

**The Ascension of Our Lord (Observed), May 12, 2024**

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**Come, Ascended Lord Jesus**

Luke 24:44–53

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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**[Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God. (vv 50–53)**

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**“COME, LORD JESUS.”**

Some days, looking up with eyes glued to the sky, we just utter the short and simple prayer of longing, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” Our hearts cry out for His return. We cling to the words of the angels who said that He “**will come in the same way**” as the disciples “**saw Him go into heaven**” (Acts 1:11). We plead that today might be that day. “We are ready, O Lord, for we are weak and weary, bruised and battered, in need of that rest which only you can bring.” We pray with groans too deep for words, with heartaches, exhaustion, and tears.

Come, Lord Jesus, because life is more than we can bear. Is that a prayer of faith or a plea of desperation? Maybe both. Where is the Lord when we’re lonely and in despair? It’s the question of those who mourn, of widows and orphans, of families who grieve. It’s the cry of the lonely and the broken, the divorced, the friendless, the down trodden. For those who already feel alone Ascension Day might be tinged with sadness, as though our Lord is among those who have forsaken us. The One who descended has now ascended and seems so far away, high above our troubled lives.

Come, Lord Jesus, for we are those who are tossed about on the ocean of life and need an anchor to secure us. These are the words of the hungry and the homeless, of those whose bodies grow old, of the unemployed and the impoverished. Come, O Lord, for we need your wisdom in our families, in our work, in all that we do. We need direction, guidance, and assurance as we flounder in these troubled waters. But the One who calmed the storms seems so far away.

Come, Lord Jesus, for the world is evil, the devil is active, and we are sinful. The world pressures us to compromise, minimize, and despise the faith. We are mocked for your sake by friends and family and coworkers. The devil constantly tempts us with that which is pleasing to the eye and our own spirits grow weary in the non-stop battle

with sin. It seems that the devil, the world, and the flesh consider Jesus' ascension a sufficient excuse for misbehaving.

We may wonder, if it is better to be with our Lord then why are we left like this? Why the ascension? Surely those in the early church must have wondered the same thing. "If only the Lord were here. . . ." St. John exiled to the island of Patmos. St. Stephen the martyr stoned to death. St. Peter cast into prison. St. Paul shipwrecked, beaten, whipped, stoned, hungry, cold, and sleepless. "Come, Lord Jesus."

#### ASCENSION IS NOT ABSENCE

But our Lord's ascension was not welcomed with sorrow or tears or dread as we might imagine. The angels were not there as a consolation prize. Instead, they proclaimed the promise by which the Church has lived ever since: the same Jesus who ascended is He who will come again. The book of Acts makes it clear that Jesus Christ, the One crucified, resurrected, and ascended, is not absent. He is neither napping nor in Tahoe. In fact, heaven is nowhere mentioned as a location where Jesus went, as though He is now in a land far, far away. Rather than ascending indefinitely as if to orbit the earth or explore the limits of the universe, "**He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight**" (Acts 1:9). Jesus would not be with the Church visible as He had been before, but He would continue to be with the Church as her God and her King. "**Lo, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age**" (Mt 28:20). This is why the disciples worshiped Him and went with great joy to the temple in Jerusalem.

Ascension is not an end but a beginning. With His ascension the Church was ready to begin her mission. "**Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem**" (Lk 24:47). "**Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**" (Mt 28:19). As they returned to Jerusalem from the mount of ascension Jesus' followers were headed to a new beginning marked by the proclamation of forgiveness and the promise of Holy Baptism. Luke described His Gospel as a record of "**all that Jesus began to do and teach**" (Acts 1:1). That was the beginning of Jesus' work, the Acts of the Apostles declares the work that Jesus has been doing ever since in and through the Church. This is why the disciples gathered fearlessly in the upper room and devoted themselves to prayer.

The ascension is not about Jesus' absence at all, but about His presence – about Christ present with His people in a new and powerful manner. There was no power vacuum when He left, for He said, "**Behold, I am sending the promise of the my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high**" (Lk 24:49). And in Acts, "**You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth**" (Acts 1:8). What remains when Jesus has ascended? His person and work remains! The Holy Spirit is the means by which the incarnate Christ's presence continues with us. The Spirit continues the work of Jesus in the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and in the fellowship of

the Lord's table. Through the Spirit our Lord exercises His authority as God's "right-hand man" on our behalf. Our Lord is not passive, but active. All the gifts of His incarnation, His suffering, death, and bodily resurrection belong to us through the Holy Spirit. Since Jesus promised to send the Comforter who will stand with us and strengthen us, His ascension was a day of rejoicing.

#### **BUT A TWO-FOLD PRESENCE**

Therefore when we pray "Come, Lord Jesus" we do not pray for our Lord to return from a distant land. We ask only for Him to complete the work which He is even now doing through the Church. We rejoice now, even on ascension, for He has not left us alone in our brokenness and our trials. While we await His return we receive the gifts which He gave in His ascension. Like Elijah, He gave a full and abundant portion of His Spirit. Even now the Church lives with His gifts in anticipation of His return.

Among the gifts which Christ gave were the men who watched the ascension, those whose writings and recollections we have in the New Testament. And He appoints men today just as He did then to bear the keys of His kingdom, with the authority to proclaim His forgiveness and to announce that salvation and eternal life. He gives to us the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, in Baptism, to seal us as His own and as a down payment of the room which He even now prepares for us in His Father's house. And, finally, He gave the gift of His own body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Our prayer of "Come, Lord Jesus" rests in these gifts even as we await their fulfillment in the heavenly kingdom.

#### **"COME, LORD JESUS, MAKE US YOUR GUESTS"**

Before Jesus was carried up into heaven He blessed His disciples. It is this same benediction, these same good words, which He speaks to us in this service today. The blessing which He gave at His ascension is a blessing which never ends but goes on and on and on into eternity wherever His Word is preached and His Sacraments are administered. Where His means of grace are present, there He is also.

If we pray as repentant sinners, as those constantly tempted by the devil, and as those who suffer the assaults of the world; if we feel the pressure of a society that would have us fear men rather than God, then receive your Lord Jesus Christ who gives to you the forgiveness of sins won by His own precious life. Commune here with the One who stands with you against all the forces of darkness. He says, "Come, receive the very body and blood of your ascended Lord."

If we pray as those who are lost at sea in a confusing world; if we suffer some need of body or spirit and wish for His deliverance; if we lack wisdom this day, then receive your Lord Jesus Christ who offers His own body and blood as the promise of all that is yet to come. He says, "Come, receive the very body and blood of your ascended Lord."

If we pray today as those who are alone and who long for the presence of our living Lord; if we we sorrow over family and friends who are distant and mourn the death of loved ones; if we feel forsaken and despised, then receive here in this house your Lord Jesus Christ who is really present for you. He says, “Come, receive the very body and blood of your ascended Lord.”

It is truly better to be with our Lord and that is why we gather on this Ascension Day. On this Ascension Day we gather around His Word and Sacraments, where He is continually present as God and man and at work for us. We gather around these gifts until the time when we would see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory. While we do not grieve over His ascension we certainly do pray “Come, Lord Jesus” as those who long for the full enjoyment of His kingdom.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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*Revised from a sermon preached by Pastor Gregory for the Feast of the Ascension  
at his vicarage congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church, Palo Alto, California, on May 25, 2006.*