

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY
18 May – Ascension Day

HYMNS: 771 169 111 372 294 113

INTROIT: Psalm 47

Clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with a joyful voice!
For the LORD Most High is awesome. He is the great King over all the earth.

May He subjugate peoples under us and nations under our feet!
He chooses our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom He loves.
God has gone up with a shout, the LORD, with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praise to God! Sing praise! Sing praise to our King! Sing praise!
For God is the King of all the earth. Sing a psalm of instruction!
God has been reigning over the nations. **God** has been **sitting on** His holy **throne**.

The nobles of the peoples have gathered together as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God. He is greatly exalted.

COLLECT: 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 for ever. Amen.

Welcome to all worshipping with us today!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaelc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

READINGS:

Acts 1:1-11 You will testify of Me to the farthest parts of the world.

Ephesians 1:15-23 Your minds will be enlightened.

Luke 24:44-53 You will testify to these things.

Acts 1:1-11

¹ In my former book, Theophilus, I have written about everything that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had given Instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.

³ After His suffering, Jesus also showed these men, through many convincing proofs, that He was alive. He was seen by them during a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While He was eating with them, He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, “You have heard about this from Me. ⁵ For John baptised with water, but not many days from now you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ Therefore, when they met together, they asked Him, “Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He told them, “It is not for you to know the times or events that the Father has set by His own authority. ⁸ However, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the farthest parts of the world.”

⁹ After He had said this and while they were watching Him, He was lifted up and a cloud took Him away from their sight. ¹⁰ While they were gazing into the sky as He was going, suddenly two men in white clothes stood beside them.

¹¹ They asked, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing and looking up into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen Him go into heaven.”

Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵ For this reason, since I heard about the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s holy people, ¹⁶ I do not stop thanking God for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that you may know Him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your minds will be enlightened, that you may know the hope to which He has called you, how rich His glorious **inheritance** is among **His holy people**, ¹⁹ and how incomparably great His power is for us, who believe according to the working of His mighty power. ²⁰ He worked with that same power in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and **seated Him at His right hand** in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule,

authority, power, dominion and every other name that can be mentioned, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² **He also put everything under His feet** and appointed Him as the Head of everything, for the benefit of the church, ²³ which is His body, filled completely by Him who fills everything in every way.

Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴ He told them, “These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and, based on His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’ ⁴⁸ You will testify to these things.

⁴⁹ “I am sending you what My Father has promised. Wait here in the city until you are armed with power from above!”

⁵⁰ He led them out to where Bethany lay ahead of them. Then He raised His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up to heaven.

⁵² They knelt in worship of Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

⁵³ They stayed continually at the Temple, praising God.

THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Sermon for Ascension Day 2023

Luke 24:44-53

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 24:44-53: **He told them, “These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”**

⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and, based on His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’ ⁴⁸ You will testify to these things.

⁴⁹ **“I am sending you what My Father has promised. Wait here in the city until you are armed with power from above!”**

⁵⁰ **He led them out to where Bethany lay ahead of them. Then He raised His hands and blessed them.** ⁵¹ **While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up to heaven.**

⁵² **They knelt in worship of Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.** ⁵³ **They stayed continuously at the Temple, praising God.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Feast of the Ascension of our Lord is a significant celebration that many churches and Christians have unfortunately overlooked in recent years. However, we must remember and honour this event, which marks a remarkable and awe-inspiring occasion. It is worth noting that Christ’s “ascension into heaven” is mentioned in all three of our creeds, emphasising its importance. Therefore, there is every reason to commemorate and be joyful about the Ascension of our Lord.

The reason - or one of the reasons, at least; there are several - one reason we remember and rejoice in this festival is this: The ascension of our Lord tells us that Christ is working in and through His church by the ministry of the Gospel. The accounts of the ascension that Saint Luke gives us, both at the end of His Gospel and the beginning of Acts, show Christ *preparing His disciples* for the mighty ministry that the church will undertake once He ascends.

