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Ascension

## Welcome

Welcome to our Ascension Day service. We gather this evening to consider and celebrate the Ascension of Jesus, or risen and ascended Lord.

The Ascension of Jesus is a central component of the faith we confess. It was a central component of the story of Jesus which the disciples told as they announced the good news of his salvation and his kingdom. It was woven into their sermons and songs and confession of faith.

We find it in Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost, in the hymn Paul quotes in Philippians 2:6-11, as well as his summary of faith in 1 Timothy 3:16. We find it in affirmations in Romans, and Ephesians, and Colossians. It forms the heart of the book of Hebrews and is featured in 1 Peter and Revelation.

And when the early church crafted the Apostles' Creed to communicate the core of what Christians believe, Jesus' ascension was included:

*“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the father Almighty.”*

So what is so significant about the ascension? Why is it so central to the story of Jesus and to the life of the Church?

The ascension marks the culmination of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. Having completed his mission on earth, his earthly existence was brought to conclusion.

The ascension also meant the coronation of Jesus. In his ascension, Jesus was exalted and enthroned as Lord and King. In one sense, this may seem to be simply a

restoration of the glory and honour that Jesus had before the incarnation. But in another sense, this was a new development since the one now exalted and enthroned is the one in whom divinity and humanity exists fully and completely. There is a sense in which a profound change took place in God as a result of the incarnation, and that change continues and is confirmed in the ascension. Jesus has taken humanity into God's divinity. And the exaltation of his humanity is a foreshadowing of the coming exaltation of our humanity as well.

A third significance of the ascension is that it fulfils the condition Jesus had said would be necessary for the coming of the Spirit. In his incarnation, Jesus was physically present to his disciples, but was limited to one specific locality at any given time. In returning to God and sending his Spirit to indwell the disciples, though physically absent, Jesus was able to be present and powerfully active among them, and us, in a way he could not be in his incarnated state.

Fourthly, in his Ascension Jesus continues his ministry on behalf of his people – a ministry of advocacy and intercession. The love and commitment that Jesus demonstrated on the cross for his creation still find expression from his ascended and exalted position on the throne. As the exalted God-man, he understands our weaknesses and is able to sympathize with us in his role as our Great high priest. As our reigning Lord, he speaks on our behalf, defending us against the accusation of our enemy, the evil one. He continually prays for us to be strengthened in our journey toward him, just as he did for his disciples while he was on earth. He leads and assists his people in their worship of the Triune God; and there he encourages and cheers us on in our race of faith.

Writing about the Ascension in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, St Augustine says, “The Ascension is the festival which confirms the grace of all the other festivals put together—without which the profitableness of every other festival would have perished. For unless the Savior had ascended into heaven, His nativity would have come to nothing . . . and His passion would have born no fruit for us . . . and His most holy resurrection would have been useless.”

On Easter Sunday we usually proclaim, “Christ is risen!” On Ascension Day, let us declare, “Jesus reigns!” and, “Jesus is Lord!” This evening we gather to affirm and give thanks for the ascension. Let us lift up our hearts in grateful worship and joyful praise to our ascended Lord and King.

### *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*

Christ the Lord is risen today  
earth and heaven in chorus say  
alleluia  
Raise your joys and triumphs high  
sing, ye heavens, and earth reply  
alleluia

Love's redeeming work is done  
fought the fight, the battle won  
Death in vain forbids him rise  
Christ has opened paradise

Alleluia, oh hear them sing  
alleluia, oh death has no sting

Lives again our glorious King  
where, O death, is now thy sting  
alleluia  
Once he died our souls to save  
where's thy victory, in the boasting grave  
alleluia

Love's redeeming work is done  
fought the fight, the battle won  
Death in vain forbids him rise  
Christ has opened paradise

Charles Wesley  
Latifah Alattas

### **Reading: of Acts 1:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." <sup>6</sup> So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. <sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "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."

### **Psalm 47:**

Clap your hands, all you nations;  
shout to God with cries of joy.

For the LORD Most High is awesome,  
the great King over all the earth.

God has ascended amid shouts of joy,  
the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.

Sing praises to God, sing praises;  
sing praises to our King, sing praises.

For God is the King of all the earth;  
sing to him a psalm of praise.

God reigns over the nations;  
God is seated on his holy throne.

## Litany of Praise to Christ the Ascended King

Jesus Christ. Alpha and Omega.  
Jesus Christ, creation and completion,  
Jesus Christ, once descended. now ascended.  
Jesus Christ, by whom, through whom,  
and for whom all things exist.  
Jesus Christ. the one who is. and who was,  
and who is to come.  
Jesus Christ, you are worthy of all glory  
and honor and praise.

We come, O Lord, on this day of glory  
to confess our lack of trust.  
While we sing of your lordship over all creation  
we have too often acted as though you are  
powerless in the face of today's events.  
Help us to live with confidence in your presence today  
and in hope for life with you forever

We let go of our trust in . . .  
our country,  
our finances,  
our work,  
our abilities,  
ourselves.

We put our hope in you.

You are our . . .  
strength,  
hope,  
joy,  
future,  
and King.

