

The Ascension of Our Lord
May 24, 2020
Online Worship

Welcome

Easter Greeting

Leader: Christ is Risen!

All: Christ is Risen Indeed!

Leader: Christ is Risen!

All: Christ is Risen Indeed!

Leader: Christ is Risen!

All: Christ is Risen Indeed

Alleluia!

Opening Song

“Alleluia! Sing to Jesus”

ELW #392

**Alleluia! Sing to Jesus;
His the scepter, his the throne;
Alleluia! His the triumph,
His the victory alone.
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion
Thunder like a mighty flood:
"Jesus out of ev'ry nation
Has redeemed us by his blood."**

**Alleluia! Not as orphans
Are we left in sorrow now;
Alleluia! He is near us;
Faith believes, nor questions how.
Though the cloud from sight received him
When the forty days were o'er,
Shall our hearts forget his promise:
"I am with you evermore"?**

Alleluia! Bread of heaven,
Here on earth our food, our stay;
Alleluia! Here the sinful
Flee to you from day to day.
Intercessor, friend of sinners,
Earth's redeemer, hear our plea
Where the songs of all the sinless
Sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! King eternal,
Lord omnipotent we own;
Alleluia! Born of Mary,
Earth your footstool, heav'n your throne.
As within the veil you entered,
Robed in flesh, our great high priest,
Here on earth both priest and victim
In the Eucharistic feast.

Opening Litany Psalm 93

Leader: The Lord is king! He is robed in majesty.

All: The Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength.

Leader: The world stands firm

All: and cannot be shaken.

Leader: Your throne has stood from time immemorial.

All: You yourself are from the everlasting past.

Leader: The floods have risen up, O Lord.

All: The floods have roared like thunder and have lifted their pounding waves.

Leader: But mightier than the violent raging of the seas,
mightier than the breakers on the shore—

All: the Lord above is mightier than these!

Leader: Your royal laws cannot be changed.

All: Your reign, O Lord, is holy forever and ever.

Song

“O Christ, Our Hope, Our Heart’s Desire”

ELW #604

**O Christ, our hope, our heart's desire,
Creation's mighty Lord,
Redeemer of the fallen world,
By holy love outpoured,
By holy love outpoured:**

**How vast your mercy to accept
The burden of our sin,
And bow your head in cruel death
To make us clean within,
To make us clean within.**

**But now the bonds of death are burst,
The ransom has been paid;
You reign above at God’s right hand,
In robes of light arrayed,
In robes of light arrayed.**

**Oh, let your mighty love prevail
To purge us of our pride,
That we may stand before your throne
By mercy purified,
By mercy purified.**

**All praise to you, ascended Lord;
All glory ever be
To Father, Son, and Spirit blest
Through all eternity,
Through all eternity.**

Confession and Forgiveness

Leader: We worship in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Almighty God knows us, inside and out. God knows our thoughts, our reasoning, even our excuses. If we think we can hide things from God, we are certainly mistaken. And if we think we do not sin, we are incredibly wrong. The good news is, God is loving and merciful, and therefore invites us to come and confess our sin.

Time for reflection

Leader: Almighty God,

All: We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We confess our arrogance and our self-righteousness. We repent of our greed and our harsh judgment of others.

In your mercy, forgive us. Help us to accept your forgiveness so we can walk in your light. Amen.

Leader: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you, and for his sake God forgives you all your sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ he gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

A hymn of glory let us sing!
New hymns throughout the world shall ring:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Christ, by a road before untrod,
Ascends unto the throne of God.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

The holy apostolic band
Upon the Mount of Olives stand.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
And with his faithful followers see
Their Lord ascend in majesty.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

To whom the shining angels cry,
"Why stand and gaze upon the sky?"
Alleluia! Alleluia!
"This is the Savior!" Thus they say,
"This is his glorious triumph day!"
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

"You see him now, ascending high
Up to the portals of the sky."
Alleluia! Alleluia!

**"Hereafter Jesus you shall see
Returning in great majesty."**

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

**O risen Christ, ascended Lord,
All praise to you let earth accord:**

Alleluia! Alleluia !

**You are, while endless ages run,
With Father and with Spirit one.**

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Prayer of the Day

Leader: Almighty God,

All: your only Son was taken into the heavens and in your presence intercedes for us. Receive us and our prayers for all the world, and in the end bring everything into your glory, through Jesus Christ, our Sovereign and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

The Word

Acts 1:1-11

In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Ephesians 1:15-23

Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God’s people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms.

Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

Luke 24:44-53

Then he said, “When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ You are witnesses of all these things.

“And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”

Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.

The Word of our Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The Sermon

As I was gathering notes and resources on ascension, I was very inspired by a sermon I found that was written by a Pastor named David Owens. I hope that by mingling some of his thoughts with my own, I have written a sermon that is meaningful and uplifting for each of you.

Goodbyes aren't easy. We've all had to say goodbye to friends and family. If we've been at airports or train stations, we've most likely seen them.

Many movies have depicted goodbyes that have become famous. There's Humphrey Bogart's famous farewell: "Here's looking at you kid." Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz says, "It's going to be so hard to say goodbye – I love you all!" After hugging Elliot, ET points to his heart and says, "Ouch" then points to Elliot's head and says, "I'll be right here!"

Today we are going to talk about Jesus' goodbye to His disciples – we know it as the Ascension.

The most important events in Jesus' life certainly include His birth, baptism, temptation, ministry, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. But of all of these, the ascension gets the least hype. In fact, only 2 of the gospels, Mark and Luke, record the ascension.

John says nothing about the ascension of Jesus. He ends his Gospel, saying, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

Matthew ends his Gospel by telling us that Jesus gathered together with His disciples on a mountain in Galilee. After telling them to go and make disciples, he made them a promise saying, "Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

Mark ends his Gospel with a speech similar to Matthew's, and then he writes, "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God."

Luke is the one who gives the most coverage to the ascension.

As we heard in the reading earlier, Luke ends his Gospel, by saying, "Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God."

In the book of Acts, which is also written by Luke and was read by Amy, it says “I told you, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.”

Luke records Jesus’ instructions that they should not leave Jerusalem, but should wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, and then they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.

Luke then wrote, “After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into the sky? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

When we look at Jesus’ interaction with His disciples, as He gives His farewell, there are a lot of similarities to the kind of farewells that we have with our loved ones.

When we say goodbye, we review the time we spent with the person on that visit. We offer thanks and appreciation for the visit and reassure our hosts or guests that it was an enjoyable time.

Another thing that is often a part of our typical goodbye is the promise to stay in touch. And finally, we remind each other of our next visit.

This seems to be the very thing Jesus did with His disciples. He reviewed the things that they accomplished together, and what they needed to accomplish in His absence. Jesus promised to stay in touch with them. And Jesus told them of His plans to see them again.

Jesus had to leave. On many occasions throughout the gospel, he told his disciples that he had to return to his Father. His ascension was an absolute necessity for fulfillment of scripture and the continuation of his ministry.

One reason it was a necessity was that there had to be a final moment when Jesus left the earth and returned to heaven. This was a day and event that divided when the Jesus of earth would become the Christ of heaven. The ascension marked this transition from His earthly ministry to His heavenly one.

A second reason the ascension was an absolute necessity, is the fact that Jesus' going allowed for the Spirit's coming.

Jesus told his disciples in John 16, "But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. 6 Instead, you grieve because of what I've told you. 7 But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Holy Spirit, won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you."

So the going of Jesus allowed for the coming of the Spirit, and the coming of the Spirit ushered in the beginning of the church.

Another reason the ascension was an absolute necessity, is the fact that it allowed Jesus to begin His permanent, heavenly ministry. It has been said that: "At the ascension Jesus left the here for the everywhere. He left the now for the eternal. He left the First Century to fill all the centuries." Just as the grave could not hold Him when His Father raised Him from the dead, so the earth could not hold Him when the time came for Him to return to His Father.

As Mark says, "he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God."

In the book of Hebrews, it says, "In heaven, at God's right hand, Jesus is our interceding High Priest, giving us the grace we need for life and service"

In the book of 1 John it says, "He is our Advocate before the Father, forgiving us when we confess our sins"

In Acts 7, we read about Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

As he was on trial before the Sanhedrin, the Bible says, “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

Saul who would be renamed Paul, had his own encounter with the risen and ascended Christ.

The Bible says, “As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’”

About seventy years later, the apostle John was on the island of Patmos, exiled by the Roman authorities, when Jesus the resurrected and ascended Christ appeared to him.