The risen Lord Jesus had appeared to His disciples many times during those forty days from Easter to Ascension. Luke writes how Jesus “*spoke about the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3). Jesus had been training His disciples over the past three years, but now He takes them to the next level. They still had a lot to learn. They hadn’t really “got it” up to this point. While they had heard and seen a lot from their Master during those years, it hadn’t clicked yet - especially the part about Him having to suffer and die. But now the light bulb comes on. Jesus “**opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.**” The disciple’s minds had to be opened by Jesus since the natural faculties of sinful humans cannot perceive that Jesus is the Christ and that He has

accomplished their salvation. Human eyes are blind to the reality of Jesus' presence even when He stands directly in sight, and ears are deaf to His words even when He speaks them audibly unless Jesus Himself heals the spiritual blindness and deafness.¹ Eyes and minds must be opened, and faith created by God to understand the mystery of salvation through His crucified and risen Son. Both salvation and apprehension through faith are God's work. Now the disciples understood.

Jesus tells them: **“This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.’** All of the Bible, all of God's plan for humanity, is focused on the suffering Christ. Not a ‘glory’ Christ, but a suffering Christ, because that's what it would take to accomplish God's plan of salvation. It would take the suffering and death of God's only Son to atone for our sins and achieve our salvation. *Nothing less would do.*

You could not pay for your sins. You could die on a cross a thousand times over, and you would not even pay for your own sins, let alone the world's. But Christ could, and He did. His holy blood shed on the cross, His perfect righteousness credited to your account, makes the perfect sacrifice to atone for all your sins in God's court of justice. And now that all sins have been paid for, peace with God is made, and death is overcome and conquered. And so on the third day, that is, on Easter, Christ rose from the dead in victory. The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ *are at the very heart of the Gospel.* Jesus wants His disciples to preach this, so before He ascends, He impresses the centrality of this upon them.

“This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,’⁴⁷ and, based on His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” You see, it's not just the bare events themselves. It's what they mean for us, how they are applied to us. Jesus' death and resurrection are preached for repentance and forgiveness so we would repent, believe, and receive.

The proclamation of God's Word of Law accuses us and condemns us as sinners. God is calling us to repentance, to mourn our sinful state, to turn

¹ Luke 4:18-19

from our sins, and to give up on our empty self-justification. But the proclamation of God's Word at that point is not yet complete. The Gospel then needs to come and raise us to life. We hear the life-giving Word of what God has done for us in Christ. The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts, and we receive the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. This is the Gospel, the Good News, for you!

“Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations,” Jesus says. Note those words, **“to all nations.”** Not just to Israel but to the Gentile nations also. That is something that the apostles, all of whom were Jews, would need to get used to. So Jesus is preparing them for that here *before He ascends*.

Jesus also says to His disciples, *“You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the farthest parts of the world”* (Acts 1:8). The apostles had seen Jesus' deeds and heard His words. They had witnessed His obedient life and death and seen Him alive from the dead. Their mission would be to tell this to the farthest parts of the earth. Now this may seem a daunting task. It is. The disciples may want to shrink back in fear, especially with their Master now “going away.” What will they do without Him? But they won't be “without” Him. He will be with them all the days, to the close of the age, even though they will see Him no longer. And before He ascends, Jesus assures them that He will give them the help they need: **“I am sending you what My Father has promised. Wait here in the city until you are armed with power from above!”** And again, He says: *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”* (Acts 1:7).

Ascension Day is forty days after Easter, but it is also ten days before Pentecost. And here, Jesus promises His disciples that He will pour out upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit, which He would do ten days later on Pentecost. Ascension points us to Pentecost, and the Spirit's empowering of the church's ministry.

The Spirit will work through the apostolic preaching to deliver God's forgiveness to people, bring them to faith in Christ, and keep them in that faith. It's still happening today. You yourselves are being given forgiveness. You yourselves are being strengthened in your faith as this life-giving gospel preaching comes into your ears and Christ's very body and blood come into your mouth.

Dear friends, your ascended Lord has left nothing out. He has arranged everything in the church to deliver the forgiveness of sins and to keep you strong in the saving faith. Not only has He won your forgiveness and salvation by His death and resurrection, but His ascension shows that He has not left us on our own in these latter days before He returns. Jesus has not gone away and forgotten us. Instead, He has ascended into heaven to be with His people worldwide, at all times and places, and He does this in and through the church's ministry.

