

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Festival of the Ascension, May 21, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 217, 212:1, 213, 221, 552:1-4.  
Lessons: Psalm 68:15-20, Acts 1:1-11, Luke 24:44-53.  
Sermon Text: Psalm 47:1-9  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We tend to think about Jesus' ascension from the earth looking up.

We see him with raised arms blessing his disciples as he left earth and rose up into the sky after commanding his followers to ***“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*** and promising ***“surely I am with you always.”*** Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

But our sermon text on this day gives us a glimpse of the kind of joy that there must have been in heaven when he returned triumphant from his victorious campaign on earth.

Today let's look at

**THE JOY IN HEAVEN AT JESUS' ASCENSION**

- 1. Because the Son of God has returned victorious**
- 2. And now oversees from there the work he left for his followers to do.**

I think you all know the history told in our epistle lesson and gospel lesson from the New Testament that tells us about Jesus ascending bodily into heaven. But the Old Testament, too, foretells Jesus ascending into heaven after completing his work of salvation for all mankind.

We read in Psalm 47: ***“God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.”*** Jesus, the Son of God, has completed what he came to earth to do and now he goes up again to his throne on high. This is the picture of a triumphant conqueror who himself is rejoicing over what he has achieved.

We praise God who ***“has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.”*** Like so much of scripture, which points forward to Jesus Christ, we may find two points in these words. At the time this was written people may have thought that this referred to the carrying up of the ark of the covenant to the hill of Zion, to Jerusalem, which was done with great solemnity and joy. The priests were likely blowing the trumpets, and the people following with their loud shouts of praise. The ark was a token of God's special presence with them and gave them good reason to rejoice and give thanks to God. But the Jews also ascended up the roads up the hill to Jerusalem regularly, to celebrate their high feasts like the Passover, when crowds welcomed Jesus with shouts of joy and palm branches,

But these words can plainly point to the ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven, after he had finished his work on earth. Then we have the picture of God going up with a shout, the shouts welcoming a King, a conqueror, as one who has destroyed the principalities and powers of Satan.

Jesus made it clear that he was going back to his Father in heaven, and that happened at this time, 40 days after his resurrection. The apostle John quotes Jesus: ***“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”*** John 14:12 (NIV)

And now he ascends into heaven. He ascended into heaven also as a Mediator who now sits at the right hand of God in heaven.

Just as at creation, *“the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy”* Job 38:7 (NIV) so all the beings in heaven rejoiced to see Jesus return to his throne on high.

God’s messengers, angels, tell us who are left on earth *“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.”* Acts 1:11 (NIV)

Scripture records no shouts or sounds of trumpets on earth when he ascended, but you can be sure that those who dwell in heaven were rejoicing to see him return.

The book of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as our great high priest in great detail. One of the pictures there is the picture of Christ entering a heavenly sanctuary, a holy place in this way: *“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.”* Hebrews 9:24 (NIV)

Just as Psalm 47 speaks of shouts and the sound of trumpet which can be applied to Jesus’ joyful reentry into heaven, we are sure that he shall come again with a shout and the sound of a trumpet.

Just as an earthly ruler’s victory might be celebrated by fanfares of trumpets, so this ruler’s ascension is described in similar terms.

We are certain that he will return in all his glory, and Jesus himself tells his followers in Matthew: *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.”* Matthew 25:31 (NIV) Paul gives us more of the picture in First Thessalonians: *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”* 1 Thessalonians 4:16 (NIV)

In the history of our country there have been a few instances of victorious soldiers returning home after the war. But this is a much more important and glorious victory welcome, as Jesus returns to heaven. Paul writes in Philippians about *“Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

There, too, you see that even in heaven, every knee will bow to Jesus and praise him as Lord.

This entire Psalm is plainly a song of praise to God for what he has done, and a call to Israel – and to us – to continue to praise God, who has proven that he is King.

Even now, the “shout” may refer to the words of the evangelists and apostles in preaching Christ crucified, buried, risen from the dead, and ascended to heaven, to appear in the presence of God for us. Despite the persecutions they suffered, this was a triumph of the apostles; and the conversion of multitudes of souls by this preaching was the triumph of the cross of Christ.

Jesus has ascended to heaven, his home and throne, after having secured the victory. He came down to fight and win the battle for his people in the war against Satan and his allies by the overthrow of their enemies, and having accomplished this has returned to heaven, greeted by his hosts in heaven, with their shouts of triumph. Although this is poetry in the Psalm, it is designed to speak triumph, and to show that the victory was solely accomplished by God.

This Psalm starts with the words *“Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.”* This is a gesture of exultation in joyful praise of his majesty and glory.

All people on earth should rejoice. Yet even if they don’t, that doesn’t dampen our joy for what God has done for us.

*“How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!”* God is not merely some local pagan god, a god of just some tribes on the earth, but is a God over all people.

Then we find references to the history of the descendants of Abraham. *“He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet.”* Most obviously, we see a reference to the time of Joshua, when Canaan was

conquered by the power of God for his people. The fact that God is “*the great King over all the earth!*” makes it clear that he is to be universally regarded with awe and reverence. Jesus, who has “*All authority [all power] in heaven and on earth*” Matthew 28:18 (NIV) & [KJV] has dominion over all creatures, but he especially rules his Church with his grace and mercy.

The Psalm goes on: “*He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.*” This is a reference to Israel’s history. Moses wrote in Exodus: “*You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance - the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.*” Exodus 15:17 (NIV) God gave them the land of Canaan as their physical inheritance. But even more importantly, he gave them the inheritance of eternal life because of faith in God. Yes, God first chose the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But all believers, whether they belong to Israel according to the flesh, or whether they have been gained from the ranks of paganism, the people called Gentiles, will share in the glorious blessings gained by Christ and enjoy their happiness, forever and ever.

Because of this marvelous gift of God, God’s people do not stand idly by. “*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.*” Four times this is repeated: “*sing praises*”! The Lutheran church has been called a singing church, perhaps because we sing more than others in our worship.

God is king, ruler of all. Scripture teaches us that Jesus is prophet, priest, and king and on this day we especially look at him as king.

Along with all the hosts of heaven, we rejoice, for “*God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.*” Jesus has proved himself king, and has taken his seat on his holy throne.

As great as secular rulers are, God is greater, and is above all; King of kings and Lord of lords; and kings and presidents and congresses and supreme human courts are in his hand; and he turns them wherever he pleases. All rulers of the earth are under God’s control, whether they know it or not, whether they acknowledge it or not. All things are under his absolute dominion.

Thus in this way too God is greatly exalted.

Jesus’ exaltation was particularly emphasized before men in his visible ascension, followed by his sitting at the right hand of God, his heavenly Father. As a result and fruit of this exaltation he is continually adding new members to his spiritual Israel, to the congregation of believers, from all nations and peoples of the world, all of which ultimately, in heaven, will unite in singing his praises forever.

The disciples who saw him bodily ascend into heaven were no doubt puzzled and possibly confused. But notice that “*Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.*” Luke 24:52-53 (NIV)

Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians about the power of God: “*I pray also 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 the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*” Ephesians 1:18-23 (NIV) Later in that letter, he writes: “*What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.*” Ephesians 4:9-10 (NIV)

Risen, ascended, and sitting at the right hand of the Father, Christ now fills the whole universe. He is totally in charge.

The residents of heaven, too, looked at Jesus’ ascension into heaven and rejoiced. May we rejoice, not only today, but every day! Amen.