our own. We do not relish contemplating our limitations. We like to feel in control. Indeed, for many life is a constant – though ultimately fruitless – struggle to control their destinies.

But miracles force us to accept that ultimately God controls everything. They are disconcerting because they manifest the awesome extent of God's power and, in doing so, strip away our delusions of autonomy. They demolish the foolish conceit that we can command our own destinies – the conceit that inspired Adam and Eve to take the first bite out of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

Miracles graphically illustrate our weakness and frailty and irrefutably affirm our total dependence upon God's grace. This thought didn't appeal to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and it doesn't appeal to us in the world today. *AMEN*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.