Ascension Day tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ is working in and through His church by the ministry of the Gospel. For this reason, the Ascension of our Lord truly is a most wonderful festival. Even though much of the church may have forgotten this festival, the good news is that Christ, our ascended Lord, has not forgotten His church! Remember and rejoice in that! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ASCENSION DAY

Lord God, heavenly Father, You are our strength and our song. We praise You that You have prepared salvation for us in Jesus, Your Son. We praise You for His life on earth as a human being like us, full of grace and truth. We praise You that You have revealed Yourself and Your love in Him. We thank You for Jesus' death and resurrection. We praise You that our Lord, who has offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, is now at Your right hand. Give us Your Spirit's power to believe all that He has taught us, and to do all that He has commanded us. Accept our thanks for His miracles and deeds of mercy.

By Your Spirit, help us to claim His sacrifice for our salvation, and to trust in Him for the gift of eternal life. As we now celebrate His ascension to Your right hand, give us constant joy. Enable us to centre our devotion on our living Lord on heaven's throne, ruling all things for the good of His Church and His children. Lift our minds to heaven where our Lord Jesus lives to pray for us. Give us confidence in His compassion and in His power to bless.

Lord Jesus, continue to be present with us, as You have promised. Be present with us as You move us to witness to Your saving love to people everywhere, that Your Gospel may be proclaimed to all nations. Establish Your kingdom of grace in every land. Turn the hearts of people in every corner of the world to faith and obedience, so that every knee may bow and every tongue confess that You are both Christ and Lord.

Lord Jesus, with all things under Your feet, keep our land in righteousness and peace. Give us leaders who love and honour You. May Your Spirit hold sway in all schools, and in all institutions of learning and research. Bless all hospitals and places of mercy; and make Your healing touch evident in them. Protect us from war, disease, and every calamity; spare us from greed, rebellion, and lawlessness. Give all in our land a true love of piety and peace.

We pray for all who are suffering in any way, especially for those who are sick. Give them trust in Your love, and teach them to pray in patience and hope.

Lord Jesus, seated at God's right hand, preserve our faith and love during life's little day, and strengthen us to watch and pray for Your return. Make us glad that, when You come again, You will come to receive us to Yourself for ever. We offer these prayers, Christ our Lord, in Your name, which is far above every other name. Amen.

Article: The Reformers on the Ascension

The Festival of the Ascension marks Jesus' ascension into heaven forty days after Easter. The scriptural accounts of the event are straightforward. Jesus, while blessing His disciples, is taken up, and a cloud hides Him from their sight. Two angels appear and tell the disciples that Jesus will return in the same way.

While the account is straightforward, Jesus' ascension raises some questions. What does it mean to ascend? Where is Jesus now? What benefits do we gain from Jesus' ascension? Lutheran Reformers, in their sermons, point us to the scriptural answers to these questions. They emphasise Christ's victory over sin and His continual presence with His church in the world.

Martin Luther

In 1534 Luther preached on Ascension Day. Luther speaks about the history and the fruit of the ascension. This history states what happened, how Christ was taken up and hidden by a cloud. If this is preached only as history, Luther says, it does not benefit us. Yet it is preached for our sake, leading Luther to focus more on the fruit of the ascension.

As he preaches the fruit and use of the ascension for us, Luther proclaims that Christ has taken captivity captive. Luther is drawing here on Ephesians 4:8, and its citation of Psalm 68:18. The Greek here literally says, “You took captivity captive.” Luther preaches that this means Christ has made captive all those things that held us captive. Sin, death, the devil, etc., no longer hold us captive. Christ has bound them in captivity on high. Since Christ has captured our captors, we are now free from the things that would hold us captive before God: sin, death, hell, and the devil.

A key fruit of this for us is that we are free from sin. Luther says that we can now taunt sin. If sin threatens to terrify us, we can say to sin: “You are my servant, I am your lord. Have you not heard the canticle ‘You have ascended’ [referring to Ephesians 4:8].” This is one component of being free from sin, the freedom from fear before God. Another component is the freedom to turn away from sin. Luther preaches both components: “If you believe in Christ, then the text says that you believe that he sits above and that he has taken captive my captivity, that is, my sin. In what way? It should not terrify me before God.... I believe in him who is above, who has captured sin. Therefore I know no other sin than sin that is captive, that is now condemned before God and in the end, will be beheaded. ...You [sin] wish to lead me into despair and sadness, presumption, and idolatry. But you no longer have power. You have been taken captive. Your tyranny and dominion are ended. Nor should... I do evil things, be proud, hateful, or jealous, but I tread these underfoot, am patient, etc.”

