

**Overview:** The ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God presents believers with the comfort of his continuing ruler-ship and their call to be his witnesses throughout the world.

**Suggested Service** is Service of the Word (CW p. 38).

**Suggested Hymns:** 171 “A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing”

341 “Crown Him with Many Crowns”

175 “Hail the Day that Sees Him Rise”

169 “Alleluia! Sing to Jesus”

\* Please feel free to sing additional hymns from the Ascension section: CW 169-175.

**Prayer of the Day:** Lord Jesus, King of glory, you ascended far above the heaven’s and at God’s right hand you rule the nations. Leave us not alone, we pray, but grant us the Spirit of truth that at your command and by your power we may be your witnesses in all the world; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**First Lesson:** Acts 1:1-11 After his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples over a 40-day period. At the end of this time, he once again commissioned them as his witnesses “to the ends of the earth,” blessed them, and ascended visibly before them until a cloud hid him from view. Angels reminded them that the Lord will return visibly at the end of time.

**Psalm** is Psalm 47 (CW p. 85) The Church sings a psalm of praise that “God has ascended amid shouts of joy.”

**Second Lesson:** Ephesians 1:16-23 Paul prays for the Ephesians that they may have the gifts of the Spirit in abundance. By this they will know the great power of God, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him in heaven at the right hand of the Father. There he rules all things in the interest of his Church.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. Alleluia. (Matthew 28:20)

**Gospel:** Luke 24:44-53 Closely connected with the First Lesson, the Gospel recounts how, after his resurrection, the Lord commissioned his apostles and was taken up into heaven before them.

**Sermon Text:** Acts 1:1-11

**Sermon Theme:** THE MEANING OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

**Prayer:** CW p. 126 or p. 42. Lord’s Prayer: CW p. 43.

MY DEAR CRISTIAN FRIENDS,

There are many memorable events in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Three of them stand out: Christmas, Easter, and Ascension – three very important events in the life of our Savior. They are important for God's plan for our life on this earth and for our life beyond this earth. We have a pretty good handle on Christmas and Easter; but the Ascension – perhaps not so much. Maybe it is because the world has not yet found a way to capitalize on and materialize the Ascension the way it has on the Lord's birth and on his resurrection. Maybe it is because the Church does not emphasize the Ascension enough. We do not know our Lord's Ascension like we do his birth at Christmas and his resurrection at Easter.

This morning as we have gathered together to celebrate our Lord's ascension, the Holy Spirit will make its importance for us and our lives a little more clear. The message of ascension, the message that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has ascended to the right hand of God and has taken his rightful position as our king is to live on in our hearts and lives. Jesus is our King. He is the unelected and undisputed King of my life and yours. Jesus is the King of my personal life and the King of my congregational life. He has no intention of abdicating his power and authority. Jesus is the King!

As sinners, we admit that we often resent and resist our Savior's kingship in our lives with every fiber of our sinful flesh. We don't always want Jesus to be King. We want to run our own lives and be captain of our own ship and the master of our own destiny. Fortunately, we are not. In our sinful condition, we have no hope of pleasing our God or attaining the righteousness he requires of us. But God took matters into his own hands. God sent Jesus to live a perfect life for us and to die the sacrifice for our sins. God makes us righteous in his sight through faith in Christ Jesus.

Now that Jesus has accomplished our salvation, he again ascends to his rightful place in heaven. He again takes up the full use of his glory, the glory he had set aside to be our Savior. This morning we want to better understand THE MEANING OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD. What we find is: I. Our place in heaven is made secure II. Our purpose in life is made clear.

It all really began in the beginning. God created this world and he created Adam and Eve to live in perfect harmony with him forever. But Adam and Eve sinned. They sinned and brought death to this world and to this life. The wages of sin is death. Adam and Eve gave birth to sinful human beings who were also then cursed with this same sentence of death. And so it has been throughout history that man has been born in sin and faces the curse of sin in death.

This is not the life that God had created mankind to live. To restore that life, to restore that image of God, God promised to Adam and Eve that he would send a Savior, who would defeat

the devil and restore to mankind the life he created them to live. This eternal life in heaven was made secure when, after Jesus had lived and died and rose again, he ascended to heaven.

