

***Risen Christ Lutheran Church  
Arvada, Colorado***

***Family Devotion in Absence***

***The Ascension of Our Lord (Observed) - May 24, 2020  
Lutheran Service Book (LSB)***

**OPENING HYMN** *LSB 491 “Up Through Endless Ranks of Angels”*

**INVOCATION**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

**INTROIT** *Psalm 47:1-2, 5, 8; Acts 1:11*

Men of Galilee,

why do you stand looking into heaven? Alleluia.

This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven,

will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. Alleluia.

Clap your hands, all peoples!

Shout to God with loud songs of joy!

For the LORD, the Most High is to be feared,

a great king over all the earth.

God has gone up with a shout,

the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

God reigns over the nations;

God sits on his holy throne.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning,

is now, and will be forever. Amen.

**COLLECT OF THE DAY**

Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**OLD TESTAMENT** *2 Kings 2:5-15*

<sup>5</sup>The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.” <sup>6</sup>Then Elijah said to him, “Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. <sup>7</sup>Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. <sup>8</sup>Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the

two of them could go over on dry ground. <sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.” <sup>10</sup> And he said, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.” <sup>11</sup> And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. <sup>12</sup> And Elisha saw it and he cried, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. <sup>13</sup> And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. <sup>14</sup> Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over. <sup>15</sup> Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. (ESV)

**GRADUAL** *Adapted from Matthew 28:7; Hebrews 2:7; Psalm 8:6*  
Christ has risen from the dead.

God the Father has crowned him with glory and honor,  
He has given him dominion over the works of his hands;  
he has put all things under his feet.

**EPISTLE** *Acts 1:1-11*

<sup>1</sup> In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” <sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” <sup>9</sup> And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup> and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (ESV)

**HOLY GOSPEL** *Luke 24:44-53*

<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And behold, I am sending the promise of

my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”<sup>50</sup> And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.<sup>51</sup> While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.<sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,<sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple blessing God. (ESV)

**SERMON HYMN** *LSB 494 “See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph”*

**SERMON**

*The following is from an article that I wrote, which can be found at [fleshandbloodbioethics.com](http://fleshandbloodbioethics.com).*

Aware that my favorite day in the church year is The Ascension of Our Lord, our organist, Molly, showed me a cartoon that depicted Jesus ascending into the clouds while one of the disciples cries out that he can’t see him. An arrow points to that disciple with the words “Ascension Deficit Disorder.” That’s hilarious!

What’s not so funny, however, is that there is a sort of ascension deficit disorder that has crept into the church during the last several decades, which has diminished our focus on the necessity of Christ’s ascension for our salvation. This is probably due to several factors. First, Ascension always falls on Thursday, the fortieth day after Easter. Due to its seemingly odd time during the week, attendance is often low for the Divine Service on this day; and I have heard of some churches where it is no longer celebrated. Second, some of the liturgical calendars have changed the name for the Sunday that follows Ascension. Prior to 1982 it was called The Sunday After the Ascension; since then it has been referred to as The Seventh Sunday of Easter. If you miss the Ascension service on Thursday, you could theoretically never hear anything about the Lord’s ascension into heaven (we will celebrate it on the following Sunday now). Finally, I think that ascension deficit disorder occurs when the ascension of Christ is merely viewed as his departure from earth to heaven. Each of these factors contributes to the decline in the importance of Christ’s ascension, which in turn diminishes our understanding of how God defines our human nature.

In Christian tradition based on Scripture, there are some key examples of the ascension of Christ as necessary for our salvation. Some of the early Church fathers held to a theologically sophisticated view of the ascension. Athanasius and Hilary, for example, believed that Christ’s ascension was just as important as his birth, death, and resurrection. It was Christ’s final work of salvation for us because it accomplished the ultimate goal of our salvation, the exaltation of humanity! This led both of these fathers to effectively declare that in Christ God became man in order that man would become God. The same theology is seen in the creed that bears Athanasius’s name where, speaking of the two natures of Christ, it declares that he is not two but one person, not by his divinity being converted into flesh but by the assumption of his humanity into God. That is the exaltation of Christ! Still, he did not do this for himself but for us, to exalt us together with him, as a necessary part of his great works of salvation that began at his conception and birth, continued throughout his perfect life, intensified at his atoning death and glorious resurrection, and brought to completion with his ascension into heaven and session at the right hand of God. By the ascension of our Lord, we Christians are exalted now by faith; and on the Last Day we will be exalted in our glorified bodies to reign together with Christ on his heavenly throne. This is seen in two of my favorite hymn verses from the TLH version of the sermon hymn for today:

Thou hast raised our human nature on the clouds to God's right hand;  
There we sit in heavenly places, there with Thee in glory stand.  
Jesus reigns, adored by angels; Man with God is on the throne.  
Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension we by faith behold our own.

So at last, when He appeareth, we from our own graves may spring,  
With our youth renewed like eagles', flocking round our heavenly king,  
Caught up on the clouds of heaven, and may meet Him in the air,  
Rise to realms where He is reigning and may reign forever there.

Most importantly, Holy Scripture teaches this theology which is sometimes referred to as the doctrine of deification or theosis, man becoming divine. In the Old Testament, a few passages indicate a divine status of God's people. However, prior to the incarnation and exaltation of Christ this divine status is one of function and not essence. For example, the LORD tells Moses that he will be God to Aaron, who would be Moses's spokesman and prophet, and he would be God to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:16; 7:1). Jesus, quoting Psalm 82:6, says that those during the Old Testament era – to whom the Word of God came – are called gods (John 10:34–35). After the incarnation of Christ, the divine status of God's people is both one of function and of essence because of the assumption of the human nature into God. In Baptism, Christians enter *into* the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) and, therefore, into a communion relationship with and in the Triune God. Christians are born again/from above by the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–6; Titus 3:5–6). In Baptism, God makes Christians to be sons of God in the only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus. Thus, their new birth and sonship are divine. Everyone is familiar with Ephesians 2:8–9, “For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works in order that no one may boast.” However, the prior two verses (Ephesians 2:6–7), which are hardly known, should be understood in the same context, “And He has raised us up together and has enthroned us together in heaven in Christ Jesus, in order that in the age to come He will show the overflowing riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Notice the tense of the verbs! By grace through faith, we have already been resurrected and have already ascended with Christ to reign with him on his throne in heaven, not physically yet but in our souls. Finally, 2 Peter 1:4 states that Christians are partakers of/communers in the divine nature of the Triune God. The Holy Scriptures teach that by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word and Sacraments humans are drawn into Christ and unto the Father who declares us to be his sons in his Son. As Christians, that is our exaltation!

The ascension of our Lord effects the ultimate goal of humanity. If the Christian message includes the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ but ends there without a strong focus on his ascension, then we are missing out on part of the gospel. Everything that Christ did was for us and for our salvation, including his ascension. It deifies and exalts our human nature, which God intends as the ultimate goal and destiny of humanity.

## **NICENE CREED**

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one

substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**PRAYER HYMN** *LSB 492 “On Christ’s Ascension I Now Build”*

**COLLECT FOR THE WORD**

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**BENEDICTION**

The Lord bless us and keep us.  
The Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us.  
The Lord look upon us with favor and give us peace. Amen.

**CLOSING HYMN** *LSB 493 “A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing”*

**SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR NEXT SUNDAY:** Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21;  
John 14:23-31.

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