

Celebrate Christ's Ascension!

Luke 24:44-53

May 14, 2026 (Ascension Day)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (Lk 24:44-53 NIV)

In the name of the ascended Lord and Savior Jesus, dear friends:

Did you buy any Ascension Day cards and send them to friends? No? Wasn't there an Ascension Day gift section at Walmart, like there is for Christmas or Easter? I didn't see it there either. Ascension Day doesn't even make it on most calendars.

But that doesn't mean that this day, the fortieth day after Easter, is unimportant. Far from it! Luke's gospel and the books of Acts give us great reasons to **Celebrate Christ's Ascension!**

First, it signifies that his saving work is now complete. Jesus mentioned that to the disciples when he appeared to them that Sunday night. After he showed them his nail-marked hands and feet and ate a piece of broiled fish to show them it was he, not a ghost, Jesus told them: "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." That's the entire Old Testament: The first five books, written by Moses, was the Hebrew "Torah" or Law of Moses; the other historical books are grouped with the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah; and the book of Psalms heads the poetical books and other writings like Ruth and Ezra, all 39 books of the Old Testament.

What was written about him? Jesus specified: "The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day." It was foretold in Moses' law that God would send a man, born of a woman, to crush the serpent's head. In Isaiah 53 God spoke of his servant's great suffering, though he had done no wrong. Psalm 22 has details about the Christ's crucifixion and death. Psalms 16 and 118, as well as Isaiah 53, spoke of his not being abandoned to the grave but living again, while the prophet Jonah was a type of Jesus' rising on the third day. So Jesus informed his disciples: "All this has now happened. My saving work is now complete. I am ready to return to heaven." Forty days later, in their sight, he did just that.

Jesus' ascension is a way of God declaring: "Mission Accomplished!" Some of you may remember that infamous sign in Iraq after two months of fighting there in 2003. Unfortunately, that mission was not accomplished and the war lasted for another 10 years. But Jesus' mission was accomplished. He paid the full price to redeem us sinners; he crushed Satan's power when he died and rose; he transformed death into the gateway to eternal life. Now he could return home. Ascension Day is a day of celebration: It tells us, "Mission accomplished!"

But another type of work still needed to be done on earth. Jesus told his disciples, “Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Before Jesus went up, he gave his disciples that assignment, an assignment we share in, so that his saving message would continue.

“You are witnesses of these things.” The disciples were the first-hand reporters of all they had seen of Jesus: His miracles, his perfect life, his crucifixion, death and burial. They were witnessing right there that Jesus had risen, and then they observed his ascension. Now they were to go and tell this to others. Jesus told them to start where they were—Jerusalem. But don’t start right away, Jesus said, “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” The ascended Lord would pour out the Holy Spirit on them, clothing them with the power to proclaim the message, just as Jesus promised.

It’s been almost 2,000 years since Jesus ascended. Sometimes we might wonder if it wouldn’t have been easier if Jesus just stayed on earth and did the job himself. We, the successors to those disciples and the early church, are his witnesses today. But sometimes we feel too weak, we get too hesitant to open our mouths and share a message about Jesus with someone. “What if I say the wrong thing?” we wonder. “What if they don’t believe me?” Well, many people rejected Jesus too. But the fact remains: Jesus has chosen us by grace to be his witnesses. The power doesn’t come from ourselves, but from the Holy Spirit who comes to us through his Word and the sacraments of baptism and communion.

Christ’s ascension enables this to happen. Paul wrote to the Ephesians (4:10,11): He “ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people...” Jesus has ascended, but he has not left us! He fills heaven and earth, and is with us wherever we go. Before he ascended, he promised, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). As we go forth with the gospel, Jesus still blesses us; he’s in control of events to make sure his gospel gets proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

Ascension Day also points us to his saving glory that is yet to come. When Jesus went up into the sky, and a cloud hid him from their sight, the disciples just stood there gazing—until two men in white (angels) appeared. Luke records it in Acts 1:11: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? 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.” No need to keep looking up now! We have Jesus’ own word that one day he will come back “in the same way”: In the clouds, in glory, with his heavenly angels on the Last Day.

And that’s another reason why we celebrate Christ’s ascension. Here was a man, in every way like us, but without sin, being taken up into heaven. We of course celebrate Christmas when God’s Son came down to earth and was made a human being like us. Ascension is just as important, because he still is a human being, and now he’s in heaven! That tells us that all who are in Christ, believers, will one day go up there to heaven as well. “On Christ’s ascension I now build the hope of my ascension,” as we will soon sing. So let’s be like the disciples, who returned to Jerusalem “with great joy” and were “continually at the temple, praising God.” Even if we aren’t able to purchase Ascension Day cards or gifts, let’s continually **Celebrate Christ’s Ascension!** Amen.