We know the history. We know how God kept his people throughout the Old Testament until the time had fully come for Jesus to be born into our world. We know the birth of our Savior, which we celebrate at Christmas. We know how he lived a perfect life and died a perfect sacrifice on Good Friday. We know how he was raised to life on the third day, as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord every Easter. But can we be fully assured of our eternal life in heaven if Jesus had not preceded us in ascending to heaven?

Jesus appeared to his disciples and others for forty days and explained to them the kingdom of God; just as he had explained to Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. Yet, the disciples were still unsure. They ask, "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*" Had they forgotten how Jesus had told them, "*In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back so that you also may be where I am.*" (John 14:2-3) The time had come for Jesus to go and prepare that place. If he had not gone, if he had not ascended, if he had not returned to the Father, could you and I be sure of this place called heaven? And could we be sure that Jesus has prepared a place for our eternal dwelling, a place free from sin and evil, free from suffering and pain and tears?

Jesus did ascend to heaven! He ascended right before their very eyes. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died for our sins, rose again on the third day. After he secured our forgiveness, our salvation, our resurrection; he secured for us an eternal home in heaven. Jesus had given convincing proof that he was alive and our sins forgiven. Now, the ascension of our Lord to the right hand of God makes our place in heaven secure.

The two men dressed in white boldly proclaim that this same Jesus who was being taken up into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. There is a place. There is eternal life. There is hope for you and me and for all who have put their trust in Jesus. There is a place where Jesus is now and where you and I will be for all eternity.

Secondly, the Ascension of our Lord means that our purpose in life is made clear. Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said to his disciples, "*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.*"

Ten days from the ascension and a week from today, we celebrate the Pentecost, or the Lord's pouring out of his Holy Spirit upon his disciples. Peter began immediately to boldly speak and preach of salvation through Jesus. 3,000 were baptized that day as the New Testament Church had made its beginning. Ever since that first day of Pentecost believers have continued to spread the message of forgiveness and salvation through faith in Jesus.

Jesus had made it pretty clear to his disciples what would take place after he ascended to his rightful place in heaven. His disciples, his followers, would spread the gospel. Their purpose in life was made pretty clear. They would preach and teach Christ crucified for the sins of

mankind; and people would come to believe in Jesus as their Savior. Believers would gather together to worship and then they would scatter to spread the gospel.

Sometimes it is hard to figure what anyone of us is doing in life and with our life. Yet, all of us as believers in Christ do have this one purpose in common – and that is to talk about the Word of God and to spread the gospel of Jesus to other people. Faith comes by hearing and learning the message of God's Word, which is that in Christ God has reconciled the world to himself. In Christ, people are forgiven of their sins. Through Christ, people have the sure hope of eternal life in heaven. As believers, this is what we do.

Have you ever wondered why the name of this church is Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church? Let's break it down. I think we all know where Ascension came from – the Ascension of our Lord. I think we know where Lutheran came from – Martin Luther and his stand on the Bible. I think we can figure out church too. But what about evangelical and why is that a part of our name?

If you look at the middle of the word you will find the word angel. An angel is a messenger. God's angels are God's messengers. The "ev" stands for good or good news – in this case the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus. So we call ourselves Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church because our purpose as a church is to be messengers of the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus. As is the purpose of our church or congregation, so also is the purpose of we the members of Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Ascension of our Lord has made our purpose clear – to live to spread the good news of salvation until that day when our gracious Lord would call us to his own side in heaven.

Jesus' ascension gives you and me the courage to live our lives to the fullest here in this sinful world. We know that whatever this world brings, we have heaven waiting for us. We know that when the wages of sin take their toll on the days of our life here on earth; there is God's gift of eternal life in heaven waiting for us. It is where Jesus is now, ruling all things for our benefit and preparing a place for our eternity. It is where Jesus continues to serve as our Prophet, Priest, and King. You and I can live each and every day in the comfort and joy of knowing that our place in heaven has been made secure and our purpose on earth has been made clear in the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN