

## THE KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Our homily for the Festival of the Ascension of our Lord is taken from our inspired Psalm. Hear the Word of the Lord as it is declared in this night's Psalm hymn:

*See, the Lord ascends in triumph; conqu'ring King in royal state,  
riding on the clouds, His chariot, to His heav'nly palace gate.  
Hark! The choirs of angel voices joyful alleluias sing,  
and the portals high are lifted to receive their heav'nly King.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Tonight, we celebrate one of the top three oldest of the five great High Feasts of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. What are the others?

They are:

- 1.) The Nativity
- 2.) The Epiphany
- 3.) The Resurrection of our Lord, and,
- 4.) Pentecost.

The Feast of the Ascension, held on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Jesus' Resurrection Feast is celebrated, it sadly appears, to continue to be overlooked to the loss of the hearers of the Word in many congregations. That is not true here! Each year, God assembles us on that year's Thursday of our Lord's Ascension to hear of Christ's exaltation to the Right Hand of the Father. We hear of Him ascending in triumph, riding on the clouds. We learn anew that they veiled Him to human sight before He entered heaven's gates. We are reminded of the angels' presence among the heavenward gazing disciples, and their enduring reminder that Jesus will *come in the manner in which you all saw Him going into the heavens.*<sup>2</sup>

Until then, He reigns in order to fill all things; to place our flesh at the pinnacle of creation; to rule all things (that includes restraining evil until He vanquishes it to the

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<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth, Christopher. 1807-85. "See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph," *Lutheran Service Book*. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2006, 494.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 1:11b.

fiery pit on the Last Day), to rule for the benefit of His Church Militant; to be our Mediator (to “clean up our prayers” to offer them as right sacrifice to the Father); and to fulfill His work as the greatest and perfect Prophet ever by sending men to preach His Word in season and out of season.

Here, we learn again each year to look up to Jesus as the Author and Perfecter of our Faith. We remember Him as the One Whose ascension means that we who remain in Him will be caught up with Him on the Last Day. We recall that means that we will be given glorified bodies, and in that glorified flesh reign and do all kinds of joyous work in the coming eternal New Heavens and New Earth!

For years now, we have heard this day’s readings declare Christ’s Ascension. That is the day’s focus, in particular, of those from Luke and Acts. Christ’s Ascension was prefigured in Elijah’s departing earth with the chariots of fire in a whirlwind into the heavens. In addition to hearing sermons from those texts on different years, nearly every four years we hear an Ascension sermon based upon the Psalm of the Day. Today, because we had a Psalm hymn, that is serving as the basis for the rest of this sermon, in particular, with these words:

*See, the Lord ascends in triumph; conqu’ring King in royal state,  
riding on the clouds, His chariot, to His heav’nly palace gate.  
Hark! The choirs of angel voices joyful alleluias sing,  
and the portals high are lifted to receive their heav’nly King.<sup>3</sup>*

In focusing on the day’s Psalm and hymns based upon it, we follow the practice of the early Christian Church. They chose to annually remember Jesus on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after His resurrection. The words from the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm, which are about the Christ, this we know for Jesus Himself declared them to be (*Mt. 22:44*), as did His Apostles and Evangelists (*Acts 2:34; Romans 8:34; I Cor. 15:25; Hebrews 1:3, 13, etc.*). These Divine Words surely guided their celebrations:

*Says YHWH to my Lord,*

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<sup>3</sup> Wordsworth, Christopher. 1807-85. “*See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph*,” *Lutheran Service Book*. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2006, 494.

*“Sit to My Right until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet.”<sup>4</sup>*

According to our hymn guide, that Psalm verse certainly guided the first stanza of our Psalm hymn, our theme text for the evening, which you have already heard repeated. The Psalmist (King David whom we declare to be the composer based upon the testimony of the incarnate Word), declares David’s Lord to be the One Who is to be seated at the position of highest honor over all beings and things in all of heaven, the earth, and under the earth.

While Elijah ascended into heaven (the one of whom we heard in our Old Covenant Reading) and a tiny few such as Enoch were translated from earth to heaven, none of them were given the position of highest honor over all. It is only of the crucified, dead, risen and ascended Lord Jesus that this night’s Psalm and hymn proclaims. Hear again that which you sang about in Jesus’ fulfilling the ancient words (about 3,000 years old now) of this day’s chosen Psalm:

*See, the Lord ascends in triumph; conqu’ring King in royal state,  
riding on the clouds, His chariot, to His heav’nly palace gate.  
Hark! The choirs of angel voices joyful alleluias sing,  
and the portals high are lifted to receive their heav’nly King.<sup>5</sup>*

The composer of tonight’s Psalm Hymn thought it to be, “the first duty of a hymn-writer to teach sound doctrine, and thus to save souls.”<sup>6</sup> He was so committed to that principle that he produced hymns for every season of the Church Year, and for each part of each season. (*The Holy Year, or Hymns for Sundays, Holidays, and Other Occasions Throughout the Year* by Christopher Wordsworth).

It is fitting tonight, that after two Sunday Bible studies have taken us through hymn studies – the most recent a wonderful study about the hymns of Easter – that we hear now of the Good News that is proclaimed through sound doctrine in our psalm hymn. It is an age-old truth that what we sing becomes what we believe. The music

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<sup>4</sup> *Psalm* 110:1.

<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth, Christopher. 1807-85. “*See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph*,” *Lutheran Service Book*. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2006, 494.

<sup>6</sup> Internet. [https://hymnary.org/person/Wordsworth\\_Christopher](https://hymnary.org/person/Wordsworth_Christopher), accessed May 10, 2018. c.f. Precht, Fred L. 1992. *The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, Hymnal Companion*, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 810-11.

and lyrics of hymns we are privileged to sing here are actually intended to convey biblical meanings. Having said that, the first part of our hymn's first verse's teaching has already been revealed.

It is now time to hear more of the second. In it, we proclaimed: *Hark! The choirs of angel voices joyful alleluias sing, and the portals high are lifted to receive their heav'nly King.*<sup>7</sup> To "harken" is an old English way of saying, *listen attentively*. Where else in the Church Year can you think of the Church calling out to people to "Hark?" From our hymnbook, the first that might come to mind is one that calls us to hear the angel voices heralding the Savior's birth. You may be able to think of others.

Today, we sang out that people might harken to angel voices singing *alleluias*, those are, *praise the Lords!* The angel voices in that hymn are revealed tonight to be your voices. That is because, in our hymn singing you became God's messengers of His Good News. You reported that which was not seen by the disciples in Jesus' ascension, that which occurred in the heavenly realms, namely that King Jesus entered into the heavenly throne room (that is wonderfully revealed in *The Apocalypse of St. John*). From that imagery comes one of power and eternal military victory, proclaimed when we sang:

*Who is this that comes in glory with the trump of jubilee?  
Lord of battles, God of armies, He has gained the victory.  
He who on the cross did suffer, He who from the grave arose,  
He has vanquished sin and Satan; He by death has crushed His foes.*<sup>8</sup>

Again, that music reflected tonight's Psalm. Hear what King David still declares of His Lord, and our Lord:

*"The scepter of Your might sends forth YHWH from Zion,  
rule in (the) midst of Your foes."*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wordsworth, Christopher. 1807-85. "See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph," *Lutheran Service Book*. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2006, 494.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 494, 2

<sup>9</sup> *Psalm* 110:2.

The Christ's ascension was promised to bring powerful rule from God's Holy Mountain. On that earthly mountain, Jesus ascended the cross to display God's victory triumph over sin, Satan and death. Think anew of the power of the words you sing in this place. They declare God's victory in Christ – for you, and for all who will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God! Our hymn then continued, a bit later on, as we declared Christ's threefold roles completed in His Ascension, all which were also foreshadowed in the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm:

*Now our heav'nly Aaron enters with His blood with in the veil;  
Joshua now is come to Canaan, and the kings before Him quail.  
Now He plants the tribes of Israel in their promised resting place;  
now our great Elijah offers double portion of His grace.<sup>10</sup>*

With those sung words, we revealed Jesus the Christ to be Priest, King and Prophet. They reflect Christ's roles prophesied in this night's Psalm. There the Christ was promised to be Priest, King and avenging Prophet, with words like these:

*YHWH has sworn and (will) not be sorry:  
"You (are a) Priest unto forever, unto the manner of (the) King of  
Righteousness."  
Adonai, on Your right, will shatter kings in (the) Day of His wrath;  
He will execute judgment in (the) nations.<sup>11</sup>*

What heavenly power you wield with your voices as you sing the great doctrinal hymns of the Faith! What mysteries you reveal in words that are easy for children to memorize! What truths you are given to proclaim, including the benefits of Christ's Ascension to you while you remain on earth. Hear again these words that you sang:

*He has raised our human nature on the clouds to God's right hand;  
there we sit in heav'nly places, there with Him in glory stand.  
Jesus reigns, adored by angels; Man with God is on the throne.  
By our mighty Lord's ascension we by faith behold our own.<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Wordsworth, Christopher. 1807-85. "See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph," *Lutheran Service Book*. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2006, 494, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Psalm 110:4-5*.

<sup>12</sup> Wordsworth, Christopher. 1807-85. "See, the Lord Ascends in Triumph," *Lutheran Service Book*. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2006, 494, 5.

In a way, those words also reflect mysteries hidden in King David's now ancient Psalm:

*"Your people will present themselves as (a) freewill offering in (the) Day of Your strength, in holy splendor, from (the) womb (of the) morning, for Your youth are to You (as) dew."<sup>13</sup>*

In Christ, you are already presented to God as a freewill offering. He freely gave of Himself as the bloody and final Sacrifice for your sins. As you remain attached to Him, you abide in the strength of His victories. Where our Head is, there you as His Body remain.

As droplets of dew reflect the rays of the morning sun, so will you eternally reflect the glory of our mighty Lord. As Jesus has been bodily raised from the dead, so too will you who die in Christ also arise to meet Him in the clouds. Those who are still alive at His coming will join the resurrected and ascending ones, and we will reign with Him forever! That is God's Good News, which we declare with this simple proclamation:

Christ is risen and ascended!

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

The Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord

Psalm 110; II Kings 2:5-15; Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:44-53

May 10, 2018

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

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<sup>13</sup> Psalm 110:3.

We believe that there is One God, One Power, One Presence that we call the One Cosmic Reality. This One expresses in, through, and as all creation. This One is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient.

We believe that all creation is connected through our relationship with the One Power, the One Cosmic Reality. Therefore all creation is one with God and one with each other since all creation is the One Cosmic Reality expressing as that creation.

We believe that our consciousness creates our reality. Hence, our physical experiences are an out-picturing of our inward beliefs.

We believe that it is possible to change our physical experiences at any time by changing our beliefs.

We believe in the power of prayer to heal the body and sustain the mind of the one who believes.

We believe that we can and will achieve peace on earth through the development of human consciousness.

We believe in the continuation of life, in some form, after the experience referred to as death.

We believe that God, the One Cosmic Reality is Love, therefore love is our basic nature.

We believe that there is only One Power, God, the One Cosmic Reality; therefore anything appearing to be the opposite, or evil, is not an entity, but merely a misunderstanding, a misuse of the One Power.

We believe that all religions are legitimate pathways to God.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Internet. [http://communityinterfaithchurch.com/Page\\_2.html](http://communityinterfaithchurch.com/Page_2.html), Accessed May 29, 2014.