Free in Christ, we can mock sin and stand against its temptations because Christ has led sin into captivity by His ascension.

Johannes Brenz

Johannes Brenz published a sermon on the ascension in the 1550s. Brenz was a Lutheran reformer who was widely-known and respected in the sixteenth century, publishing many works and attending events such as the Heidelberg Disputation, the Marburg Colloquy, the Diet of Augsburg, and the Council of Trent. He was the reformer of Schwäbisch-Hall and later served in Württemberg.

Brenz's sermon expands on the structure of Luther's sermon. Like Luther, Brenz discusses the history and the fruits of the ascension. Additionally, Brenz cites a wide array of scriptural passages beyond Acts 1 that speak to the ascension. Brenz then adds a section on what it means that Christ ascended into heaven.

Brenz refutes the arguments that Christ's ascension and session at the right hand of God mean that Christ's body is restricted to a single physical location in heaven. Because of that supposed restriction on the location of Christ's body, the Sacramentarians argued that Christ's body and blood could not be present in the sacrament of the altar. Brenz holds that Christ ascends into heaven that He may fill all things. This presence goes beyond human understanding, so that Christ is "outside of, within, above, and below all places, both in heaven and on earth."

Brenz expands on the fruits of Christ's ascension. Like Luther, he proclaims that Christ has led our enemies captive, enemies such as misfortune, death, and hell. But then he adds that Christ has also led us to heaven. Brenz asks the obvious rhetorical question: how can this be? The disciples were left on the mountain when a cloud hid Jesus. We are still in this world. Brenz responds that the answer is found in Paul: "*Your life is hidden in Christ with God*" (Colossians 3:3). Christ, the Head of the Church, has ascended. We, the members of His body, have ascended with Him. But our ascension with Christ is now hidden. Our reign in Christ above gives us hope in times of trouble. Those troubles have been led captive by Christ. We reign over them. There will come a time when Christ and our victory will be made visible for us.

Conclusion

The Reformers have much comfort to offer in preaching the ascension. Luther and Brenz recount the history and show how Christ uses the ascension for our good by leading captivity captive. Brenz proclaims Christ's ongoing presence with us and offers the rich comfort that we reign now in Christ over all troubles and calamities. We look forward to that day when our faith and our hope will be changed to sight!

Children's Message:

Who knows what Ascension Day is? “Ascend” means to go up, and Ascension Day, the day we’re celebrating with our special service today, is when Jesus, after He died on the cross, rose from the grave, and appeared lots of times to His disciples, went up, up, up back to heaven.

Our Introit for Ascension Day says this: *“God has gone up with a shout!”* (Psalm 47:5).

Here’s what happened on Ascension Day. As we said, Jesus died on the cross and paid for all our sins. Then on Easter, you remember, He rose again. He’s alive. And for forty days after Easter, He showed Himself to His disciples many times, so they definitely knew He was really alive.

But then Jesus led the disciples out to the Mount of Olives, and while He was speaking to them, He started to rise up to heaven. The disciples watched Him go until He went up through the clouds and they couldn’t see Him anymore. And for a while, they just stood there staring up into the sky. What do you think they were thinking as they stood and stared? I bet they were thinking, “Jesus has always taken care of us. What are we going to do now without Him?” I bet they were feeling sad.

The disciples probably thought Jesus was leaving them and wouldn’t be with them anymore. And of course, for now, we can’t see Jesus anymore. But actually, He’s with us in even better ways than He was with the disciples when they could see Him. Now He’s not just one place at a time like He was with them. Now He fully uses His powers to be with all of us everywhere all the time. Psalm 47 also says, *“God is the King of all the earth”* (v 7). Jesus rules the whole world, so He’s with us everywhere. He’s with us, especially every time He speaks to us in His Word. And He’s with us in our baptism, and one day He’ll come back, and we’ll see Him with our own eyes.

Thank You Jesus for being with me all the time. I look forward to the day when You come to take me to be with you forever in heaven! Amen.

**Divine Services for Sunday 21st May**

8.30am OAK HC

9.00am TMBA LR

9.30am AUB LR

10.15am GRN HC

9.00am MARBURG LR