## *Love Covers*

Teach us to let go  
to fall into you, God  
So You can go where no one else has gone  
the deepest places of our hearts

And teach us to surrender  
teach us to forgive  
Teach us to receive all the love  
all the love You have for us

For love covers a multitude of sins  
Your love covers a multitude of sins

Teach us to let go  
to fall into you, God  
So You can go where no one else has gone  
the deepest places of our hearts

For love covers a multitude of sins  
Your love covers a multitude of sins  
Isa Couvertier

## **Affirmation of Faith:**

The word catechism comes from a Greek word meaning *to teach*. A catechism, then, is a teaching tool which is especially suited for oral instruction and is most often set up in a question and answer format. The following questions and answers are taken from *The Heidelberg Catechism*:

Question: What do you mean by saying, "He ascended to heaven"?

Answer: That Christ, while his disciples watched, was lifted up from the earth to heaven and will be there for our good until he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

Question: But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us?

Answer: Christ is truly human and truly God. In his human nature Christ is not now on earth; but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is not absent from us for a moment.

Question: How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?

Answer: First, he pleads our cause in heaven in the presence of his Father.

Second, we have our own flesh in heaven – a guarantee that Christ our head will take us, his members, to himself in heaven.

Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth as a further guarantee. By the Spirit's power we make the goal of our lives, not earthly things, but the things above where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand.

Question: Why the next words: "and is seated at the right hand of God"?

Answer: Christ ascended to heaven, there to show that he is head of his church, and that the Father rules all things through him.

Question: How does this glory of Christ our head benefit us?

Answer: First, through his Holy Spirit he pours out his gifts from heaven upon us his members.

Second, by his power he defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies.

(from The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days, 18-19)

## **Reading of Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:14-18; 4:14-16**

<sup>1</sup> In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

<sup>14</sup> Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—<sup>15</sup> and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. <sup>16</sup> For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. <sup>17</sup> For this reason he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

### *Before the Throne of God Above*

Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea  
A great High Priest whose name is Love  
who ever lives and pleads for me  
My name is graven on His hands  
my name is written on His heart  
I know that while in heav'n He stands  
no tongue can bid me thence depart  
No tongue can bid me thence depart

When Satan tempts me to despair  
and tells me of the guilt within  
Upward I look and see Him there  
who made an end to all my sin  
Because the sinless Saviour died  
my sinful soul is counted free  
For God the Just is satisfied  
to look on Him and pardon me  
To look on Him and pardon me

Behold Him there the risen Lamb  
my perfect spotless righteousness  
The great unchangeable I Am  
the King of glory and of grace  
One with Himself I cannot die  
my soul is purchased with His blood  
My life is hid with Christ on high  
with Christ my Saviour and my God  
With Christ my Saviour and my God

Charitie Lees Bancroft  
Vikki Cook

### **Reading:**

“The ascension is not only a great FACT of the New Testament, but a greater FACTOR in the life of Christ and Christians, and no complete view of Jesus Christ is possible unless the ascension and its consequences are included” (Griffith Thomas, ISBE, Vol. 1, p. 263).

We worship an ascended Lord. So when we pray and when we celebrate the sacraments, we must always be thinking of Christ Jesus as our mediator. In his incarnation, Jesus comes into our world, into our life to search for us, lost sinners that we are, wandering in the darkness of our sin and in the confusion of our finitude.

In his ascension, Jesus blazes a path for us into the heart of the Godhead. Since our God is a consuming fire, we can only enter into relationship with him under the protection of Jesus, through our union with him in the power of the Spirit. Given that union—made possible by his continuing incarnation—we have access to the throne room of God.

When we celebrate communion, we are lifted to this throne room. Even when we are not thinking about it, our humanity is there in the throne room of God, because Jesus is there, fully human as well as fully divine. As hymn writer Christopher Wordsworth put it: “You have raised our human nature on the clouds to God’s right hand; there we sit in heavenly places, there with you in glory stand.”

(Laura A. Smit, *The Incarnation Continues: Recovering the Importance of the Ascension*, Reformed Worship, Issue 79)

## **Let us pray together:**

God, this God of life and love  
has sent an advocate to save us;  
Jesus Christ the righteous,  
now at the right hand of God.

God, whose glory fills our world.  
God, whose life is closer than breath.  
God, whose love is stronger than death.

God, this God of life and love  
has sent an advocate to save us;  
Jesus Christ the righteous,  
now at the right hand of God.

Not to condemn but to bring full life.  
Not to accuse but to redeem.  
Not to reject but to draw close.

God who hears the cry of our seeking souls.  
God who sees the pain of our suffering bodies.  
God who feels the loss of our grieving spirits.

God, this God of life and love  
has sent an advocate to be with us forever;  
the Spirit of truth abides with us eternally.

Before us to teach and lead,  
within us to comfort and heal,  
around us to shield and protect.

God, this God of life and love  
has sent an advocate to be with us forever;  
the Spirit of truth abides with us eternally.

## Reading of Ephesians 1:15-23

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all his people, <sup>16</sup>I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

### *Holy, Holy*

Holy, holy

Holy is the Lord God Almighty

Holy, holy

Holy is the Lord God Almighty

Who was and is and is to come

who was and is and is to come

Lift up His name with the sound of singing  
lift up His name in all the earth  
Lift up Your voice and give Him glory  
for He is worthy to be praised  
for He is worthy to be praised

**Closing Prayer:**

God our Father,  
make us joyful in the ascension of your Son Jesus  
Christ.  
May we follow him into the new creation,  
for his ascension is our glory and our hope.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.