

Kontakion of the Ascension

Intro

This kontakion falls into three main sections. The first, stanzas 1-9, concentrates on the distress of the apostles at Christ's imminent departure and his reply. In the second, stanzas 10-12, we have the Ascension itself and in the third, stanzas 13-18, we return to earth with the angels and their message to the apostles, ending with the return of the latter in joy to Jerusalem. So the movement is from earth to heaven and back again to earth. The first prelude and first stanza are still used: in the Pentecostarion for the feast of the Ascension. It is the only kontakion in the manuscripts which is given for the feast, a fact which indicates its popularity. No other could replace it, or even rival it. The sources are the account of the Ascension in Acts 1.9-13 and Luke 24.50-3.

Kontakion of the Ascension

Prelude 1

When you had fulfilled your dispensation for us,
and united things on earth with things in heaven,
you were taken up in glory,¹ Christ our God,
in no way parted, but remaining inseparable, you cried to those who loved you,
*"I am with you and there is no one against you."*²

Prelude 2

When you had sanctified the disciples on the Mount of Olives,
you were taken up into heaven, Lord,
having promised³ them teaching and having cried to them,
"I am not parting from you."
I am with you and there is no one against you."

¹ 1 Timothy 3.16. This is the key text for the language used in the texts of the feast.

² The refrain combines two texts: Matthew 28.20, "I am with you all days", and Romans 8.31, "If God is for us, who is against us?"

³ In Luke 24, Christ tells the apostles he will send them the "promise of my Father", that is the Holy Spirit who will lead them into all truth: John 16.13.

1

Abandoning on earth the things of earth,
leaving to the dust the things of ash,
now, let us come to our senses and raise on high our eyes and minds.
Mortals, let us make our sight together with our senses
fly to heaven's gates.
Let us imagine we are standing on the Mount of Olives
and that we bend our gaze on the Redeemer
as he rides upon a cloud.
For, from where the Lord has hastened back to heaven,
there too the One who loves to give has distributed his gifts
to his apostles, cherishing them as a father and crying out to them,
"I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you."

2

The One who came down to earth, as he alone knows how,
as he ascended from it, again as he knows how,
took those he loved and led those he had gathered to a high mountain,
so that, having mind and senses aimed on high,
they might then abandon all that seeks the ground.
And so, having climbed the Hill of Olives,
they surrounded the Benefactor,
as Luke, the initiate, recounts,
while the Lord, raising his hands like wings,⁴
sheltered them, as an eagle the nest which it was warming,⁵
and says to the nestlings, "I have sheltered you from all evils.
As I have cherished you, do you love me?
I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you.

3

"High over you, my disciples,
as God and maker of the whole world
I stretch out my palms, which the lawless stretched out, bound and nailed.
And so, as you bow your heads beneath my hands,
understand, know, my friends, what I command.

⁴Luke 24.50-1.

⁵Cf. Deuteronomy 32.11 (LXX).

For, as though baptizing, I lay my hands upon you now,
and, having blessed you, send you out
enlightened, and made wise.
Upon your heads, praise and majesty,
upon your souls, illumination, as it is written,
for I shall pour upon you of my Spirit,⁶ and you will be accepted by me,
taught and chosen, faithful⁷ and my own.
I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you.”

4

In saying this, the Saviour caused
the apostles much great grief.
At once they wept and, groaning deeply, said to the teacher,
“Are you leaving us, O Compassionate? Parting from those who love you?
You spoke to us like someone going on a journey.
These words indicate a departure,
and this is why we are troubled,
since we long to be with you;
we seek your face,⁸ for it delights our souls.
We have been wounded, bound by the most sweet sight of you.
There is no God but you.⁹ Do not take yourself far away from those who love you.
Stay with us¹⁰ and say to us,
‘I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you.’

5

“We have abandoned our whole way of life ¹¹
and fled it like violence.
To gain you, we have become strangers and aliens on earth.¹²
The first of us, Peter, when he became your friend,
disposed of everything that he had before.¹³
Andrew, his own brother, when he found you,
immediately left the things of the world

⁶Joel 2.28 (3.1), Acts 2.17-18.

⁷Cf. Apocalypse 17.14. Said of the followers of the Lamb in the final conflict with the Beast.

⁸Psalms 23(24).6, 26(27).8, Osee (Hosea) 5.15, Zacharias 8.22.

⁹Isaias 45.5, Psalm 17(18).31.

¹⁰Cf. Luke 24.29.

¹¹Cf. Matthew 19.28.

¹²Psalms 38(39).12, Hebrews 11.13.

¹³Luke 5.11.

and took your cross on his shoulders.¹⁴
Do you wish to abandon, Master, such a renunciation?
And are you hurrying to leave us as though you had forgotten us?
Let it not be, O King. Let us not become a laughing-stock for those who hate us.¹⁵
Let them not cry out to us, 'Where then is he'¹⁶ who said,
"I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you?"