The Bible says, “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw ...someone ‘like a son of man,’ ...he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!

So we see from these verses that the ascended Christ is very much alive and active.

One final reason the ascension was an absolute necessity was the fact of Jesus’ return. Jesus could not return if He never left. Before their very eyes that day, Jesus began lifting into heaven in a way that may be described as majestic and mysterious.

There stood the disciples intently gazing into the sky, when they were interrupted by two men standing beside them. It is obvious they are angels because of their white garments, and their knowledge.

“‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’”

Their words are a bit humorous – “Why are you standing around staring at the sky?”

In so many words, they’re saying, “Yeah, Jesus is gone, but he’s coming back. Not right now, not today, so get to work.” The words of the angels at the ascension testify to the fact that Jesus is coming back.

So now we know why ascension was necessary, but how is the ascension Good News for us today in this time? How does it bring us peace and comfort in this time of the Coronavirus?

First, we can find comfort in knowing that one of the reasons Jesus left was so that he could prepare a place in heaven for each one of us and He will come back to take us to be with Him.

That is His promise to us in John 14 “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. 2 There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

Second, by leaving, Jesus sits at God’s right hand to become our advocate in heaven forgiving us when we confess and granting us mercy and grace.

We can also take comfort in the fact that Jesus left so that he could send us the Holy Spirit. The spirit that fills each of us is the same spirit that filled the disciples and started the church on earth. This same spirit equips and strengthens us for our daily challenges. It also gives each of us gifts to share, and calls us to use our gifts in these unsure and unsettling times. For some of us, this is a call to share Christ’s light with those around us. For others, this may be a time of waiting. Maybe you are overwhelmed with the circumstances we are living in and aren’t feeling called right now. It’s OK, Jesus told his disciples to “wait for the Holy Spirit” and offers that advice to those of us who need it today.

So many cultures place great value on the final words and actions of a person. We can find comfort in realizing that Jesus’ final words and actions were all loving and caring and meant to draw us all closer to him.

Finally, no matter where you are in your spiritual journey right now, you can take heart from Jesus' final words in Matthew and Mark, "I am with you until the end of the age". Jesus had to say goodbye to his disciples so that he could be everywhere present – and that means with each one of us, every moment of every day and he will never leave.

Amen

The Affirmation of Faith –The Apostle's Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty
Creator of heaven and earth.**

I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

And born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

And is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

The holy catholic Church,

The communion of saints,

The forgiveness of sins,

The resurrection of the body,

And the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn

“Lord, You Give the Great Commission”

ELW#579

Lord, you give the great commission:

“Heal the sick and preach the word.”

Lest the church neglect its mission,

And the gospel go unheard,

Help us witness to your purpose

With renewed integrity:

Refrain: With the Spirit’s gifts empow’r us

For the work of ministry.

Lord, you call us to your service:

“In my name baptize and teach.”

That the world may trust your promise,

Life abundant meant for each,

Give us all new fervor, draw us

Closer in community:

(refrain)

Prayers of the People

Pastor: We are led by the Holy Spirit to pray for the church, all of creation and for those who need special blessings.

(after each petition)

Pastor: Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Pastor: Great and mighty God,

We Remember in Prayer :

Those in need of physical, mental or emotional healing: Barbara, Carson, Bertha, Kevin, June, Susan, Anne, Tim, Barry, Bonnie, Rose, Bill, Emma, Carl, Laura, Marian, Ronnie, Amanda, Pat, Tim.

Those who mourn: Betty Ann, Erika, Beth & Gregg, Tony & Narrie, grieving the recent death of their father Renato, and the death within the year of their mother; and the family and friends of Pastor Jeanne Lowe, Bill, Anne & Bob, Tony, and Bud

For these prayers, and for all the things you know are needed, we trust to your mercy and grace. We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us;
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.**

Closing Song

“Go, Make Disciples”

**Go, make disciples,
Baptizing them, teaching them.
Go, make disciples,
For I am with you 'til the end of time.**

**Go, be the salt of the earth.
Go, be the light for the world.
Go, be a city on a hill
So all can see that you're serving me. (Repeat)**

Go, make disciples.

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Benediction

Leader: May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, now and forever.

AMEN

Jim: Go in peace to serve the risen Christ!

All: Thanks be to God.