6

"Do you despise, Redeemer, and do you reckon nothing
to the friendship of the sons of Zebedee?
Remember, Lover of mankind, how they heard and did not disobey your divine word.
They did not say in their hearts, 'Who is this who calls us?'
But they chose you even before their own father.¹⁷
Matthew again considered
the profit of the customs house as total loss,
since he longed for your wealth.¹⁸
Thomas the Twin also hated life itself.¹⁹
And in a word we have all said, 'We love you more than all.'²⁰
Then do not leave us. Take us in your arms, you who fill all things.
Enfold us and say to us,
'I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you.'"

7

When the Saviour had listened to the apostles
and seen the sorrow of those who loved him,
then he supported them as a father his sons. He took pity and cried out,
"Do not weep, my friends, for this is not
a moment for tears,
nor is it a day of sorrow.
It is an hour of joy, because I am taking
wings²¹ to go towards my Father²²

¹⁴Cf. Matthew 16.24.

¹⁵Cf. Psalms 24(25).2.

¹⁶Cf. Psalms 41(42).4, 41(42).11, 78(79).10, 113.10 (115.2),

¹⁷Matthew 4.21-2.

¹⁸Matthew 9.9.

¹⁹Cf. John 11.16.

²⁰Cf. John 21.15, Matthew 10.37-8.

²¹Cf. Psalm 138(139).9.

²²John 20.17.

and I am coming to rest in my tent.
For I made the firmament of heaven a tent,
not a tent which circumscribes, but one which surrounds me;²³
as Isaias cried, 'God has established heaven as a vault,
And dwells there as in a tent,'²⁴ he who says to his own,
'I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you.'

8

"So now, be joyful and radiant,
and, adopting an air of gladness,
sing a new song.²⁵ For everything that may happen, happens for your sake.
It was for you I came down and went through all,
so that I might please you, and you might receive me.
It is for you again that I ascend to heaven,
to prepare the place
where I must be with you.
For there are many dwelling places on high with my Father;²⁶
some contain the fathers, others are filled with the just
and others with the prophets. But your dwelling no one yet knows.
I shall prepare it and take you.
I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you.

9

"Now rise upright,²⁷ stand firm²⁸
and contemplate with blameless eye
this taking up. As you see it, understand it as of the body, not the Godhead.
For the flesh that you see is reaching the things on high.²⁹
For every place is full of my Godhead.
But nevertheless to this visible body, which is being lifted up,
is conjoined that of me which is not apparent.
For I was united to that which is apparent.
I am one, unseen yet at the same time seen,

²³Cf. Psalms 17(18).12.

²⁴Isaias 40.22.

²⁵Psalms 32(33).3, 99(96):1, 97(98).1, 149(150).1.

²⁶John 14.2-3.

²⁷As in the services where the deacons at important moments order the people to "stand upright" (*orthoi*).

²⁸Cf. 1 Corinthians 15.58.

²⁹Cf. John 8.23, Colossians 3.1-2.

I am really the one you look on, and I have not been changed,³⁰
as the Scripture said. I am both immortal and like you,
over above you and in your midst.
I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.”

10

When Christ had said these things to his friends,
he then made a sign to the archangels,
to prepare for his pure steps an impassable ascent.
And no sooner had they been ordered, than the first of the angels
cried to all the principalities on high,
“Lift up the gates and fling wide the heavenly
and glorious doors,
for the Master of glory comes.”³¹
Clouds, spread out your backs beneath the One who mounts.³²
Bright air,³³ prepare yourself for the One who journeys through you.
Stand open, heavens. Heaven of heavens, receive him,
because he is coming to you, he who says to his own,
‘I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.”

11

Those in the height immediately obeyed,
and opening at once all the heights,
thrones, dominations with principalities and powers ran to meet him,
and, swiftly spreading the cloud as a chariot,
sent it to the Mount of Olives.
It came down and took into its bosom
the One who drives³⁴ the clouds
and makes them give birth to showers.
Taking him then, it carried him, or rather it was carried —
for he who was borne bore the cloud which carried him,
as Mary once. For Scripture prophetically calls her cloud,³⁵
she who is guarded by him who dwelt in her, who said to his friends,

³⁰Malachias 3.6.

³¹Psalms 23(24).7-9.

³²Cf. Psalms 17(18).11.

³³Ether, that is the fiery upper air believed to be at the final frontier of the world.

³⁴The word is used of charioteers.

³⁵Cf. Isaiah 19.1. One of the most frequent types of the Mother of God in the liturgical texts.

“I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.”

12

Not one of the apostles was indifferent.

But together they were attentive to what was being accomplished,
and all raised their faces to the heights as they watched his taking up.

Immediately the cloud, lowering its back,
became a chariot for his unblemished foot.

The heaven was rent apart like a tunic,
and the One born from Mary ascended on high,
as fiery choirs preceded him,
crying out, “Come, Master, for your throne is ready.”³⁶

Mount, be lifted up on the wings of the winds,³⁷
and come to the Father’s bosom. For that is clearly your throne forever,
where you dwell and which you do not leave, even as you cry out to those below,
‘I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.”

13

So when the faithful saw all this take place,
at once, like David, they chanted and said,
“Truly God has gone up with a shout, the Lord to the sound of
the trumpet.”³⁸

As they chanted together and looked on high,
a pair of angels came towards them,
in the way that the book of Acts teaches:
when the Creator had been taken up
and the saints were gazing intently,
there came upon them two beings, like men, resplendent by their raiment,
who cried out, “Why are you standing here? What are you gazing at?
What do you wish to look on? See, God is seated on his throne.
He was our King,³⁹ the One who cried out to you,
‘I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.’

³⁶Psalms 92(93).2.

³⁷Psalms 17(18).11.

³⁸Psalms 46(47).6.

³⁹Psalms 46(47).9.

14

“Be amazed no longer, Galileans,
for Jesus Christ, as he has been taken up,
so too he will come, as you have seen him arriving on high.
For he has been clearly taken up and has not been translated.
It is not the same for Christ as it was for Enoch of old.
For the well-known Enoch passed over from things of earth;
he was not found worthy of those of heaven,
but was placed in the tents of the just,⁴⁰
while Elias, seated on the fiery chariot,
ascended, yet did not reach heaven, as it is written,
but ‘as towards heaven’.⁴¹ But the God of Enoch and the God of Elias,
on ascending to heaven, declared to you,
‘I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.’”

15

But immediately they heard these words
the disciples of the Deliverer said to one another,
“These are surely faithful witnesses of Christ’s assumption, for they are heavenly beings,
for had they not seen him on high in heaven,
they would not have come down to proclaim it to us.
He is Master of angels and through angels makes known
his loving dispensations for mankind,
he who dawned from the Virgin.
He was born, and angels revealed his nativity.⁴²
He was raised, and again angels revealed his rising.⁴³
He has ascended into heaven, and has revealed to us his divine and radiant
assumption through good angels,
‘I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.’

⁴⁰Genesis 5.24, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 44.16, Hebrews 11.5.

⁴¹4 Kingdoms (2 Kings) 2.11. This is the traditional understanding by the Fathers of the Greek expression in the Septuagint, which in strict grammar is simply a reinforced way of saying “to”. Patristic hermeneutics asks the question, “Why the added *ôs*, which usually means ‘like’?”

⁴²Luke 2.9-14.

⁴³Matthew 28.5-6.

16

“Let us nerve ourselves then against the deceivers.
Let us be armed as a company against the calumniators.
Let us all toil, let us wrestle steadfastly, until we have thrown them.
Let us say with boldness to the sons of perdition,⁴⁴
‘Where is he, whom you held as a corpse in a tomb?
Where is the one whom the soldiers were guarding,
and your seals protecting?
How was he stolen? How was he taken up?⁴⁵
Who spirited him away? Who carried him off?
How was he stolen from the grave? How then from the firmament
has he sent now to us and declared to us, ‘Do not be afraid of them.
They will not overcome you, for I said to you,
I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.’”

17

With thoughts such as these, the disciples of the Deliverer,
Christ and God who had been taken up,
then came down from the Mount with gladness and rejoicing.
And arriving below, as the Scripture teaches,
bowing down, they worship the God on high,
and addressed words full of praise to the mountain
as they extolled the Mount of Olives,
because it had been found worthy of such honour,
“Mount Sinai,” they said, “you have surpassed.
For it received the steps of Moses,
but you, those of God himself. On the former was the law, but on you the grace⁴⁶
which both fashioned Moses and said to us,
‘I am not parting from you.

I am with you and there is no one against you.’

⁴⁴John 17.12, 2 Thessalonians 2.3. The reference is to those among the Jewish community, in which Christ lived and taught, who opposed him.

⁴⁵Deliberate irony. The word used for the Ascension is here used for the suggested stealing of Christ’s body.

⁴⁶Exodus 19-20, John 1.17.

“Now too you are far above Lebanon,⁴⁷
 Thabor and Hermon are less than you,⁴⁸
 because the Lover of mankind did not do on them what he has done on you.”
 When they had said this, the Creator’s disciples
 limited their words to these,
 and raising their eyes and hands on high,
 they besought the King
 of things in heaven and on earth,
 crying out, “Sinless One, give to us your peace⁴⁹
 and, through us, to your world, at the prayers of her who gave you birth.
 For the foe cannot bear to look on the fair deeds done by us.
 But drive him from us, you who said,
 ‘I am not parting from you.
I am with you and there is no one against you.’

⁴⁷Cf. Psalms 71(72).16.

⁴⁸Psalm 88(89).13. This verse is common in the liturgical texts for the feast of the Transfiguration which traditionally took place on Thabor.

⁴⁹Isaias 26.12; cf. John 14.27.